

Weak / Strong

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[0:00] He's looking right at you, buddy. Take your Bibles, please, and turn to 2 Corinthians. Chapter 11, and that black Bible in the chair in front of you, go towards the back of that Bible and find page 145.

Page 145, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, starting in verse 16. Excuse me, we'll read all the way to chapter 12. Verse 10.

11, 16 to 12, 10. A long section, and yet it all goes together, so I didn't want to split it up. So 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 16.

We'll start there. Again, page 145 in that black Bible. I'll read, and then we'll dive in. Again, I say, that no one think me foolish.

Otherwise, receive me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little. What I'm speaking, I'm not speaking according to the Lord, but as in foolishness, in this assurance of boasting.

[1:12] Since many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly. For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face.

To shame, I say, we have been weak. But whenever, in whatever, anyone is bold, I speak in foolishness. I am just as bold.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they of the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane. I, even more, in unsurpassing labors, in unsurpassing imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.

Verse 24. Five times I received from the lashes, from the Jews, 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. One stayed through stones at me. Three times I was shipwrecked.

A night and a day I spent in the deep. On frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers among countrymen, in dangers from the Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers on the sea, in dangers among false brethren, in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, without food, in cold and nakedness.

[2:36] Apart from external things, there's a daily pressure upon me of the concern of all the churches. Verse 29. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is cause to fall?

And I do not burn. If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

In Damascus, the Ethnarch, under Eretus, the king, was guarding the city of the Demacines, in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket, through the window, in the wall, and escaped his hands.

Boasting is necessary, but it is not useful. I will go on to apparitions, even revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ, who 14 years ago, whether in the body, I don't know, or out of the body, I don't know, God knows, such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

And I know such a man, whether in the body, or without the body, I don't know, God knows, was caught up into paradise, and heard unutterable words, which it is not permitted for a man to speak.

[3:44] On behalf of such a man, I will boast, but on behalf of myself, I will not boast, except in regard to weaknesses. For if I want to boast, I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth, but I refrain.

So no one may give to me something, what they see, or hears from me. In connection to the surpassing greatness of the revelations. For this reason, verse 7, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to strike me, to keep me from exalting myself.

Concerning this, I urged the Lord three times that it might depart from me, and he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.

Most gladly, therefore, I will boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell upon me. Therefore, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, for Christ's sake.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. It was created to be a parody of Superman, appearing in 1942, in a theatrical animated short film.

[5:07] He had one name, but after seven films, from 1942 to 1943, he was renamed. And anyone who's over 30, maybe over 40, it would be familiar to you.

The name, Mighty Mouse. Remember? Here I come to save the day. Now all of you like 30, at 40 and under, you're like, what in the world is he talking about?

It's okay, it's true, it really did happen. What was obviously entertaining, about this small little mouse, was that the small little mouse, would fight and defeat, bigger foes.

What you would think to be weak, and feeble, proved to be strong. Because appearances can be deceiving.

Can't they? When the world calls for, great strength, power, ability, God uses weak, feeble nobodies.

[6:19] He doesn't use mice. Well, maybe he does. As we come to this, section of 2 Corinthians, we've seen the theme of 2 Corinthians, boasting our weakness, boasting our Lord, those go together.

What seems to be, contradicting each other, they go together. And as you can tell from this, which is quite easy to, make sense of, in terms of the, paradox, which comes there, from the last verse of chapter 12, verse 10, that we read, for when I am weak, then I am strong, weak, strong, that's the paradox, for this morning.

Weak, strong. Or here's different ways, to put it. Weak, strong, weak, boasting, Jesus boasting, foolish weakness, why strength?

Different ways, you can categorize, this section. Or, as we've done this, weeks ago, when we started, in 2 Corinthians, God's great strength, is seen in our great weakness.

This is what God likes to do. God likes to stack, all the odds against himself, before he moves. You see that, through all of the Bible. He'll stack, all the odds against himself, and he'll make it look like, oh there's no way, he's gonna win, and yet God always wins.

[7:51] He will always make himself known, in ways, we would not have expected, and ways that seem feeble, weak, even morbid.

Are your circumstances, overwhelming you today? Good. God has you exactly, where he wants you.

Because now, when you realize, that you're weak, that's when his power, his grace, his favor, will be shown. When you trust.

God works in, and through us, for his glory. It's always about, God's sufficiency, always about God's power, always about God's provision, seen in our, insufficiency, our weakness, our deficiency.

We need to suffer, to make us rely more, upon God, instead of ourselves. Or as we said, weeks ago, God will always, put us in hard positions, and hard places, so that, he can give himself glory, by having us cry out to him, in total dependence, because he loves, to show his great strength, in our great weakness.

[9:08] And where's the morbid, act of God? It's in the cross. He showed his glorious strength, by the glorious weakness, of the cross.

That's the greatness, of the greatest, a paradox. Jesus suffering, and dying for us, that's the great paradox, of Christianity. Christianity. That's why people, think you're ridiculous.

You put your hope, in a guy, who died on a cross? Exactly. Exactly. God's grace, his power, is seen most clearly, not in the best, of circumstances, but in what seems, to be the worst, of times, and the worst, of circumstances.

God's work, and his son, Jesus, and his apostles, life, and death, light, and darkness, comfort, and affliction, strength, and weakness.

This is Christianity 101. Remember, the life of the apostle, is really the life, of a Christian. It is. It's just, it's like watching a movie, at an IMAX theater, in 3D.

[10:16] It's the same movie. It's the same movie. It's just, right? Just in your face. That's the life, of an apostle. It's the same movie, though. This is Christianity 101.

It's in Christ, that life, is hidden in death, wealth, and poverty, strength, and weakness, and wisdom, and foolishness. The foolishness, of the God-man, dying for sinners.

This is something, the Corinthians forgotten. They prided themselves, in power, prestige, persona, and privilege. They were losing it.

And this is the danger, for any church, for this church. Was Paul a fool? Yes, he was. He was a fool, of Christ, not of the Corinthians.

And the marks, of an apostle, were the marks, of Christ, which was weakness, and suffering. So, there's your introduction. Now, let's go through this, we'll march through this part, this section.

[11:24] First, we have, boasting is foolishness. Paul is trying to show, that this boasting, is just, it's ridiculous. It's insane. By the way, when you see that word, foolish, it's not the Greek word, moron.

It's the Greek word, that's not moron, it's the Greek word, that means insanity, crazy. Okay? Notice, verse 16. Let no one think me foolish, otherwise, receive me even as foolish.

So, I'm gonna boast just a little, I'm gonna be eccentric, but notice, he says there, in verse 17, what I'm gonna say, is not according to the Lord. I'm gonna boast, according to the flesh.

See, boasting is foolishness. It's foolish for me, to talk about this, because you guys, they wanna, you wanna glory, in the exterior, the outward, the appearances.

That part of boasting, is ridiculous. It's crazy. But, so, boasting is fleshly, and you love it, don't you, Corinthians?

[12:28] Verse 18. He says, since many boast, according to the flesh, fine, I will. So, he'd do it too, and yet, not in the way, that the Corinthians, were expecting, or required.

Paul's gonna, turn everyone, on their head, make their head spin, and how he boasts. Anyways, he's gonna do this, to win their heart, that they would embrace him, as their, apostle, as their pastor. So, he says in verse 18, when he boasts, according to the flesh, I will boast. Notice what he says though, in verse 19. For you, and here's the sarcasm, being so wise, oh yes, you being so wise, you gladly, endure, fools.

He sarcastically said, they had good sins. They had practical wisdom. They bore with these fools, oh, I'm such a fool, but you all, Corinthians, you're all just so wise.

You sense a sarcasm there? The issue, interesting, was, their lack, of practical judgments, and how they judge Paul. Basically, they were saying, Paul was not a legitimate apostle.

[13:42] I mean, and for us, I mean, we're reading this, I mean, we think, Paul was like, the guy, right? He was like, right? And it's, in our heads, we're like, how in the world, can these Corinthians, doubt him, being a legit apostle?

They think they're crazy. They're foolish. That's what they're doing. But look at what he says in verse 20. Oh, but you bear with anyone if he enslaved you, exploited you, entrapped you, dominated you, humiliated you.

Oh, you endure that well, he says. Again, you sense the ironic sarcasm? They gave themselves to this abuse while accusing Paul of abuse and lording it over them.

They're sitting there saying, Paul, you're doing this, and yet they're sitting there letting their leaders do that to them. It's ridiculous. Which is why he moves into the next point.

Not boasting is weak. Verse 21. Oh, to shame and our disgrace. We're so weak in this regard.

[14:59] Again, the sarcasm. What's he really saying? No, Corinthians, no, guys, we've not taken advantage of you as they have.

We, meaning Paul and his associates. No, guys, it wasn't shameful or disgraceful that Paul did not abuse them.

It was bizarre that they would sit there and accuse Paul of being blah, blah, blah, when their leaders were the ones doing that to them. The loyal opposition.

So he says, not boasting. Oh, that's so weak of us to do. Oh, we didn't do this the way we should have been doing. But then he says, but, next part, I will boast in my strengths.

Notice the next part there, verse 21. But in whatever anyone has been bold, bold enough, I speak in foolishness as if I'm insane.

[16:07] I'm just as bold. I will plunge in to remedy my failure. They become bold to do this? You want to take this from them, these leaders?

Fine. So will I. But be careful what you wish for. This is going to make their heads spin. And then starting in verse 22, he goes into his super qualifications according to the pattern set forth by this loyal opposition.

But what would he do? He would happily boast not in his persona, not in his power, not in his privileges, no, no, no, in his weaknesses.

You want my credentials? I'll give you my credentials. Notice how he first begins there in verse 22. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Israelites? So am I. Seed of Abraham? So am I. Ethnically, communally, in a special way, maybe the opponents were claiming this.

So am I. And then notice what he says in verse 23. Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if I am losing my mind. I am even more. He was a superior messenger of Christ.

[17 : 28] He was Christ's agent or ambassador with combinations based on weaknesses, sufferings, pains.

Because notice what he starts to say there in verse 23. Unsurpassing labors, unsurpassing imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.

What were the true marks of an apostle? True marks of a true apostle. Lowliness, weakness. See, he doesn't boast in what he's done.

He boasts in how he's suffered. Because he, they, we, represent Christ to the world. Because what does Jesus say in John chapter 16?

As they so hated me, they will also hate you. You will suffer. True marks of an apostle, of a Christian, were lowliness and weakness.

[18 : 42] That's what it is. And look at, look at now he gets specific starting in verse 24. Received the lashes from the Jews five times.

Three times beaten with rods as from the Romans. They were throwing stones at him. Did that once. Shipwrecked. Night and day in the deep. Notice he says in verse 26, the frequent journeys. How? From rivers, from robbers, countrymen, Gentiles, from the city and the wilderness, on the sea, among false brethren. In verse 27, toil and hardships that go along with being Christ's agent. Sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, without food and cold and naked. Do you see something here? As you go through all this whole list, notice something. Notice that Paul made no distinction between afflictions from other humans and sufferings from natural events or causes.

Both displayed weaknesses. Both were for Christ. Because you might say, well I'm not suffering for Christ. Yes you are. If you're suffering today, you're suffering on behalf of Christ.

[19 : 50] whether it's a weakness that comes from natural causes or supernatural causes or something that comes upon you by someone else or just circumstances, it doesn't matter. That's what Paul's doing.

And notice there's nothing about planting churches. Nothing about all these things that he's done. Because he rested not in what he'd done but in his service to others.

He loved and cared for those Corinthians. He did. He loved them. But then notice what he says in verse 28. Apart from this external things, there's the daily pressure, the burden, the concern of all the churches, the daily anxiety, the concern for all of them, the constant pressure of shepherding a church is extreme.

You have no idea. You have no idea. You have no idea. what it's like. Notice he says in verse 29, who is weak and I'm not weak?

What's he talking about? It's in reference to his care and concern of the churches. Who are these people who are in the churches that they're weak and yet I'm weak with them? He asked this as one who was bound to others in the gospel.

[21 : 18] If they were weak, he was also weak. He's participating with all his heart and soul. When you as a member you're weak, I'm weak. Do you understand that?

Do you get that, members? members? I'm not against you. I'm on your side. I've always been on your side.

Notice he says the next part, verse 30, excuse me, the second part of verse 29, who is led into sin really, who has been caused to fall? And literally it's without me burning.

I do not burn. He shared in their failures because the stumble was to transgress. And when this happened to someone, Paul, he said he would burn.

What does he mean by that? Did he get angry? Was he sorrowful? Was there love? He doesn't say. He doesn't explain that. But the point is this.

[22:22] He identified. He comes alongside. That's what true pastors do. In concern and hardships, Paul far surpasses that loyal opposition.

And that's why he says in verse 30, if I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weaknesses. That's what he says. This is how he turned them on their heads.

He changed their whole thinking. See, they're thinking, oh, Paul's going to talk about how he did all this stuff and he was like, blah, blah, blah, doing all these wonder workings. No. He's talking about all his sufferings, hardships, difficulties.

They're kind of thinking, what in the world is this? This guy is crazy. Exactly. If I have to boast, he says, I will boast of my weaknesses.

For example, now, first, before he gives you the example, notice his oath, verse 31, under oath, the God, maybe his opponents were doing the same thing, under oath, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who's blessed forever, he knows, I am not lying.

[23:44] It's his oath, maybe even taunting his opponents, using their lingo. In other words, to put it in our vernacular, I swear to God, I'm not lying.

And then, he gave the Corinthians the signs of a true apostle in a mocking way. Verse 32, in Damascus, the Athenarch, under Eretus, the king, was guarding the city of the Demacines, in order to seize me, I was let down in a basket, through a window on the wall, and escaped his hands.

Why in the world does he start talking about this? Doesn't it seem kind of weird? Just kind of like, pfft. It's like, why are you talking about this? Because remember, think about it, think of it this way, his opponents were about wonder working, right?

About the flashes, the glitz, and the glamour. So he's recounting part of his commission. Remember there in Acts chapter 9, Jesus appeared to him, right?

A blindness came upon him. Ananias came and healed him, right? And then he started preaching Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. But notice, he didn't say anything about Jesus appearing to him, didn't say anything about him being blind, or being healed for that matter, nothing.

[25:05] What does he talk about? I was let down in a basket, a hole in the wall, blah, blah. No angel appearance, no mighty deed from God, no awesome deliverance by means of a great miracle.

His escape was mundane. A basket used to carry salted fish saved him. These are silly, humiliated, weak.

Exactly. That's the power of God. God. That's what we base it on. That's why people think you are a fool, even a moron, for believing in the gospel.

But it's the gospel that saves, because Jesus dying on a cross for sinners, that very weakness is the very power of God. Right?

That's why he does this. He's throwing off the Corinthians. They had their opponent saying, I'm so awesome, I'm so great, you should look at me, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[26:22] And Paul says, I'm nobody. I'm a nobody. And yet, this is what he's going to do, this next section starting in chapter 12, my strengths versus my weaknesses.

Though he experienced the appearance revelations from the Lord, Paul did not boast in those things, but he boasted in the affliction given to him by Christ himself.

Look at what he does. Boasting is necessary, but it's not useful. Only because the Corinthians, who were attracted to the boasting of Paul's opponents, that's why he's doing this.

And yet, this boasting is not useful or profitable. Why? Because the purpose of spiritual gifts and the meaning of spiritual gifts is not to bolster yourself, it's to edify others.

But notice he says, but I go on to visions and revelations of the Lord, I translate that for you, apparition, which the word signifies the appearance of an object or person.

[27:34] He's talking about the appearances given to him by Jesus. Revelations from the Lord, expected, even required by the Corinthians, they would say, oh, that's an evidence of an apostle.

And there's truth to that, right? Acts chapter 1, Peter, the apostles, they said, you must have seen the risen Lord to be a true apostle. Remember that? Okay, that's true.

Yet, it wasn't enough for the Corinthians, was it? they sought more evidence from Paul. Ongoing apparitions, they wanted more.

Well, notice what Paul does. Again, turns it, puts their heads for a spin. Verse 2, I know a man in Christ. Wait, what?

I knew this guy. Paul distanced himself from this experience knowing that it wasn't about the experience, but it's about the gospel, the truth.

[28:41] See, it's not about what people experience. People experience lots of things, don't they? I mean, you can hear some pretty crazy stories that some people remember about, right? You're like, what? What did you just say?

I had this dream. Okay, right? I mean, really? I'm not, I'm being partly facetious, but partly truthful.

But it's not about the experience. It's about the gospel and the truth.

And why does Paul do this? Just for humility? No. He does this to show that his sufficiency was not of himself, but of God. Why does he do this then?

Because he's implying this could have been anyone in Christ. This could have been any Christian.

To show it wasn't about him, it's about Christ. he avoided suggesting he was some super Christian.

So, he's an anonymous guy. A nobody. I mean, look at what he says. I knew a guy 14 years ago?

[29:48] No, no, the Corinthians was like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. we want to know about these things now, buddy. Hey, pal, what about these things now? He says, 14 years ago, I knew this guy. 14 years ago, Paul was a nobody.

See what he's doing? And he says, in the body, out of the body, I don't know, God knows. He says, such a man, end of verse 2, was caught up to the third heaven.

the highest heaven where God was present. And notice he repeats this in verse 3. I know this guy.

That's kind of the new one's sarcasm. I knew this guy, he knew this guy, he knew this guy, he knew this guy, he knew this guy, he knew this guy's cousin. Whether in the body, apart from the body, I don't know, God knows.

He was caught up in the paradise, and notice what he says, and heard unutterable words, which it is not permitted for a man to speak. I know it has inexpressible, but that shouldn't be translated that way.

[30:55] Unutterable words, in that he couldn't reveal what was told him. This was verbal communication that happened, not some ecstatic experience. Making the revelation far superior to his adversaries, and yet also put him beneath his adversaries, because guess what?

He couldn't say anything. Verse 5, On behalf of such a man, I will boast. On behalf of myself, I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.

So, what does Paul do? He distanced himself from himself, only willing to boast when it came to his weaknesses. The experience was because God showed grace to him, not because he was special. It's about the gospel. which is why he wouldn't boast in any other way but in his weaknesses. So, you don't got it all together.

That's the whole point. You're not supposed to. Notice what he says here in verse 6. If I want to boast, I won't be foolish, for I'll be speaking the truth.

[32:09] If I want to talk by myself, I can talk by myself. I could talk by myself, and guess what? I wouldn't be an idiot, or I should say, I wouldn't be insane, because everything I would say is true.

Guess what, Corinthians, whether you believe it or not, or whether your opponents believe it or not, it doesn't matter, I'm legit. That's what he was saying. but, notice he says, I refrain.

He didn't want anyone ascribing something to him beyond what they saw in him, or heard from him.

That's what he says. I didn't want to ascribe, that no one may ascribe to me more than what they see in me, that's the nuance to what he says here in the verb, or hears from me, and then actually what I did for you at the beginning of verse 7, it actually goes to verse 6.

They cut it off there, they shouldn't have done that. That last part, that first part of verse 7 goes to the last part of verse 6, so it should read like this, heard from me even in the surpassing revelations.

He didn't want somebody to ascribe to him something beyond what they see in him, or what they hear from him, beyond these things he's going to talk about in reference to these appearances that he had from the Lord. Why?

[33:29] Because it's not about the experiences, it's about the gospel and faith in Christ now. Well, I made a decision for Jesus 25 years ago.

That's nice for you. Do you trust Christ now? People see this, I may have a conversion experience. Great, praise God, but do you trust Christ now?

Because how you're living brother does not show that. Sister, how you're living, that does not show that. Do you trust Christ now? By the way, Paul's going to bring that up in chapter 13.

He says, examine yourself to see if you're in the faith now. He couldn't speak what he heard. He could only speak the gospel.

Okay, well what would they see? This weak bodily presence. Christ. They heard this, his pathetic rhetoric abilities. They saw one who faced insults, persecutions.

[34:29] Yeah, they saw the power of Christ. That's what they would see. And they would see Christ's love in the apostle. This apostle who loved them and he stuck in there with them.

I mean, can you imagine this? Paul was still hung in there with the Corinthians. Even they thought he was an absolute ridiculous crazy guy and they thought he wasn't a legitimate apostle.

I mean, what would you do? You'd probably just blow him off, right? Forget it, fine. He didn't love them. And now we come to the crux here in verse 7 through 10 because now he starts to say God brings weakness.

Look at verse 7, that next part for this reason. To keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to strike or to beat me to keep me from exalting myself. His visit to heaven was accompanied by a visit from hell to benefit him. You see that? I mean, think about it.

[35:37] How does God work good through both suffering and evil? God used evil, Satan, for good.

To beat Paul. The idea is in an ongoing way. Now, in what way did Satan do this? Paul doesn't say, oh, and speculations abound.

You can literally read pages upon pages upon pages of what commentators think Paul was talking about here. It was the false teachers.

It was his physical ailments. It was his eyesight. It was the fact that he couldn't walk right. He was bald. He had too much hair. He had not enough hair. He doesn't say. And it doesn't matter. because what's the point? We are bound to the weakness of our flesh and subject to attacks from natural and supernatural circumstances for our good.

[36:40] That's the point. If you miss anything, don't miss that. We are bound to the weakness of our flesh and we are subject to attacks from natural and supernatural.

circumstances all for our good. Whether we're talking about other induced circumstances or natural induced circumstances, all these come from the hand of God to direct us to God and his power for his good and our good for his glory.

Remember the statement that I told you earlier. God will always put us in hard positions and hard places so he can give himself glory by having us cry out to him in total dependence because he loves to show his great strength in our great weakness.

You want to know a person who understood this? John Chow, who died this past week as a missionary. He understood that. God, he got that.

Don't listen to the news media. Go to Christianity Today and read the interview that they did with all nations and you'll see the truth about John Chow, not with BBC and all those other ridiculous type news media, what they do and how they blasphemed his name.

[38:16] He knew. He understood. He understood. And look at what Paul says, this is for his benefit, to keep me from exalting myself at the beginning and at the end of this.

This superior revelation could lead Paul to boast in himself, to say, look at how awesome I am.

Well, God took care of that. And look at his reaction to the weakness.

Verse 8. Concerning this, I urged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. Now keep in mind, if you're suffering and unless you ask the Lord three times, he's not going to take it away from you or whatever.

Or you ask too many times. Three is just a number of completion. So don't make too much out of that. But how did Paul resist the evil that was given to him?

He prayed. He asked God to take it away. Resisting it deliberately, specifically, boldly. Should we resist the evil that comes to us?

[39:18] Should we, by means of prayer, resist the evil that comes to us? Absolutely. Absolutely.

God, I don't like this. God, this is painful. God, this is hurting me. This is suffering. These are insults and difficulties and troubles. I don't like it.

This is not masochism. I'm going to beat myself for Jesus Christ. No, it's not that. But he came to embrace God's plan.

He was called to suffer even though he was not able to fully understand it. It may not be meant for you to understand why you have cancer.

All I can tell you is that you must come to a place where you embrace it. I can't tell you why. No one else can either. But notice God's response.

[40 : 27] And this is where we come to verse 9 and 10. And this is what we have here. And why I, meaning Paul, boast in weakness. This is why. And he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.

This is God's response. God's response to Paul, to his prayer. What's the response? Christ's grace is sufficient.

The thorn wasn't removed, but God is not silent. relief comes in a relationship. This was Christ's personal favor towards Paul.

Understand this, it's not about possessing some kind of power, but possessing a relationship with Christ, his unmerited kind favor. It is sufficient to sustain Paul, us, in our times of horrible, weak circumstances.

grace is not a thing. Grace is a person. Grace is Christ. Remember in chapter 8? What was it, verse 8 or 9?

[41 : 40] Where he says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus. The grace which is Lord Jesus. It's not about having a thing to sustain you during a time of suffering.

It's about having Jesus. It's about a relationship with him. That's why he says, for power is perfected or completed or purposed in weakness.

There's a purpose for your weaknesses. There's a purpose for your sufferings. There's a purpose for your insults, whether you cancer or whatever. It's this.

God, who dwells in a high and holy place, dwells with the lowly, not the haughty. God doesn't look up, but he looks down low to poor and needy people to show that he is a God who lifts up out of dust and ashes.

He heals the broken hearted. He binds up their wounds. You read that, remember? This is the grace that he's talking about.

[42 : 54] So don't think of it as a thing. grace is a person. It's relational. Grace is known in Christ's self-giving love in the incarnation and at the cross.

So this very principle, weak, strong, is seen at Christ's death and resurrection. And yet, it never occurred to me until this week, weakness still remains on the risen one.

Do you know that? And I went, wait, what does that mean? weakness remains on the risen one? He still has the nail prints in his hands.

He still has the nail prints in his feet. He still has the hole in his side. forever.

Forever. Forever he'll be like that. Forever. Weakness will remain on our Lord.

[44 : 17] Forever. Forever. We will remember that weakness. Do you get that? Does that make sense? weak, strong.

We will always remember because God has willed to dwell in human weakness through the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus. The supreme power of weakness is the incarnation and the cross of our Lord who was called the man of sorrows.

Suffering man just like you, just like me. Notice what he says in the next part of verse nine.

Most gladly therefore I will boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell upon me. Notice it's not just in this thorn he expands things out in all weaknesses.

not as a way to gain the power of Christ but as a response of faith to the grace shown in Christ.

Again, this is not masochism but it's boasting in weakness because weaknesses and afflictions they come unexpectedly, unannounced and even undesired.

[45 : 48] Yet we respond in faith to the grace of Christ so that we can boast in anything that comes our way and I put that for you katatheon. Say that. It's Greek for according to God.

Katatheon. Katatheon, O Lord. According to God. This is for you. This is according to you.

Therefore, and it says I am well content.

No, no, no. The actual word means I delight. Now, talk about something that's insane. There's foolishness.

There's insanity. I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in all these troubles and difficulties for the sake of Christ.

And all these hardships that come, we can delight. Whether violence done by other persons or hardships that happen by circumstances, all come for the sake of Christ.

[46:57] Because, friends, this is not our home. Perhaps we should be discontent with this life. So that the final paradox, he says, for when I am weak, then I am strong, which finds its basis in Christ and his saving work.

I mean, in Christ's greatest weakness, there was the power to save sinners, the power that comes as a power of Christ, which is in our relationship with Christ, which is so vital if you're here and you're not a Christian.

You can have relationship with Christ, and you can, the weakness is there, power is found in the gospel. It's not about getting the gift, you get the giver, you get God himself.

So realize this, we don't make ourselves weak, we already are, we're humans, we are already weak, it's a reality, and yet into this reality, our Lord has entered, and even participated in the greatest way by dying on a cross.

God enters into our world. Is that not what we're going to celebrate? At Christmas? The gospel exposes the truth.

[48:34] What truth? We're weak, subject to suffering, subject to death, and the destructive power of sin. Yet in the gospel, God speaks in Christ to save, renew, restore.

This is a new reality which will be remembered forever and ever. Amen. Oh, if you're here, come to Jesus and he will renew you and restore you.

Because God likes to stack all the odds against himself before he moves. He will always make himself known in ways we would not have expected, and in ways that seem feeble, weak, even morbid.

The cross. Are your circumstances overwhelming you today? Perfect. God has you exactly where he wants you.

Because God's great strength is seen in our great weakness. Weak. thank you, Jesus.

[49:44] Thank you, Jesus. You have eternally bound yourself to human flesh, resurrected, glorious, yes, still with the scars in your hands and your feet and your side.

God. And so we proclaim that grace is sufficient, this relationship with you is sufficient, we have the response, we will respond in faith and in trust in the midst of all these sufferings that we have, all these difficulties that we have.

we will hold on to, we will cling to this gospel truth. You died, you took on flesh, you died, and you resurrected so we can be with you.

You did that to display your great grace to us. Thank you. Thank you. Lord, I'll allow you to have some time to ponder and to think what we've seen from God's word and to prepare your heart for the Lord's Supper, which we'll celebrate that together.

So take this time to let your mind dwell on the gospel. And even though you're here, maybe you're visiting, you're not a member, but hey, you come from a church of like faith and practice, you've been baptized by immersion, hey, come join us in the Lord's Supper.

[51:24] But if you don't know Jesus, we implore you to not partake. And if you have something against another Christian, or non-Christian for that matter, we encourage you not to partake at that time, at this time as well.

Try to first reconcile, and then maybe the next time you can partake with us to Lord's Supper. But let this time of silence be a time for you to think and ponder the gospel.

Reflect upon the weakness of the cross to save us weak sinners. of theleen cannotiskt be a time for you after but of causing theiss