

Second Corinthians Talk: 1 Corinthians 1 v 18 – 2 v 5

To remind us of where we are!

Today is the second of a series of snapshot looks at Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Last week by way of an overview we looked at the way Paul drew that errant community back to truth by his emphasis on faith, hope and love, the latter being the greatest.

Today we see the interplay of those 3 words again as we look at an area of faith that again the church in Corinth had maybe got confused.

The message of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is power of God. V18

It seems that this community had to some degree at least lost sight of the **core message of the cross** and maybe diluted it with human wisdom.

So Paul brings us back to the core message, the cross, at the start of the letter. The other side of the core message, **the resurrection**, gets a whole chapter, 15, later. So Paul's advice to the church in Corinth begins and ends with the work of God in Christ (a) on the cross and (b) through the resurrection.

Today we look at the loving work of God on the **cross**, the core, the **cornerstone** of our faith, our hope.

The message of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is power of God.

The power of God. The Greek word used by Paul is dynamis, power from which we get dynamics, dynamo or, courtesy of Alfred Nobel dynamite.

Lets re render **To Christians the message of the cross is dynamite.**

How can this possibly be? How can there be power in an extraordinarily barbaric method of judicial killing, of execution? How can this possibly be a source of power? A source of life? a source of hope??

This is a huge subject, and one which Christians should explore again and again. It goes under the name of 'atonement.' This word is best understood as at- one- ment. Because, at heart, the cross is all about being **at one with God**, a restored relationship, renewed communication with our Father, our maker.

We maybe capture the real sense through this story which I know I have told before:

On the Hill of the cross.

There is a picture which was painted at the request of the Royal Corps of Signals to depict an incident in the First World War. Its one figure was an unarmed linesman in no-man's land; he had been sent out to mend a broken cable and to restore the line of communication. He lay on the shell scarred land prostrate and lifeless, his body outstretched, his life mission fulfilled. His arms were straight; his wrists were cold and stiff; but his dying action had been to bring the ends of the cable together into contact as wrist was clamped to wrist. Contact had been restored at the cost of his life and beneath the picture one word told the story. That was the brief word 'Through'. This is just what the Son of God achieved in His death on the cross. He had gone out unarmed and alone, into the no man's land of sin and separation from God; He had gone out there to restore the long broken contact between heaven and earth. He was to lie on that blood stained field, rigid and lifeless, His body transfixed, his object achieved. His hands were pierced with nails; His arms were taut and numb; but His dying action had been to put men through to God and His two arms outstretched were the sign of contact restored.¹

It illustrates the way, by dying in our place, Christ made forgiveness possible, a life renewed, restored, bought back.

It was essentially this way of looking at the cross that so influenced a young **David Watson**, whose work in York was so remarkable and whose inspirational addresses I heard several times when a student myself.

David Watson

When he was a student he was introduced to the meaning of the cross at breakfast time via a piece of toast used as a visual aid. It was explained that just as the toast could be transferred from one hand to the other so could our sin and guilt be transferred from us to JC. 'I was beginning to see it', he wrote, 'even though my mind wanted something much more intellectually profound. Perhaps that was the meaning of the cross. Perhaps Jesus did somehow take upon himself the sin and guilt of us all so that we, sinners though we are, could be free to know the love and forgiveness of God without any barriers at all.'²

But I would like briefly to add a further dimension to the work of God on the cross. An additional benefit if you like. In a very real sense on the cross God identifies with humanity in a way that uniquely shows his deep understanding of us, helping support us in our own weakness, **even in our own suffering**.

Elie Wiesel, who spent a period of his boyhood in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, tells a horrifying tale.

The guards had tortured, and then hanged a young boy. Someone behind him whispered where is God? Where is he? Thousands of prisoners were made to walk past looking the boy straight in the face as he took over half an hour to die. Again the voice where is God

¹ From *The Hill of the Cross* p31. Marcus Loane 1968

² In 'The Message of the Cross' Tidball p29 IVP 2001

now? And, Wiesel writes, 'I heard a voice within me reply 'where is he? He is here hanging on these gallows.''³

A reminder that God understands such suffering because he has himself suffered. So too in our times of pain, whatever the cause, whatever the nature, are known, understood, even experienced by God in Christ.

What Paul wanted the Corinthians to know and in turn us to know is the **centrality** and the **power** of the cross. We worship a God who (a) has taken the necessary loving action to bring about restored friendship and communication and who, in doing that, has (b) engaged with a world of unimaginable suffering and pain which assures us that he understands and identifies with our problems whatever they may be.

But in all of this a response from us is required. What we must do, if we have not done so already, is come to him humbly thanking him and asking his forgiveness like David Watson did.

I have offered today two complementary ways in which there is indeed **power** in the cross.

- Primarily it is the **power** to save, to restore, to experience forgiveness. To be set free.
- But in addition the **power** is about with knowing that, wherever we are, God has gone before.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that **hope** begins with the cross. So us too.

If any of the issues raised this morning touch you in any way, make you maybe feel there is something here to engage with, something to explore further then two things.

- I have a little booklet, do ask for it I will not pry any further. It explains things a bit more and contains a short prayer p18. READ
- Do speak to one of us, here today, by phone, by email (addresses in PN) in total confidence and we can explore with you just what it is to come to the cross and experience God's love in a new way.

³ In 'The Cross of Christ' John Stott IVP p 335 1986