Sometimes being narrow minded can be a bad thing. If for example you refuse to consider other points of view or are so determined in a course of action that you fail to listen to reason, then being narrow minded is not a good thing. But sometimes being narrow minded is a good thing. For example, when Handel composed “The Messiah,” for twenty-three days he completely withdrew from the things of this world. So immersed was he in his music that the food brought to him was often left untouched and he barely slept. Such narrow mindedness produced one of the greatest musical scores of all time. Describing his feeling when the “Hallelujah Chorus” burst on his mind, Handel said, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself.” Handel had become so narrow minded that he was focused on one thing, the great God himself.

That is a good kind of narrow mindedness. As Paul has been encouraging those who Gather in Grace he has encouraged a thankful attitude for the church that gives God's blessings, he has encouraged them to work together as a team united in Christ, and he has coached them to have a humble opinion of themselves. Today as Paul continues to encourage those who gather in grace he is going to encourage them to be narrow minded when it comes to Jesus Christ and him crucified.

To have a better appreciation of what Paul is talking about this morning it might be a good idea for us to remind ourselves a little bit about the culture of Corinth. Paul arrived in Corinth after what some would consider a defeat in Athens where he did ministry among sophisticated Greek philosophers and won but a few converts. No doubt Paul was nervous as he began his work in Corinth. Corinth in some ways was similar to Athens. The Corinthians held the eloquent speaker in high regard. In fact, they idolized him. They would lay out good Greek drachmas to be taught how to eloquently use wise and persuasive words in their orations. As a speaker, Paul was almost the opposite—as his own description clearly indicates, 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. “

But Paul puts all of that out of his mind. He has one thing on his mind. He reminds those Gathered in Grace, 1“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.” For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. When it came to Jesus Christ and him crucified Paul was narrow minded. Notice that it wasn’t because Paul was a simpleton. It wasn’t because he lacked the ability and skill of other men. Paul once told those who Gathered in Grace in Philippi, “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” (Philippians 3:4-6) Having read Paul’s letters, I personally get the impression that Paul possessed wisdom and the ability to speak and write with eloquence. But Paul made a decision to pay no never mind to such things. Instead he resolved to be narrow minded. Paul resolved to know but one thing; Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Why was Paul so narrow minded when it came to the crucifixion? Well because the cross is where the debt of sin was paid and salvation was won. The cross was foolishness to many in Corinth but to those who believe it is the power of God. To ignore the cross is to ignore the power of God. To ignore the cross is to ignore forgiveness and salvation. Paul is resolved that he is going to be narrow minded when it comes to the crucifixion.

Now you might rightly ask why Paul feels the need to mention that to people like us. Perhaps something like that would be better said to people who have not gathered in grace at the foot of a fourteen foot copper cross. Are people like you and me really in danger of ignoring the crucifixion, the message of the
cross? I don’t think we do it intentionally. But I do think we are guilty of eloquently sugar coating the cross. Again I don’t think we mean to do it, or when we try to spare some people’s feelings, or when we are afraid that if we tell our friends certain words and certain actions are sinful they will never speak to us again, what are we really doing? When we, in our wisdom, try to make God’s word more palatable for others by shying away from telling people the truth we are guilty of ignoring the cross.

Paul encourages those who Gather in Grace to be narrow minded when it comes to the cross. Not only so that we see the seriousness of our sin and the sins of others but so that we may see how serious God is about our forgiveness and salvation as well. Again Paul told those Gathered in Grace in Corinth, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ”.

Why was Paul so narrow minded when it came to Jesus Christ? Well because Jesus Christ is the only one in all of history that perfectly understood the seriousness of sin. A couple instances come to mind. I think of the time that Jesus overturned the table of the money changers in the temple saying, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16) Or the time that Jesus minced no words when he addressed the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees saying, “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Matthew 23:33) And I think about how Jesus never showed favoritism to his friends when they sinned. Remember what he said to Peter who was trying to talk Jesus out of doing what God the Father sent Jesus to do? He said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:23) Paul is resolved that he is going to be narrow minded when it comes to Jesus Christ because Jesus never downplayed the seriousness of sin or tried to make God’s word more palatable by shying away from telling people the truth.

Paul also resolved to be narrow minded when it came to Jesus Christ because he knew what Jesus Christ and him crucified means for us. God forsook his perfect son so that you, a sinner, would not be forsaken. Jesus Christ and him crucified means that your debt of sin has been paid in full. “It is finished”, Jesus declared! Talk about eloquence! With but one word our God has composed a Psalm that sings both of our sin and forgiveness from our Savior. “It is finished.” Talk about wisdom! With one word the problem that has plagued mankind from Eden has been solved. Sin was brought into the world through one man. So also sin was overcome by one man. No amount of eloquence from the orator’s mouth or wisdom from the scholars mind could accomplish what Jesus Christ and him crucified did by simply declaring, “It is finished”. You understand now why Paul was so narrow minded when it came to Jesus Christ and him crucified. You understand why he writes, 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. May God grant us such narrow mindedness.

As we Gather in Grace, thankful for our church, united in Christ, serving with humility... we also Gather together in Grace resolved that when it comes to Jesus Christ and Him crucified, we are narrow minded.

Amen

1 Corinthians 2:1-5  Epiphany 5 February 6th 2011  Pastor Harmon Lewis @ Saving Grace, Mobile, AL