

Set Sail Ministries

“Anchored in the Cross. Sailing by the Breath of the Spirit.”

Sermon Title: “The Power of the Cross of Christ”

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Text: Various

Date: March 24, 2002

Location: Aurora Alliance Church, Aurora, Colorado

Introduction

It’s great to be able to talk to you today. I really appreciate Jonas letting me speak to you. God has been teaching me some neat things lately, about how sometimes we get so familiar with the cross of Jesus and with our salvation, that we don’t allow it to impact us as it should. For example, did you know that the word ‘power’ is used 266 times in the Bible? To give you a comparison, the word ‘faith’ is used 246 times. So the word ‘power’ is actually used more often than ‘faith’ in the Bible. That kind of surprised me when I first saw that. Power is not a topic that is often addressed in sermons or Bible studies, at least not as much as faith even though it is used just as often. Yet 1 Corinthians 4:20 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”

Well today, I am excited to share some thoughts with you so we can learn together more about the true power of the cross of Jesus Christ. With Easter coming up next weekend, it’s a great opportunity for us to refocus on that power; to make sure that we are living in that power. Honestly, this message is not one that I have created so much as one that God has given me and I really believe He wants us to hear it today. The power of the cross of Jesus Christ. Do we know what it is? Does it make a difference in our lives? Let’s look at God’s Word. In Paul’s first letter to the Believers at Corinth, he tells them:

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. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Again, in his letter to the Galatian Christians, Paul says:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians. 6:14

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” In reading these verses, I have to ask, what is it about the crucifixion of Jesus that is so powerful, Paul would choose to focus on that one aspect of Christ’s life to the exclusion of all the others? I find this verse interesting because of what it DOESN’T say. I mean, he could have said ‘For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and his good works’, or ‘Jesus Christ and his prayer life’ or even ‘Jesus Christ and Him resurrected’, (after all, one of the unique facets of Christianity is that we

serve a living God; you would think that Paul would mention that) but he didn't. He said 'Jesus Christ and him crucified.' Again, in first Corinthians, Paul says,

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

There are a couple of things I want to point out in these passages. The first is Paul's constant reference to the cross and crucifixion of Christ and the second is all the references to 'power'. Did you catch those? Let look at those verses again. You may want to underline these as we go along. [Repeat slides on screen] In the first verse we read,

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Then in the third we read:

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is" what? [congregation response= "The power of God"]]. The cross is...the power of God to those of us who are being saved. Just a few verses later in that same chapter, Paul states:

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

There it is again, [repeat verse on screen with 2 phrases underlined] "Christ crucified: ...the power of God." [Pause] I am about to say something that is pretty hard, but I need you to hear it. I really believe that the meaning of the cross of Christ is radically different from what we have made it to be. We have allowed the message of the cross to be so watered down in our lives and sometimes even in our preaching and teaching, that it is but a shadow of what it once was. I don't often see this power that Paul talks about being applied to the lives of many Christians, and more often than I would like, that includes my own. Have we become so familiar with the cross that we have lost the power that it has for us? And if so, how we can we regain what we have lost? That is what we are going to look at this morning.

The Work of the Cross

When you think about the 'work' of the cross, or in other words, what was accomplished spiritually when Jesus died on the cross, what do we know about it? There are a lot things that we could talk about, and I just wanted to mention a few of them so we could have a framework to start with this morning.

Number 1. We could talk about how mankind was separated from God with no way to return to Him; (our relationship was broken) so God came Himself in human form to be the sacrifice for our sins, to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. Now we can again have fellowship with God if we accept Him and believe in Him for our salvation.

2. We could talk about the many Old Testament scriptures that not only foretold the death of the Messiah or Christ, but His death on a cross.

Zechariah 12:10 says, "...They will look on me, the one they have pierced..." referring to Jesus hands and feet that were pierced, when he was nailed to the cross. Psalm 22:16 says, "...a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet." When you read these statements in context it is clear that the crucifixion of Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. It is also clear that there is no other method of execution that COULD have fulfilled them.

Even Jesus himself prophesied that He would die on a cross. You may remember that on the morning that He rose from the dead, several women went to His tomb, but instead of Jesus, they found 2 angels who said:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Luke 24:5-7

3. At the cross, Jesus reconciled both Jews AND Gentiles to God. So now all believers are in one body. He didn't just come to the Jews although he was one nor did He just come to the Gentiles; he came for everyone. In Ephesians 2 we read:

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two[Jew and Gentile], thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Ephesians 2:15-16

4. Furthermore, Christ reconciled ALL things to God at the Cross. We read in Colossians:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus),²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20

5. Not only that, but Jesus won the victory over the forces of darkness through the cross. I think we sometimes give our enemy: Satan and his demons, too much credit because really they have already been defeated by Jesus at the cross. Again in Colossians we read,

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15

All these things are amazing displays of God's grace and mercy as well as His power and I could go on much further about the theology of what happened at the cross. But I want to focus this morning on 3 key areas that I think we need to look at closely, because I really believe there is more about the power of the cross that we can understand and live.

Story

I want to share a story with you that we are going to come back to at the end. When I was a student at Baylor University, which is a Christian college, every semester you could find usually find someone carrying around a large wooden cross on campus. I mean a big one! Like 8 or 9 feet tall. They would carry it everywhere. To class, to the cafeteria, even to the football games, everywhere they went. One guy even put a wheel on his so instead of carrying it, he could roll it around.

Others have done that too. This is a picture of a man named Arthur Blessitt, who has carried a cross through many of the countries of the world which is quite a feat in itself. [Show picture]

You'll notice he has a wheel on his too...so I guess technically, he is not carrying it, but just rolling it.



Now I mean no disrespect for anyone that has felt led to do this. I am sure that those students and others like them felt called to do what they did, and I hope that they were able to open many discussions with others about the real story and power of the cross. But sometimes I believe actions like that help perpetuate wrong ideas about the cross of Jesus and even rob us of the true power of the cross.

I want to share with you 3 familiar beliefs that I think many Christians have come to believe that are incorrect, and I want to contrast those with the truth from God's word. These aren't necessarily ideas that were incorrectly taught to us, but it's very easy for us whether we are a new believer or have believed for many years to allow a subtle change in our beliefs to happen without even realizing it. I've seen this in my own life and I think you probably have seen it in yours. Sometimes it is good for us to refocus our beliefs; to make sure we always stay in line with what God's word really says. When we look closely, we sometimes find that the truth of scripture is the opposite of what we previously believed.

Familiar (incorrect) beliefs vs. God's truth

The first is:

- 1. We view the cross as if it will save us from our problems.**

We view the cross as if it will save us from our problems. Have we been taught (and even taught others) that coming to Jesus will save us from our problems? Think about that for a minute. [Pause] Have we come to Jesus to be saved from our problems? What do I mean by that? Sometimes I think we get the idea that if we accept Jesus, He is supposed to come into our lives, wave a magic wand, and fix everything. Well, I know I have a relationship with Jesus, and I still have problems, how about you? ☺ We all do.

Guess what? Jesus promised us that we would have problems in this life. John 16:33 quotes Jesus as saying, “In this world, you will have trouble.” The Amplified Bible says, “In this world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration.” So it is obviously not right to come to Him thinking we will be saved from our trouble. Jesus was arrested, beaten and put to death. Most of his 12 disciples were also, because they refused to renounce Jesus, but continued to preach the gospel of His kingdom. And any one of us can add our troubles to that list too.

Well, if we shouldn't come to Him to be saved from our problems, why should we come to Him? We come, be to saved from our sin. Now, 'sin' is not a real popular word in our culture and even in the church today. We would rather say we have problems. We call it a 'drinking problem' rather than getting drunk. We call it 'marital problems' rather than adultery. We call it a 'problem with anger and self-control' rather than murder. The 'problem' ☺ with that is that God calls it sin. [Pause] And sin is what we need to be saved from.

Sin is what separates us from God; sin is the actions and attitudes in our heart that are in conflict with God, that are really against Him and it breaks our fellowship with Him. You may have heard Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” And Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...” If there were no sin, then there would not have been any reason for Jesus to have to die on the cross.

The power of the cross is not deliverance from our problems...but deliverance from our sin. Would you say that with me, “The power of the cross is not deliverance from our problems, but deliverance from our sin.” And Christianity offers this gift of salvation for free! Many of you can probably quote Romans 3:23: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” but we rarely hear Romans 3:24, and it is part of the same sentence!

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by the grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:23-24

The same with Romans 6:23: We often hear, “For the wages of sin is death...” but the verse goes on to say, “...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” It's a free gift if we will accept it. There might be other religions in the world that claim to help us with our problems...but only one can offer to save us from the penalty of our sin. And what good is it to live a peaceful easy life on earth, only to be separated from God forever in Hell after your short time here simply because you did not know Jesus personally and accept the work He accomplished on the cross?

Rick Joyner, in one of studies states: **“Jesus did not come to deliver us from our problems, but from ourselves. He did not come to change our circumstances; He came to change us!”** The good news is that when we accept God into our hearts, we begin an amazing personal relationship with him and He is WITH us DURING our problems and that makes them bearable, but He did not come to save us FROM them. The bottom line meaning of salvation through Jesus Christ is being saved from our sin. The power of the cross is deliverance from our sin.

Secondly,
2. We view the cross as if it is a heavy burden.

We view the cross as if it is a heavy burden. What do I mean by that? Jesus said:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23

When we think about the cross...because we know that it was physically a big object made of thick wood we naturally imagine it to be heavy. So when we hear that we are supposed to pick it up daily and carry it, we assume it is going to be heavy. Makes sense, right? And sometimes that idea causes us to make statements like "well, that is just my cross to bear" or maybe "wow, she really carries her cross well." So what is wrong with this way of thinking? Well, it's in direct conflict with another statement that Jesus made:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you...and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus used this same word, 'burden' when he was rebuking the Pharisee's, the religious leaders of that day. He said, "you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry. (Luke 11:46)" What was He talking about there? The Pharisee's were champions of legalism; they had laws for everything. They even tithed on the spices that they grew in their garden. And they tried to make sure that everyone else followed the law too. And understand this wasn't just the 10 Commandments, but a whole bunch of other laws they made up. That's called legalism.

And it is easy for us to begin thinking that way too. We start thinking that we have to DO certain things for God, that to be a 'good Christian', we have to 'do this' or 'do that' and definitely 'don't do this over here'. We might start thinking that if we are really spiritual, we'll get up at 3:00 AM every morning and pray for 4 hours, and then go to work or school and witness to 25 people, and then come home and memorize the whole New Testament...before dinner! ☺ Now praying and reading and memorizing God's word and telling others about Him, those are all good things. We should be doing them. But they become a heavy burden when we stop acting out of the joy and excitement of our relationship with God, and start living with an 'I have to' attitude.

The power of the cross is this: although we are asked to take up our cross daily, it isn't a heavy burden of do's and don'ts that we must perform. When we come to Jesus, He offers us His burden which is light. When we come to Jesus, He offers us His burden which is light. Now this could be a sermon all on it's own! Jesus didn't come to load us down with heavy burdens; with a long list of rules and regulations or with a bunch of do's and don'ts. He came to offer us a relationship where we partner with Him to accomplish His work on earth. Sure, there are rules but they are for our good. And when we get to know Jesus by listening to and talking to Him on a daily basis, we have no problem following His rules, because we know HIM and know that He wants what is best for us.

This whole relationship thing is why Jesus was so harsh on the Pharisees. They tried to make following God into a religion of rules and regulations, into a religion of having to DO this or DO that in order to be accepted by God, rather than focusing on the relationship. They were great at keeping the law, and Jesus told them so...yet they didn't really even know the God they were trying to serve.

The burden that He offers to us is light for one reason: because He carries it with us. Psalm 68:19 says, "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens." It only becomes heavy when we move away from Him and suddenly we are carrying the whole load ourselves.

The power of the cross is not only deliverance from our sin, but it is a burden that is light.

There is a final belief that I think we have that is very closely related to the second one. When God showed me this, I began to see how powerful the cross really is and what the true meaning of discipleship is.

3. We view the cross as if we are supposed to carry it around with us

We view the cross as if we are supposed to carry it around with us. We have already looked at the verse where Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me". But He doesn't stop there. He gets even more specific. Matthew 10:38 says:

"...anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:38

And if that's not strong enough for you, listen to how Luke records Jesus' words in his gospel:

"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:27

That's pretty strong language isn't it? I think we probably should study that a little more and make sure we understand it. It is abundantly clear that we ARE in fact supposed to carry our cross daily. There is no doubt about that. But have you ever considered: where are we supposed to carry it too? Just like those students at Baylor that would carry a big cross around wherever they went, I think we sometimes believe we are supposed to carry our cross around with us wherever we go. Sort of like trying to fit Jesus into our schedule. 'Let's see, today I have to go by the post office, stop at the grocery store, and I guess all that will take me a little longer because I have this cross to carry around.' Sometimes I am afraid that we invite people to begin a personal relationship with God with the idea that they can just squeeze Him in to their daily schedule. Sort of like, 'Yeah, you just give Him 30 seconds every morning in prayer and then He has to give you whatever you ask for the rest of the day.' We treat the cross as if we are supposed to carry it around with us.

But I have to be honest with you. If that is what we believe, then we have missed a fundamental truth about the cross of Jesus Christ. Because when Jesus spoke those words, the cross was a method of execution. And the concept of carrying a cross around with you to work or school or wherever you might go during your 'regular daily routine' was totally foreign to them at that time. When you saw someone carrying a cross, you could be assured that they were going to one place and one place only...to their very death. Death was imminent for anyone who was seen carrying a cross in Jesus' day.

Because of that I don't think Jesus is asking us to carry our cross as if we would try to fit it in to our daily schedule. It is much deeper than that. The relationship He invites us to take part in is much deeper than that. **When Jesus asks us to carry our own cross, he is asking us to carry it to our own death.** [Pause] Did you catch that? When Jesus asks us to carry our own cross, he is asking us to carry it to our own death. All of a sudden, our whole perspective changes. Because you can't just say, "Sure, I'll carry my cross around today, I think I can fit it in." Because it's not a matter of carrying it around from place to place. It's a matter of carrying it to our own death. **The power of the cross is that we are to carry our cross to our own death.**

Now, if you have never heard this before, let stop right here and something very clear. God is NOT asking you to commit suicide. He will never do that. This is a spiritual issue, not a physical one. God may not even ask you to physically die on a cross for Him, (although that does happen to Christians on this Earth even today). In telling us to take up our cross each day, Jesus is asking us

to identify with Him and live in the power of the cross through a relationship, through a discipleship with Him.

Christianity is NOT best characterized by figuring out how we can fit Jesus into our lives; it is best characterized by a discipleship, a following of Jesus, that is so different from the world, and honestly, that is very different from most of Christianity today, that the world would call it radical. That is part of what we mean when we say in our AAC mission statement, "...to develop all people into passionate followers of Jesus Christ." It is not a religion of do's and don'ts or even of trying to be a good person by doing good things. It's about relationship. It is getting to know God and His Son Jesus. That is what 'eternal life' is all about.

In John 17:3 Jesus is praying to His Father, God, and says, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." And it starts now, not just when we get to Heaven.

Good News

So how do we respond to this? Remember "Christ crucified...the power of God"? Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, yet died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, not to solve our problems. He calls us to carry our cross daily and follow him; not around town, but spiritually to our own death. But He doesn't leave us to carry it alone; He carries it with us, so He can say, "my burden is light."

There is another thing that Jesus did. He asked those who would follow Him to count the cost of their decision. Earlier in Luke 14:27 we read Jesus' words, "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." He continues in the next verse with a story about a man who wanted to build a building and Jesus said, 'Before he builds this building, will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?' When you put that story together with His statement that we can't be His disciples unless we carry our cross, He makes it very clear that we ought to understand the cost before we choose to follow him.

Now by all means, if you are ready to begin a relationship with Jesus, don't wait! But don't make your decision flippantly. Know what He requires. The cost is high. He requires everything we have.

[Pause] But before you get too discouraged, there is good news! Which is just in time because some of you look a little concerned! ☺ If we are believers in Jesus Christ, we have already been crucified with Him! Galatians 2:20 says,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20

When we begin a relationship with Jesus, we can identify with Him in His death (we have been crucified with Him). Remember what Steve taught us a few weeks ago about covenant? Jesus was our covenant representative in the covenant between us and God. Spiritually, we were IN HIM at the cross. When He died, it was like we did too. So if we died, what do we do now:.....we live for him, not for ourselves.

"And he(Jesus) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again." 2 Corinthians 5:15

Would you say that with me? "And Jesus died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again." When we accept that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin by dying on the cross, then God's power through the cross allows Jesus to live in us. We have already died if we have a relationship with Him! Now we just need to live in His power and live for Him! THAT is the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Response Time

In just a minute, I am going to ask you to respond to what you have heard today. Please understand, this is not a response to me, but to God. Like Jonas taught us a few weeks ago, worship is our response to God because of who He is and what He has done in our lives.

The Praise Team is going to come and play a few songs of worship. Maybe God has spoken deeply to you this morning and you are ready to respond to Him. I invite you to do that however you can best worship whether through singing or silence or prayer, whether you sit, stand, or kneel or even if you want to come here up front. But wherever you are, I encourage you to listen for and expect God to speak to you.

Perhaps He needs to convict you of a wrong belief. Maybe He is calling you to live a life for Him that is radically different than how you live now. Maybe you don't really even know this Jesus I talk about, but you would like to find out more about Him. If you want to talk to or pray with someone, I invite you to come to the front and we'll find someone you can talk to.

Jesus says to each of us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."