

Cross: Power by the Cross

by G. Campbell Morgan

G. Campbell Morgan's sermon explores the transformative power of the Cross in the believer's life, emphasizing its role in salvation and daily challenges.

Scripture: Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 6:10, Philippians 4:13, Colossians 1:11, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 4:16, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Living in Christ", "Power of the Cross"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the transformative power of the Cross in the life of believers, highlighting that while they experience pardon, purity, and peace through Christ, they also require ongoing power to navigate life's challenges. He explains that the Cross is not just a historical event but a source of strength for those who are being saved, enabling them to resist temptation, endure suffering, and fulfill their divine purpose. Morgan encourages believers to embrace their weaknesses, as it is in surrendering to Christ that they can access the true power of the Cross, which empowers them for service and living a victorious Christian life.

Transcript

THE ASPECT OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST WHICH IS NOW TO occupy our attention is one that has application only to a certain number of people, whom the Apostle refers to in the words, "to us which are being saved." We have spoken in this series of meditations first of pardon, and then of purity, and lastly of peace by way of the Cross.

We are now to speak of a third blessing-power by way of the Cross. We are often reminded of the fact that in the great experience of salvation there are tenses. I was saved; I am being saved; now is my salvation nearer than when I believed-that is, I shall be saved. The particular aspect of the Cross which is before our minds deals with the present and progressive tense of salvation. Pardon full, sufficient, perfect, is granted in the very moment in which we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Purity is in that selfsame moment placed at our disposal; whether we appropriate it or not may be another matter. Power is also at our disposal from that moment and ever onward, but we necessarily come to understand it and make use of it as we live the Christian life. The Word of the Cross is the power of God to those of us who are being saved. The soul pardoned and purified immediately confronts the future, and nowhere is weakness more keenly felt than at that moment. Often men are kept from that great act of surrender to Jesus Christ, which brings them into the position of pardon or purity, or of both, by fear of the future. And though men yield to the call of the

Lord, and rejoice in the forgiveness of sins; even though they submit themselves wholly to Him, and claim the great purging of conscience which comes by such surrender; even though the great peace of God is in their hearts, yet when they face the future the sense of weakness comes, perhaps as never before. To that sense of weakness the Cross brings an evangel, and as by the way of the Cross I have pardon and purity and peace, so also by the way of the Cross--blessed be God!--there is power for me.

Let us think for a moment of the need of the soul pardoned, purified, at peace. The new relationship to Jesus Christ does not remove us out of all the old relationships. We are still left on the probationary plane. We shall live in the same store, the same workshop, even though our sins are for-Christ. We shall go back to business in the same office, the same store, the same workshop, even though our sins are forgiven. All the peculiar forces that have played on our personality prior to our relationship with Jesus Christ will still operate to-morrow, though He has forgiven us, purified us, and brought us into the place of peace. All the ordinary conditions and contingencies will recur to the soul that has come into new relationship with the Lord. The old temptations will come again, and will be felt far more keenly than they have ever been felt before. The old temptations will come through the old avenues; there are but three--the physical, the spiritual, and the vocational. Bread--that is the first; tampering with confidence in God--that is the second; attempting to possess the kingdoms in some other way than by treading the Divinely appointed pathway--that is the third. The devil has no other. These avenues are still open when I give myself to Jesus Christ. I still live within the physical tabernacle; I still am dependent on God for everything, and must live the life of trust; I still am called to Divine purpose in the world. And along every one of these avenues temptation will come to me, even though I am forgiven, purified, and at peace. My consciousness of temptation will be far keener than it ever has been; temptation will be more subtle; the tempter will be more busy. The devil is far more eager to spoil that new life dedicated to Jesus Christ than he is to pay any attention whatsoever to the souls that lie asleep in him.

Not temptation only, but suffering will still be my portion. Bereavements will come to me, as they come to others; defeat will sometimes overtake my endeavor, as it overtakes the endeavors of all men; treachery may lurk in the pathway to harm me; I am still in the place of tears, the place of suffering, the place of sorrow. Again, I am still in the place of joy. I now belong to Jesus Christ, but that will not rob me of the rapture of success; I have been pardoned and purified, and am at peace with God, but that will not interfere with the delight I have in the comradeship and friendship for others of my kind. I have indeed seen Him Whom to see is to find light and life and love and liberty; but there is still within me that which asks for gold on the morning sky. Hope will still take hold of every promise and build on it some great expectation. I am still in the midst of the old circumstances. I must still live the old life.

Once again, the dedication of my life to Jesus Christ, and all the answering blessings that come by the way of the Cross: these things do not remove me out of the place of mystery. I am still limited in my outlook. Phantoms will flit across the seas of life, threatening me and affrighting me; questions will still arise in the inner life as they did before. Yielded to Jesus Christ, I am not at the end of the questioning mind, I have not solved the last riddle or probed the deepest problem.

The man pardoned, purified, and at peace, abides in the place of peril. He must live where he lived, and as he lived, must strive for bread, and prosecute his business, and touch the world. At least, that is the Divine intention for him. And if any man shall attempt to live the Christian life by escaping from these conditions and hiding within stone walls, he will find that he has cut the very nerve of saintship, and has made it impossible to be all that Christ meant him to be. "As is the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." Christianity is not an exotic which flourishes in hothouse atmosphere, separated from all

difficulties. Christianity is a hardy perennial that blossoms among the thorns; and if a man moves from such surroundings he will move from the conditions that make him strong.

Yet it is not merely in order that we may meet these things that we need power. When we yielded ourselves to Christ, and received blessing at His hand, we were brought into a new realm of activity. New demands were made on us. When I come to the Cross and receive these benefits, I, by that reception, commit myself to its responsibilities. When I come to the Cross, and there, a lost and ruined soul, see that I am found and redeemed, in the act by which I receive the Christ I take the oath of allegiance to the One Who saves me. In that moment I commit myself to all the enterprises of God. He demands that what there is of my life shall be surrendered to Him, and that from that moment I shall be a worker together with Him, in fellowship, partnership with Him. From that moment I am to stand, wheresoever my lot may be cast, for righteousness, and not for policy merely--I am to put my whole life into the great business of bringing about a reconciliation of men to God. From that moment in which the blessings of the Cross become my own, my life is committed to the publication of the evangel of the Cross to all men; from that moment in which the compassion of God becomes my salvation, I am called on to live in the power of that compassion for the salvation of others. Standing on the brink of the new life of service, with its demands so great and wonderful, the soul says, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Pardoned, purified, at peace, I have to live and serve. How can I live and serve?

What I need is that there shall come into my life a new force that is equal to all the demands. Power to resist temptation, power to endure suffering equally, power to endure joy that I be not spoiled thereby, power to wait amid the mysteries until His light shall shine on the pathway.

For service I need power. If I am called to this new service I need the passive power that will enable me to stand four square to every wind that blows; I need the active power that will enable me to accomplish the work God puts in my hands as a saved man; I need persuasive power to constrain men to this selfsame Cross where I have found my blessings.

Now, I take up this letter to the Corinthians because in face of difficulties and divisions and misunderstanding the Apostle insists on this one thing, that "the Word of the Cross is the power of God."

Now, the question arises, simply and naturally in the heart of each one of us, In what sense can it be true that the Word of the Cross is the power of God to them that are being saved? Not merely the power which enables a man to find salvation, but the power that he needs to live this life, which is in itself a procession and probation of salvation. In what sense can the Word of the Cross be said to be power? If you approach from the standard of merely human intellectual strength you will come to one of two conclusions. You will come to the conclusion of the Jew or of the Greek. You will come to the conclusion that the Cross of Jesus is either a stumbling-block or utter foolishness. These are perfectly natural conclusions. The Jew said the Cross is a stumbling block, a skandalon, something in the way, over which men fall. Put the Cross into its relation to the life of Jesus as the Jew saw it. Take the disciples, not the great crowd that neglected Him: they learned of Jesus, and learned to love Him, and desired to follow Him. What was the Cross prior to Pentecost? It was a stumbling-block; the moment Jesus mentioned it they drew back from Him, and why? Because they thought the Cross would hinder, not help. There was no power in the Cross to the mind of Peter when he said, "That be far from Thee, Lord." It was the thing that ended power, that robbed Jesus of power to the thinking Jew unilluminated by the Spirit of God, who had never seen into the mystery. After the Cross and resurrection, when Jesus walked to Emmaus, two men talked to Him about the Cross. They said, "We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel." In imagination I will join the group, and ask

these men a question. Do you not still hope? No, we have lost our hope. What killed it? The Cross killed it. So long as He was careful, or seemed to be careful of Himself, so long as when men were angry He went away into the country and waited awhile, and went on with His teaching, we hoped; but when He became reckless and set His face to go to Jerusalem, and we could not dissuade Him, that Cross was the stumbling-block; there He fell, there our hopes were ruined. There is no other conclusion; they were perfectly right, judging by natural law.

Or if not, then what? Then, still within the realm of the natural, you say with the Greek, the Cross was foolishness. It means the same thing underneath. It is absolutely foolish to talk about a Roman gibbet lifting a man except that it may kill him. Foolishness to the Greek. When Paul began his ministry, this teller of tales. There were men who traveled through these Greek cities doing nothing but telling tales of travel, adventure, things seen in distant places; and the men of the time who listened had itching ears-and they have successors to-day-men always seeking for some new thing. When Paul came to tell them the story of how Jesus lived and was crucified and rose, they said: This is a tale, and it is just foolishness, we will amuse ourselves and listen to it. The Cross is still that to-day to some. There is nothing that vitalizes the intellect until you are born again; there is nothing in the Cross that helps on the redemption of the race until you are born again. It is a cold, dead, lifeless stumbling-block, and some men are doing their very best to get rid of it. I am therefore limited in all I say now. "To us which are being saved."

What is it to us who are being saved? "The power of God." What is the "power of God"? The "Word of the Cross." Not the preaching of the Cross-one of the most important changes in translation here-not the preaching, but the Logos, the Word, exactly the same phrase which you have in John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." "The Word of the Cross." It is not the preaching of the Cross that is the power. Thank God there is a sense in which the preaching of the Cross is the power of God; it is by the preaching, the heralding, the proclamation of the Cross that men find the Word of the Cross. But it is not the act of preaching that is powerful, it is the thing preached. Some years ago a theological professor said what seemed to be a smart thing to his class. He said, "Gentlemen, remember God has chosen the foolishness of preaching, not the preaching of foolishness." If he had looked a little more closely he would have found he was wrong. God has chosen the preaching of foolishness, foolishness to the Greek. What is this foolishness? "The Word of the Cross." Let us take the phrase and look at it for a moment, very reverently. "The Word . . . The Word of the Cross."

Have you ever made anything like careful and patient study of what the Bible says about the "Word of God"? Have you ever taken that phrase and traced it through? The Bible says wonderful things about the Word of God. I go back into the Old Testament, and there is a wonderful amount of New in the Old. I turn to one of the Psalms and I read this:

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made;

And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap:

He layeth up the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord.

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spake, and it was done;

He commanded, and it stood fast.

Listen to a statement of the New Testament, "Who being the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." "Upholding all things by the word of His power." Hear once again. An angel visitor is talking to the Virgin, and in the midst of her sweet and holy questioning he says, "No word of God shall be void of power." The word of man is a wish! The Word of God is a work! It is always so. I speak, and then I must do it; He speaks, and it is done. I utter a thought that is in my mind; it is a dream, a prophecy, a desire, a disappointment perchance. When God expresses Himself, the thing He expresses, is. The Word of God is the expression of God, the Speech, the Revelation, the uttering forth, the going out, and with the Word is the Work.

In the fulness of time "the Word was made flesh." And what did men do with that Word made flesh? They crucified Him. I know perfectly well that at this moment-God help us to be reverent--we are standing in the presence of the burning bush. It is well that we take our shoes from off our feet, and say to our hearts that we are looking on the ineffable glory, and cannot explain it. We stand and peer into the mystery, and never understand it; yet, I pray you, think moment in the realm of analysis.

Reverently let me take that great Word of the Cross and see how power is in it, in the mystery of defeat, in the hour of dying, by listening to the words of the Word of the Cross. If you will take the words spoken by the Word in the supreme agony of the Cross, you will find every one of them tells of defeat and of victory, of weakness and of power.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is the word of an unutterable pain, but the pain is the plea that prevails.

"To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." It is the confession of defeat; not often have we said so, but you must take the word and put it into Jewish thinking. Paradise, what is that? The place of departed spirits, and men do not want to pass into the place of departed spirits. He says in effect: I am passing, I am a dying Man, I am going to Paradise. But you will not leave it like that; you know full well it is the passing of a King, that it is the voice of the Master of all defeat, that it is the voice of One Who in supreme defeat utters the word of an eternal victory, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

"Woman, behold thy son," "Behold thy mother." His heart is bereaved, and He knows His mother's heart is pierced through with a sword, and yet He knows that there, through that bereavement and that agony and loss and suffering, the suffering of sympathy for His own mother, there He creates the new kinship, the new relationship, gives His mother a son in the bond of His love, such as she never could have had in any other way, gives Himself back to His mother through John in the new discipleship of John, and begins that gracious work that He has carried on ever since, of healing broken hearts with the new kinship, the new relationship, the new family of God. It is a great triumph through a great sorrow.

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That forsaking that so appalls you as it appalls me, what is it but the way of approach? ne forsaking is the pathway to fellowship.

"I thirst." Out of that thirst there springs the living water of which thirsty men shall drink, and never thirst.

"It is finished," and we sing of it to-night, not as the declaration of a Man who is beaten and defeated. We know the ending was the beginning. That is the dawning of the new order and the new life.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." The actual passing is the coming back to the Father. Take any of the words, and I will defy you to explain them. Crucified in weakness, and yet throbbing through the weakness rivers of power, which, by the way of the resurrection, have passed out into all human life. "The Word of the Cross" is "the power of God." He spake at creation; it was done. He spoke in Jesus, and it was done. Pardon and purity and peace, and all the power that man needs to live a life and render a service come by the way of the Cross.

Now, brethren, finally, how am I to realize this power as an actual positive fact in my own life? The abiding condition of the manifestation of Divine power is that of weakness. This, carried to its logical and proper conclusion, teaches us that the supreme condition for the working of the power of the Word of the Cross in our lives is that we know what it is to be crucified with Him, to enter into the place of death with Him. It is when I come to the point of the cessation of my activity in the power of the flesh, in the power of my own intellect, that the power of the Cross becomes operative in me, and through me. Here is where we stand away, and do not know His power, even those who are His. Someone writes me. I open the letter, and I read it. It is such an old story. It says: "I am a Christian, and have been one for long years, but I cannot overcome this temptation, this besetment. I want power to overcome." Or the letter says: "I have been trying to work for God for long years in the Sunday school, in the church, it may be in the pulpit, but there is no power. What am I to do?" And my answer in every case must be the same. "The Word of the Cross. . . is the power of God."

But how am I to make contact with that power, that I may overcome? How am I to appropriate that power in order that I may serve in power? There is only one way, and it is that I get to the end of my own attempts to do without God, that God is able through the mystery of this power of the Cross to come into my life, and work in victory over temptation and sin, and in all the service that His will appoints. "I have been crucified with Christ," said the Apostle, and sometimes one is almost afraid to quote the passage, it has been quoted so often, it has been preached on so constantly. Yet never until I come there shall I know what power is in my own life. That great power of the Cross operates in and through only men and women who are content to die with Him, to be at the end of self, that He may be the one supreme enthroned and crowned Lord of the life. Oh, it is this dying that hinders us. These ambitions must be laid aside, these prejudices must be crucified, this pride must be humbled; that goal toward which I have been running, which is, in the last analysis, pure selfishness, must be swept away, and I must be willing to say, "I live, yet not I." It is that canceling of the "I" in the life of the Christian that creates contact with the power of the Cross. It is only as we are prepared to go down into the death of the Cross that we shall begin to find its dynamic and its thrill, and shall know its mastery in us, over all that is against us, and through us, over all that is against God. Thank God, it is the "Word of the Cross," and it is "the power of God." No human philosophy can explain it, and no human investigation along the lines of scientific method can account for it. Here the fact remains, and the simple illustrations are to be found everywhere. Here is a frail man, battered and bruised by his own sin, who comes at last to Jesus for pardon, claims His purity, finds the peace of God, and then goes out to begin his life anew. Beginning it anew, there is no dependence on himself. He says, "I have tried and failed; I yield myself to Him, willing to be nothing, sinking to the place where I count not my life to be anything. I cast ambition as dust beneath my feet, or, in the words of old, 'I lay my treasure in the dust,' and all I counted as dear is to be counted as dross and dung. I am nothing."

Easily said, but not so easily consented to. It is when a man gets there--and now I am out of the realm of explanation, but I am in the realm of faith--that this great Word of the Cross, the Cross that is the death of sin, the Cross that cancels sin, the Cross that brings the power, begins to thrill and throb through that man's life. He is able to sin no more.

God is sufficient for all the life and service of His people. No exigencies can surprise Him, no combinations can defeat Him. But the element of human trouble and weakness has ever been the self-life. Where that ends, God, through the mystery of His Cross, the Cross of His Son, resumes His government, resumes His activity; then the life touches the place of omnipotence. I thank God for the pardon of the Cross. I thank God for purity that is mine by the way of the Cross. I thank God for peace; but, oh! sometimes--and I suppose it is because it is the last thing one thinks of in God's great gifts is always the best--this power that has come into the life and made it equal to the things to which it was unequal, this present power of God, how great and gracious a thing it is! If you and I, who tremble and are afraid as we face our surroundings and our service, will but consent to all that is meant by crucifixion with Him, we shall find that that Cross, which was a stumbling-block to Jew and foolishness to Greek, is to such as are being saved the power of God.

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