

Made Perfect in Weakness

Acts 9:19-31

Introduction

Christ's kingdom is a paradoxical kingdom. A paradox is something that at first sounds contradictory but upon further investigation is proven to be true.

In Christ's kingdom

The way to be exalted is to first humble yourself

The way to be great is to become a servant

The way to find your life is to lose it

One of the things that we are learning in Acts is that when Jesus wants to build the most powerful kingdom in the universe, he does it through weakness. On the one hand that's surprising but it's also encouraging because it gives us hope.

This morning our text is going to show us that God does his best work through weak people.

Paul's weakness

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus left him physically ill and weak. He was physically blinded by the overwhelming light of Christ's glory. Even though he regained his sight after his visit with Ananias, In Galatians Paul indicated that he struggled with blindness or poor eyesight.

Immediately after his conversion, Paul began preaching that Jesus was the Son of God and confounded the Jews in Damascus proving that Jesus was the Christ.

But look what happens. Some of the Jews in Damascus plot to kill him.

v. 24 They were watching the gates of the city "day and night in order to kill him."

Paul is smuggled out of the city

He escaped by being lowered out of a window of the city wall through a basket.

This is God's mightiest warrior running from his enemies in secret in the middle of night – not a picture of strength.

Then he came to Jerusalem and attempted to join the disciples there.

But they were afraid of him and did not believe he was a disciple

(imagine all the excitement of your new faith in Christ and wanting to share it with other believers... But they don't believe you – the disappointment of being misunderstood.

Barnabas takes a risk and brought him to the Apostles

Paul goes in and out among the Apostles "preaching boldly in the name of the Lord."

Paul began speaking and disputing against the Hellenists.

The Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) were the group that Paul was formerly a part of. If not the leader he was one of their most powerful leaders. They could not withstand the spirit and wisdom that Stephen preached with and so they executed him. And now their former leader his preaching in the name of Christ. Now they're seeking to kill Paul.

When the "brothers" learned about the Hellenists plot, they get him out of town so no harm comes to him.

Here's what I want you to see...

The greatest Evangelist the world has ever known

The most powerful instrument Christ ever created

Does not, from a human perspective appear to be very strong.

He's physically weak, constantly being misunderstood by believers, and on the run for his life from the enemies of the gospel.

Several years later Paul reflects

2 Corinthians 11:23-33 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better; I am talking like a madman; with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 30 ***If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*** 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. ***For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

Do you see what we're being taught? We're being taught nothing less than this. Our weakness is the platform for Christ's strength to shine. Our inability plugs us into God's infinite ability. Coming to grips with our weakness puts us in a position to be tapped into God's unbelievable power. And God, by doing it this way gets all the glory. We get all the help. He get's all the glory. We experience the grace of God by his using our weakness. He is shown to be great and awesome.

Our Weakness

Our problem – we don't like weakness. In the story of our own lives we don't like to be the victim in distress. We want to be the hero.

Me and Mark at work...

Me driving my dad's 1978 Chevy Impala, getting stuck

Hating the fact that someone else came and did for me what I couldn't do for myself

One of the ways you can see how we avoid dealing with our weakness is the way that we approach and interpret the Scriptures.

Young boy with the fishes and the loaves (Jesus feeds the 5k – John 6)

We hear that story and we usually hear, look how much you can do if you just give Jesus all you have (I'm not saying there's not some truth to that). But the main point is to show us that God has called us to do impossible things that we'll never be able to do without his power.

Good Samaritan - Jewish Lawyer – who is my neighbor (trying to justify himself) Luke 10

We identify ourselves as the Good Samaritan who had the courage and resources to rescue the man who had been beaten and robbed. But Jesus essentially made the Jewish lawyer the victim in the parable and a man who was despised and rejected was the rescuer.

David and Goliath – 1 Samuel 17

We usually interpret the story of David and Goliath something like: Little people and do big things/If God is on your side you can slay giants/You can be courageous.

The story of David is the story of God winning a stunning battle through weakness. In fact, the story of David and Goliath is the story of God sending a son to fight and win a battle on behalf of his people, when they weren't even able to lift a stone to fight for themselves.

We can either build our kingdoms with our own strength (sand castle)

Or we can be used in our weakness, by Christ, to build his kingdom – a kingdom that shall stand forever.

Haven't you experienced trying to do things in your own strength?

God can do more through your weakness than you can through your strength.

****Not that we seek to act or be weak! We have the right perspective of our strengths.**

Brief magical period of time as a parent...

God's Weakness

1 Corinthians 1:23-25 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, **and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**

Christ entered into our weakness so that we could be clothed in his strength.

Remember what I said about Christ's kingdom at the beginning?

The way to be exalted is to first humble yourself

Jesus humbled himself and became obedient even to death on a cross! **Philippians 2**

The way to be great is to become a servant

Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many **Mark 10:45**

The way to find your life is to lose it

Jesus came and did not spare his own life, but lost it, so that he could bring many Sons and daughters to glory!

Why we should be encouraged in our weakness and actually embrace it.

1. Your weakness is evidence that God is at work in you like he was with Paul
2. Even though it doesn't seem like it, God is using your weakness
3. We should be encouraged as a Church because God delights to make his power known through weak instruments

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.