

“When I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong”  
(2 Corinthians 12:10)

I. Introduction.

Paul tells us here

Of a remarkable experience

He had fourteen years earlier:

When he was caught up into heaven

And heard words that were so sacred

That he wasn't allowed to repeat them –

Likely because they were for him alone.

On the surface,

This looks quite a bit like Isaiah's experience,

When he was lifted up to the throne room of God –

When what he saw and heard

Was so deeply convicting

That he thought he would be destroyed,

But for the Lord's mercy.

We have a few instances in Scripture

Where God brings His prophets

Into His secret council chambers

To prepare them for the ministry

He is calling them to.

The interesting thing here

Is that it seemed to have

The opposite effect on Paul:

Where Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me” –

Knowing he was cursed apart from God’s grace –

Paul appears to have enjoyed his experience.

This is one of the differences the Gospel makes –

Jesus takes away the terror of God,

And replaces it with a spirit of sonship:

After Isaiah was initially struck by his own sin

The Lord removed it

With a coal from the altar –

Foreshadowing Jesus’ work –

That allowed him to stand in God’s presence;

Paul’s reaction –

Having already been cleansed by Christ –

Was simply one of amazement.

But because of this great privilege,

The Lord afflicted Paul:

With “a thorn in the flesh”;

What he calls, “A messenger of Satan” (v. 7).

We don't know exactly what this was,  
But it appears to have been some kind of physical difficulty –  
Perhaps even persecution –  
That was inflicted on him (or inspired) by one of Satan's angels –  
By the Lord's permission –  
As He did in the case of Job.

This affliction was to keep Paul  
From exalting himself  
Because of the privileges he had received (v. 7).

Those today who believe themselves  
To have received divine revelation  
Usually capitalize on their supposed experience  
To draw a large following,  
And make a lot of money.

The Lord was protecting Paul –  
By humbling him –  
So that he wouldn't be tempted to sin.

Paul asked the Lord three times  
That He might remove this affliction (v. 8),  
But He wouldn't,  
Because of its gracious purpose:

He didn't mean this to hurt Paul,

But to help him.

He answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (v. 9).

Paul understood and responded –

As we should all respond

To the help He sends our way:

"Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; *for when I am weak, then I am strong*" (vv. 9-10).

The difficulty he had to face

Was a good thing –

Because the greater it was

The weaker he saw he was

And the more he looked to the Lord

To find His strength.

The point is,

If we would find His strength,

We must first be emptied of our own.

It's when we're weak –

At least weak as the world would define it –

That we are strong.

## II. Sermon.

### A. Jesus wants us to see things as they really are –

Because that's what will really help us:

Tonight, He particularly wants us to see

The things that will hurt us,

And the things that will help us.

#### 1. The kingdom of God

And the kingdom of this world

Are really opposed in so many ways:

The things people value here

Have no value in God's kingdom –

And vice versa.

There's a reason the Lord's kingdom

Is called the kingdom of light,

And Satan's, the kingdom of darkness –

The two are as different

As day and night –

One is good and the other evil.

If we want to find the Lord's strength –

The same strength Paul found –

We have to pursue it His way,

Not the world's way.

One of the sad realities today  
Is that believers typically seek  
The things of the world,  
Because they believe they are valuable –  
That they will give them an advantage.

That's not surprising,  
Because we were all born into the same world;  
Many of us were raised  
Like the children of the world, and with them –  
To many of us,  
What the world does is the norm –  
We have a hard time seeing it as otherwise.

If we were blessed by the Lord  
To have been raised by Christian parents,  
We might have escaped some of these things in our youth,  
But we eventually came into contact with them.

John tells us what this influence is in 1 John 2:15-16,

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

He tells us what the world is:

The lust of the flesh,  
The lust of the eyes,  
The boastful pride of life.

He tells us these things are not from the Father;

And he says if we love these things,

We don't love the Father –

Because the world and the Father are opposites.

He goes on to tell us in verse 17,

That if we embrace the world,

It will not be to our advantage,

But to our detriment;

But if we embrace God through Jesus,

And do what He says is right,

We will find blessing.

“The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of  
God lives forever.”

## 2. So what should we be seeking?

We should seek

What the Lord says will be to our advantage,

That will strength us.

We don't have time to look everything,

But let's look at a few things

From the Sermon on the Mount:

In particular, the Beatitudes.

The world considers these things as weaknesses,

But to the Lord, they are strengths.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"  
(Matt. 5:3).

He wants to see humility –

That we see our emptiness,

Our complete dependence on Him –

He doesn't want to see self-sufficiency/self-reliance.

Jesus said on another occasion, "Blessed *are* you *who are* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

James writes, "Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (2:5).

He wants to see a rich faith –

Not a rich bank account.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

He wants to see grief and humility for sin –

Not a self-justifying attitude –

Thinking we've done nothing wrong.



In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector,

It was the tax collector who was justified/forgiven,

Not the Pharisee for this very reason.

Jesus said of him, “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

He wants a meek and gentle spirit –

Not a forceful and abrasive one.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (v. 5).

He wants us to desire righteousness –

To see our spiritual bankruptcy,

That we would desire the perfect obedience of Christ –

Not the wealth, honors and pleasures of the world.

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (v. 6).

He wants hearts that are moved

By the needs of others –

Even those of our enemies

(As He shows us in the Good Samaritan) –

Not a hard, uncaring and unmerciful heart,

That prefers revenge.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (v. 7).

He wants hearts

In which the power of sin is broken,

That have been purified by grace –

Not hearts bound by sin.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (v. 8).

He wants us to sow the seeds of peace –

Who work to reconcile those who are at odds –

Rather than those who only want to widen divisions.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”  
(Matt. 5:9).

And He wants us to be those

Whose lives have been so transformed by His grace,

That it draws the hatred of the world –

Rather than those who simply blend into the world.

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (vv. 10-12).

Dr. Ferguson reminded us this past Wednesday:

The world didn't crucify Jesus

Because He was the same as they,

But because He was different.

If we become like Him,

We will be hated like Him.

But that is what He calls us to be.

B. Why are all these things the world considers weaknesses,

Considered strengths by Jesus?

Because all of them make us look away from ourselves –

From our resources/strength –

To God and His resources/strength.

Paul says in our passage,

“Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; *for when I am weak, then I am strong*” (vv. 9-10).

Humility –

The sense of our own emptiness –

Drives us to Jesus to be filled.

Poverty –

Not having large reserves of money –

Makes us look to Him,

To His promises in faith,

To meet our needs,

And not to our bank account.

Grief and humility for our sins

Makes us look to Jesus

To be right with God,

And not to what we do.

Having a meek, gentle, considerate spirit

Makes us look to God to meet our needs,

And not to ourselves.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness

Causes us to look to Jesus to be satisfied –

Where hungering and thirsting

After wealth, honor and pleasure

Makes us look to the world.

Having a merciful heart

Shows that we have looked to the Lord for His mercy,

And that we have and will receive it –

All these virtues really do –

But having a merciless heart

Shows we haven't.

Having our hearts purified by grace

Gives us a stronger desire to see God –

Where having a corrupt heart makes us avoid Him.

Being peacemakers again shows  
That the character of God is being formed in us –  
Because He is the ultimate peacemaker:  
He sent His Son to reconcile us –  
While those who create and widen divisions  
Show themselves to be in the kingdom of darkness –  
Because he is the ultimate destroyer of unity.

Finally, being attacked  
By those of the world  
Makes us look to God  
For His protection  
And strength to endure.

The Lord can even use  
The physical afflictions He allows in our lives  
To drive us to Himself,  
That we might gain strength.

All the difficulties He brings –  
Even the difficult things He shows us about ourselves –  
Are designed by Him  
To drive us out of ourselves –  
Out of our self-sufficiency –

And to create in us a Christ-sufficiency.

And so let's learn to see things

As the Lord sees them,

And not the world.

Let's pursue the things He values.

Because when we are weak –

When we perceive ourselves as weak –

Then we are strong,

Because we look to Him and His resources,

Rather than our own. Amen.

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