THE WORD OF THE CROSS

NO. 1611

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 31, 1881
BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;
but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."
1 Corinthians 1:18

NOTE well that in the seventeenth verse, Paul had renounced the "wisdom of words." He says that he was sent to preach the Gospel, "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." It is very clear, therefore, that there is an excellence, elegance, and eloquence of language which would deprive the Gospel of its due effect.

I have never yet heard that the cross of Christ was made of no effect by great plainness of speech, nor even by ruggedness of language—but it is the "wisdom of words," which is said to have this destroying power. Oh, dreadful wisdom of words! God grant that we may be delivered from making attempts at it, for we ought earnestly to shun anything and everything which can be so mischievous in its influence as to make the cross of Christ of no effect.

The "wisdom of words" works evil at times by veiling the truth which ought to be set forth in the clearest possible manner. The doctrine of atonement by blood, which is the essence of the preaching of the cross, is objectionable to many minds, and hence certain preachers take care not to state it too plainly. Prudently, as they call it—craftily, as the apostle Paul would call it—they tone down the objectionable features of the great sacrifice, hoping by pretty phrases somewhat to remove the "offense of the cross."

Proud minds object to substitution, which is the very edge of the doctrine. Hence theories are adopted which leave out the idea of laying sin upon the Savior, and making Him to be a curse for us. Self-sacrifice is set forth as possessing a high, heroic influence by which we are stimulated to self-salvation, but the Lord's suffering as the Just for the unjust is not mentioned. The cross, in such a case, is not at all the cross by which self-condemned sinners can be comforted, and the hardened can be subdued, but quite another matter.

Those who thus veil an unwelcome truth imagine that they make disciples, whereas they are only paying homage to unbelief, and comforting men in their rejection of the divine propitiation for sin. Whatever the preacher may mean in his heart, he will be guilty of the blood of souls if he does not clearly proclaim a real sacrifice for sin.

Too often the "wisdom of words" explains the Gospel away. It is possible to refine a doctrine till the very soul of it is gone. You may draw such nice distinctions that the true meaning is filtered away. Certain divines tell us that they must adapt truth to the advance of the age, which means that they must murder it, and fling its dead body to the dogs. It is asserted that the advanced philosophy of the nineteenth century requires a progressive theology to keep abreast of it—which simply means that a popular lie shall take the place of an offensive truth.

Under pretense of winning the cultured intellects of the age, "the wisdom of words" has gradually landed us in a denial of those first principles for which the martyrs died. Apologies for the Gospel, in which the essence of it is conceded to the unbeliever, are worse than infidelity. I hate that defense of the Gospel which razes it to the ground to preserve it from destruction.

The "wisdom of words," however, is more frequently used with the intent of adorning the Gospel, and making it to appear somewhat more beautiful than it would be in its natural form. They would paint

the rose and enamel the lily, add whiteness to snow and brightness to the sun. With their wretched candles they would help us to see the stars. O superfluity of naughtiness!

The cross of Christ is sublimely simple—to adorn it is to dishonor it. There is no statement under heaven more musical than this—"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." All the bells that you could ring to make it more harmonious would only add a jingle jangle to its heavenly melody, which is in itself so sweet that it charms the harpers before the throne of God.

The doctrine that God descended upon the earth in human nature, and in that nature bore our sins, and carried our sorrows, and made expiation for our transgressions by the death on the cross—is in itself matchless poetry, the perfection of all that is ennobling in thought and creed. Yet the attempt is made to decorate the Gospel, as though it needed something to commend it to the understanding and the heart.

The result is that men's minds are attracted from the Gospel either to the preacher or to some utterly indifferent point. Hearers carry home charming morsels of poetry, but they forget the precious blood. They recollect the elaborate metaphors so daintily wrought out, but they forget the five wounds, and fail to look unto the Lord Jesus and be saved. The truth is buried under flowers.

Brethren, let us cut out of our sermons everything that takes men's minds away from the cross. One look at Jesus is better than the most attentive gazing at our gems of speech. One of the old masters found that certain vases which he had depicted upon the sacramental table attracted more notice than the face of the Lord, whom he had painted sitting at the head of the feast, and therefore he struck them out at once.

Let us, my brethren, do the same whenever anything of ours withdraws the mind from Jesus. Christ must always be in the foreground, and our sermons must point to Him, or they will do more harm than good. We must preach Christ crucified, and set Him forth like the sun in the heavens, as the sole light of men.

Some seem to imagine that the Gospel does not contain within itself sufficient force for its own spreading, and therefore they dream that if it is to have power among men it must either be through the logical way in which it is put—in which case all glory is to logic, or though the handsome manner in which it is stated—in which case all glory is to rhetoric.

The notion is current that we should seek the aid of prestige, or talent, or novelty, or excitement, for the Gospel itself, the doctrine of the cross, is in itself impotent in its hands and lame upon its feet, and must be sustained by outside power, and carried as by a nurse whithersoever it would go. Reason, elocution, art, music, or some other force must introduce, and support it, or it will make no advance—so some injuriously dream.

That is not Paul's notion. He speaks of the cross of Christ as being itself the power of God, and he says that it is to be preached, "not with wisdom of words," lest the power should be attributed to the aforesaid wisdom of words, and the cross of Christ should be proven to have in itself no independent power, or in other words, to be of none effect.

Paul would not thus degrade the cross for a moment, and therefore, though qualified to dispute with schoolmen and philosophers, he disdained to dazzle with arguments and sophistries. And though he himself could speak with masterly energy—let his epistles bear witness to that—yet he used great plainness of speech, that the force of his teaching might lie in the doctrine itself, and not in his language, style, or delivery.

He was jealous of the honor of the cross, and would not spread it by any force but its own, even as he says in the fourth and fifth verses of the second chapter of this epistle—"My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Having cleared our way of the wisdom of words, we now come to the word of wisdom. Paul preached the cross, and our first head shall be *the word of the cross*. Many give the cross a bad word, and so our second head shall be *the word of its despisers concerning it*—they called it foolishness. And

then, thirdly, we will think upon *the word applied to the cross by those who believe it*—it is to them "the power of God." O that the Holy Spirit may use it as the power of God to all of us this day.

I. First, then, we speak upon "THE WORD OF THE CROSS."

I borrow the term from the Revised Version, which runs thus—"The word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness, but unto us who are being saved it is the power of God." This is, to my mind, an accurate translation. The original is not, "the preaching of the cross," but "the word of the cross."

This rendering gives us a heading for our first division, and at the same time brings before us exactly what the Gospel is—it is "the word of the cross." From which I gather, first, *that the cross has one uniform teaching*, or word. We are always to preach the word of the cross, and the cross has not many words, but one. There are not two gospels any more than there are two Gods—there are not two atonements any more than there are two Saviors.

There is one Gospel as there is one God, and there is one atonement as there is one Savior. Other gospels are not tolerated among earnest Christians. What said the apostle? "If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be candidly heard and quietly fraternized with.*" Nothing of the sort.

I will quote the Scripture. Paul says, "Let him be accursed." He has no more tolerance than that for him, for Paul loved the souls of men, and for to tolerate spiritual poison is to aid and abet the murder of souls. There is no Gospel under heaven, but the one Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But what about other voices and other words? They are not voices from heaven, nor words from God, for He has not in one place spoken one thing, and in another place another. Neither is it according to the spirit of the Gospel that there should be one form of Gospel for the first six centuries, and then another mood of it for the nineteenth century.

Is it not written, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"? If the atonement were in progress, if the great sacrifice were not complete, then I could understand that there should be progress in the preaching of it. But inasmuch as, "It is finished," was pronounced by Christ upon the tree, and then He bowed His head and gave up the ghost—there can be no further development in the fact or in the doctrine.

Inasmuch as the Word of the Lord which describes that atonement is so complete that he that adds thereunto shall have the plagues that are written in this Book added unto him, I gather that there is no such thing as a progressive word of the cross, but that the Gospel is the same Gospel today as it was when Paul in the beginning proclaimed it.

The word of the cross, since it is the express Word of God, endures forever. Generations of men come and go like yearly growths of the grass of the field, but the Word of the Lord abides evermore the same in all places, the same to all nationalities, the same to all temperaments and constitutions of the mind. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid."

From that word I gather, next, that the doctrine of the atonement is *one word in contradistinction from many other words which are constantly being uttered*. We preach Christ crucified, and His voice from the cross is, "Look unto me and be ye saved." But another voice cries aloud, "This do and thou shalt live." We know it—it is the voice of the old covenant which the Lord Jesus has removed, taking away the first covenant that He may establish the second.

The doctrine of salvation by works, salvation by feelings, salvation by outward religiousness, is not the word of the cross, which speaks in quite another fashion. The call to salvation by works is a strange voice within the fold of the church—and the sheep of Christ do not follow it, for they know not the voice of strangers.

The word of the Gospel speaks on this wise, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "Believe and live" is the word of the cross.

Much less do we regard the word of ceremonialism and priestcraft, which still lingers among us. We had thought it was a dull echo of the dead past, but alas, it is a powerful voice, and is constantly lifting up itself. Priestcraft is crying, "Confess to me and thou shall have forgiveness. Perform this ceremony, and undergo the other rite, and you shall receive a sacred benediction through men ordained of heaven."

This voice we know not, for it is the voice of falsehood. He that believes in Christ Jesus has everlasting life. We are complete in Him, and we know nothing of any priest save that one High Priest, who, by His one sacrifice, has perfected forever them that are set apart.

Voices here and there are heard like mutterings from among the tombs—these are the maunderings of superstition, saying, "Lo, here," and "Lo, there," and one man has this revealed to him, and another that. But to none of these have we any regard. For God has spoken, and our preaching henceforth is nothing but "the word of the cross," which is none other than the word of the crucified Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Brethren, let us hear this word of the cross, for in effect my text says, "*Let the cross speak for itself*." That is to be our preaching. We bid reasoning and speculation hold their tongues that the cross itself may speak. We let the cross speak its own word.

First, it cries aloud, *God must be just*. The dreadful voice of justice in its certainty and severity rings through the world in the sighs and cries and death-groans of the Son of the Highest. Jesus has taken man's sin upon Himself, and He must die for it, for be sin where it may, God must smite it. The Judge of all the earth must do right, and it is right that sin should involve suffering. Supreme justice must visit iniquity with death, and therefore Jesus on the cross, though in Himself perfectly innocent and unspeakably lovely, must die the death—deserted by His Father, because the iniquity of us all has been meet upon Him.

The cross cries unto the sons of men, "Oh, do not this abominable thing which God hates, for He will by no means spare the guilty." God must make bare His arm, and bathe His sword in heaven to smite sin wherever it is found, for He smites it even when it is imputed to His only Son!

The cross thunders more terribly than Sinai itself against human sin. How it breaks men's hearts to hear its voice! How it divides men from their sins, even as the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon and rends the rock in pieces! If God smites the perfect One who bears our sin, how will He smite the guilty one who rejects His love?

Let the cross speak again, and what does it say with even louder voice? *God loves men, and delights in mercy*. Though He loves righteousness and hates wickedness, yet He loves the sons of men, so much so that He gives His Only-Begotten to die that sinners may live. What more could God have done to prove His love to mankind? "God commendeth his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The love within that glorious deed needs no telling, it tells itself. God had but one Son, one with Himself by mystic union, and He sent Him here below to take our nature, that, being found in fashion as a man, He might die on our behalf—made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

"God so loved the world, that he gave his Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." The word of the cross is, "God is love." He wills not the death of the sinner, but that he turn unto Him and live.

What does the cross say next? Mark, we are not speaking of the crucifix. The crucifix represents Christ on the cross, but He is not on the cross any longer, He has finished His sacrificial work and has ascended to His glory. If He were still on the cross, He could not save us. We now preach the cross as that on which He died, who now lives and reigns full of ability to save.

Let the bare cross speak, and it declares that *the one sacrifice is accepted and the atonement is complete*. Sin is put away, the work of reconciliation is accomplished, and Jesus has gone up on high unto His Father's throne to plead for the guilty. Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more. Death has no more dominion over Him. He is risen for our justification and we are accepted in Him.

"No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more,
For hell itself shakes at His name,
And all the heavens adore."

Let the cross speak and it tells of ransom paid and atonement accepted. The law is magnified, justice is satisfied, mercy is no longer bound by the unsatisfied demands of judgment. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation," which also is the word of the cross.

When we let the cross speak still further we hear it say—*Come and welcome*! Guilty sons of men, come and welcome to the feast of mercy, for God has both vindicated His law and displayed His love. And now for the chief of sinners there is free and full forgiveness to be had—to be had for nothing, for the cross gives priceless blessings without price. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Free pardon, free justification, perfect cleansing, complete salvation—these are gifts of grace bestowed upon the unworthy as soon as they believe in Christ Jesus, and trust themselves with Him. This is the word of the cross. What more can we desire to hear? We may be forgiven in a way which shall not violate the claims of justice.

God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes. He is merciful and just to forgive us our sins. Oh that I knew how to be quite still, and to let the cross itself speak out with its matchless tones of mercy and majesty, love and blood, death and life, punishment and pardon, suffering and glory. It speaks in thunder and in tenderness. If we will but listen to what it has to say, it is a word by which the inmost heart of God is revealed.

Now speak I yet further the word of the cross, for in the name of Him that did hang upon the cross *I call for faith in His atonement.* The death of Christ was no ordinary matter. The dignity of His nature made it the event of the ages. He who died on the cross was very God of very God, as well as man, and His sacrifice is not to be neglected or rejected with impunity. Such a divine marvel demands our most careful thought and joyful confidence.

To do despite to the blood of the Son of God is to sin with a vengeance. God demands faith in His Son, and especially in His Son dying for our sakes. We ought to believe every word that God has spoken, but above all the word of the cross. Shall we doubt the good faith and love of God when He gives His Son a hostage for His Word, and offers up the Only-Begotten as the token of His grace!

Oh, men, whatever you trifle with, disregard not the Son of God! Whatever presumption you commit, yet trample not upon the cross of Jesus. This is the highest thought of God. The center of all His counsels, the topmost summit of the mighty alp of divine loving-kindness. Do not think little of it or turn away from it.

I beseech you, nay, I command you, in the name of Him that lives, and was dead, look to the dying Savior and live. If you do not, so you shall answer for it in that day when He shall come upon the clouds of heaven to avenge Him of His adversaries.

Thus have I set before you the word of the cross. May the Holy Ghost bless the message.

II. We have the unpleasant task, in the second place, of listening to THE WORD OF ITS DESPISERS.

They call the doctrine of the atonement "*foolishness*." Numbers of men call the doctrine of salvation by the blood of Christ "foolishness." It is most assuredly the wisdom of God, and the power of God, but they stick at the first assertion, and will not acknowledge the wisdom of the wondrous plan. It is, therefore, no wonder that they never feel its power.

No, it is foolishness to them—a thing beneath their contempt. And why foolishness? "Because," say they, "see how the common people take it up. Everybody can understand it. You believe that Jesus is a substitute for you, and you sing with the poorest of the poor—

"'I do believe, I will believe

That Jesus died for me;
And on the cross He shed His blood
From sin to set me free.'"

"There," say they, "that's a pretty ditty for educated men. Why, the very children sing it, and are able to believe it, and talk of it. Psha, it is sheer foolishness! We don't want anything so vulgar and commonplace. Don't you know that we take in a high-class review, and read the best thought of the times? You don't suppose we are going to believe just as common ploughboys and servant girls may do?"

Ah me! How mighty wise some people think themselves! Is every truth which can be understood by simple minds to be thrown aside as foolishness? Is nothing worth knowing except the fancy thinking of the select portion of humanity? Are the well-known facts of nature foolishness because they are open to all? Is it quite certain that all the wisdom in the world dwells with the superfine gentlemen who sneer at everything and take in a review?

These superficial readers of superior literature, are they the umpires of truth? I wish that their culture had taught them modesty. Those who glorify themselves and sneer at others are usually not wise, but otherwise. And those who call other people fools may be looking in the glass, and not out of the window. He who is truly wise has some respect for others, and the profoundest respect for the Word of God.

But why is it that you count the Gospel of the cross to be foolishness? It is this—because this religion of ours, this doctrine of the cross—is not the offspring of reason, but the gift of revelation. All the thinkers of the ages continued to think, but they never invented a plan of salvation in which divine justice and mercy would be equally conspicuous. The cross was not in all their thoughts. How could it be?

As a thought, it originated with the infinite mind, and could have originated nowhere else. The doctrine of the cross is not a speculation, but a divine revelation—and for this reason the learned ones cannot endure it. It is God telling men something which they could not otherwise have known. And this suits not the profound thinkers, who cannot bear to be told anything, but must excogitate everything, evolving it from their inner consciousness, or from the depths of their vast minds.

Now, inasmuch as nothing can come out of a man that is not in him, and as the supreme love of God never was in such an unlovely thing as an unregenerate man, it happens that the doctrine of atonement never originated with man, but was taught to him by God at the gates of Eden.

The plan which blends vengeance and love was never invented by human imagination. Since man has such an aversion to the great atonement, he could not have been the author of the idea, and he was not the author of it—God alone reveals it in language that babes may understand, and therefore carnal pride calls it "foolishness."

Besides, the carnal man thinks it foolishness because it makes him out to be a fool—and you may take my word for it that anything which proves either you or me to be a fool will at once strike us as being very foolish. Our conscience is dull, and therefore we retaliate upon those who tell us unpleasant truth.

"What, am I nobody after all? I, bound in the best black cloth, and wearing a white cravat? So religious and so respectable, so thoughtful, so studious, so profound—am I to be a nobody? Do you dare to say to me, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom'!

"My dear sir, you cannot know what you are talking about. Why, I am a professor, a philosopher, a doctor of divinity, and therefore you cannot really mean that I am to receive truth as a little child! Such talk is foolishness."

Of course they say so. We always reckoned that they would say so. I have rejoiced when I have read the skeptical papers, and have seen how they sneer at the old-fashioned Gospel. The Bible said that

carnal men could not receive spiritual things—how truthful is its statement! It is written, "There shall come in the last days scoffers." Here they are, hastening to prove by their conduct the things which they deny.

One is grieved that any should scoff, and yet in a measure we are rejoiced to find such confirmation of the truth from the lips of her enemies. As long as the world lasts, ungodly men will despise a revelation which they are unable to understand. It is beyond their sphere, and therefore its preachers seem to be babblers and its doctrines to be foolishness.

But in every deed, it may well seem foolishness to them, for it treats on subjects for which they have no care. If I were able to explain to a general audience how to make unlimited profit upon the Stock Exchange, or in some other market, all the world would listen with profound attention. And if I make my point clearly, I would be pronounced a really clever preacher, a man well worth hearing.

But when the sermon is only about the Word of God, and eternity, and the soul, and the blood of Jesus—most people turn on their heel—they are not sure that they have souls, and they refuse to argue upon the supposition of a future existence, which is an old wife's fable to them. As for eternity, their philosophy has no room for it, and they do not concern themselves about it.

One said in argument the other day, "I believe I shall die like a dog." I could give him no better reply on the spur of the moment than to say, "If I had known that you were a dog I would have brought you a bone." As I had the notion that he would live forever, I came to talk to him upon subjects suitable to an immortal being, but as I found out that he was going to die like a dog, what could I do for him but provide such cheer as the creature could enjoy?

These men call the Gospel foolishness because they look after the main chance, and care more for the body than for the soul. One of their wise men said, "Why do you preach so much about the world to come? Why not preach about the world which now is? Teach these people how to ventilate their sewers—that is a much more needful matter than their believing on Jesus Christ."

Well, sanitary matters are important, and if any of you feel that you have nothing to live for but ventilating sewers, I wish you would live at a great rate, and get it done as quickly as you can. Meanwhile, as we are convinced of the need of other things besides drainage, and as many of us expect soon to take our happy flight to a place where there are no sewers to ventilate, we shall look into those things which concern our future life, seeing they also fit us for the life which now is.

They call the word of the cross foolishness, because they regard all the truths with which it deals as insignificant trifles. "Soul!" say they, "what matters whether we have a soul or not? Sin—what is it but the blunder of a poor creature who knows no better?" Of all things, the eternal God is the greatest trifle to unbelieving men. It is merely a name to swear by, that is all.

They admit that there may be a great master force in nature, or an energy co-extensive with the existence of matter, hence they allow Theism or Pantheism, but they will not endure a personal God whom they are bound to obey. Theism and Pantheism are only masks for atheism. These men will have no personal God who loves them, and whom they love.

God is a nonentity to them, and therefore when we speak of God as real, and sin as real, and heaven as real—and God knows they are the only real things—then straightway they mutter, "Foolishness." As for us, we deplore their folly, and pray God to teach them better. Having entered by a new birth into the realm of spiritual things, we know the reality and power of the word of the cross.

Now, brethren, I say of these gentlemen who pronounce the Gospel foolishness that you need not take much notice of them, because they are not capable witnesses. They are not qualified to form a judgment upon the subject. I do not depreciate their abilities in other respects, but it is certain that a blind man is no judge of colors, a deaf man is no judge of sound, and a man who has never been quickened into spiritual life can have no judgment as to spiritual things.

How can he? I, for instance, have felt the power of the Gospel, and I assert that I have done so. Another man declares that I am not speaking the truth. Why not? Because he has not himself felt that power. Is that sound reasoning?

Have you not heard of the Irishman who, when five men swore that they saw him commit a theft, made answer that he could produce fifty people who did *not* see him do it? Would there have been any force in that negative evidence? And what if all the world except two men should say, "We do not feel the power of the cross"—would that be any evidence against the fact asserted by the two? I think not.

Two honest men who witness to a fact are to be believed, even though twenty thousand persons are unable to bear such witness. The unspiritual are incapable witnesses—they put themselves out of court, for at the outset they assert that they are not cognizant of those things concerning which we bear testimony.

Their assertion is that they never were the subjects of spiritual influences, and we quite believe what they say—but we do not believe them when they go further, and assert that therefore what we have seen, and tasted, and handled is all a delusion. Concerning that matter they are not capable witnesses.

And I beg you to notice that those who call the Gospel of the cross folly are themselves if rightly looked at, proofs of their own folly, and of the sad results of unbelief. The Christians in Paul's days felt that the Gospel had emancipated them from the bondage of idolatry and vice—and when they heard others that were captives under these delusions telling them that the emancipating force was foolishness—they looked at them, and smiled at the absurdity of the statement.

They noticed that such men were themselves perishing. What a calamity it is for a man to be perishing! A house is unoccupied, its floor is untrodden, its hearth knows no genial glow. It suffers from neglect, it is perishing. Men who are not living to God are missing the end of their being, and like deserted houses are falling into ruin—they are perishing.

While unoccupied by good, such minds are surrounded by powers of evil. Yonder is a tree. I have seen many such—around its trunk the ivy has twisted itself, grasping it like a huge python, and crushing it in its folds. The tree is perishing. Its very life is being sucked out by the parasite that grasps it.

Multitudes of men have about them lusts and sins, and errors that are eating out their life—they are perishing. Their souls and characters are as timber devoured by dry rot. It remains in the fabric of the house, but it is perishing. Ungodly men are devoured by their own pride, eaten up by self-confidence. Unbelieving men are comparable to a ship that is drifting to destruction—its has snapped its cable—it is nearing the rocks, it will be broken to pieces, it is perishing!

Those that believe not in Jesus are drifting towards a sure immortality of misery. They are daily perishing, and yet while they perish, they condemn the means of rescue. Fancy drowning mariners mocking at the lifeboat! Imagine a diseased man ridiculing the only remedy. That which we have tried and proved, they call "foolishness."

We have only to answer them, "You are yourselves, as you remain captives to your sins, the victims of foolishness. You are yourselves, as you waste your lives, as you drift to destruction, proofs that the foolishness is not in the cross, but in you that reject it."

The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to nobody else. O that their hearts were changed by the power of the Word of God—then would they see all wisdom in the word of the cross.

III. We come, in the third place, to notice THE WORD OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE.

What do they say of the cross? They call it *power*, the power of God. The more we study the Gospel, the more we are surprised at the singular display of wisdom which it contains, but we will not say much upon that point, for we are not qualified to be judges of wisdom.

But we do say this—the word of the cross is power. It has been the power of God to us. It has worked upon us as nothing else has ever done. Its work upon many of us has been so remarkable that even onlookers must have been surprised at it.

The phenomenon of conversion is a fact. Men and women are totally changed, and the whole manner of their life is altered. It is of no use to deny the fact, for instances of it come before us every day. Unbelievers become devout, the immoral become pure, the dishonest become upright, the blasphemous become gracious, the unchaste become holy.

Evil ways are on a sudden deserted, and penitents struggle towards virtue. We see persons in all ranks of society undergoing a radical transformation—self-satisfied people are humbled by the discovery of their unworthiness—and others, who were steeped in immorality, renounce their vicious pleasures, and seek happiness in the service of God.

How do you account for this? We who are the subjects of such a change account for it in this way—it is wrought by the doctrine of the cross—and the power which accomplishes the change is the power of God. No force less than divine could have effected so great a change. The word of the cross has delivered us from the love of sin—no sin is now our master—we have broken every fetter of evil habit.

We fall into sin, but we mourn over it, and hate the sin, and hate ourselves for committing it. We have been delivered from the bondage of corruption, and made free to serve the Lord. We have also been delivered from the dread which once bowed us down—a horrible dread which held us in bondage, and made us tremble before our Father and our friend. We thought hardly of God, and fled from Him. From this we are now delivered, for now we love Him and delight in Him. And the nearer we can approach Him, the happier we are.

We have been delivered, also, from the power of Satan. That evil prince has great power over men, and once we were led captive at his will. Even now he attacks us, but we overcome him through the blood of the Lamb.

We are also daily delivered from self and from the world, and from all things that would enthrall us. We are being saved—yes, we are saved. Every day a saving force is operating upon us to set us free from the thralldom of corruption. This we feel and know. We are bound for the kingdom, and nothing can keep us back. We are bound for purity, for ultimate perfection—we feel eternal life within us, urging us upward and onward, beyond ourselves and our surroundings.

We sit here like eagles, chained to the rock by the feebleness of our bodies, but the aspiration within us tells us that we are born to soar among pure and glorified spirits. We feel that heaven is born within us—born by the word of the cross through the Spirit.

We could tell the histories of some here present, or better still, they could tell them themselves—histories of changes sudden but complete, marvelous but enduring—changes from darkness to light, from death to life. How gladly could we detain you with details of our being held up when our temptations have been almost overwhelming—and kept pressing forward in Christ's service when we had been altogether without strength had not the word of the cross poured new energy into us.

We have been ready to die in despair until we have looked to the cross, and then the clouds have yielded to clear shining. A sight of the bleeding Savior, and a touch of His hand have made us men again, and we have lifted up our heads as from among the dead.

Under the power of the cross we still advance from strength to strength. There is power in the word of the cross to make a man grow into something nobler than he ever dreamed of. We shall not know what we shall be till we shall see our Lord and Savior as He is.

Why, brethren, the power with which God created the world was no greater than the power with which He made us new men in Christ Jesus. The power with which He sustains the world is not greater than the power by which He sustains His people under trial and temptation. And even the raising of the dead at the end of the world will be no greater display of divine power than the raising of dead souls out of their spiritual graves.

These wonders of power are being performed in our own experience every day of the week, entirely through the cross. I appeal to you who are truly converted—were you converted through the wisdom of man? I appeal to you that are kept from sinning—are you led towards holiness by the power of elocution, of rhetoric, or of logic?

I appeal to you who are despairing—are you ever revived by musical words and rhythmical sentences? Or do you owe all to Jesus crucified? What is your life, my brethren, but the cross? Whence comes the bread of your soul but from the cross? What is your joy but the cross? What is your delight,

what is your heaven, but the Blessed One, once crucified for you, who ever lives to make intercession for you?

Cling to the cross, then. Put both arms around it! Hold to the Crucified, and never let Him go. Come afresh to the cross at this moment, and rest there now and forever! Then, with the power of God resting upon you, go forth and preach the cross! Tell the story of the bleeding Lamb. Repeat the wondrous tale, and nothing else.

Never mind how you do it, only proclaim that Jesus died for sinners. The cross held up by a babe's hand is just as powerful as if a giant held it up. The power lies in the Word itself, or rather in the Holy Spirit who works by it and with it.

Brethren, believe in the power of the cross for the conversion of those around you. Do not say of any man that he cannot be saved. The blood of Jesus is omnipotent. Do not say of any district that it is too sunken, or of any class of men that they are too far gone—the word of the cross reclaims the lost.

Believe it to be the power of God, and you shall find it so. Believe in Christ crucified, and preach boldly in His name, and you shall see great things and gladsome things. Do not doubt the ultimate triumph of Christianity. Do not let a mistrust flit across your soul. The cross must conquer. It must blossom with a crown—a crown commensurate with the Person of the Crucified, and the bitterness of His agony.

His reward shall parallel His sorrows. Trust in God, and lift your banner high, and now with Psalms and songs advance to battle, for the Lord of Hosts is with us—the Son of the Highest leads our van. Onward, with blast of silver trumpet, and shout of those that seize the spoil.

Let no man's heart fail him! Christ has died! Atonement is complete! God is satisfied! Peace is proclaimed! Heaven glitters with proofs of mercy already bestowed upon ten thousand times ten thousand! Hell is trembling, heaven adoring, earth waiting. Advance, you saints, to certain victory! You shall overcome through the blood of the Lamb.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.