

THE PREACHING OF -THE CROSS

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For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified

(1Cor.2: 2).

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was taken to the Corinthians through Paul, with great power and authority as we read in 1 Cor.2: 4,5. Yet the believers there remained babes for a long time. With a heavy heart he wrote to them saying, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Cor.3: 1-2). He had to speak to them as little children and could not teach them the deeper truths of salvation. Even though they heard the word with power and authority, yet they remained babes in the spirit. As a result they not only had strife, confusion, contention and divisions among them but sin also. Then came the wrong teaching and false doctrines. The main reason for all that was, they had not experienced the power of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of us fail to grow spiritually because we do not understand the meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not appropriate it in our lives.

Over the centuries, the cross is being used as a sign or a symbol. Many people bow before it or wear a small cross in the neck or keep it in their homes. Some think of it by repeatedly saying, "He died, He died". But there is no power in their lives. Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor.1: 18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness: but unto us which are saved it is the power of God". The power of God comes into us in fullness and abundance by appropriating the power of the cross of Christ in us. There is no other way, and no other plan by which that power will come into us. Some people try to get that power by wrong means like dreams and visions. Apostle Paul saw many visions but he did not depend on them for this power. According to Phil.3: 10, he longed to know the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection. He had the privilege of seeing not one but many visions and miracles in his life. He even had the privilege of being caught up into third heaven and sees many wonderful things (2 Cor.12: 2-5). He did not glory in those visions and miracles but longed to know how to identify with the death of Christ and to enjoy the power of His resurrection.

Now the cross means, the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people think of hardship as their cross. Any difficulty, any trial, any persecution or even an unhappy home, they call it their cross. Some say their wife is their cross. But the cross means the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. He never died as a martyr or by force. He gave Himself willingly. He is not asking for any sympathy or tears from us. Some people think that by shedding tears on Good Friday or by fasting for three days, they show sympathy. But in John 1 a: 18 we read that He gave His life willingly. He died so that we may receive into us this powerfully. That is why we should experience it in our lives. All of our teaching and preaching should be centered on the cross of Christ. As we saw earlier, Paul saw the Lord personally, did many miracles and great works, yet he did not glory in all that. He gloried in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal.6: 14). We have to learn that by experience. The

power and the secret of the cross is not one day's experience. It should be our daily experience to claim the power of the cross by faith.

Christian life is warfare, a life-long warfare (Eph.6: 12). Do not be satisfied because you got victory over a few temptations. That is no proof that you will not face any more temptations or fall into sin. None of us who overcame in the past can say, "I am safe". The devil makes us fall by simple things. Unknowingly you may put your foot on a piece of soap, fall down and break your leg. It is not done intentionally but a very small thing causes you to slip and fall and break the leg. Then you have to be in bandage for some months. None " of us can say, "I will never fall". That is why the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Watch". We may not know but it is possible to be overtaken in sin. The devil can come as an angel of light, or as a roaring lion, a flood or as a grievous wolf. Whenever we are not watchful, the devil comes in a subtle way to deceive us. That is why we have to learn the secret of getting victory by the power of the cross. It is not attained in one day, but as we appropriate that power day by day we get strength to defeat the devil.

In Corinth, believers were divided. Some said they belonged to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas and some to Christ (1 Cor. 1: 12). They were full of hatred and jealousy. That is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:2, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified". He also told them about the great things God had purposed to give them. "... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). There was no need for them to glory in the miracles done by the apostles in the past. We can also have the same weakness of glorying about the past. We should rather enter into the great purpose of God as revealed in 1 Cor. 2:9. God wants to do so much for us, far beyond our understanding. But these great mysteries can be understood only by the deeper work of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why the apostle had such a burden to know among the Corinthians nothing but Christ crucified (1 Cor .2:2).

The believers at Corinth gloried in their Bible knowledge, because they had plenty of knowledge. They gloried in their utterance also (1 Cor. 1: 5- 7). They believed in and waited for the second coming of the Lord Jesus. They had more gifts than other people. In spite of all these advantages they remained babes. It is quite possible to be like that. That is the sad condition of many believers even to day. With all the preaching and knowledge, there is no depth in their spiritual life. They live a life of defeat, and are dry spiritually. There is no spiritual oneness among them, whether they are God's servants or believers. There is no understanding of deep spiritual matters; they know only repentance and salvation. But Paul says, God wants to give great things, and for that we need to understand the deeper meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The power of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ helps us to die with Him as Paul testifies in Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me". Before we can die with Him, we have to understand how He died for our sins. He became our Substitute. He did no sin; He knew no sin, yet He died for us. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin: that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own

self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:23, 24). "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). We must remember this fact day by day, not just think about it now and then. It will take our whole life, even eternity to know this unchanging, divine love of the Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, we must know that He died for our sins (Rom. 6:23). God is just. He must punish us for the sins, which we committed by word, deed and thought. We think that the sins of deeds only are great sins. But before our God, "any thing that breaks our contact with Him is sin. A few drops of water in a switch, causes all lights and fans to go off. Once in a big building we found that lights were going off very often. When one of us went to see the cause, he found few ants running in and out of the switch. Small ants only, but because of them fuse was going off and the whole building was in darkness. Even so, a sinful thought or deed breaks our contact with God.

Now who can count evil thoughts? In Mark 7:21-22 we read, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, Fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness,... an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness". Though we do not want, thoughts of hatred and jealousy often come into us. In the same way, all our idle words will be counted. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment"(Matt.12: 36). We have to be punished for our sinful deeds, words and also thoughts. If we can count our bad thoughts of one day, they are more than the number of our hairs. If that is true of one day, what about every day? If we put all our thoughts together, our punishment will be very great. Our sins are so many, that we deserve eternal death. But our Lord Jesus Christ as our loving Creator bore all our punishment on the cross. His love is very great! Many parents pay the debts of their children. Some children throw stones and break the neighbor's windowpanes. Then the parents will pay the cost of the glass. Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ our Creator paid the penalty of all our sins. That is why He allowed people to do to Him whatever they wanted. If He wanted, He would have brought fire from heaven, as the disciples wanted to do in Luke 9:52-54. But He rebuked them and said, "...the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (v.56). As our loving Savior He bore all our sins in His own body. He gave His hands and feet to be pierced, face to be spat upon, hair to be plucked, and back to be scourged. Every joint of His body became loose. When He was scourged His whole body was bruised, for the scourges were made of steel pieces. He gave all as the Scripture says. That is why it will take us eternity to thank Him sufficiently. Do you thank Him for dying for your sins? How many times do you thank Him? You may take hardly a minute. Many thank Him only as a routine, and not from their hearts.

See the Lord Jesus taking your place, bearing your punishment, your curse and your condemnation upon Him and you will know that He is so loving, holy and perfect. Wicked people mocked Him, reviled Him, and pulled His hair, but He did not say one word. He gave Himself fully. In the world, even if one has committed murder, he will not be punished unless his crime is proved by two or three witnesses. Without witnesses there cannot be any punishment. But in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ there were no witnesses, yet He was punished. He has full record of all our sins. We may forget what we have done, but He says, "My dear child, I know how many sins you have committed. I have paid the price for all your sins". So we have to go on thanking Him. It must be from the heart. For the power of the cross to come into our lives, we must spend much time in thanking the Lord for dying for our sins.

If any one pays our debts we will be very grateful to them. In my school days I was once traveling by train to go to my hostel. I slept and went beyond the station where I had to get down. Only at the next station I woke up and realized what had happened. I got down there, went to the stationmaster and said to him, "Sir, I overslept, which I should not have done, and so did not get down at the right station". He was a kind man. He gave me food and put me in the next train. Even today, I am grateful to him. The Lord Jesus did so much for us; how much more should we be thankful to Him! That is why our worship round the Lord's Table is so important. If we take part in the Lord's Table worthily and thank Him for the very fact that He paid all our debt and saved us, the power of resurrection will come into us. If we thank Him day by day for dying in our stead, sin becomes very sinful to us. Then we begin to hate sin and say, "How can I grieve the Lord again and again?"

There were two brothers who were always quarrelling. One day as they were having food, they started quarrelling again. One of them threw a knife at the other in anger. Then the mother put forth her hand to protect the other brother. Her hand was cut. They both felt very much ashamed for hurting her. Thereafter whenever they quarreled, the mother would say, "My dear boys, I get hurt whenever you quarrel", and she would show her hand. That is how every time we commit sin, we grieve our Lord. We must remember how much He suffered for our sins and thank Him adequately and sufficiently and learn to hate sin. We must love Him for His great love, which no one else can ever show; love which constrained Him to die for us.

He died not only to forgive our sins but also that we might die to our sinful nature. Many people stop at the first stage. They confess their sins, receive forgiveness and stop there. Through the power of His death we can die to our sinful nature with which we were born. Sin is like a serpent or a scorpion. No amount of milk can change their nature. Supposing a man takes a serpent and feeds it with milk everyday for some months. Then one day he puts his hand in its mouth. It will surely bite him. Then that man may say, "Mr. Serpent, how much milk I gave you and looked after you? Why did you bite me?" Then the serpent will say, "Sir, I am born like that, I cannot help because it is my nature". So also, we have inherited from our first parents Adam and Eve, their sinful nature. Many scholars and great men have tried to overcome their sinful nature, but all have failed. That nature must die. Cancer cannot be cured by any medicine or injections. The diseased part must die. That disease is too horrible. People who have suffered from cancer may think that they are all right, but after a short time they find that they were wrong. We also may think, "I have conquered this sin, I have conquered that sin", but the very next day we will fall into the same sin again. Every day you say, "I won't fall, I won't fall", but you will be surprised to see how you fall again and again. We are defeated, either by word, thought or deed. We have to appropriate the power of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ daily and go on dying to our sinful nature.

By faith we must pray saying, "Lord, I don't depend upon my will-power or strength. You help me to die to my sinful nature". None of us should be careless about this; otherwise we are liable to be deceived. We must ask the Lord Jesus Christ for His thoughts and His desires, saying, "I am.. troubled with sinful thoughts and desires. Lord, please help me to die to these sins". It is a daily warfare. There are wicked, evil and unseen powers coming upon us. Because of that so many times you are full of fear and evil thoughts. You must die to all these. Do not depend upon your own strength or will power. Ask the Lord to pour His power of death into you

that you may die. This is how we have to die daily and receive the power of Christ into us.

Apostle Paul says in Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me". We have to give complete charge of our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of having morning quiet time. His life should control us the whole day.

Thirdly, the Lord Jesus Christ died that we may die to the world. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal.6: 14). Not only should we be delivered from our sinful nature but also be delivered from worldly attractions, such as honor, fame, fashions, glitter and glory of the world. We are easily attracted by earthly glory, but the Lord Jesus Christ put an end to all these by His death. We must not imitate worldly people in our conversation, deeds, dress and manners. "For our conversation is in heaven" (Phil.3: 20). We see many believers imitating worldly people in dress, hairstyle etc. All these show that they are; living in darkness, If we follow worldly people In conversation, dress, music etc, we become spiritually weak. We- must die to all the things of the world. It is only possible by the power of the cross of our lord Jesus Christ. Whenever a temptation comes to you to imitate worldly people, pray, "Lord, have mercy upon me; I am tempted to follow the world in my ways and dress. Please help me to follow Your; ways". We have to live as pilgrims and strangers in this world, as God's peculiar people. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy. But now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet.2: 9, 10). It should be seen in our dress, conversation, and ways. And everything else that we are really a heavenly people. But sad to say. Many believers become worldly. That is why they are dry spiritually; they have knowledge but no power only by a deep work of the cross, can one be delivered from these attractions.

See for instance, Joseph was the wealthiest man in the whole of Egypt. He was next to Pharaoh. But he was never deceived by the glory of Egypt. Before he died he said to his people, "Carry up my bones from hence" (Gen.50: 25; Exo..13:19; Josh.24: 32). If you go to Palestine, even today you can see Jacob's well, and Joseph's tomb side by side. Even though his brothers deceived him because of jealousy, he felt more one with them than with the Egyptians. He identified himself with Abraham and his people but not with the people of Egypt. This is possible only by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should not be deceived by worldly methods, worldly fame, worldly glory, worldly honor, and worldly ways. It is a great temptation in the West. But the working of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ can deliver us from all these and we can enjoy the things, which are kept for us in heaven.

Thus, the power of the cross of the Lord Jesus works in a threefold manner, First of all, the Lord Jesus died in our stead that our sins may be forgiven. Secondly, He died that we may also die to our old sinful nature and live as new people, for the new nature only will qualify us for Heaven. Thirdly, He died that we may die to the world, that is, we may be delivered from worldly attractions and live as pilgrims and strangers in this world.

May the Lord give us all a full experience of this power of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

