

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Power of the Cross In Daily Life

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Scripture:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Transcript:

Good to see you. Thank you for being here, as well as those of you joining us online. Great to have you with us. Our guest preacher today is a longtime friend of this congregation. Dr. [Antwan Rutisiri 00:00:16] is the pastor of [Ramara Anglican 00:00:19] Church in [Kigawi 00:00:20], Rwanda. Prior to that, he was the Director of African Evangelical Enterprise in

Rwanda. That's the organization we partnered with to build the Center for Champions for street kids in Rwanda. That center was Dr. Rutisiri's vision, and he drove that.

Dr. Rutisiri has a degree in English literature, which of course makes him perfect because English majors. He also has a master's degree and a Doctorate of Ministry from Fuller Seminary in California. He is the author of the book *Reconciliation is my Lifestyle*, talking about reconciliation, his own story, and the genocide in Rwanda, and learning to reconcile and forgive. He has preached here before, but it has been a long time. You are in for a treat. I have learned a lot from Pastor Antwan about the power of forgiveness, and how to forgive, and how to reconcile. He's a very godly man. Please welcome back to our pulpit, Dr. Rutisiri.

Good morning, everyone. It's a great joy to be back here. As Pastor Scott said, I'm not new, but it has been a long time. I think the last time I was here was around 2004. So, it has been a long time since I was here. I'm meeting some old friends, and thank you very much, Scott. I'm not going to go in a lengthy introduction about myself. As he told you, I'm the senior pastor of a church in [Kigawli 00:02:16], in a place called [Ramira 00:02:19] near the airport, for those who know the city. I bring you greetings from the Land of 1000 Hills, as we call it.

In the past, we used to call it Land of 1000 Hills and 1000 Problems, but today we speak of the Land of 1000 Hills and 1000 Blessings, because so much has changed since the year 1994 when the genocide against the [inaudible 00:02:47] that Scott mentioned happened. Today, I'm going to be speaking about the power of the cross in our lives. The power of the cross in our daily lives. We are reading from I Corinthians 1:18. This is what we read, "For the message of the cross is the foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. Where is the Wise Man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. The Jews demand miracles and signs and the Greeks look for wisdom. But to preach Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and a foolishness to gentiles but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, for the foolishness

of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

This is the passage we are going to look at and withdraw some lessons. And the first question we are going to ask ourselves is, what's so special about the cross? Because we see crosses everywhere we go. When you pass a church you see a cross on the church, we see the cross on the covers of Bibles, we see crosses on covers of books, we see crosses on the necks of some people, we see crosses on jacket lapels of pastors and we see crosses everywhere. But what's so special about the cross?

Here, Paul says something in this text to first we look at it, it says Greeks look for wisdom and Jews look for miraculous signs. You know why Paul puts those things aside, he says Greeks look for wisdom, but the wisdom of the world doesn't give salvation. And the Jews look for miraculous signs and he says those too can't save you, why? Because they impress people, but they don't transform lives.

And you know in some places we love preachers who can impress us with their rhetoric. As Scott told you, I was a major in English literature and linguistics. Though I speak English with an accent, it's by choice, cause when I was doing my masters in English linguistics I told my supervisor, I said I'm going to correct my English and speak it so well that you can't tell where I'm from. He said how horrible, why don't you keep your accent because your accent is your signature, it's part of your identity so people who hear you know you are not from UK you are not from US they will know you are from Rwanda. So I kept my accent, which sometimes is so difficult for people to get because when you speak English with a Rwandan accent sometimes so difficult for people to get.

Thing is, we don't preach to impress people. Greeks look for wisdom and Jews look for miraculous signs, even in some churches we just do things to impress people. You adjust and move your jacket and people fall all over and they say, wow, there's power here. But what happens after? Are they being transformed. So the power of the cross is in the kind of transformation it brings in our lives. And Paul says for us we preach Christ and him crucified. So what's so special about the cross of Jesus Christ? Number one, the cross of Jesus Christ speaks of love, divine love. Extravagant love. Paul wrote to the Romans and said actually some would may dare die for a good person, I may try and die for a righteous person but

Christ showed his love and he died for us when we're sinners. And that's what's so special about the cross, it is the expression of the love of God.

When I was young, when I got a fiance, by then I was teaching in a very remote secondary school and access to transportation was difficult and my fiance was working far away in the city and the only way of communication, we didn't have phones, mobile phones weren't there yet, and even these landline phones we didn't have. So the only way of communication was writing letters. And I always wrote her lengthy letter I would pour all of my emotion in the letters and try to find the right words just to express what I was feeling and she did the same thing so we kept the letters. And when I was feeling lonely, when I was feeling depressed, I would just go to those letters and comfort myself.

And that's what God has done. By the cross of Jesus Christ he wrote his love for us, not with ink but with blood. Imagine if your fiance or your friend just took a syringe and drew blood from his veins and put it in a bottle and then takes a feather and sharpens it and he writes you a letter and it says dear love, I'm writing you this letter in red, this is not ink, it's blood from my heart, that should show you how much I love you. Even if he stopped there, I think you'd treasure that letter and say, after all, if he can draw his blood and write a letter to me with it, than he really loves me.

And that's what God did. When Jesus went to the cross he wrote the love of God for us. In blood. And every time you see a cross, remember, God is saying, see how much I love you. And John put it so well and said God so loved the world that he gave his only son to die for us on the cross so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. That's the extravagant love, holy extravagant love for us. Amen?

And what was Jesus doing on the cross again? Actually Isaiah gives us the answer, and I remember when we come out of the genocide in Rwanda, I was just wondering, I was a preacher by then, I was young preacher, very fiery preacher, making a lot of noise, and raising some don't everywhere I passed, and I was wondering how we are going to go about preaching the love of God in a country where one million have been killed in just a hundred days, by their neighbors and some of them Christians or their pastors and priests, and they all took part in that. And then I went to God and said what do we tell people. He said preach Christ and him crucified because at the foot of the cross, that's where you understand fully human wickedness. Because when they took Jesus to the cross, he was fully

innocent and the people who had acclaimed his arrival in Jerusalem just one week before that, they all got together to say crucify him.

So when you stand at the foot of the cross, you understand human wickedness. When you stand at the foot of the cross, you understand human fickleness. Because human beings change. You marry a husband who says I love you then the following day he cheats on you. You marry a wife who says I love you then the following day she walks away from you. That's human fickleness. And you understand it very well when you stand at the foot of the cross, because the cross shows man at his worst. But at the same time it shows God at his best.

Because when we hated most, God loved extravagantly. And when Jesus was hanging on that cross, he looked at the people who put him there and you can image Jesus hanging there and he looks at the people and says those ones when they were sick I healed them, those ones when their children were dead I raised them from the dead. Those ones when they were hungry I fed them and now they are paying me with this. Imagine the kind of prayer you'd have prayed if you were in his place. I'm you would have said God curse them. Well that's not the prayer Jesus made because as he was dying he said, that's what I came for, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.

Actually it's that prayer that transformed my life. As pastor Scott spoke about the book I wrote entitled reconciliation is my lifestyle, actually it's a story about my pains and my sorrows from the time when I was a child. Because I was born in Rwanda I grew up in Rwanda, my dad was killed when I was five. When I was 15 I was in high school I was kicked out of school, and when I was 25 I had graduated from the university and I was teaching at the university, I lost my job not because of something I had done, but because of who I was. And I was angry and I was bitter.

That's when Jesus came into my life, and one day I was reading the story of Jesus going to the cross, you see all the people abandoning him, betraying him, mocking him, and then when he's hanging on that cross he prays that prayer. That changed everything about me. Say father forgive them, I said Jesus you can't, how do you dare forgive people who put you on that cross, but that's what he did, he forgave them, and then finally I said well I've never chosen to be born Rwandese but I've chosen to follow you, so I'm not going to live by my accidentals, I'm going to live by my choices. And a lot of time we live by accidentals, I

didn't choose to be born Rwandese, I didn't choose to be born in the Turisi family. I never chose, even the color of my skin, I just happen to have it. That's an accidental, but I've chosen to follow Christ, and that day I gave away my anger, because I saw Christ hanging on a cross. But how are you empowered to do that? That's the power of the cross.

Because in Isaiah 53 the Bible tells us, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, he took on himself our sorrows and our pains. And he suffered everything we suffer, he suffered rejection, people rejected him. He's friends abandoned him, one of his disciples betrayed him and sold him and another one denied him, and he was naked and beaten and slandered, he was misjudged, everything we suffer in this life, he's suffered. He can understand you, when you go to him.

I remember after the genocide I preached this sermon many times, I was speaking to a group of widows and I said, learn to forgive your enemy if you're going to have peace. I know many people struggle with this concept of forgiveness, I can't forgive what they did to me was so bad. And when I finished preaching, one of the ladies took me aside and said, pastor, don't speak so easily about forgiveness because you are a man and you can't understand that kind of shame you've gone through, during this genocide. She took me aside, and I said, what did you go through. She said look at me, I'm a mother and they took me in the village fully naked, totally naked, they walked me around the village for everybody to see and then they gave me to some boys to sexually abuse me. Boys of the age of my own children. I just stood there trying to understand I said what can I tell a woman like this, how can I dare say you forgive.

But I remembered the cross, because on the cross of Jesus, I told her, I told her I'm dumb, I can't understand your pain, but I know somebody, he's the one I've been telling you about, I know somebody who can understand it and he's a man. Because she was telling me, you are a man you can't understand the kind of shame we're subjugated too and I told her, this man can understand, because he too was subjugated to shame. He was put on a cross fully naked and four hours he was there, everybody was watching his nakedness, everybody was watching him in agony and he said father forgive them, so you go to him you tell him your shame and your pain and your sorrows and the lady did. And Jesus did, and she was transformed, today she gives a testimony of her life that has been transformed by Jesus hanging on the cross. Hallelujah.

Because that's what we needed, because we live in a world competition, we live in a world full of cheaters, we live in a world full of people who betray, who reject, who abandon, or listening to us, you too, you've been cheated, you've been betrayed, you've been left behind, you we're hoping for something, it didn't happen, somebody took your place, somebody took your promotion somebody cheated on you, when you look at Jesus on the cross he tells you, I know, I too have gone through it, I took your pain and your sorrows, come to me.

And that's why he kept his arms open on the cross, to embrace us, and heal us and comfort us. Then, on the cross of Jesus, that's not the only thing find there, in the country broken like our country of Rwanda, I've seen the power of the cross even upon the perpetrators, Isaiah says that when Jesus went to the cross, he took on himself our sins, and our iniquities. And sometimes we do things and we feel regret. And we feel guilt. And we feel self condemnation that doesn't go away. Then you go to Jesus then he says give that to me too, because I took your sins and your iniquities and I was beaten and I was crushed for that and my blood will wash you of all sins, I've seen the power of the cross among the perpetrators of the genocide, I've preached in the prisons that we have in the country and I've seen people, I've seen masses of people just coming to repent, because they knew they can be relieved from the guilt and the self condemnation. I always give that example because it impressed me.

One time I was preaching in one of the largest prisons in the country and there was a man sitting in the front row, every time I looked at him it was like he was fighting or just not sitting quiet, twas as if he had ants in his pant. Then all of a sudden he raised his hand and he said preacher can you stop, I said why, he said are you telling gus that the blood of Jesus washes of all sins, and I said yes that's what the bible says, it says that the blood of Jesus washed of all sins, he said no, is it all sins? I said yes it's all sin. The man said, now, let me speak, my he spoke, he confessed for something like 30 minutes, he told his story of cruelty, or destruction, of murder, then he said, I feel relieved, I feel peace, I feel forgiven.

And of sin I could tell you stories and stories and stories like those for a full day, because I know there is that power to heal that power to change that power to transform, and we too, you may not have been a murderer, you may not have committed something big, but sometimes we can't even forgive ourselves for small things like forgetting to do something, like telling lies that cost you something, you always beat yourself and say why did I say this,

why did I do that, but Jesus went to the cross to give us peace so if you're listening to this message, sitting in this congregation, or from afar, I want to ask you, will you take your sorrows and pains to Jesus? And forgive and let go? Will you take your guilt and self condemnation to Jesus and let go? Because that's why Jesus went to the cross, and he was hanging there looking at the wicked humanity and saying come to me, and saying father forgive them for everything.

We are going to pray, but if you feel this is your message or this message is for you, get closer to Jesus and say Jesus, I bring you this, give me peace from my sorrows or give me peace from my guilt and heal me, and we pray, heavenly Father, we thank you again for loving us so much, we can't understand, we can't fathom, the depth of your love for us, for you give your son Jesus Christ to go to the cross and to suffer and die for us and it's at the cross we see the depth of your love for us and Jesus you did that to take out sins and our iniquities and the consequent guilt and self condemnation. And you went there to take our sorrows and our pains, to relieve us and give us peace.

So stretch that hand that was crushed and pierced for our sins and relieve and give peace to those who are feeling guilty and are coming to you now. And stretch that hand that pierced for our sorrows and our pains and comfort those who are grieving and give them strength to forgive and embraced those who offended them, so that the power of the cross be the all, not just the symbol on our buildings, not just a symbol on our necks or whatever, may the power of the cross be real and active in our daily lives. Let your name be glorified let your people rejoice. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question: What languages can you speak?

Opening Question: Looking back...Last week we talked about the assurance we receive as a child of God. How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

- In reading 1 Corinthians 1:18 - what are some ways we can share or live this out in our daily lives?
- What is the meaning of the cross in scripture?
 - What does that mean in your life?
 - How do you share this with others?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.