

Preaching the Cross

#0414

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—March 23, 1968

Our text is 1 Corinthians the 1st chapter beginning with the 17th verse. We've been speaking to God. We've been worshipping Him in our songs, in prayer, and with our offerings. Now, He's going to speak to us through His Word. In this book is a message for every one of us, so let us listen.

And remember this, my dear friends, while you'll be hearing what the preacher says, let your inner ear hear the voice of the Spirit as He applies to your heart what is in this book. For God may have something to share with you personally that I don't know anything about. You may be having some problem this morning that nobody else in the world knows anything about. But God knows about it, and God has brought us together here this morning to hear Him speak to us.

This must be a very personal experience. We're to hear Him speaking to our hearts through this book. So, for this little while with the world shut out, shut in with God, let us take the attitude of Samuel:

"...Speak, LORD; for Thy servant heareth" 1 Samuel 3:9.

Shall we do that? Ah, friend, God will speak to us through His word.

Our text:

"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" 1 Corinthians 1:17–18.

Now, let us notice first that last expression, "the power of God." Does God have power? Oh yes, *all* power. As Paul says in Romans 13:

"...There is no power but of God..." Romans 13:1.

As He is the source of all light, He is the source of all power. And the power of God in this verse is said to be available to us through the preaching of the cross.

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" 1 Corinthians 1:18.

What is the power of God? The preaching of the cross. Now, I wonder, do any of you need power?

“Oh,” somebody says, “I surely do.”

What do you need power for?

Well, says one, “I have a difficulty with the temptations of Satan. It’s easy for me to lose my temper,” or “I’m tempted to use tobacco,” or “I tend to be moody and gloomy. I have lots of problems. I wish I had more power.”

Well, you *can* have, you can have more power. There’s plenty *there*. And it is available to us, this text says, through the preaching of the cross.

Somebody else says, “Yes, I wish I had power. I wish I had the power to win souls. I wish I had the power to help other people.”

Do you? Would you like to help other people? Well, you can. There’s plenty of power available.

Let me illustrate. I notice we have the lights on here this morning. That’s electric power transformed into illumination, isn’t it? Suppose we had only one little light burning here this morning.

And somebody should say, “Oh, I wish we had more light.”

Suppose I should say to you, “Yes, I wish we did too, but I’ll tell you. The Dynamos down there at Chickamauga Lake are already overburdened, and I’m afraid we can’t turn on more than one light.”

You’d say, “Oh, foolishness. There’s plenty of water in the river, and all they need to do is turn in a little more water, and the electricity will be running over the wires 186,000 miles a second to give us some more light.”

Is that correct? Yes, yes. So, we can turn on another light if we need it. It won’t overburden the generators there, will it? No, no. There’s plenty of power there. And so it is, my friend, in your life and mine. There is power, plenty of power with God, infinitely more than all the generators in the TVA system. And you and I can *have* it. We don’t have to go limping along, barely able to make it. Oh, no.

Jesus says:

“All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and...I am with you always, even unto the end of the world “ Matthew 28:18–20.

But now, even though there’s plenty of power over there in the generators, there are ways to get it. And if we want the power, we have to go *that way*.

I can’t just get out here and fan my arms around and say, “Oh, I wish we had some more power.”

No, no. There's more than one switch in this building, but I'll tell you, every electric light in this building is dependent upon the turning of switches to shine. Am I correct? Yes. And I can go around on the wall here and here and here and here and press and punch and pull, and I get nothing. But I come around to that switch, and the slightest little flick of the finger and more light is mine. Is that correct?

Well, what makes the difference? Why can I just push and push on the wall all along and get nothing, and then suddenly I come to a certain place and just touch it, and lo, the light appears. Well, that's the way the law is. That's the way it's arranged.

By the way, those are the laws of God, friends. The laws of electricity are just as much the laws of God as the Ten Commandments. The laws that govern our bodies, stomach, liver, lungs, brain—they're just as much the laws of God as what He wrote on the tables of stone. All the laws of the universe are the laws of the great Creator. My point is by learning how God works and working *with* Him, we get the benefit of all that blessing.

Now, would you like to learn how to turn the switch and get more power in your life? Well, that's what Paul is talking about.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are [being] saved it is the power of God” 1 Corinthians 1:18.

The power of God is in the preaching of the cross. But now, watch. He says to those who are perishing, it's foolishness. I'll tell you this, friend. If this was midnight and the room were all in darkness, and somebody came in that had never known anything about electricity, and you should say to him, “Friend, would you like to have light?”

“Yes,” he said, “I sure would, but I don't know where there's any kerosene, and I haven't got a match. I don't know where there's any lamp around.”

You say, “Well, it's very simple. If you'll just go around there to the back panel and feel around, you'll find a little place about so square, and you'll find a little button there. And if you'll just press that, if you'll just press that, the whole room will be full of light.”

Do you know what he'd say?

“Foolishness.”

Wouldn't he? That's what you and I would say if we didn't know. We've just gotten used to electricity. But I can remember, friends, when if we wanted a light at our house, we had to strike a match and light the old kerosene lamp. Any of you remember anything like that? Why, yes, yes. Sure. Well, it worked, too. This works faster, doesn't it? And you can get more light. But the point is, it would sound foolish to a person that wasn't acquainted with it. Am I correct?

Now, this is what Paul is talking about.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness...” 1 Corinthians 1:18.

The world of Paul’s day could not see any sense in going around talking about a man who had died upon a tree as having any effect on saving men and women and giving them the power to live a different life. They couldn’t see that it added up, that it made any sense. And the unconverted heart today cannot understand it. But oh, unto us who are being saved, the preaching of the cross is the power of God.

I ask again, would you like to have more power? Would you like to have power in your life to live a sweet, victorious life, the life of Jesus? Would you like to have power to reach out and help others? Let’s get it this morning. What do you say? The cross will be preached this morning. And you and I, if we will come together at Calvary and behold the miracle, the miracle that Jesus accomplished there and *is* accomplishing through its preaching, we can go out of this chapel this morning every one of us with more power than we entered. Is that worthwhile? Come, then, let’s behold and look. Let’s listen.

“...The preaching of the cross...is the power of God”
1 Corinthians 1:18.

Now, before we look at what the cross *is*, let’s look at what it is *not*, for there are misapprehensions about the cross. There are misconceptions of its message. And we need to sweep away those cobwebs that we may behold the true glory.

First, the cross is not an arrangement to appease God, to placate Him and make Him feel more loving toward us and more willing to accept us. The heathen looked upon their sacrifices as an arrangement to appease the deity.

A heathen would think, “Well, one of my children is sick, or my crops don’t grow. I guess the gods are angry with me. I must take some offering and go up to the temple, and I must sacrifice that offering so that god won’t be angry with me anymore.”

I want to say to you that the cross is nothing remotely like that. It’s true that God gave His ancient people sacrifices. It’s true that He arranged that they should bring a lamb, a goat, a bullock and sacrifice it. But God never had the slightest purpose that they should think that by that they were placating Him and appeasing Him and satisfying His anger, nothing like that, my friend.

In the first place, if the infinite God were angry, friend, that would be no way to placate Him. In the second place, stop and think of this, what do we have at Calvary? It is God Himself in Christ suffering. And what could we think of a Father on His throne who would get the slightest satisfaction of seeing His own Son being tortured? Nothing like it, friend. God suffered with His Son. God suffered with His Son. It was God Himself that provided the offering.

“...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself...”

2 Corinthians 5:19.

So, I repeat, we must not think of the cross as an arrangement whereby God is placated or appeased. We must not think of the cross as an arrangement that makes God willing to do for us what He wasn't willing to do before. No, no. Before this world was made God and Christ looked ahead, and they arranged that if the need should ever arise, Christ would be offered as the atonement for sin.

There's another thing the cross is not. The cross is not an arrangement so that you and I can keep on breaking the law and not suffer. Suppose I'm going along the highway between here and Chattanooga, and I run up 70, 80, 90 miles an hour. And there's one of the state police happens to be along the highway about that time. Would anything happen? Probably.

I'd hear a siren or see a flashing light. I'd pull over.

He'd say, "Let me see your operator's license."

And I'd get it out, and he'd begin to write me out a ticket.

Suppose you were riding with me—just suppose now, you're riding with me. And by and by, the policeman goes on his way, and we get in the car and drive on again. And you were sitting right by me, and you noticed the needle going up again 70, 80, 90 miles an hour.

And you say, "What about this, Brother Frazee? I thought you just got stopped back there for doing this. Aren't you breaking the law? You've already got one ticket."

And suppose I say to you, "Oh, never mind. We don't have to worry about that. I have a friend that knows the judge, and he'll fix this ticket with the judge all right. I won't have to pay."

Do you think that would be a very good way to uphold the law? Do you? And if I have a friend that's fixing my traffic tickets with the judge so that I keep speeding on the highway and driving recklessly, is he a very good friend of mine? No. No, he isn't.

He's not only—don't miss this—he's not only endangering the life of all the people on the highway that I happen to be around, but he's also endangering *my* life, isn't he? He's helping to teach me disregard of the law that is for my safety, right?

Now, listen, if we can see how utterly absurd and wrong that is, what would we think—don't miss this—what would we think of a religious teaching which would lead men to feel that Jesus died on the cross so they could go ahead and break the law of God and have no consequences? Do you see what I mean, my friends?

But that teaching is in the world today. From many a pulpit, it is proclaimed that *before* the cross, men had to keep the law of God, but *after* the cross, that's all done away. What an idea, my friends. Is that what the cross is for? Is that what

Jesus died for is to fix the traffic ticket so you wouldn't have to go to jail or even pay a fine, but you can drive merrily on at any speed? Nothing the judge can do because your friend has fixed that all up, so you're safe. Ah, my friends, such an idea did not originate in the mind of God. No, no.

Now, if the cross is not an arrangement to placate God, and if the cross is not an arrangement to fix things up with the Judge so we can go on breaking the law, what is the cross?

Ah, my friends, there are two great lessons that I want to look at with you at the cross this morning. Let me state them very briefly and then look at them with you. Let me tell you personally what it means to me. The cross shows me how bad Satan is and how good God is. The cross shows me what a terrible thing sin is and what a wonderful love God has.

And there is no other place in all this universe that I can learn those two lessons so well. And if I can learn them fully, the power of sin is broken, the power of sin is broken. This is all I need.

And so, it is written:

"If sinners can be led to give one earnest look at the cross, if they can obtain a full view of the crucified Saviour, they will realize the depth of God's compassion and the sinfulness of sin" *Acts of the Apostles*, page 209.

Let's think first of how the cross reveals how bad sin is, what a devil old Satan is. Now, you think of Jesus there in the Garden of Gethsemane. He hasn't hurt anybody. He hasn't wronged anybody. He's innocent. But here comes a mob at midnight. They grab Him, bind Him, hurry Him off to the high priest's palace.

There He goes through a farce of a trial, and another one and another one and another one. And so, trial after trial He goes through. In between, the mob beat Him and kick Him. Finally, the soldiers make a crown of thorns and put it down on His head. One man takes a reed, hits Him on the head, putting those thorns deep into His flesh and causing the blood to trickle down His face. Others spit in His face. Some hit Him on the face. Some pull the hair out.

Finally, they scourge Him, bare His back and beat Him, whip Him with those long lashes with the steel braided in the leather. And then, they lead Him out to the hill called Calvary and nail Him to the cross, and hang Him up between the heaven and the earth to die.

But they're not through with Him yet. For all the weary hours He hangs there. As the multitude gather around, they seem inspired, and they *are* inspired by the Devil to do everything mean and contemptible and abusive that can be thought of.

What's back of all this? The Devil is back of it. And if you want to see what kind of a devil he is, look at what he did to Jesus at Calvary. This is the nature of

sin. This is sin real. And this is the same Devil that comes around to you and me and tries to get us to break God's law and follow Satan in his campaign.

Listen, friends. Do you know the Devil will be just as mean to you if you stick with him as he was to Jesus? Yes, he will. The Devil doesn't love anybody. The only satisfaction that he gets in playing the game of life for human souls is the satisfaction he gets in hurting the heart of Christ. My dear friends, the longer I look at what he did to Jesus, the more I *don't* want to give that kind of a devil any satisfaction.

And if smoking a cigarette will make him happy, I say, "Down with the cigarette."

If getting angry and losing my temper will make him laugh with glee, I say, "God, keep me from rendering such an offering to his satanic majesty."

If breaking God's Sabbath will make the Devil happy, I say, "God, help me to keep the Sabbath holy."

And so with everything else that God has asked us to do for Him. I don't want to give the Devil the satisfaction of hurting the heart of Christ. He's a bad devil, and the cross shows just what kind of character he is.

But now, watch. In the cross, we have the revelation of God's love. The same cross that shows us how bad the Devil is, shows us how good God is, for on the cross we see God, in Christ, willing to make any sacrifice in order that you and I might be saved.

Years ago, I was holding a series of revival meetings in an academy, and two girls came to me for counsel.

And they said, "We're having a problem. It seems that every time we're tempted, we fall, and we just do it over and over again. What can we do?"

And I said to them, "Now, suppose that next time you're tempted to do this thing that somebody should step up to you and say, 'Yes, you can do that thing, *but* there's one thing you must do first. You must take a hammer and a nail and drive that nail in your mother's hand. Now, you can go ahead and do it. You can go ahead and yield to the temptation and do the wrong thing, but first, you must drive that nail.'"

I said, "Would you do it?"

"Oh, no," they said, "we wouldn't do it."

"Well," I said, "would it be hard or easy to resist? Would it be hard to say, 'No' to the Devil, or would it be easy?"

Well, they said they thought it would be easy.

“Well,” I said, “that’s the secret, that’s the secret—for you to realize what sin costs Jesus. If you realize how much He loves you and how much sin hurts Him, then you’ll have power to say, ‘No’ to Satan and say, ‘Yes’ to the Savior.

This is it, friends. And when I come to Calvary, I see One who loves me so much that He can never be happy while I do wrong. Every sin hurts Him afresh. But my point is He loves me so much that He’s willing to take that burden.

Do you know how much Jesus revealed His love on Calvary? I can tell you. Don’t miss this. As He hung there on the cross, the Devil told Him that if He went ahead and died for me that Jesus would never live again, that Jesus could never see His Father again.

But Jesus loved me so much that He said, “If it means that, then I’ll take the plunge. If that’s what it’s going to cost to save him, I’ll pay the price.”

Jesus died for me as *if* that death were to be forever. Can you think of any greater love than that, my friend? Can you disappoint a love like that? If it could become *real* enough to us, would we ever want to sin again? Would we, friend? Oh, no. *This* is the power of God.

“...The preaching of the cross... is the power of God”
1 Corinthians 1:18.

This is why we’re told that it would be well for us every day to have a period when we think about what Jesus did for us upon the cross [a paraphrase of *Desire of Ages*, page 83]. We sang it a while ago, “Jesus, keep me” where? “Near the cross.”

“Jesus, keep me near the cross.”

He wants to keep us there, but we have a choice to make. Day by day, we can read in the Bible about what He did for us on the cross. Matthew wrote it down. You can read it in Matthew 27. Mark wrote it down. You can read it in Mark 15. Luke wrote it down. You can read that in Luke 23. John wrote it down. You can read it in John 19.

And the prophets of old wrote it down. Read it in Isaiah 53. Read it in Psalm 22. Read it in a hundred other places in the Old and New Testaments. The wonderful story of the suffering and death of Jesus is to show us how bad sin is and how much He loves us. Oh friends, here is the power of God.

Now, turn over, please, to the last book of the Bible. What’s that book? Revelation. And do you know what the name of the book is?

“The revelation of Jesus Christ...” Revelation 1:1.

Men have given it the name of, “The Revelation of St. John.” But the book itself, in its very first line, gives its true name:

“The revelation of Jesus Christ...” Revelation 1:1.

“The revelation of Jesus Christ...” Revelation 1:1.

Turn now to the third chapter of Revelation, the 20th verse. Will you read it with me:

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear
My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and
will sup with him, and he with Me” Revelation 3:20.

You’ve seen the picture, haven’t you? Jesus at the door. Now, what is it He wants? He wants to come in, He wants to come in. What’s He doing? He’s knocking. I want you to look at something. What does a person use to knock? The hand. Whose hand is it that’s knocking? Jesus’ hand. If you look in that hand, what do you see? Scars, reminders of Calvary. The hand that knocks is the hand that was nailed to the cross for you and me.

Now, where does it say He knocks? Where does He say? At the door. That’s where people usually knock, isn’t it?

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock...” Revelation 3:20.

Do you know what the door is? Let me tell you what the door is. The door is whatever stands between you and Him. If there’s nothing between you and Him, the door is open. If there’s something you haven’t yielded to Christ, that’s the door. That’s where He stands.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My
voice, and...” Revelation 3:20.

What?

“...and open the door, I will come in...” Revelation 3:20.

You mean that thing that has stood between Jesus and me can be taken out of the way? Oh, yes. If I look to Christ upon the cross and see how bad sin is and how much His love means, oh friends, the more I look, the more the desire will deepen in my heart to get that door out of the way, so that Christ can come in and He and I can be just like that, close together.

I’m glad Carolyn’s here this morning, and I want her to sing just what we’ve been reading about here. Two weeks ago this morning, Carolyn sang this song for me. I want her to sing it for me again this morning. And as she sings, I want you to see Jesus at the door. And what’s He doing? What did we read here? What’s He doing? Knocking. And what does He want? What does He want? He wants to come in. All right.

Who at my door is standing,
Patiently drawing near,
Entrance within demanding,

Whose is the voice I hear?

[Refrain]

Sweetly the tones are falling,
'Open the door for me!'
If thou wilt heed My calling,
I will abide with thee.

Lonely without He is waiting
Lonely within am I,
While I am still delaying,
Will He not pass me by?

[Refrain]

Door of my heart, I hasten!
Thee will I open wide.
Though He rebuke and chasten,
He shall with me abide.

[Refrain]"

"Who At My Door Is Standing?"

by Mary B. Slade, first, second and fourth stanzas.

It would make the Master very happy this morning if each one of us made a very personal response. As we think of His great gift of love, let's do what He's asked us to do. What do you say? How many of us would like to send Him the word this morning that we choose to hate sin and love Him. May I see your hands? Is that our response this morning? Thank the Lord.

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