

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## *God's Power in Our Weakness* *July 16, 2023*

The Theology of the BIG is a Lie

**Sermon Text:** 2 Cor 12:7-10

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 27

The theme Scripture for this series of messages 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.**

Prayer is the language of faith. Since we have been considering this vital truth – God's power is perfected in weakness, when I am weak, then I am strong – have you been praying more? For the salvation of your unsaved loved ones or neighbor? For this church, that the Lord would glorify Himself through us and use us to His praise? Are you recognizing just how weak you are, how reliant you are upon the Lord for *everything*? Are you seeing it? For your heartbeat, for you existence,

for the air you breath, for the food you eat and the water you drink?

And most of all, are you ceasing from all boasting for your salvation in Christ? Are you realizing this:

Eph 2:1-6 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

If you are a Christian, it is only because God, being rich in mercy toward you, *raised you up from the*

*dead*. And if you are still in your sins, still under God's condemnation, do you see that you are a dead man? And that your only hope is for Christ to give the command as He gave for Lazarus – *Lazarus! Come Forth!* And he who was dead came forth.

*You were dead in the trespasses and sins*. So was I. And we walked in them. *We walked in them*. They were our daily path. "Let's see, which way shall I go today? I know, I will walk in the course of this world, I will follow Satan, I will walk in the passions of my flesh and I will carry out the desires of my body and sin-loving mind. I will once more be, today, a child of wrath – an object of God's hot anger."

That is what we did. Every morning, every day, every evening, we walked the devil's path. We chose to and we *had to*.

We were *just like the rest of mankind*. You look around the world today and you see all of the evil brewing and bubbling over. Wickedness. Insane evil. But WE

were once just like this mass of sinful mankind. If you are not in Christ this morning, then you have made that very same choice which you have made every morning of every day of your life. You chose to follow the course of the world, the flesh, and the devil. You may put a skin of religion over it all, but if you are not born again, then you are still just like the rest of mankind.

So, what are you going to do about it – dead man walking? What can you do about it? *You are dead in your sins.* Dead! I was dead in my sins. What did I do about it? Did I just decide one day – “well, I’m going to choose a different path. I’m going to inform Satan that I no longer want to go his way. I’m taking a different path than the world.” Is that what I did? And then did I tell myself, “my, what a good boy am I”?

There are many, many people today who claim to be Christians and yet as foolish as that sounds, this is precisely what they are doing. “God, see what a good boy I am.”

Luk 18:9-14 He also told this parable **to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous**, and treated others with contempt:

(10) “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

(13) But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

(14) I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This tax collector knew something. *He knew he was weak. He knew he*

*was dead. He knew there was absolutely nothing he could do to be justified before God. If he were to be saved, it would be God who must do the saving. And that is exactly what happened.*

What happened then to everyone who has ever been saved and made righteous before God? What happened? This:

(4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

In the preceding chapter of Ephesians, Paul emphasized over and over – *God elected His people in eternity past, according only to His own good pleasure. He did not peer into the future and see who was a good boy or girl. No, He chose His people and rejected the rest simply because it pleased Him to do so. For the praise of His*

*glorious grace, and for the praise of His glorious justice.*

In other words then, in the fullness of time, God saves His elect? How? *He makes us alive together with Christ. He raised us up with Christ and put us, in Christ, right there in the heavenly places.*

Why are you a Christian, if you are? Because God raised you from the dead while you were still walking the course of this world and Satan. He showed you mercy, sent His Spirit to regenerate you, He gave you faith so that you could now see the glory of Christ and believe in Him.

And I want to tell anyone who is listening today – *as long as you are patting yourself on the back, boasting of what a great person you are, seeking the approval of men and being popular with the world, you will remain a dead corpse in your soul.* Because no one can raise a dead man except the Lord Jesus Christ. And He does not and will not raise dead people who boast about how alive they are!

Now, do you understand how this all relates to our theme? – *when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*“God, be merciful to me, the sinner.”*

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Mar 2:17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. **I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.**”

*You are weak and so am I. The question is, will we humble ourselves and admit it, or do we insist on exalting ourselves?*

### God’s Power in Weakness

I have known people who claimed to be Christians, who spent their entire lives right up until they died, exalting themselves. As a result, God’s power never came to them. They remained dead in their sins, and they departed this life in that condition – they are in hell and will always be in hell.

God’s saving power then is always and only applied to the weak – to those who humbly admit they are weak – that in fact, they are DEAD men when it comes to any ability in themselves to contribute one mite to their salvation.

Rom 10:3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

And this very same principle continues to operate in us once the Lord does save us. We know this because Paul said it of himself – God’s power is perfected in weakness, when we are weak, then we are strong.

Here is the real prayer for the man or woman or child dead in their sins:

Listen to Isaiah say it:

Isa 40:28-31 Have you not known?

Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. (29) **He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.** (30) Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; (31) **but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.**

Faint. No might. Wait for the Lord. These are the ones to whom the Lord gives power and strength and through whom He works.

1Sa 17:26-27, And David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (27) And the people answered him in the same way, “So shall it be done to the man who kills

him.”

(30) And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. (31) When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. (32) And David said to Saul, “Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.”

(33) And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.” (34) But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, (35) I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. (36) Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” (37)

And David said, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you!” .....

(40) Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. (41) And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. (42) And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.

(43) And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. (44) The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.”

(45) Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a

javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. (46) This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, (47) and that all this assembly may know **that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand.**”

(48) When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. (49) And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. (50) So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David. (51) Then David ran and stood

over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

In our flesh, in our unbelief, we are bent toward believing that the Lord works and saves through *sword and spear*. Through OUR instruments and methods and energies and schemes. But that is not the Lord. That is NOT how He works. He always works His power in a way that leaves no room for us to boast. A shepherd boy and a sling shot.

I do not hesitate to say that the majority of professing Christendom today, and down through church history, has not and does not believe this. They insist that in order for them to accomplish great things for the Lord (and actually, for themselves), BIG things of power are required. BIG congregations. BIG buildings. BIG programs. BIG reputation. BIG leaders. All this is what equals BIG results.

But this is a lie. Do you know what BIG things and BIG results will inevitably lead to? Here it is:

Rev 13:11-15 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. (12) It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. (13) It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, (14) and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. (15) And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

Study the history of the visible church and what do you see



happening whenever so-called “Christianity” becomes BIG and popular? You see Rome. A false gospel. A false priesthood. A false Jesus. And you see it oppressing the real church.\*\*\* THIS is what man’s power produces. Do you think this Wikipedia article describes something that is anything like the Apostle Paul? –

St Paul's Cathedral is an Anglican cathedral in London, England, and is the seat of the Bishop of London. The cathedral serves as the mother church of the Diocese of London. It is on Ludgate Hill at the highest point of the City of London and is a Grade I listed building. Its dedication to Paul the Apostle dates back to the original church on this site, founded in AD 604.[1] The present structure, dating from the late 17th century, was designed in the English Baroque style by Sir Christopher Wren. Its construction, completed in Wren's lifetime, was part of a major rebuilding program in the city after the Great Fire of London. The earlier Gothic

cathedral (Old St Paul's Cathedral), largely destroyed in the Great Fire, was a central focus for medieval and early modern London, including Paul's walk and St Paul's Churchyard, being the site of St Paul's Cross.

The cathedral is one of the most famous and recognizable sights of London. Its dome, surrounded by the spires of Wren's City churches, has dominated the skyline for over 300 years. At 365 ft (111 m) high, it was the tallest building in London from 1710 to 1963. The dome is still one of the highest in the world. St Paul's is the second-largest church building in area in the United Kingdom, after Liverpool Cathedral.

Services held at St Paul's have included the funerals of Admiral Lord Nelson, the Duke of Wellington, Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher; jubilee celebrations for Queen Victoria; an inauguration service for the Metropolitan Hospital Sunday Fund; peace services marking the end of the First and Second World Wars; the wedding of Prince Charles and

Lady Diana Spencer; the launch of the Festival of Britain; and the thanksgiving services for the Silver, Golden, Diamond, and Platinum Jubilees and the 80th and 90th birthdays of Queen Elizabeth II. St Paul's Cathedral is the central subject of much promotional material, as well as of images of the dome surrounded by the smoke and fire of the Blitz. The cathedral is a working church with hourly prayer and daily services. The tourist entry fee at the door is £23 for adults (January 2023, cheaper if booked online), but no charges are made to worshippers attending advertised services.

And here is the current Bishop of London –

Sarah Mullally supports the Church of England's current teaching on marriage; that is between one man and one woman for life. In September 2016, she became one of 10 bishops to make up the church's "Bishops' reflection group on sexuality". In relation to same-sex relationships, she stated in 2017 that "It is a time for us to

reflect on our tradition and scripture, and together say how we can offer a response that is about it being inclusive love." When asked about LGBT people in the church, she further said that "What we have to remember is this is about people, and the church seeks to demonstrate love to all, because it reflects the God of love, who loves everybody." In 2022, Mullally supported the observance of LGBT+ History Month and the launch of an Advisory Group aimed at advising the diocese on "pastoral care and inclusion of LGBT+ people in the life of our church communities".

Mullally has described her views on abortion as favouring abortion rights although she would lean against abortion faced with her own decision. She has said that "I would suspect that I would describe my approach to this issue as pro-choice rather than pro-life although if it were a continuum I would be somewhere along it moving towards pro-life when it relates to my choice and then enabling choice when it related to others."

In 1987, she married Eamonn Mullally; the couple have a daughter and a son. Following her appointment as Bishop of London, Mullally moved into the Old Deanery at St Paul's. Mullally has stated that she had alterations made to the property, including the construction of an oratory in a former laundry room in which she prays the rosary and other Marian devotions and presides at weekly eucharistic adorations.

All of this in the name of St. Paul the Apostle. And yet, here is the real Paul:

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.**

Examine your thinking very, very carefully. Look around this church, this tiny, weak church – what do you think? Do you wish we were like the big ones? Do you think that the Lord only works if man is BIG and POWERFUL? If so, it is past time for you – for each of us – to confess our boastful pride and humble ourselves before the Lord and start walking by faith, not by sight.

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\*\*\*[Excellent words here from John Calvin’s sermon on Galatians 4:26-31, how Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the true child of Abraham, and so it is today]

There is an excellent message here which ought to be useful to us, and which confirms that to which I have alluded; and that is, *that we are not to be dazzled by the splendor of this world, nor transported with amazement when we see displays of great magnificence in religion.* If we were, for example, to believe all that we saw with our eyes, the Pope upon his throne with all his

sparkling garments and their trimmings, would seem to be an idol to be worshipped.

It does not surprise us that people stand there aghast, as if they have been hit over the head with a club and are semi-conscious! Why? Because human beings are inclined to judge carnally, and are less than little children when it comes to the things that concern the kingdom of heaven. Yet, Paul tells us that those in positions of authority, who are filled with self-importance and who are held in awe by the crowds – indeed, those who might be regarded as the first-born – are often Ishmaelites. They are bastards (illegitimate) children, despite what they may claim about their seniority.

Now, if Paul lived today, the proclamation of his message *would be so unwelcome that he would be burned a hundred times over!* Today, we may write or say whatever we wish, but we could not describe the Pope and his clergy more aptly than in the words of Paul. The implications of this scripture are that they are a band of

Ishmaelites and evil, illegitimate children who fight against God and all His true offspring.

[NOTE: This is why we have been mocked and scorned and rejected so often over these years. Because so many who have paraded here as Christians are in fact not children of the promise, but are Ishmaelites. And thus:

Gal 4:29-30 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

To continue now with Calvin:

With time, they (the papists) have grown in number and say that we are no more than a handful of people in comparison to them. They say that they have kings and princes among their number, that the whole world agrees with them, from the greatest to the least, and

that their rule extends across most of Europe and part of Africa. But even with all of this to boast of, it amounts to no more than the seniority of Ishmael...It is plain enough for all to see! Under the cover of being a 'church', as I have been saying, they have audaciously assumed that they have the authority to add and to take away from the Word of God.

...They are proud that they have an infinite number of followers. They say that we are like little runts, in a manner of speaking; we are despised and we have no dignity or reputation in the world. When they speak like this, it is Ishmael's mocking we can hear. We have a great need of patience, therefore; for when the enemies of God occupy the highest places in His house (ie, in the visible church), it is a sore trial for the real children of promise.

Many poor, simple souls have forsaken the gospel through their weakness. When they hear the noble titles, such as the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Throne, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor to

Saint Peter and Saint Paul, prelates, bishops, and so on, when such things are placed before them, these poor folk are confused and conclude that they ought to follow Rome. They are captivated by this mask, the same as would horrify little children – but this deception does not work with those who are strong in faith and follow God fully.

Take note then of what Paul is telling us here. For the ill-treatment of Isaac by Ishmael *was not just a one-time occurrence. We see the same kind of thing happening today. The children of God will be oppressed and trodden underfoot by those who, in theory, are the first born, (Ishmael was born first, before Isaac), and many simple souls will be seduced by this very claim of theirs. They cover all their filth and pollution with such pretty colors, do they not?*

However, let us prepare ourselves for battle, says Paul, and not allow our faith to be overcome by the pride of those who are the enemies of the truth of God. *These are domestic enemies. That is to say,*

*these Ishmaelites, these counterfeits, are garrisoned within the church, such as these prelates and great leaders.*

Just as Ishmael mocked the real child of promise and thus mocked the Promise itself (and therefore mocked Jesus Christ), so the counterfeit hypocrites in the visible church today mock the true children of God. There are many hypocrites seeking to destroy as far as they possibly can the doctrine of grace which is offered to them by the Lord Jesus Christ. *Let us be ready then to fight these battles with our internal foes, who claim to be children of God. They say they are our superiors and boast of their seniority, hoping it will make us feel crushed and beaten.*

Finally, notice what Paul says in conclusion, that all those who boast in this way that they belong to the church and claim the rights of the first-born *will be cast out as bastard children.* Do not be deceived by the splendor that surrounds those who strive against the truth of God; their tyranny is maintained by force, by

persecution, by gloating, and the like. Look to their end; they will be cut off, for they are not heirs. They may well live in the same house (ie, in the visible church); just as we are told that the Antichrist sits in the temple of God (2 Thes 2:4); but they will be scraped off like mud or dung.”

[Calvin’s sermons on Galatians, Banner of Truth Trust]