

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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God's Power in Our Weakness
June 25, 2023

The Lord Teaches us at the Red
Sea

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 12:7-10

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor 1:1-11

The theme Scripture for this series of messages on the subject of God's power being perfected in weakness is this:

2Co 12:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. (8) 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.**

As we continue to consider this fundamental doctrine which is taught to us repeatedly from Genesis to Revelation, *we must believe it.* Any time we come to God's Word, we must come to it in faith and trust and give ourselves to *hearing it.*

Mat 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes

and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

And again in Luke –

Luk 8:12 The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

Listen to this challenge:

“They gladly received His word and were baptized and the same day there was added to them about 3,000 souls.” Acts 2:41

“We must believe that our Lord empowers it for the glorification of His name and the building up of His church, just as He has done from the beginning.

This is a noteworthy passage, for it concerns us inasmuch as we [ie, mankind in sin] are so corrupt and wretched by nature that we are barred from the kingdom of God unless – as John 3 says – we

become new creatures. So we must be born a second time.

How then can we be born again to become children of God? *It is by His Word, which must work deeply within us and be imprinted on our hearts before we can be regenerated and become children of God.*

When God presents Himself to us and wishes to draw near to us, *we must draw near to Him.* It is true we cannot do so on our own; we have to ask Him to produce in us by His Holy Spirit the burning desire to receive His word.

From the moment we see that the word of God is effective, *we must endeavor to listen attentively to what it teaches so that we may profit from it and humble ourselves because the testimony of the word will condemn us severely in the day of the Lord if we fail to apply it more advantageously than we have.*

If a single sermon preached by Peter so effectively won 3,000 individuals to Jesus Christ, what

will 3,000 sermons do? And herein we can see our sin, for what good will 3,000 days of preaching do us? *Very little, for with great difficulty do we find that one person has been brought to Jesus Christ.*

It is true, perhaps, that that we say we desire His teaching, but what effort do we make to follow it and obey it?

Luke also adds this: ‘They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread.’ Now it is not enough to show that we are quick to *receive* what our Lord tells us, but we must be faithful and persevering. We see many who are rather easy to instruct, but then fall away immediately.

Therefore, as soon as God speaks to us, let us be ready to hear Him and obey what He commands; then, as soon as we are firm in our faith, let us not display our arrogance by showing our courage at the beginning only to end up abandoning everything. Let us be founded on and rooted in His teaching so that it will be evident

we are so steadfast that we will not fall away for any reason.” [John Calvin, Sermons on Acts, Banner of Truth Trust]

As we come to God’s Word once again then, do we truly believe this:

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Jer 23:29 Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

Let’s honestly confess our sin regarding this truth, myself included. Namely, our unbelief. *God’s Word is powerful. He speaks and the universe comes into being from nothing. He speaks and a dead man rises. He speaks and His enemies perish. God’s Word is powerful to sanctify us – to change us, to make us new creatures. But if we come to it carelessly, not giving*

ourselves to hear Him, it will do us no good and in fact will increase His judgment against us.

Just think on this – *what evidences in us demonstrate that we really do not believe that God’s Word is mighty and powerful to save us and to make us more holy? We are careless, just as the Apostle warned the Hebrews:*

Heb 2:1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Heb 3:12-13 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Understand? This Word is God’s Word. He is speaking to us, but it will only benefit us if we come to it in faith.

Rom 10:17 So faith comes from

hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Right now, at this moment, in this very place, Satan is watching YOU. As he hears the Word of God preached, he is going to do everything he can in YOU to snatch away that Word so that you will not hear it, let alone understand it. Why? So you won’t be saved. Now then, you must diligently plead with the Lord *to give you ears to hear and a heart to believe so that the seed of His Word will be planted and grow and bring forth fruit in YOU.*

If you come to the preaching of God’s Word in unbelief, if you come letting your mind wander off to other things – your plans for this afternoon, your possessions, your car, your house, your job.... – you are not going to hear. You will leave with nothing.

Let’s come then to this powerful Word of God which is able to save to the uttermost – if we will hear it in faith. It is able to save YOU even while you are still dead in your

sins, and it is able to sanctify you and make you more like Christ. It is powerful.

Hear His Word then, again as we continue to listen to the Lord teach us that *when we are weak, then we are strong, because He perfects His power in weakness.*

2Co 1:3-11 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, (4) who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (5) For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (6) If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (7) Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (8) For

we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. **(9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.** (10) He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. (11) You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Understand? Just as the Lord brought the Israelites into an impossible situation at the Red Sea with Pharaoh's armies charging down upon them, so the Lord brought the Apostle Paul into an impossible situation.

And Paul recognized that it was impossible. He said that he despaired of life itself. That is to say, he just knew he and his comrades were going to die. There

was no escape. This was the end. But what happened? The Lord delivered them from that deadly peril. The Lord spoke and it was done.

Why? Why does the Lord do this? It is characteristic of Him in His dealings with us – to bring us up against Goliath, to whittle down Gideon’s forces to a tiny band, to work His power in that weak little church at Smyrna while withdrawing from the boastful and apparently strong Laodiceans. Why? Why does He do this?

Here is the answer Paul gives us –

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

It is a hard lesson to learn, so strong is our sinful flesh, so ingrained is it in us to want to boast and trust in ourselves rather than upon God.

Look around here right now. We are weak? Why has the Lord brought us to this point of weakness? The answer is the same – so that we learn to rely NOT on

ourselves, but upon God who is even able to raise the dead simply by speaking.

When we are focused upon our weakness, we are not walking in faith. When we assume that God cannot do much of anything through us, we are not walking in faith. When we assume that in order to do anything for the Lord, we must be people who are noteworthy, who have great resources, who are, in other words, strong – then we are in fact the very kind of people the Lord will not work His power in.

This unbelief leads to grumbling – unbelief grumbles:

Exo 14:10-11 When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. (11) They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of

Egypt?

But years later, even after seeing with their own eyes the mighty power of the Lord, they still had not learned. They still did not believe.

Num 14:1-4 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. (2) And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! (3) Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” (4) And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

Remember those great words of Jonathan?

1Sa 14:6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the

garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, **for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.**”

Jesus admonished the Jews for trusting in themselves, in their physical lineage from Abraham -

Mat 3:9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ **for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.**

Speaking of Abraham and his children – *why did God wait so many years, until Abraham and Sarah were “as good as dead” as far as reproductive ability goes – to give them Isaac, the son of Promise?*

I hope you know the answer by now – *to eliminate any boasting on man’s part. To display His power in Abraham and Sarah’s weakness.*

Here is still another evidence of this very same truth – God perfects His power in our weakness:

Gen 15:1-21 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” (2) But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (3) And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”

(4) And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” (5) And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (6) And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

(7) And he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” (8) But he said, “O Lord GOD, how am I to

know that I shall possess it?”

(9) He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” (10) And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. (11) And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

(12) As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

(13) Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. (14) But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. (15) As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. (16) And they shall come back here in the fourth generation,

for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

(17) When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. **(18) On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,** saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, (19) the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, (20) the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, (21) the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

Living in a land inhabited by enemies on every side. Childless.

In fact, Abraham would step in along with Sarah and try to give the Lord some assistance:

Gen 16:1-2 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. (2) And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

Where was Abram in all of this? Off to the side. Asleep. *It was only the Lord who passed between the pieces, not Abram. Because it was the Lord who established this covenant with Abram and it would be the Lord alone who would fulfill it.*

Now, if you wanted to think up a more impossible scenario, Abraham's situation would have topped the list. Old – really old.

But, as the Apostle Paul teaches us in Galatians, Ishmael was the product of man. He and Hagar his mother became an image of Mt. Sinai and the thunderings and curse of the Law. He was not the son of Promise. This is all that our own supposed strength can produce.

The ultimate example of God's power working through our weakness is *the New Covenant in Christ*. Mount Zion is radically different than Mount Sinai –

Jer 31:31-33 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke,** though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

The New Covenant in Christ *is dependent upon Christ, not upon man.* It is of faith, not of works. The Old Covenant was – well, you would live IF you DID it –

Gal 3:10-12 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified

before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” (12) But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

Now, let’s bring this home to ourselves.

1. As long as we place our faith and trust in ourselves, as long as we cling to the notion that I will be ok with God because after all, I am pretty good and He will blink at my shortcomings, we can be certain that the saving, regenerating power of the Lord will never come to us.
2. Any nation trusting in it’s own power, in its own “chariots,” for salvation and for obtaining God’s blessing, will have none of these things.
3. Third, and I suppose in some ways most central to our own experience here in this church, the only thing that will result in the Lord NOT working through us, in His power NOT

being present in us, is *boasting in ourselves which is in fact, unbelief in the Lord.* But He is not hindered by our weakness. He is not hindered by our few in number. This is the lesson we must learn.

This is the thing He has been working to teach us. *When we are weak, then we are strong. His power is perfected in weakness.* We cannot and must not boast. We must not look at ourselves and conclude that the Lord cannot accomplish His work through us unless we are many in number. That is the enemy's lie and it is unbelief.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

More Examples

Psa 33:16-17 The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

(17) The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue.

Psa 44:1-3 To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah. O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: (2) you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; (3) for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

2Ch 20:12-15 O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” (13) Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. (14) And the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of

Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. (15) And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's.