

Power of the Gospel

#0979

Study Given by W.D. Frazee—June 12,
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Our text is in 1 Corinthians 1. You know, in these beautiful songs and in prayer and in our offerings, we have worshiped the Lord. Now, through His word, He desires to speak to us. And in 1 Corinthians 1 beginning with the 17th verse, we shall read:

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” 1 Corinthians 1:17-24.

I’m sure that we all this morning, from time to time, have a great longing for more power in our lives. The power, Paul says, is in the preaching of the cross. There is something about Calvary that breaks the hold of sin in the life and gives a man power to withstand the temptations of Satan. I trust that all here have experienced this to some extent.

But, my dear friends, no matter how much we have received, there’s more. In the words of this song:

Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Into the crimson flood.
Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Under the precious blood.

Let us see if we can discover, this morning, something more of that power which is revealed in the cross. Paul plainly states that it is not the power of miracles which the Jews were seeking after. It is not the power of human logic and philosophy which the Greeks delighted in. On the contrary, He acknowledges that the preaching of the cross is to the Jews, who seek after miracles, merely a

stumbling block; to the philosophical mind of the Greek, the cross was foolishness. It still is, my friends. It still is.

What is the purpose of the cross? What happened there? What is there at the cross that will give you and me power in our daily struggles?

We're all familiar, more or less, with the historical record. We know that at the midnight hour, Thursday night, the mob seized Jesus and took Him to the judgment hall. After being arraigned 7 times He was led out to Calvary to die. As they nailed Him to the cross the rough soldiers did nothing to make His suffering less, but the soldiers and the mob and the spectators all joined to make everything as cruel as possible.

As Jesus hung there through those 6 weary hours, from 9:00 o'clock in the morning until 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, He said very little, but His heart was going through the greatest struggle of eternity. Beside the physical suffering of the crucifixion and the reviling of the mob and the great disappointment over the fact that His own disciples had forsaken Him, He was struggling also with two great invisible battles.

One was the power of Satan. Satan was urging temptations upon Him, making Him feel that if He gave His life a sacrifice for sin, that He would never live again; if Jesus took the plunge to save us, it would mean eternal separation from His Father.

The other battle was the battle in His heart over this: a mysterious darkness that had come between Him and His Father. He had walked in the smile of God's countenance, and now that smile was withdrawn. He was taking the sinner's place. In fact, for our sakes He had become sin. So the frown of God rather than His smile was all that Jesus could see. This broke His heart. It called forth that anguished cry, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Finally He died, and the disciples put Him in the grave to come forth on the resurrection morning, to ascend to be our mediator.

I ask again, now, what is there in that, that furnishes us power to live the life and do the deeds of His law?

First of all, let us notice what the cross is not. The cross is not a sacrifice to appease an angry God and make Him willing to accept us, whereas before He was unwilling. This is paganism, all such ideas. And whether that paganism, that heathenism be manifested in some ancient religious culture or in our modern times, whether it be in some heathen temple halfway around the world, or in some supposed Christian church here in America, any idea that some sacrifice is required in order to appease God and make Him willing to love and forgive us, I say my dear friends, that is about as far as one can get from an understanding of the character of God.

You know, Satan studied the prophecies minutely. And when after our first parents had sinned, God introduced the plan of salvation, and it was revealed that

some day God's Son would come as a sacrifice for sin, Satan studied how to pervert the thinking of men on that point, so that they would not understand the effort of God. Both before Calvary and since, the majority of mankind has never understood the purpose of sacrifice. It is not to appease God. It is not to reconcile God to man. On the contrary, the scripture says:

“...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself...” 2 Corinthians 5:19.

The cross, let us put it very simply, is not to change God. It is to change me. That is its purpose. The reconciliation that needs to be made between God and me is not to be brought about by some change on God's part, but by some change in me. And it is through the blood of His cross that, that reconciliation is to be effected and accomplished.

If that is so, do we not see that unless that change is wrought in us by coming to Calvary, so far as we're concerned, the cross has failed? And we must acknowledge that, as far as the majority of mankind is concerned, the cross has failed to reconcile them to God—not because the power is not there, but because men have been unwilling to let the power operate.

We must not, then, think of the cross as some historical incident which somehow does something for us without any participation on our part. Which leads me to the next point, my dear friends; the cross is not an arrangement under which you and I can be saved in transgression. No. Let me illustrate it.

I'll not ask you to raise your hands, but did any of you ever get a ticket for speeding? It has happened, hasn't it? Yes. That's breaking the law, isn't it? Not a felony, nevertheless breaking the law. Very well, suppose you get a ticket. You accept it from the officer. But you say, “Never mind. I have a friend who's the friend of the judge, and he'll fix that ticket for me.”

There are multitudes who somehow think that Calvary is something like that. Jesus has died, somehow, to fix things with the judge so that the punishment I deserve for transgression will not come to me, and I can go right on breaking the law.

If that is what Calvary is, my dear friends, then where's the law of God? It is indeed, as thousands of so-called Christian preachers teach from their pulpits today, nailed to the cross. The Ten Commandments are indeed nailed to the cross, if Christ did anything remotely like that. But He didn't. He came to magnify the law and make it honorable. In His sermon on the mount, He took pains to make it clear that He had not come to set aside one iota of this law. Not one letter would ever pass away, He said.

The cross, then, is not to do away with the law. It's to do away with the transgression of the law, which is something entirely different. If the cross succeeded in doing away with the law, it only accomplished what Lucifer had set out to do 4,000 years before. But Jesus did not die in any way to establish the claims of

Satan. On the contrary, He died to make it possible for sin to be taken out of the hearts and lives of men, thereby reconciling them to God and exalting the law.

So let us review for the moment. The cross is not a sacrifice to appease an angry Deity. The change that needs to be made is not a change in God. It's a change in me. The cross is not the payment of a fine, the meeting of a penalty, so that the law will not operate in my case. The cross is not to do away with the law. It's to do away with sin which is the transgression of the law.

Now, do you all agree with me in what we have studied so far? All right. Then I ask you, friends, unless the cross has made a change in me, has it yet accomplished its purpose? No. And second, unless the cross has taken sin out of my life, has it yet accomplished its goal? No, no. Oh, that the power of the cross may operate in our lives to so change us that we will know God and love Him, and know His law and love it. Thereby the atonement may be accomplished between us and God. What do you say? The Lord grant it.

Very well, then, let us look, for a little while, at how the cross accomplishes this. In order that you and I may be reconciled to God, we must understand God. The cross reveals God as nothing else could in all the universe, because it shows how far God will go in giving everything for us, to draw us back to Him.

In the beginning of the great controversy, Lucifer charged that God, in His law, was demanding obedience which God would not give Himself; that God was requiring self-denial which He, God, did not practice. But at Calvary we see that God will go far beyond anything that He has ever required of us in the endeavor to save us. The love of God is revealed at Calvary.

Let's look. What do you say, friends? Oh, let's look at that cross until God's love becomes more and more real to us.

There's something else that is revealed at Calvary, and that's the character of Satan. When the universe saw the Devil taking Jesus and treating Him so cruelly in the judgment hall and at Calvary; as they saw how Satan inspired the cruel mob and the priests and the soldiers to heap every kind of abuse upon the Savior, they realized that there was nothing lovely or kind or good or desirable about Satan. As they saw what Satan did to Jesus, they saw what he would do to them, were they in his power. And when you and I look at Calvary, friends, we can see what Satan would do to us, were we fully in his power. He delights in cruelty. He delights in meanness and abuse. When I behold that scene, the power of sin to woo and win me is spoiled.

Well, let's go deeper. Some years ago I was conducting a week of prayer in one of our academies here in California. Two girls came to me one day, for counsel. They said, "Brother Frazee, we'd like to talk with you about a problem we have. We seem to fall over and over again, when we're tempted on a certain matter. What can be done?"

I said to them as we studied together, "Suppose the next time you girls are tempted on this point, somebody should come and say to you, "Yes, you may do that. But first you must drive a nail in your mother's hand. Would you do it?"

"Oh, no," they said. "We wouldn't do that."

Well, I said, "Would it be hard to say no to the temptation, or would it be easy?"

They said, "No, it wouldn't be hard if we had to drive that nail."

The deeper meaning of Calvary is that every sin wounds the Savior afresh. So it is written in Hebrews 6:6, that those who continue in sin when they know better:

"...crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh..." Hebrews 6:6.

This realization comes as we see that the thing that actually killed Jesus that dark Friday was not the wounds in hands or feet. It was the heart-breaking sorrow that sin brings. That's what killed Him. He died of a broken heart.

Now, friends, this is the thing I'd like to have us think about this morning. If I see that, can I any longer get pleasure out of that which brings Him pain?

I remember when I was a boy in my teens; one evening I was out a bit later than my mother expected me. In fact, the plan was for me to be in early that evening for some reason. But something had come up, and I took it upon myself to stay out later. When I got in, I could see Mother was greatly disappointed. In fact she wept as she talked with me. I had disappointed her. Finally, I said this, "Mother, if I had known how you would take it, I wouldn't have done it. If I had known you would feel so bad about it, I wouldn't have done it."

This, my dear friends, is the secret of victory over sin. The reason anyone sins is because he does not realize how it makes God feel. Calvary is the effort on the part of God to show you and me how He feels over sin. And if we hear that heart-broken cry from the cross, and realize that it was our sin, my sin, that drew that cry from His broken heart, how can I repeat that tragedy? How can I go again and do the thing that will break His heart? This is the real meaning of Calvary. This is the power of the cross, my dear friends, to break the hold of sin.

You see, God tried to teach the Israelites this, in the centuries before the cross, through the sanctuary service here on earth. You remember the repentant sinner was to come to the sanctuary and bring what? Bring an offering, a bullock, a goat, a lamb. And there by the altar, he was to place his hands upon that substitute and then do what? Slay the sacrifice.

"Oh, but I don't like to do that. Let someone else do that. I'll confess my sins and hurry home. The priest can slay the sacrifice."

Not so. The priest must sprinkle the blood, but I must slay the victim. And what does it mean? Turn, please, to Zechariah 12:10 will you? Here is the power of the cross revealed through an Old Testament prophet:

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” Zechariah 12:10.

Notice, as we pray we’re to look. Look where? Look upon Him whom we have pierced. We, did we pierce anybody?

Let me tell you about one of the saddest funerals that I ever heard of. Some years ago, I was holding a series of evangelistic meetings in Ogden, Utah. One morning a young father backed his car out of the garage, as he did every morning on his way to work. But this morning, His little boy had followed him from the breakfast table, out from the kitchen, into the yard, and got in the path of that moving automobile—just a little toddler. And so at this funeral, there in the casket, lay the little form, and here was the father, the one who had killed him. Can you imagine his grief, my friends? He had killed his own little boy.

Ah, you say, “It was an accident.”

Do you think that took the grief out of the father’s heart? This verse says that if you and I will look upon the One whom we have slain, whom we have pierced, we will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son.

Or did you have anything to do with Calvary? Are those nails driven by you? Did you pierce Jesus? Was it your sins that broke His heart; your pride; your folly; your worldliness? My dear friends, unless it was your sin that pierced Him, your sin is still on you, and you must bear the penalty. Unless He died for you, you must die for that sin. But if He died for you, then it was your sin that killed Him. And when you sense that, you’ll not want to repeat that, because you know that He died under that heart-breaking sorrow that your sin brought, and you do not want to repeat that sorrow in the Savior’s heart. This is the power of the cross.

So we need to come every day, and let the precious blood dropping from the Savior’s hands and head and feet fall upon us. You know, friends, we have this choice, if we have any heart about us at all. We can either be sorry after sin or we can be sorry before. When we’re sorry after and we ask God to forgive us, He does. But, oh, He would like so much if we would come morning by morning and let the blood be sprinkled in our hearts before we fall, before we sin. If we’re sorry enough we’ll not do it again. Do you agree with me?

Will you turn to Hymn # 275?

In the blood from the cross

I have been washed from sin;
But to be free from dross, Still
I would enter in.

Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Into the crimson flood;
Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Under the precious blood.

And as we sing these words of response, if there's somebody here this morning to whose heart Jesus has spoken in a special way, and you long that the power of the cross shall so grip your heart that you shall no longer disappoint the One who has so loved you; if in your heart this morning you long for an experience in what we've studied together, and you feel the call of Jesus to seek for that, I invite you to come up here and kneel at the altar. Forget all about this audience, forget about this speaker. Think only of Jesus as He hangs upon the cross for you. If you seek Him with all your heart, you shall receive the power you need to break the hold of sin in your life.

In the blood from the cross
I have been washed from sin;
But to be free from dross, Still
I would enter in.

Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Into the crimson flood;
Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Under the precious blood.

Day by day, hour by hour,
Blessings are sent to me;
But for more of His power
Ever my prayer shall be.

Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Into the crimson flood;
Deeper yet, deeper yet,
Under the precious blood.

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