

Lest the Cross of Christ Be Emptied of Its Power

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of guarding the power of the cross in our personal lives, corporate life, and witness.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:17

Topics: "The Cross", "Gods Power"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the contrast between the power of the world and the power of God, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between the two. He uses the analogy of a giant poker game where nations are obsessed with power, leading to wars and chaos. Through the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5, he illustrates how true power comes from God, not from worldly wealth or influence. The sermon highlights the significance of the cross as the source of God's power, urging believers to guard and glory in the power of the cross in their personal lives, corporate worship, ministry, and witness.

Transcript

The events of recent days have focused our attention on the fact that the nations of this world deal with each other in terms of power.

When the power is in balance, we have peace.

And when the balance is disturbed, we have war.

Sooner or later the balance is always disturbed.

It's like a giant poker game when the time comes and everyone at the table has to show their hand and this nation seems to suddenly discover that the nations around this table are playing for high stakes. And the only card in any hand that counts at all is one that represents power.

When our Lord told us that we would hear of wars, and rumors of wars, and not to be

alarmed, that nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, that there would be famine, earthquakes, false Christs, hatred, tribulation, growing bitterness, he was describing the final rounds of the giant poker game of this age.

And as it moves toward its end, all the nations, and
all the multitudes of the nations,
almost everybody will be obsessed with power.

The beast that has the most power will be the beast that is worshipped.

The Kingdom of God is concerned with a power of a very different kind.

In order to be part of the Kingdom of God and
to function in the Kingdom

it is essential that we are able to distinguish in our minds and hearts
between the power of this world and the power of God.

The power of God manifests itself in healing,
setting people free from their bondage,
overcoming evil,
conveying life.

The power of this world manifests itself in wealth,
influence,
angry mobs - not only overseas, but here
and weapons that can kill.

Rarely do both kinds of power exist any one individual together for very long.

If we happen to be rich in the power of this world, then we will find it extremely difficult
to take hold of and stay under the power of God.

And if we happen to be rich in the power of God, generally we will be very weak and
vulnerable as far as the world is concerned.

Example: from 2 Kings 5

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great

man with his master and in high favor, because by him the lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the maiden from the land of Israel." And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So here, we see the contrast between Naaman this very powerful man, high ranking under the king, controlling the destiny of tens of thousands of people, but he's a leper. On the other hand, here is this little Jewish girl, who was picked up in a raid, and is utterly weak and vulnerable and yet, in her burns the flame of the presence of the Living God. She's not embittered. She's concerned for this man.

Continuing from 2 Kings;

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." And when the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and

chariots, and halted at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

Again we see the power of Naaman.

So powerful that the king of Israel is shaking in his boots.

Now he finally arrives, parking his chariots and horses and everybody who came with him in front of the little old dumpy house of Elisha the prophet.

Now Elisha has no silver, no gold, no chariots, no festal garments, no horses, but he has one thing Naaman does not have. He has the power of God.

But Naaman was angry and went away saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like that of a little child, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But Elisha said. "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

Naaman wants to show his appreciation and he does it in the only way he knows.

"Let me give you some of my power. Take some of this gold. How about some silver, festal garment anything you want." And Elisha says, "No way. Keep it."

Why?

Why? Because Elisha does not want to lose the power of God in his life by reaching out for the power of this world.

But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him, and get something from him." So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw some one running after him, he alighted from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, "There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of prophets; pray give to them a talent of silver and two festal garments.' " And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two festal garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and put them in the house; and he sent the men away, and they departed. He went in and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, menservants and maidservants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you, and to your descendants for ever." So

he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow.

Gehazi yielded to the temptation that comes to us all -- to try to get the power of the world along with the power of God. "My master's a fool. Why shouldn't I get some of that stuff?"

But as he reaches out to take hold of the power of this world,
he loses the power of God.

Now all of us have working in us the spirit of Gehazi all too much.

We want the power of God, but we also want the power of this world.

And very often we do it in very subtle ways.

We tell ourselves, "What I'm after is spiritual power."

But the spiritual power that we are after,
is the spiritual power of the order that is unholy - of the prince of this world.

And the proof that all too often we are in the role of Gehazi is that,
when we look down and see where we are going, and think about it,
we discover what is happening is that we are moving farther,
and farther,
and farther from the cross of Jesus.

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel
and not with eloquent wisdom lest the cross be emptied of its power."

The fountainhead of the power of God in this world,
the place of God's extreme weakness,
the place where God in fact dies, in His Son, in a shameful way,
is the cross.

Every healing of mind and body,
every deliverance from darkness into light,
and from bondage into liberty, owes itself, its liberty and its life to that cross.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until

the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-tha'ni?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "This man is calling on Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. But others said, "Wait, let us see if Elijah will come to save him." And Jesus cried again in a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

You want to receive the power of God into your life -- you go to the cross.

You want to see the power of God moving on another life and blessing it -- you proclaim the cross.

And you'll notice if you read the book of Acts how the cross is at the center of every message that got any results.

Starting at Pentecost, not to read Peter's whole sermon, but look...he goes on with his sermon and finally says,

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised

him up...

Peter and John go up to the temple sometime later, heal a man, a crowd gathers.

Peter preaches again and the burden of his sermon again,

"Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?

The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.

Peter and John are arrested and the next day they are brought out of jail and brought before the authorities. Same thing.

"Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

They preached the cross.

They lived in the shadow of the cross.

The Jesus with whom they walked and talked was the Jesus of the cross, the Lamb of God.

Whenever anybody came along and wanted in any way to add something to the cross, like human eloquence,

lofty wisdom,

some new set of rules and regulations.

Whenever believers began to put their trust in something in addition to the cross,

which happens all over the place

and even among us today.

Whatever it is... drains the cross of its power.

And they end up standing there with their two little bags of silver,

but empty of the power of the cross.

Paul learned the hard way. Remember, Paul went to Athens and he preached an eloquent sermon. It was marvelous.

He quoted Greek poetry.

Referred to the writings of the philosophers.

Did all these wonderful things.

But in that sermon, not one mention of the cross. And very, very meager results.

He learned the hard way that human eloquence and human wisdom is the power of the world. The cross is the power of God.

He left Athens and went on to Corinth a broken man who had found once again the source of his power is the cross.

And we read in the book of First Corinthians exactly how he arrived;

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.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Lest the cross be emptied of its power.

This has to be the major concern of all of us at this critical time.

At this time of fantastic opportunity.

We have to be sure that we guard the power of the cross in our personal lives.

Because the source of our life,
the source of the life we live every day is the cross. Nothing else.

"I am crucified with Christ it is no longer I who lives, 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."

"But far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus
Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

But see, am I glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has
been crucified to me and I to the world?

Or am I chasing after Naaman to get some more silver,
get a little more influence,
establish my name in the fellowship,
to get a hold of a paint brush and
put my name in gold some place.

The cross is not something we just put up with. "Oh, that's the cross I have to bear."
We have to glory in the cross.

The cross of Jesus is the place where I was set free from my delusions,
healed of my sin sickness,
my soul sickness,

Where the heart of rock is made into something flesh.

Where our eyes open and we begin to see God and man in a new way.

God help us to get near and stay near the cross of his Son
for only there do we get our life and
only there do we get the strength to fulfill the calling which he has put on us.

We also need to guard the power of the cross in our corporate life;

"But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because
when you come together it is not for the better, but for worse. For,

in the first place, as you assemble together as a church, I hear there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Jesus put his cross at the center of our corporate life.

The center of our worship here week by week is, praise God, not the sermon,

"Oh, I didn't get anything today."

"Oh, I couldn't get anything out of it today."

If you walk away from any service, I don't care how lousy the sermon is, with nothing it's your own fault because the center of our worship -- the center is the broken body and the shed blood of the Lamb of God and that is always the same.

How can you say, "I didn't get anything. It was stale today"?

Come on.

This is the feast of victory for our God. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The center of our ministry is the cross.

As we go out the door, we go out as bread and wine for the world.

And the power of God will move out of us only to the extent that we are willing to be broken bread and poured out wine with Jesus for that world.

The Son of man came also not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many as the Father has sent me so send I you...

to do the same thing.

We have to guard the power of the cross in our witness.

Once more;

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power.

The world is full of many, many gospels, but there is only one gospel of a crucified God.

A god who comes down,

who suffers,

who bears our sins,

our grief,

our sickness,

and our death.

We don't have to worry about how it's being taken.

Whether people will like it if we do nothing but proclaim the cross all the time.

Whether it will do any good.

Whether there will be results.

All we have to worry about is that we are faithful to make it simple and clear.

The gospel of the cross;

For the word of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing,
but for those who are being saved it is the power of God.
While the nations and most of Christendom go chasing after the power of this world,
one way or another,
God help us to stay back there with Elijah and not go chasing with Gahazi
after Naaman to get some of his gold, or snatch one of his swords.
And if we find we have drifted from the cross in our personal life,
may God help us to get back.
May the power of the Living God be restored to us, individually and corporately,
this day as we come back once more to the cross of his Son, Jesus.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/lest-the-cross-of-christ-be-emptied-of-its-power/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net