

# I Came to Cast Fire on the Earth

by Richard E. Bieber

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*The sermon explores the transformative power of the cross as the source of spiritual fire that cleanses and empowers believers to live out their faith.*

**Topics:** "The Cross", "Spiritual Renewal"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the transformative power of the cross, emphasizing how Jesus' crucifixion, initially seen as defeat, was actually the source of divine power that brings judgment, division, and resurrection life. The fire kindled at the cross symbolizes the refining flame of Jesus' death that burns in believers' souls, leading to a radical cleansing and renewal. The sermon highlights the importance of daily cleansing, renewal, and walking the way of the cross to experience resurrection life and God's power in everyday life.

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## Transcript

When Jesus of Nazareth hung on the cross that dark Friday afternoon, it looked like the end of the road. He'd had a good run while it lasted. He shook things up for a while. Now it's over. He's done. Everybody can see that this prophet wasn't the prophet he claimed to be.

His disciples were devastated. His mother was heart-broken. Jesus had failed. And all his wonderful promises turned out to be worthless.

So it seemed.

Nobody had a clue about what was actually happening as he hung on that cross--- nobody, except one of the criminals hanging beside him, and a Roman army officer who could not stop trembling.

Who could have guessed that this hour of defeat was actually the fountainhead of his power.

"I have come to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled," he had said.

Well, now that fire is kindled.

Kindled at the cross.

The fire of heaven.

It's a fire that brings down judgment, a fire that divides like a knife.

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division;

for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.

Luke 12

It's a fire that consumes evil. A fire that refines the precious gold that comes out of the flames.

Long ago this fire fell on Elijah's sacrifice at Mt. Carmel, bringing judgment on the people of Israel. Now, at the cross, this fire falls on the sin of the world---all the world's sin collected in the body of this dying man. This dying man, who is more than a man; this man is the heart of God. A broken heart. A heart pouring out forgiveness on the lost sheep.

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53

But this fire did more than burn up the sin of the world. Three days later the fire raised this man from the dead, the Firstborn of the New Creation.

Then it began to spread. Those followers of his, who were so devastated---suddenly, when they saw him alive from the dead, burst into flame. The fire came down like a knife and cut them off them from their past, from the ways of this dark world. These men and women were now ablaze with a fire which they themselves could not contain.

It was like a forest fire. It had a will of its own. If came near you, you burst into flame. You blinked your eyes and suddenly found yourself cut off from your past, standing inside the Kingdom, anointed with the fire of heaven.

But here's the part we often forget: the source of this fire is the cross. Jesus' cross is where it began, and from which it spreads even now. The cross is where the power is. You will find this power nowhere else. Because.....

....On that cross the Lamb of God drained all our darkness into his Light. Swallowed all our guilt into his death. And then set fire to the earth---a fire which judges, divides, raises the dead. A fire which, hopefully, burns in this place today.

Maybe the Muslims don't understand the power of the cross. Maybe the Jews don't understand the power of the cross. But why is it that so many Christians keep looking for power in a thousand other places, when God's redemptive power is to be found nowhere else? The cross is the spiritual Big Bang, the door through which heaven spreads its fire of judgment, division, and resurrection life out over the face of this earth.

It's not money, it's not political clout.

Not crosses sitting on top of church steeples, or crucifixes hanging on our walls.

Not the sign of the cross we make as if we were working some kind of magic.

Our only power is the refining flame of Jesus' death, burning in our bones, just like it burned in the bones of the Apostle Paul, when he wrote:

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling;

and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

I Corinthians 2

The cross is our only power. Jesus' death working in our souls until we die to ourselves, and rise out of our vanity graves to live our lives to God.

At this hour the worldwide church is going through a radical cleansing by means of this fire. The church that emerges from this cleansing will be very different from the church we see today. Out of this refined, chastened church will flow the grace of God as it has not been seen for a long, long time.

The signs our Lord performed with utter simplicity, will occur with that same simplicity among believers near and far. No more hocus-pocus. No more drama. Right in the middle of a hymn, a woman racked with pain will suddenly feel warm all over, as the pain leaves. A man with suicidal thoughts will walk away from the Lord's Table, no longer depressed.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he/she who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will they do, because I go to the Father."

John 14

We won't need evangelism committees and church growth seminars. We will have our hands full helping all these new believers who come through our doors---helping them to walk the way of the Kingdom.

But we will need to keep our eyes open and pay attention. Because there will also be men and women who prophesy and cast out demons and do many mighty works in Jesus' Name, who are not part of what God is doing. On the surface, their signs and wonders look like the real thing, but they will lack the fire of the cross. These people will seem pious and "spiritual", but they are not crucified with Christ. They are not burning with his fire. They have an agenda of their own.

On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

Matthew 7

So---on the one hand, there are those who perform signs of the kingdom who, at the end, will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

On the other hand, there are those who perform signs and wonders in Jesus' Name, who, at the end, will hear the Master say, "I never knew you."

We need to keep this in mind, because, in the coming days we are going to see, here in this place, and in our daily lives, an increase of spiritual power. But we need to make sure that the source of our power is the fire of the Cross.

Indeed, we ourselves need to learn to live under the power of the cross every day.

To live under the power of the cross means three things.

Daily cleansing at the cross.

Daily renewal at the cross.

Daily walking the way of the cross.

1. Daily cleansing at the cross.

I knew a man who many years ago sat in this church and had a vision. As he sat, looking at the cross on the altar, he seemed to see a stream of blood flowing from beneath the cross, out through the air, and straight into his heart. He had the impression the stream went through him and came out his back as an ugly black substance that gradually became clear as crystal as the stream kept flowing, and disappeared. The man walked out of here with his burdens lifted.

But I'm sure that man found, as we all do, that such a cleansing is never once-and-done. It's continuous. Who of us does not need to find cleansing at the cross every day? Every hour.

Sometimes a memory rises up and accuses us. Some nasty thing we said, some cowardly thing we did. Someone who still bears the scars of our neglect. So we take this thing and bring it to the cross, and with fear and trembling, let the fire of God burn it away and set us free.

2. We need daily renewal at the cross.

To be renewed at the cross these words of Paul are a great help:

"I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me..."

Galatians 2

Christ cannot live in me, unless I am crucified with him. Dead to myself and burning with his fire. So I find renewal by reminding myself daily that when he died on that cross, I was up there wrapped inside him. He was the seed falling into the earth and dying. I am one of the countless seeds he produced when he rose from the dead.

Just as many of us begin our daily prayers by praying the Lord's Prayer, we might find it helpful also, to repeat those words of Paul:

"I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ to lives in me."

There is no better place to go, when we feel lost and confused, than to the cross. And then, we just hold still, until the heavenly fire burns away our confusion.

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Look unto him and be saved, all the ends of the earth.

3. Finally, we need, daily, to walk the way of the cross.

Faith is not a mental state, it's a walk. It's following the Way which our Master walked.

"If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Luke 9

No matter who we are, or where God has placed us in this troubled world, once we start following the Master, we carry a cross inside us. We offer ourselves up to God daily, as our Master did. And, behold, there he is, right there with us!

"Lo, I am with you always."

Throughout each day we simply do what needs to be done in the midst of our mundane chores. We open our ears to burdened hearts. We speak words of encouragement. We breathe prayers of blessing. We keep doing what we know our Lord wants us to do.

Even though we feel inadequate! Even though we feel unworthy, in the midst of our weakness, the power of the cross burns like a flame within us, sustaining us with its power.

Every day we find cleansing at the cross.

Every day we find renewal at the cross.

Every day we walk the way of the cross.

And the outcome?

Resurrection life from God, every single day. The fire of heaven that raised Jesus from the dead raises us from the dead, moment by moment, until we reach the Final Resurrection.

For all our aches and pains and worries and fears the fire of heaven keeps raising us up out of the darkness, and sending us forth to do the Father's will.

And when our work is done, the fire of the cross leads us into worlds beyond our knowing, where eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart o man, the things God has prepared for those who love him.

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