

“The Way Up is the Way Down”

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

The website, Fast Company said the average person gets bombarded with upwards of 5,000 brand messages every day.



Every brand wants to share a message with you that is memorable and taps into a deep level of desire.



This is the image for Nike. It is called the Swoosh. Nike was the Greek goddess of victory, and this image is supposed to look like one of her wings.



This logo is from Amazon. Often, logos have a hidden meaning. If you look carefully at where the yellow line starts and ends, it's showing you can buy everything from A to Z.

FedEx Then, there is FedEx. FedEx says, "When it's got to get there fast." The arrow in between the E and the X represents speed.



This logo is Baskin-Robbins. They have 31-derful flavors and the 31 is incorporated in the BR logo, just to remind you.



What company uses this logo? (Starbucks) I have no idea what the image means, but their coffee tastes good.



And we can't leave out the Golden Arches. This image means you get food. You get it fast. You get it cheap. If you have a van, the kids can get a whole meal just rummaging in the cracks between the seats to find french fries you got the last time you were there.

Smart people stay up late dreaming about these things. A good logo isn't just memorable; it's compelling. It makes you say, "I have to have that. I have to be a part of that."



What's the greatest logo? For 2,000 years now, the primary image that has been associated with Jesus and the movement He started has been, oddly enough, two pieces of wood that were fastened together to execute slaves and criminals. For people who follow Jesus, that's our logo. That's our brand.

Other religions have much more inviting symbols, such as the Star of David or a crescent moon. If you were designing a symbol to attract men and women all around the world to be part of a movement, no marketing expert would recommend a means of execution.

The cross has become so familiar in our day that we see it in jewelry and art. We have been desensitized, and we forget its shocking meaning.

How likely is it that Ohio Edison would choose as its logo an electric chair with the slogan, "The power is on"? How likely is it that jewelry makers will sell necklaces with little guillotines on them?

How strange that more graves should be marked by crosses than anything else? It's unthinkable that tombstones would be shaped as other causes of death like gallows or knives or guns (unimaginable), but we don't even think about the cross.

Last week we began a new series of sermon messages based on the New Testament book 1 Corinthians. Go to our YouTube channel and check out that message, if you haven't heard it yet. Corinth was rebuilt by Rome. It had a startup culture. It was generating enormous wealth. It was culturally and ethnically and religiously very diverse. It was extremely competitive. The people who lived there were obsessed with status. Corinth was killing it.

If you think a cross would be a strange logo to us, it would be very, very, VERY strange to them. An author, Fleming Rutledge, writes, "**Until the gospel of Jesus Christ burst upon the Mediterranean world, no one in the history of human imagination had conceived of such a thing as the worship of a crucified man.**"

The cross of Jesus expresses the deep loss, and at the same time the measureless love of God. The cross of Jesus is about a paradoxical pathway to a life of victory and satisfaction and abundance – satisfaction and abundance that Amazon and Nike and Starbucks and McDonald's can never come close to rivaling.

By the way, the word translated message is the Greek word, "**logos.**" It's where our word logo comes from. The logo of the cross -- the message of the cross -- is the power of God. Now, this would sound completely bizarre to Corinth. Corinth prided itself on its intellectual and cultural life. It was a Roman colony. It had favor with Caesar. It had Greek wisdom and culture. It had Roman power and wealth. It had sexual freedom and financial opportunity. Corinth was where you came if you wanted to get ahead. Crucifixion would not have struck the people of Corinth as a good career booster.

Crucifixion maximized the pain inflicted on the person crucified. It took hours or even days to die. It was a public spectacle. The victim would be stripped naked. This happened to Jesus. This was an essential part of crucifixion, to have no power over your body, to be exposed and shamed and mocked.

A Roman writer named Seneca who lived around Paul's time wrote that any self-respecting man would commit suicide before ever allowing himself to be crucified.

Rome only used crucifixion for slaves or for rebels who conspired against the government. Rome was trying to control foreign countries like Israel who hated them, and this was their way of discouraging rebellion.

Paul did not minimize Jesus' public failure. In fact, he highlighted it. He wrote, ***"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..."*** *1 Corinthians 1:22-23* Now, you might think about this as three alternative brands, three logos, if you like, and you can think about which one you would prefer for your own life for your own personal brand, because we live in a world where everybody has to have their own brand.

Paul says the people of Israel, the Jewish people, demanded signs. We would often see this in the Gospels. People and some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law would say to Jesus things like, "Teacher, we want a sign from you." The idea here is they are looking for works of great power, miracles that would indicate this leader has enough strength and charisma to overthrow Rome.

If we were to attach an image to this brand, it might be a picture of The Rock, Dwayne Johnson, former wrestler turned fabulously wealthy movie star who is so strong he is called The Rock. You want a powerful Messiah? You want The Rock.

This logo would say, "The way to the good and flourishing life is more power, more strength, more charisma, the ability to dominate, through power." I get that! I want that, but Paul says, "That's not Jesus' brand."

With the second brand, he says, "The Greeks look for wisdom." Now, if we were going to choose a logo for this one, it might be a picture of Albert Einstein, a brilliant, brilliant guy. In Corinth wisdom was all about how to pursue honor and wealth and status.

To try to secure the good life by demanding signs that guarantee power, influence, control, domination, and strength... I get that brand. To try to secure the good life by being the smartest

guy in the room and figuring out how to get ahead of everybody else... I get that brand.

We, by our sinful nature, chose Brand 1 or Brand 2. Our world today, here in America, even in Amherst, Ohio, is all about these 2 brands. The good and fulfilling life is what we strive for. This good and fulfilling life we define as having smart, athletic, above average kids, a good looking family, good looking house, above average neighborhood, very nice cars, beautiful clothes, enough money in the bank that we never worry about the future, we can afford to give nice gifts, and take nice vacations. The good life is being known in our community, invited to the expensive dinners where the movers-and-shakers of our town call you their friend if you contribute to their cause. The full life is having a good-paying job, where people look up to you, respect you, and ask your opinion before they act.

This is what our world tells us. And we who live in the world, look just like, live just like, talk just like everyone else. We value the same things. We've brought these values into the Church. We hide the signs that we follow Jesus so that we aren't any different. And we really aren't any different. And yet we wonder why our kids and grand kids turn away from following Jesus when all they see in our lives and hear from us are the values of this materialistic, empty, self-promoting, selfish world.

Friends, this should not be. And our turning from Jesus deserves the same eternal consequence that anyone who rejects Jesus deserves – we've chosen an eternity without Christ.

But there is a third brand. There is another way to live. There is the Jesus brand. This brand, Paul says is, "***We preach Christ crucified.***"

This is the brand that appears foolish, and empty by our world. The cross does not appear to be about the good and abundant life at all! The cross is a symbol evil, guilt, and death. The cross is not about power, but about submission. Jesus submitted to the plan of His Father, and He chose to give Himself up for you.

Christ Jesus took what is the epitome of weakness, and evil, an failure, and He turned it to embody goodness, love, and the life that

is really life. Jesus turned the cross from a weapon intended to kill God to a weapon God would use through Jesus to kill your death by dying Himself.

Jesus is true God, who loves you more than he loved Himself. He gave up everything this world values – His status, His position, His comfort, His wealth, His dignity, even His life itself – to forgive you, and win everlasting life with Him better than anything you imagine. He went down, even to suffer hell on the cross, so that you might never have to go down to what you deserve. Instead, His gift through His loving sacrifice for you, is that you now are brought up, up to the real abundant life of forgiveness, hope, and heaven to come.

An oxymoron is two words that actually contradict each other. For example, jumbo shrimp, or Hell's Angels, or small crowd, or virtual reality, or a civil war. Another one is “awful pretty.”

Christ crucified is an oxymoron. Christ was not a name. It was a title. Jesus was his name. Christ was the title that meant anointed one or Messiah. Crucifixion meant, by definition, that you were not the Messiah, that Rome had defeated you. You could have a Messiah or you could have a crucifixion, but you could not have both.

Yet, Paul is rubbing the Corinthian's noses in it. It would be one thing to preach Christ, anointed leader, wise teacher, and noble character. I get that. But no! Paul doesn't say, "***We preach Christ.***" *1 Corinthians 1:23* He says, "***We preach Christ crucified***" -- failed, crushed, shamed, humiliated, and executed."

This is the way to human flourishing but it's not the way of Corinth. It's not the way of more status, more money, more power. It is the way of the cross. That is, full surrender to God. At the cross I lay down my life. I confess my sins, and I receive His life and His forgiveness.

In response to the cross, I give God all the things that our world values. All the things that we strive for, thinking they will deliver fulfillment, all the things of this world that we have turned into our little empty gods, we give over to God. I give Him my life, my

money, my time, my security, my good name, my habits, my ambitions. I give him my old self, my old life. And in place, Jesus gives a new life. A different life. One that the world thinks is nothing, but it's really everything.

The cross is about much more than just how to get a ticket to heaven. The cross is the image of everything Jesus taught about the reality of the kingdom of God. It seems to make no sense that those who become servants are actually the greatest, that the first are last, that it is more blessed to give than to receive, that those who seek their life will lose it, but those who die to themselves will receive true life and everlasting life.

Do you see how astonishing it is that Paul leads with the cross? Jesus experienced the deepest, most public, most dehumanizing shame in the eyes of the people of the world. And the result of the cross is that greatness is going to have to be redefined. Jesus turned everything on its head -- the purpose of life, and the nature of God, and the foundation of hope, and who counts and who doesn't, and the power of suffering love to overcome hatred, and the possibility of having our evil and sins forgiven by God, have all been turned so radically upside down by a crucified carpenter, for crying out loud, that Rome and Caesar and our world today are bit players in comparison.

What Paul is claiming, against all odds, is that in thousands of years when the Roman Empire has crumbled, this man Jesus would still be expanding his kingdom and, by the way, that is exactly what has happened, and that is the power of the cross. The power of the cross turns out to be God's power. This is why we preach Christ and him crucified.

Folks, this now is the noble, glorious, painful, scary path that we are called to, the adventure we begin together this week. Often people misunderstand this about Christianity. Often people think, "Jesus died on a cross so that I don't have to." Not for Paul. He said, ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."***

Jesus tells us, "This is the way." He said, ***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."*** Jesus chose the way of the cross, and He named the cross as His brand even before He died on one.

Today, we have little crosses at all of our doors. I want to invite anybody who wants to, to grab one of these on your way out and take it with you into your week and to ask God to allow you to live in the way of the cross, in the power of the cross, in humble, God-powered love. Take it to your office or your school or where you volunteer and work under the cross this week.

Make it your goal this week not to promote yourself but to do your work diligently with His help, cheerfully, constantly asking Jesus to partner with you, to guide you, to give you creativity and perseverance, looking to see who it is that you might encourage. When you're at a meeting this week, pray God would let some other person say something really smart. Pull for your biggest rival to shine the brightest. That's hard for us, I know, but it's good!

When you get in your car, drive in the way of the cross. It will change the way you drive.

This week, when you look on your phone or you turn on your computer, go online under the cross. Am I looking at sites Jesus would look at? Am I not looking at sites Jesus would not look at? Am I posting and tweeting words the way Jesus would be tweeting if Jesus were me?

This week, take the cross into your home and ask God to help you be a servant to your spouse or your children. Let the cross remind you that God has not put you in control over them -- even though you know their lives would go so much better if they would just let you run them, don't you?

Instead, under the cross this week, help them. Listen. Care. Serve. Notice. Encourage. Speak truth. Give. This week, you take the cross with you into our world that is like Corinth. I'll tell you a little secret. There is a wisdom that you cannot Google. There is a

treasure you cannot get on Amazon. There is a hunger you will never satisfy at the golden arches. Fed Ex might save you a little time but cannot give you eternity.

Through the cross of Jesus, the power of God, we are more than conquerors, and the riches of God, (***"...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."***) and the wisdom of God (***"all of the treasures of the wisdom of God are found in Christ"***) and eternal life can be yours.

Follow Christ crucified. The cross – it is the image of real life that is now yours, through Jesus Christ, your Savior. Amen.