

The Horizon of Christ - Part 7

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in utter dependence on God and denying self-pride and self-sufficiency in order to experience the power of God and live a life of redemption and victory.

Duration: 44:09

Scripture: Genesis 22:2, Matthew 5:39, Acts 4:13, Romans 12:19, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 2:7

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the transformation that occurred in the early members of the church when the power of God came down from heaven. The idea of weakness and being put to death was initially resented by these men, but when they witnessed the boldness of Peter and John after receiving the power of God, they were completely defeated in their attempts to explain and understand. The speaker emphasizes that this power came from heaven and completely changed the standard of values and ideas about power for these men. The sermon also highlights the importance of not attributing any glory to man, but rather giving all glory to God.

Transcript

Second letter to the Corinthians, chapter thirteen, and verse four. He was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth through the power of God. We also are weak in him, but we shall live with him through the power of God.

He was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth through the power of God. Here in one brief, concise statement is gathered all that the days from what we call Good Friday to Easter Monday represent. On the one side, the cross.

He was crucified. On the other side, the resurrection. He liveth by the power of God.

And then the statement is carried forward into the life of believers. Principle and the experience of the Lord Jesus is transferred to Christians. We also are weak in him, but we shall live through the power of God.

He was crucified through weakness. This is the cross at its very lowest and deepest level. It is indeed a picture of utter weakness.

You cannot read any of the accounts of the trial, condemnation, crucifixion of Jesus without being impressed with his apparent helplessness and impotence and weakness. So it does appear and seem.

And yet, this is not a statement marking that Jesus was crucified because the adverse forces were too strong for him.

That is not what it means. That is not what it means. When it says he was crucified through weakness, it does not mean that those forces, be they human, be they of the world, be they satanic, were too strong for him.

This statement of his being crucified through weakness contains the profoundest secret of God's way of redemption and victory. We shall not understand it. We shall not understand anything in the Bible if we do not see it in its largest setting and content.

I want to say that to you. It is a very important key to anything in the Bible. For there are very few things in the Bible which can be taken by themselves.

We have to see everything in its main setting and connection. And here is an example, a great example of that fact. What is this profound secret of God's method in redemption and victory? What is the great, the full setting and context of this statement about his being crucified through weakness? It is this, nothing less than this.

It is almighty God operating in a great reverse movement in this universe. The cross of the Lord Jesus is God acting in reverse. Now you do not know perhaps what that means.

If you go back again where we have been several times in these days, to that great disruptive, disorganizing, disintegrating movement amongst angelic, creative beings, of which the Bible tells us, when one of the superior angels made a bid for power in heaven, made a bid for authority in his own right, set himself to be an independent, self-sufficient center of a movement, head of a movement, and evidently made his thoughts and ambitions known among angelic hosts, with the result that he gained a following there. Many fell to his scheme and entered into complicity with him to take the power and to be independent of God by being a law unto themselves, to have it in themselves and not to have it in God and from God. That revolt disrupted heaven's harmony, the harmony in the universe.

We are told late in the New Testament that the angels which kept not their first estate but are reserved in everlasting change. That's what happened. That's when it happened.

What happened? It was a bid for power, to take power out of God's hands and to have it in their hands, to forsake the position of being dependent upon God, and being independent to make a course of their own without reference to God. Revolt against the throne, being cast out of heaven, being cast out of heaven. That leader came into this creation.

We know that with that same evil ambition he injected the idea into the mind, into the thoughts of man, and in effect said, Look here, why should you be bound and limited by obligation to God, by dependence upon God and have to have everything by reference to Him? Why not be a law unto yourself? Why not be as God, be as God? Knowing and therefore being able to do. Have the seat of things in yourself and not in Him. Take things into your own hands and assert your independence.

That's the meaning of it, the heart of it, the nature of it. And what had happened in heaven was repeated on earth. Man fell to the tempter, to the suggestion, and Adam took himself out of the realm of God and fell into another realm which was not of God.

Now you notice the whole principle, the whole nature and motive of that two-fold movement was a quest for power. A quest for power on the part of the evil one and man. A way of independence, rejection of divine authority.

And there's a long and terrible history connected with that beginning. The whole history of the human race is just the history of man seeking preeminence. Man seeking superiority.

Man seeking to have in himself what alone belongs to God. Man hating anything in the nature of submission, subjection, subordination. Hating authority.

Are we not seeing that in our own time? Have we not seen that in our own lifetime with the most terrible results? It just seems that there can never be a movement in this world but someone will try to go one better. It's so nationally and internationally. It is so socially, it's a part of human nature.

In the social world someone sees something that someone else has, wears, or possesses in some way, and they imitate but try to just go one better. It's like that. All the terrible story of criticism.

Criticism, denouncing, defaming, reproaching is just after all the working of that inhuman nature which must put down the other one in order to get on top. It's a horrible thing in this universe. Everywhere that thing is at work.

That nature. It's just this spirit of power politics in everywhere. What a fight there is today.

International. Just to be ahead of the other one. Ahead of the other one and above the other one.

And there's no end to that. There is no end to that. Except the end.

The end of the destruction of the race. The destruction of the race. God's creation.

The spoiling of the earth. The enemy knows what he's after. What he's after.

To spite God. In his, in the spoiling and destroying of his creation. That's the setting and the context of this.

God is not going to fight the enemy on his own ground. And one of the laws, mark you, of the Christian life is just this. You cannot meet carnality with carnality.

You may not fight spiritual battles with carnal weapons. You must not give what is given to you. Two different realms with God altogether.

And so we come to this. He was crucified through weakness. In the cross of the Lord Jesus.

All that evil thing. Which arose in the heart of Lucifer. And did its mischief in heaven.

And then produced its fruit in earth. All that evil thing of ambition and pride and quest for power. Has got to be undone.

Has got to be undone. Destroyed. He was crucified through weakness.

It's the picture of man absolutely emptied of all selfhood. In terms of self-sufficiency, self-strength, power in himself. That's one side.

Now we have noted in these gatherings that that has ever and always been God's method. With those who have come really into his hands. There is one principle, one law, one truth running right through the Bible.

Right through the Old Testament. That whenever and wherever God took up a vessel and an instrument. By which to show for his power.

He did not make something according to the standards of this world. In greatness and importance. He proceeded to empty that vessel.

And to bring that vessel to the place of absolute and utter dependence upon himself. Study all your Old Testament characters in relation to God in the light of that. Study Israel in the light of that.

Just that. It's a great weakening, emptying discipline. To take away all self-confidence.

All self-sufficiency. All self-assurance. All the power and the authority from man himself.

So he did with Abraham. And all who followed. Just that.

God's law of all his activities was the law of emptying of all self-pride. For the reason that we have seen. He's going to destroy and undo this mischief.

That's the Old Testament. The New Testament. Come to the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus. Well his teaching is all on that line. All on that line.

You're not allowed to turn on your persecutors and give them what they give you. Indeed you have got to give them just the opposite. Just the opposite.

You're not allowed to vindicate yourself. Stand for your own rights. Seek to preserve your own reputation.

And show that you're as good as the other. You're not allowed to do anything like that. All his teaching is of that kind.

His warning in his teaching is always that his servants, his disciples, his followers will have to go the way that he himself went. Despised. And rejected of men.

Despised. And being despised. Not answering back.

His teaching. His example. In life and in death.

This is the heart of that amazing but marvelous silence. When, as a sheep before her shearers is done, he opened not his mouth. As a lamb led to the slaughter.

Unresisting. From the story of his encounter with some of those who tried to trap him and corner him and worst him by arguments and questions. It was not in self-defense in those cases.

We know quite well that he could bring forth an argument or a case or an answer that would send them all out in perfect shape. Perfect shape. How? Game the game.

He just did it very simply. Very simply. Trying to ensnare him.

Is it right? Is it right to give tribute to Caesar? You see the trap, don't you? The trap that they've set for him. Well, you know his answer. Show me the coin whose superscription is this.

Caesar's. Caesar's. Stamped upon the coin.

Render to Caesar the things of the Caesar. To God the things of the God. They're silenced.

We could go on with those things. He could very, very skillfully and effectively have made out a case for himself and put both the Jewish authorities and the Roman authorities to complete shame if he had been so disposed that he was silent. He was silent.

He knew that for this purpose he came into the world. That this was the will of God for him. He would make out no case by which he might escape this thing.

Something has got to be undone. That temporal power in Rome. That religious power in Israel.

Oh, it was a mighty power in this world. It looked as though it was more powerful than he. The son of God.

See the Jews, the Jewish rulers playing with him. Playing with him. Mocking him.

Having carried out their trumped up charge and case and passed their sentence upon him. They, as it were, tossed him into the hands of Pilate, the Roman leader. Who began to taunt and play with the Jews in return about him.

But here was the victim, apparently. The plaything of this world power on both its sides. The religious and the temporal.

Apparently. The plaything. The pawn.

And deliberately, deliberately letting them do it. He's going to destroy that power on both its sides. He's going to bring down that authority to the very dust.

He's going to humble that thing beyond recovery. To do it. He cannot do it on the basis of man's strength and power and sufficiency.

Not at all. All that must be emptied out because he is there in his cross the representative of this Satan. Governed, dominated, energized humanity.

When he is made sin. And in himself as we have sung in our hymn. What a hymn that is.

Through weakness and defeat. Through weakness. On that side he's going to do it.

He must empty all that out in himself. Be crucified through weakness. But he lives by the power of God.

There's all the difference of two realms. Two realms. Between the great power of Satan.

The great power of this world. The great temporal power. The power of human strength and sufficiency.

All the difference between that and the power of God. And room has got to be made for another kind of power to come in. You know dear friends if you have any spiritual experience at all.

That while you hold on God stands away. While you will not let go he stands apart. While you are in strength.

The Lord just lets you get on with it. It is never until you let go. Until you yield.

You surrender. You subject yourself to the will of God whatever it costs that God steps in. And undertakes.

And does the thing. The law of the spiritual life comes right home. We know it to be true.

Some of us have fought to have our own way. We have fought. We have stood for what we wanted.

And we have known that in those times they were the times when the Lord was not by any means with us. And he was letting things take their course until we came to this path. Yielded to God.

Then things changed. Or began to change. That is the principle you see of the cross.

There is a strength in us that has got to go in order to make room and way for the strength of God. He was crucified through weakness in order to undercut. Undercut and empty out all that which had come in to this cosmos that invaded this creation.

From this usurping power. Usurping power of Satan. Undoing it.

Well that is the context. You cannot understand the cross until you see it related to that eternal issue. Then on the other side he lives by the power of God.

He lives by the power of God. We said in our opening statement that here is the cross at its lowest and deepest level. Touching bottom.

The utter weakness. How the picture changes. In a very short time.

In a very short time. The power of God comes down from heaven. And begins operations by completely converting.

Transforming. The first members of the church. The men who up to that time had resented with all their soul.

Resented this idea of weakness. He spoke of being put to death. It was an intolerable idea.

An intolerable idea. When he was crucified they were offended. Stumbled.

He had suffered defeat. And undoing something inconceivable. Unimaginable.

The whole of this human nature rose up against such an idea. Conception. Such a thing.

If that happens. Then the day is lost. If that happens.

Everything is gone. Look at them on the day of Pentecost. When the other power.

Not of man but of God comes down. There is a wonderful chapter the fourth of Acts isn't it. When they beheld the boldness of Peter and John.

And perceived that they were unlearned men. Well they just had no explanation. No answer.

They were completely defeated. In every attempt to explain and understand. That the men had got the secret.

This Jesus whom he crucified. And who was crucified through weakness. This Jesus.

In his name. What a revolution in these men. But now.

Now. It's not their own strength. It is not their own authority.

It's something from heaven. Completely changed their standard of values. Their ideas about power.

And they go out. Into this world. And meet it on both its sides.

The religious system of Jewry worldwide in its hostility. To their lord and master. The temporal worldly power on its pagan and heathen side.

In its antagonism. They meet it full force. And overcome it.

Not by human strength. Often in the direst weakness. In every way.

Temporal. Physical. Where they could never naturally stand up to the situation.

At all. Yet. This power comes through.

And on they go. And the world is overcome. The power of Satan.

Is broken. It's another power. Not the power of man.

And it has come along the line. Along the line. Of this emptying.

And weakening. Of that old Satan dominated creation. Where the principle of self-sufficiency has been altogether undercut.

This is, dear friend, but an explanation of spiritual experience. We've said it so often. So often.

Are you, are you a candidate for power? Are you in quest for power? Do you ask for power? That word and that idea of power a great, a great idea for you? Oh, the tragedy. The tragedy of a misconception of power. So many pray for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is mightily powerful. But their prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit is to make them. In themselves something.

A great preacher, a great missionary, a great Christian worker or something like that. With a reputation of their own. If the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you and me and into you and me in terms of power.

He's going to empty us first of all. Of all our own strength and reputation. Make no mistake about it.

We must study the lives of these apostles again. And the chief of them, the apostle Paul, in the light of that great truth. Power of God did rest, did encamp upon these men.

Would look at their idea of themselves, their estimate of themselves. And see how they will all the time, all the time be keeping this thing not only before their own eyes. But before the eyes of everybody else.

That no flesh shall glory in his presence. That the glory shall be his alone. Not one iota attributed to man in any way.

Intellectually, emotionally, volitionally. In any way, whatever. Man is not going to have his flesh ministered to in the things of God one little bit.

By the Holy Spirit. It's going to be of God. And all of God.

And all the glory is going to be of God. Now that's the law of Christ crucified and Christ risen. And now it's transferred to us.

To the church. To the believers. And we also are weak in him.

I said it before today that there was probably no man alive who more than Saul of Tarsus when he was dead had this ambition for power. You can see him. He's just after power.

Asserting himself, taking things into his own hands. Being the authority to bring everything down under him. And there was no man after he met Jesus Christ and came into the power of his cross who more if as much exemplified being crucified through weakness.

What a change. What a change in that man. But have we any reason to question that the power of God worked in and through that man? Why the power that worked in and through him two thousand years nearly ago is still working through Paul.

In our own lives the same power comes to us through his ministry. It's a power that overreaches time. Overreaches all limitations.

It's the power of God. It's a costly way. This is what the Lord says, except a man means when he says, except a man take up his cross and deny himself.

Himself. I'd make difficulties for our friends in other countries with their language if I changed it and said, deny his self. But we English know what that means.

His self. That's really what the Lord meant. His self life.

His selfhood. Say no. Say no.

Negative that. You're not going to come in. You're not going to dictate.

You are not going to order my cross. Any self interest. Any selfhood.

No. I deny you a place and any right. It's the Lord and the Lord only who is to be in the place of Lordship.

Dictating. Determining. Directing.

Supporting. Supplying. Mind is a life.

Not a dependence upon anything that is in myself. But utter dependence upon him. And the nearer we get to the Lord Jesus in the depth of the cross.

The lowest depths of the cross. Crucified through weakness. So the nearer we get to the power of God.

The power of God. I think I've said enough about this passage. There it is.

We are confronted with tremendous forces. Great power. All around and within.

That power which is evil will win. Will gain. Will succeed.

Just in proportion. Just in proportion. As we live outside of Christ.

Just in proportion as we live on the ground of our own selfhood. That power will be defeated. And neutralized.

Just in the measure in which we live on the ground of Christ. Crucified through weakness. And living by the power of God.

Shall we pray?

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