

The Power of the Cross

Power in Weakness

Have you ever struggled with spiritual consistency?

I find that to be a tough one.

Every one of us wants to be a witness for Jesus.

We want to be His disciples, don't we?

You probably wouldn't be here if that is not your desire.

Isn't it our desire to let the light of Jesus shine through?

Yet there always seems to be a blanket handy to cover His light.

You find yourself saying to Jesus, "Just duck behind here for a minute."

And we veil His light, we douse His brilliance and glory.

Why do we do that?

We want to live for Him.

But sometimes the price tag is too much or the risk too high.

We might lose something.

You know, popularity, or position, or promotion.

The "cool" crowd might vaporize if the light of Jesus leaked out.

It's not that you want to ignore Jesus.

But sometimes it is more convenient to keep Him out of sight.

Paul calls that, wanting the best of both worlds.

He identified that struggle in the church in Corinth.

The Corinthians wanted the best of both worlds.

The Corinthians wanted the treasure of eternal life.

The Corinthians also wanted the pleasure of the world.

They wanted to be known within the church as Christians.

But out in the world it was a different story.

They blended and tried to fit into both worlds.

They tried to be people of faith and people of the flesh.

Notice Paul's description of them.

"I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough." (2 Corinthians 11:2-4)

It broke Paul's heart to see people who wanted to have it both ways.

Paul made it crystal clear this was not the way of Christ.

Jesus was consistent in every area of life.

He did not cater to the masses of people who followed Him.

Nor did He try to appear religious with the temple leaders.

Paul tells us about Jesus' life in our text.

Jesus had told Paul in Corinth, **"Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent"** (Acts 18:9)

Paul uses two words to describe Jesus.

These two words help us understand **THE POWER OF THE CROSS**.

I Paul First of all Describes Jesus by weakness. (vs. 4a)

Was this "weakness" something Jesus faked?

Was Jesus just putting on an act since He was Almighty God in flesh?

Was He just pretending when He collapsed under the weight of the cross?
Was it a false humility that wore a crown of thorns?
Was His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane just a show?
Was He pretending when He humbled Himself even to the point of death?
No, Paul knew better.

Paul recognized Jesus' weakness because he had tasted death himself.

In Acts 14 the crowd in Antioch was offended by Paul's teaching.
They took up stones and began hurling them at him.

They then dragged him out of the city confident he was dead.
But after a few minutes he got up and re-entered Antioch.

Paul knew the reality of weakness, the pain of weakness.

He could discern what was real and what was feigned.

His description of Jesus' weakness was legitimate.

Jesus was strength-less, impotent, frail, feeble.

That is where **THE POWER OF THE CROSS** leads us.

Paul honestly spoke saying, "For we are weak in Him." (vs. 4)

Hear Jesus' own words in Luke 9:22-26. (READ)

We must identify with Jesus in His weakness.

We must die to ourselves and our quest for power.

We must come to that place of absolute surrender.

It is by weakness that Jesus enters our lives.

That is the **POWER OF THE CROSS**.

Paul asks, "Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" (vs. 5)

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Look with me at 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

II Paul Secondly Describes Jesus by power. (vs. 4b)

Jesus was weak but He also lived in Power.

The power's where we want to be.

We are not interested in the life of weakness.

If we can avoid weakness we are all for it.

We want to jump right to the power.

Let me be bold.

Let me have influence.

I want the power.

Bring on the power.

Just think what I could do with the power of Jesus.

People would really take notice of me then.

I would be the Christian I always wanted to be.

I would be consistent.

No more ups and downs in my witness.

But if we seek to by-pass weakness and thirst only for power, we may experience power but it won't be the power of God.

The Power of the Cross is the resurrection.

There can be no resurrection unless it is preceded by weakness.

We must first die with Jesus in weakness before we can live with Him in power.

The power of Christ is a miraculous power.

It is dynamic, a dynamite, a power that shakes your world.

The power of Christ is the power that changes the landscape of the heart.

It is a power that transforms life.

Paul knew that only in weakness is the power of God unleashed.

He had written earlier, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive

words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Cor. 2:2-5)

In a couple of weeks Dorothy and I will be visiting Luke and Soon Nam in S. Korea. In the 2005 census 29.2% of the population of South Korea was Christian.

In 2009 South Korea had sent out 20,000 missionaries.

Only United States sends out more Christian missionaries than South Korea.

Seoul contains 11 of the world's 12 largest Christian congregations.

But South Korea has not always been a place of safety for Christians.

The story of Yohann Lee makes me feel more Corinthian than Christian.

Yohann Lee's story began in July, 1950.

South Korea had been invaded by the Communists ravaging North Korea.

During July 1950, and the months to follow, mass arrests were made.

Prisoners filled the People's Police Station in Inchon.

That is where the airport is located that Dorothy and I fly to.

Those prisoners were charged with anti-Communist activities.

Many of the prisoners were burned alive.

Yohann Lee was one of the teenagers rounded up and imprisoned in July 1950.

During his trials his interrogators asked only one question.

"Are you a Christian?"

This is his account of his interrogation.

"I felt as if my blood stopped running the first time they asked.

"My whole being felt immobilized!

"I knew the consequences of my answer to that question.

"If I answered "Yes" I would be sentenced to death."

He had seen many deadly tortures during the previous three weeks.

During his second trial they asked again, "Are you a Christian?"

"It seemed an eternity as I groped for an answer in my heart.

"I must give him the answer!

"Why did you become a Christian?" he changed the question.

"Well, I was born into a Christian family," I answered.

"He laughed.

"I felt as if my heart was knifed.

"That ended my second trial."

"The question kept ringing in my head: "Are you a Christian?"

"A feeling of shame swept through my mind as I thought over my feeble answer.

"Face death by answering "Yes" or avoid death by answering "No".

"I searched my heart in sincere prayer.

"I asked the Lord for confidence and courage.

"Five days passed before my final trial.

"I was escorted to a different room this time.

"Behind me stood three police with beating sticks in their hands.

"Are you a Christian?" the new judge asked solemnly.

"A verse from the Bible flashed through my mind.

"If any man confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven; but any man who will deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

"It wiped out all doubts and fears, from my frightened and confused mind.

"Yes, I am a Christian, sir," I answered.

"He looked up at me in surprise.

"Are you a Christian?" he asked again.

"Yes, I am."

"He nodded toward the guards who stood behind me.

"They tied my hands to my back.

"The guards began to beat my legs and shoulders.

"The judge stood up and looked down on me.

"Are you a Christian?" he asked.

"My eyes were filled with tears because of pain and agony.

"Yes, I am a Christian."

"They beat on my head.

"I sank into unconsciousness as my third trial ended.

"I must have been unconscious for more than a day.

"When I finally woke, I was terribly hungry and sick.

"My side ached.

"My legs were bruised.

"My shoulders were swollen.

"I put my hand behind my neck.

"I touched blood!

"I looked into the palm of my hand and was shocked.

"My skull was fractured.

"The day of my sentencing came, I expected death.

"I prepared my heart.

"I was skin and bones - sick, tired, starved.

"This time I was not afraid or uncertain.

"I knew what I would answer.

"Do you deny this Jesus Christ?"

"No, I do not deny Christ, sir, not today or ever."

Yohann Lee was a teenager during that trial.

How could a teenager be so bold and powerful in the face of death?

Where did that power come from?

It came from weakness that recognized the sin in his heart to be acceptable.

He died and became weak with Jesus in the Cross of Jesus.

His life was flooded with the amazing weakness of Christ.

He had been redeemed by the blood of Christ that was shed in weakness.

His heart was filled with the compassion of Christ for a lost world.

It was the power of Jesus' love that gave him power in weakness.

Miraculously he did not die that day in South Korea, he was released.

No other male person that was captured with him left that jail alive.

During his trial Yohann gave his future to God.

In the years following the Korean war he lived in the power of the Cross.

He shared the good news of Jesus with 6,000 communist prisoners.

More than 700 of them accepted Christ as their Saviour.

Have you experienced the Power of the Cross?

Has its Power been made visible in your life?

Have you acknowledged how powerless you are to live consistently?

The power to live begins by acknowledging your powerlessness over sin.

We cannot know the power of the cross until we admit we are cold toward Jesus.

Have you acknowledged you are dead and cold in your sin?

It isn't until we experience that weakness that Jesus' power comes.

When we confess our sin the power of the Cross gives resurrected life.

Jesus said to Laodicea, "I wish you were cold or hot but instead you are lukewarm."

We will never know the hot power of cross if we do not know how spiritually cold we are.

It is when we are weak that we experience strength.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9,10)

Closing Song - Once Again