

The Message of the Cross

by Steve Gallagher

This sermon delves into the profound message of the cross, emphasizing the need to deny self, embrace the crucified life, and live by faith in Christ. It highlights the contrast between worldly success and spiritual victory, urging listeners to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. The speaker shares personal experiences and biblical insights to illustrate the transformative power of the cross in overcoming weaknesses and living a life surrendered to God.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 4:7, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Luke 9:23

Description

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Transcript

Well, if you hadn't noticed, I'm going to be speaking on the message of the cross this morning, and my wife opened up the meeting by reading Isaiah 53. That is the message of the cross that came forth 600 years before Jesus was even born, and it was a message that caused the Jews to stumble because it made no sense to them, and it was foolishness to the Greeks. I'm going to be speaking out of a verse in Galatians here in a few minutes.

It's going to take me a little bit before I get to it, but I do want to say this, that in this one verse, I'm going to give you the answer to spiritual victory and why so many experience spiritual defeat, and as a bonus, I'm going to also explain to you what lays behind the battle in the spiritual realm with the great apostasy. Sounds like a pretty good deal, right? But I have to lay a foundation first, so let me just read a couple of verses to open the meeting. This comes out of 1 Corinthians 1. Paul said, For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, those who are on the way to destruction.

They're headed in that direction. People headed in that direction are going away from the cross and going towards eternal destruction, and to those people, this message is nonsense. But to us who are being saved, who are headed in the direction of eternal life, it is the power of God.

And then to the Philippians, Paul said, I often told you. This is something he repeated to them over and over when he was with them. I often told you something.

I often told you and now tell you even weeping that there are enemies of the cross of Christ. And then he describes a little bit about what you could see in their life, at least what he had the discernment to see. Whose end is destruction.

They are headed in that path, going in that direction. Whose God is their appetite. Whose glory is in their shame.

Who set their minds on earthly things. Those are people who are in the process of perishing. All right.

What is the message of the cross? Really, it was Jesus who brought the message forth. And this isn't where I'm going to be, but I'm going to just, as an introduction, I want to establish what Paul understood. Actually, what the entire early church understood.

What we do not understand in our day and age. Not many of us anyway. Jesus gave a message and he gave it to, in different settings, different situations.

All four gospel writers wrote down this message. It's the only message that all four of them wrote down. And it wasn't like one, you know, Sermon on the Mount.

He gave it this one particular time and all the disciples were there, you know, hanging on every word and writing it down. No, these were four different situations. So it tells me that he was constantly bringing forth this message.

He kept repeating it over and over again to his disciples, to the crowds. And I'm going to read it to you. It's in, this particular one's in Luke 9, 23.

I'm going to read it out of the Phillips translation, just because it kind of brings out a little bit more flavor. If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, whosoever will. The door is open.

The door is open for you men, whosoever will. And then he gives three basic, simple, not easy, but simple requirements, obligations, or things you have to fulfill if you want to follow in his footsteps. First of all, he says he must give up all right to himself.

The NAS says he must deny himself. A couple other translations say he must renounce himself. One translation said he must leave self behind.

The self-life. Walk away from it. And you know, he's really talking about repentance, because repentance, true repentance, is the only entrance into Christianity.

There is no other entrance. And that repentance means leaving self behind, making a consecration to allow the Lord to put that thing to death in you. I wrote down somewhere, a person cannot and will not follow Christ until he has renounced his allegiance to self.

As long as self reigns in his heart, as long as he is primarily devoted to self, he will repeatedly prove himself to be a traitor to God's kingdom. And that's the truth. So that's where it begins.

That is the narrow gate. There's some kind of commitment and consecration, some kind of breaking of the self-life. Doesn't mean that it all happens at once.

That's not what I'm saying. And that's not what Jesus was saying. But there is something happens.

Something that is a real breaking away from the old life. We're not talking about a simple alteration in your lifestyle. Going to an evangelical church, listening to John MacArthur on the radio, or John Piper, or whoever.

Reading the latest books. That's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about a slight turn and just making some kind of profession.

We're talking about a real breaking away inside from the way you have thought and been in the past. And then he says he must carry his cross every day. And you know, if you have had that kind of breakthrough with God, if you've gone through the narrow gate, let me put it that this way, if you've gone through the narrow gate, walking the narrow path is not a problem.

You will joyfully pick up your cross and follow Jesus. You will joyfully do it. It will be your joy to do it.

And then the third one is he must keep close behind. NAS more literal says, follow me. And to follow him means that we desire him.

Desire. The longing of your heart is to be with Jesus. To follow him means to identify with him, with his kingdom, with his way of life, his way of doing life, his way of thinking, his value system, his cause.

That's what it means to follow him. And then he goes on the next verse and he says, for the man who wants to save his life will lose it. But the man who loses his life for my sake will save it.

I'm sorry that it isn't the way you have wanted it to be guys, but this is Jesus, the one we will stand before one day. He's the one who says this. This is the message that the early Christians lived with.

They understood when they came into Christianity, they got it. They understood that this was forever walking away from my old way of living and I'm embracing a new way of life. I am going to be a follower of Jesus Christ no matter what it may cost me.

So going back to our verse here in first Corinthians, Paul's describing two different groups and take note that it's a message that's being heard. We're not talking about the Greeks out in the Roman culture or in the Roman Empire. We're talking about people who are sitting in church hearing the message.

And of those hearers, there are those who are rejecting it and there are those who are accepting it and embracing it. Alexander McLaren said, if the cross is foolishness to us, it is because a process of perishing has already gone so far that it has attacked our capacity of recognizing the ways of God. You know, when you hear Isaiah 53, I mean, if there's anything that stands out about that, it is directly opposed to the thinking of this world.

Directly opposed to all the false religions and anything that man could possibly conceive that God would come to earth and die on a cross and set the path for all of his followers. You know, when Jesus said, follow me, where was he going? Where was he going? All right, so I just say all of that to try to establish, you know, for Paul, when he said, made this statement about the word, the message of the cross, this is what he was describing. This is what he was taught and this is what the Lord showed him.

All right, but I want to bring out some of the truth of this message, but I want to use a different passage. I'm actually going to use Galatians 2.20. It's a passage we all have heard many times. Many of us could practically recite it by heart, and I fear that the profound and deep truths involved in these words, this one

verse, these, well, depending on your translations, one or two sentences, that those truths have been lost to us, largely.

So he said, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

And you hear the tenderness in Paul's voice when he finishes it out. He thought of his Savior who loved him and gave himself for him. This little verse is packed with truth.

It is like the core of the Christian life is found right here in this testimony. It really is the core of what the Christian life is all about. The same thing could be said about what Jesus said.

They're two different people saying basically the same thing, just saying it a little differently, and I'm choosing to preach on Paul's version just simply because I've preached on the other one many times, and it's nice to have different, you know, something fresh here to talk about. But anyway, this verse explains why many people live in defeat and why some live in victory. And it does explain what's going on in our day and age, that there is a battle going on, a terrific spiritual battle as the forces of darkness, it seems like every day grows stronger and more powerful and more prevalent in this world.

And unfortunately, the Church of the Living Christ, who should be manifesting the reality of these words, is largely gone the way of the world. Paul, when he talked about the apostasy, he said that people would have a form of godliness but deny the power. This is the power we're talking about that comes to the believer's life.

But you know, when all you have left is this outward facade, the form, and it's been gutted of any substance of any reality of a life in God, and all you have is this shell. There's no power in that. You're not going to have anything but defeated living.

All right, so let's take a look at this verse, and we'll just break it down into these three phrases. I'll say it this way. The message of the cross is that the old self-life must undergo the process of death.

That is the message of the cross. That's where it begins. Paul said, I have been crucified with Christ.

Now let me just tell you guys, but you need to hear this, that this is not some theoretical formula that our theologians are so, they love to come up with formulas. They concoct in their minds, they study the Bible as if it's an academic book. You know, if it were up to me and I was in charge of the church, I would ban all seminars or seminaries, or at least, at the very least, you cannot be a professor in a seminary until you know what it means to go out and lay down your life for 10 years or so, and then come in and teach students what it means to minister the graces.

But they, you know, listen, I'm not meaning all of them, okay, just 99% of them. I'm sure there's one or two somewhere that have gotten it. But, you know, they just, they live in the intellectual realm.

I just met a guy over in Europe two weeks ago, and this guy is fresh out of Bible school, and he married a girl who means a lot to Kathy and me that we've poured ourselves into. And he's, however many years of Bible seminary, six years or whatever. And, you know, for an hour or two, a couple hours, were we there a couple hours? All I heard about was this religious system that he is a part of.

I didn't hear anything about Jesus Christ. I didn't hear anything about laying down your life for others. I didn't hear anything about a love for the Lord.

I didn't hear any—this is what people are taught to create these, you know, nice theoretical—okay, I'm totally off track here. Let me get back. Cordero, are you taking notes? Just scratch out the last five minutes.

This wasn't theory, this was his reality. This was testimony that Paul was speaking of here. You know, before—let's just go back about 20 years.

Saul the Pharisee, one of the leading religious up-and-comers in Jerusalem. You know, this is God's people. The temple's there.

He's in that temple every day. He knows every bit of it. You know, he is all in, man.

He is all about serving Jehovah. He is a very religious man. He would fit perfectly, practically, into the church today.

And he's going down the road because he's going to go and straighten some people out that need to be straightened out. Just one problem. He ran into Jesus.

He ran into Jesus. And in one instant, his life was turned upside down. He went from doing religion in the self, the strength of self, to being led like a little boy into Damascus, blind.

He laid in that bed for three days. He wouldn't eat or drink. And, you know, this is conjecture, but I believe that for three days, all he could think about was who this Christ is and how out of whack he had been.

And he must have been lamenting and weeping and repenting and, God, forgive me! Because all he could see was self. Everywhere he looked was self, self, self. No room for God.

It was all about Saul. But let me tell you something. He rose up out of that bed, and God used him to turn the world upside down.

That was his waterloo. You know, so when he says, I have been crucified with Christ, by the time he wrote this letter to the Corinthians, this was 20 years later. I mean, to the Galatians.

This is years later, and he is describing the way his life has been, a life of crucifixion. It's the opposite of the self-life. And I remembered Pastor Ed, one of his messages going through the book of sexual idolatry, a little section that he came up with that really nails it.

I'm going to just read it. You don't mind if I borrow your stuff, do you? This is what Pastor Ed said. He said, the opposite of this cross-life is our self-life.

The self-life is just what it sounds like, living for self, pursuing what I want, living by my feelings, living for pleasure, a me-first attitude. You're probably pretty familiar with the tentacles of the self-life, things like self-effort, self-help, self-pity, self-preservation, self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-ambition, self-seeking, self-serving, self-centeredness, self-determination, self-will, self-exaltation, self-righteousness, and the granddaddy of them all, self-love. I mean, that nails it.

That nails what Paul is talking about, that he had been crucified to. Why is it that we don't hear sermons about this? You know, you have to go through some of this yourself before you're going to teach on it. If you don't know what it means to go through the process of having your self-life crucified at some level, you don't get it.

You'll look at things like that, and to you, it's going to be nothing but legalism. Oh, you're just trying to make people, you know, whatever. It just seems like negative, you know, unnecessarily negative.

You're just focused on, well, let me tell you something. This is the kind of stuff Paul focused on. Listen to some of the things he said, because he was constantly talking about this.

First Corinthians 15, he said, I die daily. In Galatians 5, he said, now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. In Galatians 6, he said, but may it never be that I would boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

In Colossians 3, he said, therefore put to death your members which are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, etc. And in Romans 8, he said, for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die. But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

That's exactly what Jesus said. You know, are you going to live for self on this earth if you, if that's what life is all about? Jesus says you're going to die. You're going to lose your life when it's all said and done.

In fact, when he was on the way to the cross, he said, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. You know, that is such a powerful reality in the spiritual kingdom.

The problem is in the church culture of our day, is you have a lot of preachers out there who in one form or another are in it for self. You know, if you have a huge church, for instance, you get a lot of accolades and a lot of respect, and you get paid well, and you get, you know, invited to all the big venues, and people look up to you, and you know, you can just glory in yourself. And the same with everything else, writing books, you have a successful book or whatever, it's going to be the same sort of thing.

But Jesus is laying out a different kind of lifestyle, not a lifestyle of us being somebody or being somebody great in the kingdom. No, it's a lifestyle of going down. You know, someone said it here the other day, reading what John the Baptist said, I must decrease and he must increase.

That's got to be the reality of our lives, or you are going in the wrong direction. You know, the reason why Paul would talk about the crucified life is because he knew that on the other side of that is victory, joy, contentedness, living in the love of God, living in the power of God. Let me read an excerpt from my book, *Standing Firm Through the Great Apostasy*.

This is just a little blurb. The fundamental difference between a true and false believer lies in the question of loyalty. Is he devoted to Christ or to himself? The reason many Christians cringe when they are asked to sacrifice for the sake of others is that nothing has happened within them to compel them to get outside of themselves.

They see carrying a cross as an uninvited intrusion upon their lives. In their heart of hearts, their true devotion is reserved for self. It says it, guys.

You need to absorb this and really chew on it, and you are going to make a decision before you leave this place. You're going to have to make a decision before you leave this place who you're going to live for and who you're going to be devoted to. I'm not looking for your devotion, but I sure would love to see you leave out of here one day on fire for the Lord, completely devoted to him, willing to follow him anywhere, no matter what he asks of you.

All right, number two, the message of the cross is that Christ lives in and through you. This is the glory side of it. You know, you can't have the one without the other, but I'm telling you, this is awesome.

It is awesome. He said, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And, you know, actually, if you look at the whole verse, you see I and me is used seven times in that little verse.

And really, I, the word actually in the Greek is ego. And, you know, in one sense, I mean, it didn't really mean the way we understand it now. Well, actually, half of it did and half didn't.

Is that totally confusing, Cordero? He quit writing. I can see that he's stuck on that one. Make up your mind, Pastor Steve.

Is it or isn't it? All right, I'll explain it. It is no longer I, the ego, that self-centered part of me, the flesh, the fallen nature, the old man, whatever you want to call it. It is no longer that ego who's going to continue on in life.

But there is a new creature, a new I that's going to go forth from here on out. And that new I is only new because Jesus Christ himself is living in me and through me. Did you get all that down, Cordero? If I quit bothering him, he'd probably get it down.

Someone said that the definition of a Christian, and I tell you, this is the best definition I've ever heard, and it is true. I don't know who said it, but it's great. He said the definition of a Christian is a person in whom Jesus Christ lives.

That's it. If Jesus Christ is in you, living in you, you are a new creature. Now, the word live that's used here in this verse is the Greek word *zeo*, which is the verb form of *zoe*.

And *zoe* is the word that's usually used with eternal life and other passages. I'll mention a couple here in a minute, but *zoe* is a very powerful word. Excuse me, I still have this cold.

Zoe means, you could just say it this way, our life in God. Our life in God. You know, there's two words for live in the Greek and the New Testament.

Psyche describes your, you know, just the life of any animal. It's *psyche*, it also means your soul. But *zoe* is something altogether different.

Zoe does not come to you until you have repented of your sins and been born from above, and then *zoe* enters into you and takes over. You know, the pseudo-Christian can counterfeit the Christian life. He can, you know, watch other people and kind of do what they do and sort of mimic what they do and stuff, but he can't produce *zoe*.

That only can come through the Holy Spirit. In fact, you know, in the message Jesus gave to Sardis, the professing Christians there, he said, I know your deeds, that you have a name, that you are *zeo*, alive, that you have *zoe*, the life of God. You have a name of that, but the reality is, you are dead.

How would you like Jesus to say that to you? You know, men, if you haven't yet crossed that line, it would be the greatest mercy of God for him to stand right in front of you and say, you have had a lifetime of professing, of acting, but I'm telling you, you have been dead. But you know, when Jesus says that, it's an invitation to come into real life. It's not to condemn or pound people, make them, you know, whatever.

He just wants people to come into the kingdom of God, not deceive themselves and find out on that great day that they have totally missed it. I hope and pray that none of you men are on that side. When you stand before God almighty and you will stand before him, and so will I. Jesus said, I have come that you might have zoe and have it more abundantly.

He said, I am the resurrection and the zoe, the life. I am the life of God. He who believes in me will zoe, live that life.

Now, I love this passage. I kind of had to force fit it into my message, but you'll forgive me. This comes out of 2 Corinthians 4, because I had to kind of force fit it because it really describes an aspect of this whole thing that we're talking about.

Young man, are you awake back there? Just in deep contemplation, right? I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt on that one. Pastor Steve will call you out. You know that, right? You can probably get away with sleeping with Pastor Ed, but not Pastor Steve.

He'll come to you later, you know, in a week or so, and he'll just say some nice little thing. I'm liable to take the mic and stick it under you while you're snoring or something. One day I'll be as merciful as Pastor Ed, but not today.

All right, now let me read this. This is, again, the words of Paul. This is so precious.

This is so precious. But we have this treasure in earth and vessels. What treasure is he talking about? Christ in you, the hope of glory.

We have this treasure in earth and vessels. He doesn't say gold vessels, you know? Earthen vessels. I like Jackie Bollinger calls those cracked pots.

That's about the size of it. Earthen vessels, just something that's cheap. Anybody could go out and dig up some Kentucky mud and create an earthen vessel.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Why? So that the surpassing greatness, here it is again, of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. And then he goes on to talk a little bit about what the crucified life can be like.

We're afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not despairing. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

Struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus. Why? So that the life, the zoe of Jesus, also may be manifested in our body.

It is so awesome. Thank you, my dear wife. Let me explain it a little bit this way, because this is so typical, at least for me.

You know, we are just earthen vessels. We are nothing. We have no value in ourselves.

The value is in what's in us. That's the only value. But, you know, even if you've gone through the narrow gate and you are on the narrow path, the reality is, because we have this fallen nature, self is constantly trying to reassert itself.

And it does pretty regularly in my life. And so the Lord has to constantly put me in my place. And it's usually not any fun whatsoever.

I'll just give you a little illustration of this. I could probably, if I had sat and thought about it, think of hundreds of examples like this. This is just the freshest one.

So that's the only reason I'm picking this one out. Two weeks ago, Nate and I drove from Germany to Holland, and we were going to be staying at this Bible school there for a week. Actually, I was involved with starting of this Bible school three years ago.

But these were all new people. I didn't know them. They didn't know us other than by name.

And, you know, so they were looking for, we were going to be there with them for a week, and we were going to teach the students for a couple of days right before we left. So we were going to be there for a few days before that. So we drive there.

It's a three or four hour drive, I think, right? And we get there that evening and fellowship a little bit, went to bed. And in the middle of the night, I started getting sick. And we both ended up with the flu.

I got it first. And so actually, we had a seminar. That's why they brought us over there, was to speak at the seminar.

I was so deathly sick. There was no way. I could hardly even talk to Nate.

So Nate, but he wasn't sick at the time. So he went and did the seminar, and then he got sick. And anyway, six different times I threw up.

And just to make sure that my self-life was dealt with appropriately, the Lord put me in a spot where the toilet was right next to the dining room. And so now, listen, when Pastor Steve throws up, I'm not one of those guys that just does a polite little upchuck, you know, kind of like that. No.

Right. All of Holland heard this six different times. I mean, it Yeah.

The last time, I mean, I knew they were in there eating dinner. Please, God, not now. Please.

I go running for the bathroom. I could just imagine those poor people right there in the next room, you know, just pushing their food away. I think I've had enough tonight.

So this is my introduction to the dear people running this Bible school. And, you know, then it turns into this cold that I still have. So I was sickly for the whole week that we were there.

And, you know, but I've seen this kind of stuff happen so many times. The Lord has done this with me, I guess, because I'm just got such a strong self-life in myself. I don't know.

Whatever. A couple nights later, the people who were running the Bible school wanted to sit and talk with me and ask my advice on some stuff. And I just got to talking, and I'm telling you, the presence of God just fell in that place.

They were visibly affected just by a quiet little talk I had with them. And then a couple days later, I'm sitting in the dining room, and this young girl, excuse me, my throat, this young girl comes and sits down next to me. And I knew vaguely that she was dealing with some stuff, but I really didn't know much at all about what the deal was.

And she sat down next to me, and we made a little, you know, chitchat, very brief at that. And I don't know how to explain this. All I can do is tell you what I've experienced.

I'm sitting there just eating my sandwich. You know, men are very simple. Just feed them, and they're usually pretty happy.

So I'm just sitting there eating my, you know, I'm in my blank box where I'm not thinking anything except food. And all of a sudden, I feel inside me this churning that she's going through, and I'm experiencing it. I don't know how to explain that.

I don't even know, I don't know this girl, but I'm experiencing this battle, and I can feel what she's going through. She's in the struggle of her life. Do I go the way of myself and all that I want, or do I go the way of the cross and follow after the Lord? I could feel it going on.

And all I did is I turned to her, and I looked her in the eye, and I said, God's way is better. I just quietly, it's hard to explain what this is like when it happens. Her face, she got this startled look on her face because she realized in an instant that I was inside of her, and I was reading her mail.

I was telling her exactly what she was struggling with that very moment, and she knew it. She knew it was God speaking to her. She had this startled look, and then just as quick as that came, that went, and it was replaced with a look of absolute distraught, and she burst into tears and ran to her room.

Only God can do that kind of thing. You know, I couldn't come up with some perfect message or something that would help this girl, and that was only a small part of it. The women went and ministered to her, and she had a breakthrough, and when we left that place, she was on the narrow path.

You know, so I just had one tiny little part in it. I'm not trying to gain credit here or something, but I'm explaining to you how it is, how it works in the kingdom of God. It's not about great vessels.

The vessel is nothing. The third thing Paul says here, the third part is the message of the cross is that I put my faith in Christ, not in self. My abilities, my charisma, my anything, and the life I now live in the flesh, just meaning his body, I live, zeo, by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

You know, and I gave a message about faith before I left for Europe, and I said in that message, that one of the main components of saving faith is real trust in God. Paul lived his life utterly dependent on the Lord. Guys, we have had a history of all of our trust being in self.

You can claim whatever you want to claim before you walked in these doors, but the reality is your trust was in yourself, and your life showed it. But this faith life is what bridges the gap between us and the Lord. We live by faith.

We walk by faith. We stand by faith. We overcome by faith.

We're sanctified by faith. We are kept by faith. It's that connection with God.

It's not just, as I said in that message, I think I said, our faith is not just some religious formula or something. It is a real connection with another being. And because Paul had that connection, he lived his life not to gain for self, not to try to be somebody, not to have the biggest church or the most important ministry.

He didn't care about any of that. He cared about one thing, glorifying the Lord. Not that people would look at him, but that people would look at Jesus.

And you know, I mean, the Corinthian church, they were so carnal and worldly-minded. They wanted preachers who would wow them, big, good-looking guys who had ability to preach and just, you know, put together perfect sermons and just, you know, bring, maybe have people laughing and have them crying and bring them to the point, you know, whatever. I don't know what people are looking for.

I'll tell you what, emotionally driven Christians are looking for emotionally charged sermons. And intellectually based Christians are looking for intellectual sermons. But it's all the flesh.

It should be spirit to spirit, heart to heart, from one broken heart to another is what preaching should be. But these Corinthians, like, just like the American church, were looking for something different. You know, someone said, and this really is based on historical fact, Paul was a small, kind of bent-over man, and he was ugly.

And someone said, one of these commentaries I read said he was an ugly little Jew. And you know, because I studied World War II stuff, I think of the caricatures the Nazis used to write, you know, draw about Jewish people and just kind of make them into, like, the epitome of what the Jew looks like and stuff. But that's kind of what comes to my mind when I think of Paul.

He wasn't some impressive person. They said it themselves. They said his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.

If Paul were in America today, you probably could hardly find a church around that would have him. And he didn't deny that when, you know, when they said that about him. He didn't deny that, because that is not what Paul was about.

He didn't care. He didn't care about that stuff. He said, when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom.

I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and power. You guys got to decide what kind of preaching you want.

His whole life was all about just being a vessel for the Holy Spirit to use. Jesus said, it is the spirit who gives life, zoe. The flesh profits nothing.

And, you know, when you see the American church with its billions of dollars they spend, they come in and go out and all they—buying and selling and all this stuff—and you ask, where's the power of God? Where's the tremendous conversions? All right, I'm going to wrap it up. And I want to do it—well, let me just—I'm just going to go over a couple of verses in 2 Corinthians 11. This is a picture of the crucified life, at least as Paul had to live it.

Verse 23, he begins by talking about the things that he went through, you know, being thrown in jail, beaten, and that sort of stuff. Now this was part of his calling and part of that day, okay? We may never have to go through that, but that doesn't mean that we don't live the crucified life, okay? So he had to go through that, but if you look at verse 27, you start to get the sense of the emotional price that he paid. In labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights and hunger and thirst, often without food and cold and exposure, apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

In other words, he had a burden that drove him to his knees, constantly pleading with God on behalf of these churches. And then verse 30, if I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. What a thing to say.

And then in the next chapter, we all know about the thorn in the flesh, and the Lord said to him, my grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. And this was Paul's response to that. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power, there it is again, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong. All right, I want to end with a little story. I wasn't there when this happened, but Ofer Amitai told me the story, and he was part of it.

You guys have probably heard us talk about the faith homes. Kathy and I went there in 1992, and it completely changed our lives, because we were already radical in our faith, but we came into a place where we found people who could teach us what this life was supposed to be like, and it was tremendous. The power of God was in that place.

Sometimes all you could do was just weep. His presence was so strong there. But anyway, Ofer told me the story.

This one particular weekend, the faith homes, just so you know, were there for ministers to come and rest and sit in the presence of God and get refreshed by the Lord. So this one particular weekend, there were two ministers. Well, actually, I don't know.

The younger guy, I actually don't think he was a minister, but a pastor came, and these two guys were there for the weekend, and Sunday morning, they had their regular service. One of the faith home ministers preached that Sunday morning, and then the faith home ministers asked this pastor, would you like to come and share the word tonight? And just invited him. And us preachers, we'll usually have three or four sermons that have worked in the past, and we'll dust off one of them in a situation like that, and we'll bring that message, and that's what that guy did.

And I'm sure it was a great sermon. I probably would love to hear that sermon. And this young man was really just all excited about this pastor that brought this sermon, and so the next morning at breakfast, he's with Ofer.

Ofer was one of the ministers, and he's kind of going on and on about, man, that was a great sermon. That guy is such a great man of God, and just kind of going on and on about it. And Ofer said, what did you see last night in that service? And the young man said, wow, man, I saw a great preacher.

And he said, what did you see yesterday morning in the service? And the young man had to think about it for a minute, and he said, well, I guess I just saw Jesus. And that really kind of says it all. That really kind of says it all.

I know for myself that's where I want to go. That's where I want to go. I can do more good by, you know, humiliating myself with the flu or whatever, being just dealt with by the Lord, humbled, weakened in myself.

I can do more good sitting and having a conversation. I can do more good with one little phrase that I speak to some girl I don't know than preaching to 10,000 people my perfect sermon. You know, we just don't see things right in the American church.

Listen, the Laodicean church was the big church. It was the thriving church. The church in Philadelphia was just a struggling little body, but that's where the power of God was.

That's the message of the cross, is that Jesus came and died an ignoble death, mocked. People thought he was garbage, human garbage, but it unleashed the power of God that is still alive today, and that same pathway is open to all of us, and there is no other pathway. You might as well come to grips with that.

There is no other pathway. As someone said, you can find many religions that'll say they'll take you to God, but I'm saying I'm totally butchering it, but with Christianity, there is no way around going through the cross. The reason the enemies of the cross hate this message, the reason those who are perishing think it's nothing but nonsense, is because they don't want to deny self.

They want to live for self. They don't want to say no to the flesh. They want to say yes to it.

They don't want to pick up their cross. They want to avoid it. They don't want to be weak in themselves.

They want to be strong in themselves. You know, all I can say, guys, is there is a path into a victorious Christian life wide open for you, wide open for you, but it's going to mean walking away, renouncing the self-life, embracing the cross, following Jesus, and I'm telling you, as you go down that narrow path, you will experience the power of God in a greater and greater measure in your life. Power to overcome habitual sin, yes, that's like nothing.

That's just nothing compared to what God wants to do in you and for you. Millions upon millions of Christian men are being enslaved by sexual lust, but in 1986, God raised up Pure Life Ministries to offer a way of escape to those taking captive by pornography and sexual addiction. Everything this ministry teaches, preaches, writes, and counsels is built upon the unwavering truth of the Word of God.

This is why we exist, to lead people into the truth that will set them free.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/-fN6wqC1fMk.mp4>

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