

Boasting in Weakness

by James Jennings

This sermon focuses on the Apostle Paul's experience of boasting in his weakness, particularly highlighting his escape in a basket from persecution in Damascus. Paul's reflection on this trial years later reveals a crucial aspect of true Christianity, emphasizing reliance on God's power in the midst of weakness. The sermon challenges listeners to embrace weakness as an opportunity for God's strength to be displayed, encouraging a mindset of humility and dependence on the Lord.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:30, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Acts 26:22, Philippians 4:13, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Acts 9:23, 2 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 12:7, 2 Corinthians 12:10

Topics: "Embracing Weakness", "Reliance on God's Strength"

Description

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Transcript

Well, this afternoon, I want to think about boasting in our weakness. And I have a question for you to start this out. What is the first documented persecution that the Apostle Paul faced after his conversion? And when Paul refers to that situation at a later on date, what lesson could we learn from what he says about what happened years earlier? So what's the first persecution he faced as a new believer? And the hint is, and I'm trying to confuse you with this hint, but it is a valid hint.

The hint is, the Nebaioth king, Oretus, whose capital was Petra, what is now modern-day Jordan. That's your hint. When did that happen? How many of you know who King Oretus is? A few? If I'm honest with you, for 13 years, as a Christian, I've read through my Bible, and not once, when I got to this certain passage that we're going to look at, did I see some King Oretus there in the passage.

But let's first turn to Acts 9. Acts 9 is where this takes place. And then we see Paul in 2 Corinthians years later refer to this. So Acts 9:23. This is just after he has been converted.

Saul on the way to Damascus. On the way with permission from the leaders there to imprison Christians and have Christians ultimately killed. Remember, that was his mission.

Craig just kind of dealt with some of this very recently in Acts 9 in the series in Galatians. Acts 9.23. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him. There's no King Oretus here.

What do you mean? King Oretus. It just says the Jews here. The Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul.

They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night, let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering Paul in a basket. And he goes from there. It says, and when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples.

So he went from there to Jerusalem. Now turn to 2 Corinthians 11. Let's read what Paul says years after this.

2 Corinthians 11 is where we're going to spend the majority of our time, but you could, if you have a bookmark, keep it in Acts 9. We might go back for a moment. The one thing to note in Acts 9 that I meant to mention, Acts 9.16 when he's talking about the Lord said to him, he's a chosen instrument. He's saying this to Ananias that Paul's a chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, for I will show Paul how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.

Paul would be shown by the Lord how much he had to suffer for the sake of the name. So 2 Corinthians 11, verse 30. Here he is defending his apostleship to these false apostles who are there at Corinth.

And he says in verse 30, If I must boast... You're forcing me to boast. If I must, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, He knows that I'm not lying.

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas, the Thessalonian king, was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me. Verse 33, But I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and I escaped his hands. So there you go.

Paul refers to what happened in Acts 9 years later. He looks back on that. And he sees something.

He sees something crucial to true Christianity that happened as he was being lowered over that wall in a basket escaping. So I want to think about that. I want to reflect back on what happened here.

There's something here we can learn. You know, Paul's first big trial was not one that in the eyes of the world made him look very glorious. Look at this first recorded persecution right here and say, man, that was absolutely glorious.

He was in the prison. He got arrested. He got beaten.

He survived all of that. And the gates opened and he escaped. Or something like happened to Peter.

Paul is hiding in a basket going over a wall. This first persecution shows the opposite of strength. It shows weakness.

But in the midst of all the weakness it shows, it shows the power of God to help His weak saints in order to advance His Kingdom. Again, we are the weak ones. Every one of you here today, you've believed in a message the world considers foolish if you're a Christian.

God has saved you and made you one of the weak ones in the world. Paul had not just gone from a kingdom of darkness to light, but from a kingdom of outward strength to that of weakness and reliance on another in preaching a message that the world calls foolish. That's what you entered into.

This is not a religion of strength in and of ourselves. This is not a religion of power. We don't sit here today and the world views us as those who are strong.

This is a religion ultimately of weak people relying on the all-powerful God, and that's where that strength is going to come from. And as you see in the text, Paul looks back at what happened in Acts 9, and he says, that showed my weakness there as I was sitting in that basket being let down over that wall. That showed how weak I was.

It showed my weakness. So let's think here first about the timeline here. Just because it matters, I don't want to think a lot about it.

There's a lot written in commentaries about this, but it will miss the point. The account in Acts would seem to indicate if you still have your finger there, go back to Acts 9. When you look at Acts 9, he's converted for some days. He's with the disciples in Damascus.

And immediately, he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues. So he's in Damascus. He's preaching the truth.

And all who heard him were amazed. And then he goes on. His strength increased.

Confounded the Jews. And then it talks about what happened in v. 23. And then at the end of v. 23, after he escapes in the basket, what does it say happens? It says he comes to Jerusalem.

The thing that can cause confusion is Paul says in Galatians that he went away to Arabia. And King Aretas in 2 Corinthians actually deals with that area of the world, which is not too far from Damascus. So it seems like timeline-wise, Paul gets converted.

He's in there in Damascus and he's preaching right out of the gate. Then he ends up over in Arabia and he's preaching there as well. And then he goes back to Damascus because he says in Galatians 1.17, I return to Damascus.

So he came back. And it seems when he gets back to Damascus, King Aretas, through the governor's power, they have the city all protected. Obviously, this isn't an army outside of the city because Paul leaves through a window in a basket and escapes.

So this is inside of the city. They've got the gates guarded. They've got troops in the city.

They're trying to arrest Paul. He's hiding there. And that seems to be the order of events.

So what got all these people wanting to take out Paul? It was evangelism. Him preaching the truth. People hate that.

People hate when you preach the truth. And another thing this should encourage us about, what was one of the things the Lord told Saul that he would do? Not just he must suffer much for My name, but that he would what? Take My name before kings. Well, notice here, right at the beginning, you have a King Aretas wanting Paul dead.

The Nabataean king wants Paul dead. The Jews want Paul dead. And it seems they're teaming up in some way to seize Paul here in Damascus right in this first phase of him as a Christian.

Why would that king want him dead? Clearly, the king knows something about what Paul was saying. So in some way, he's already got the truth before this king of what is now known as Jordan. The capital city of Petra.

So it's easy to miss that. We can easily miss that in Paul going to Arabia and these things and clearly evangelizing to some degree because he's got a king from there wanting his head on a platter, it could seem. Wanting him dead.

Okay, so, here you have Paul. You have him triumphantly headed to Damascus with power, right? He's got permission to go and arrest Christians and put them in prison and it'll ultimately lead to their death. Right? Tons of strength.

Saul had strength. And then what happens? On his way there, he gets converted and he goes from the team of strength into this group of weak people who are now lifting him over the wall, hiding in a basket, dropping him down, and he's facing death if he's caught. Isn't that amazing? Paul went from hunting to being the hunted.

I mean, what a turn of events. Very, very humbling. And that's why Paul says, he looks back on it and he says, that shows my weakness.

It's not just that it shows his own weakness of how he went from being the hunter to the hunted right away, but it shows the weakness of Christians in general. We are those who are exposed, as Paul would say, to danger. Paul got exposed to all sorts of suffering.

That's the same lot that we have. We don't feel it much in America these days. We've had a type of peace that is very unusual.

Just like Herod and Pilate became friends with a common enemy of Christ, so the Jews and Cain and Aretas had a common enemy, Paul. They wanted him who was seeking to win pagans and the Jews to Christ. They wanted him removed.

They wanted him out of the picture. They wanted him off. They wanted him dead.

And Christ's words that Paul would have to suffer were happening right from the start. Right from the beginning. Now, just reading Acts 9, you could ask yourself, what does this show us? If you're reading without knowing that Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 11.

And he illuminates what's happening there and he shows how he thought. He's revealing a mindset to us as a Christian. He looks on an early first persecution as a believer, and he looks at that and he says it shows my weakness.

But if you just have Acts 9 and you're just reading there, what could be some of the things? You might say, well, this teaches us we shouldn't have a martyr's complex. Right? There's a time to escape. Paul escaped.

No, that's not what the text is about. Someone might say, well, it shows us God's providence. He made known the enemy's plans.

Remember that in Acts 9? It became known to them that they were trying to kill Paul. Somehow in God's providence, it became known. Is this a lesson on God's providence? Is that what Paul refers to the passage for in 2 Corinthians? No.

Does Paul refer to Acts 9 to teach us that God controls when a door is shut and when you should move on to Jerusalem? No. Does Paul refer to Acts 9 to show us that we should sacrificially love the brethren? And you know the people who held the rope to let Paul escape? Maybe eventually those in the city found out who his accomplices were and those believers were put in prison and killed. Does Paul refer to the text to show sacrifice as a Christian? No.

He doesn't. Does he show the text? Does he refer to it to teach us that the government is watching us day and night waiting to seize us because of the truth we post on the Internet? No. Now, are all those sayings in some way, could you get some little thought about that? Sure.

But Paul looks in 2 Corinthians and he says that example of me in a basket trying to escape, trying to sneak away, that shows my weakness. And if you notice, look what Paul said right before in v. 31. Right after he said to show my weakness, he said the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, He was blessed forever, knows I'm not lying.

I mean, you're defending your apostleship. And you're going to go and refer to this? You're going to refer to you hiding in a basket, going over a wall to escape? I mean, when you come in to get hired, you don't refer to all the weakness. You don't refer to all the times you had struggles, right? You refer to the successes, so to speak.

It's not what Paul does. That's actually a credential that he is an apostle. He's boasting in his weakness.

And in his weakness, we're going to see he's going to show the power of God. And that's true Christianity. It's a religion fueled by power from God, not from ourselves.

So, he had to defend his apostleship from those false apostles. He felt forced to boast. And he says I'm not lying with what I'm about to say.

And maybe it dealt with some of what he had just said prior if you look at 2 Corinthians 11. He says starting in verse 23, are they servants of Christ? I'm a better one. I'm talking like a madman with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings and often near death.

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned.

Three times I was shipwrecked. At night and at day, I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys and danger with rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers. I mean, it goes on.

In toil and hardship. Through many a sleepless night and hunger and thirst, often without food and cold and exposure and apart from other things, there's the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for the churches. Who is weak? And am I not weak? Who is made to fall? And am I not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus who is blessed forever, He knows I'm not lying. I'm not lying about this mindset of boasting and weakness. I'm not lying about these things that happened to me.

And then He gives that example of what happened at Damascus. So weakness, what is weakness? The word weak can be used at least in three different ways. One, He does not mean here, I think clearly in 2 Corinthians 11-30, it does not mean He's immature in the faith as far as weak in conscience.

If those are weak in the faith, they have a very sensitive conscience. They have a lot of scruples. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, to the weak I became weak.

There, yes, he's meaning I became sensitive to those who had these issues of conscience. But when he says here, I'm boasting of the things that show my weakness, he's not referring to weakness in that way. Bodily weakness is definitely part of it.

Look at 2 Corinthians 10. This is some of what the false apostles were saying. They said His letters are weighty and strong.

But His bodily presence is weak. And His speech of no account. They're picking on Him for His bodily presence.

What did He look like? Was He short? Did He look like Spurgeon? Some would say Spurgeon, when the one guy down in the tabernacle ran into Spurgeon, he thought Spurgeon was the janitor. I don't think it's a coincidence why he thought Spurgeon was the janitor. Because his outward appearance maybe made him appear like that.

He didn't know he was speaking to Charles Spurgeon. That one story that's been referred to. But here they're picking on Him for His speech.

Things physical. Weakness could be a weakness of something inward. Right? There's an inward weakness.

Paul says that in 2 Corinthians 1. He said we despaired of life itself. This is so we would no longer rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. So you can face a trial and you feel weak inwardly.

Bodily, your body's in danger. Physically, you might even be sick. There's places this word weakness is literally rendered sickness.

It's talking about an infirmity. It's talking about something physical going on in the individual. So I think in this context, 2 Corinthians 11-30, when he says, I'll boast of the things that show my weakness, I think he's really referring to those second two things.

He's boasting of physical weakness and he is boasting of inward weakness as he talked about already in this letter in chapter 1. There's a sense that where Paul had faced a situation and death was right at the door, he lacked strength. He felt like he didn't have the power. He maybe even felt anxiety for all the churches and all this care.

And he had nowhere to go but the Lord. It says in 13.4, Christ was crucified in weakness. Okay, Christ was weak? Crucified in weakness? Well, there it's in suffering.

Christ was crucified in suffering. And He suffered in a way that the world will look at and say it's weak and foolish for Him to be nailed naked on a cross bearing capital punishment for His enemies. And then he says, but He lives by the power of God, for we also are weak in Him.

But in dealing with you, we live with Him by the power of God. So Christ was crucified in weakness. Paul faced weakness right from the very beginning in the midst of all of his sufferings.

Paul did not get saved and have the Lord tell him, Paul, I'm going to show you how much you're going to conquer for My name. Paul gets converted and he's told, I'm going to show you, the Lord tells Ananias that Paul's going to see how much he's going to suffer. How much he's going to suffer.

Paul says in Philippians 1, it's granted to us not just to believe in Him, but it's also graciously given to us that we should suffer. Suffer. Feel bodily weak.

Feel inwardly weak. A fear. Fear if the Lord Jesus in the garden, Jesus did not sin.

Him asking for the cup to pass, that was not an example. There's no sin there. But there is a weight of the reality of what Christ is going to face.

And Paul, in a similar way, could feel that reality weighing upon him. He just said the anxiety of all the churches. Paul feels weak.

He doesn't have the strength. And he looks and says what happened right as a new Christian, right in this first recorded persecution of mine as I'm in that basket, that shows my weakness. It shows my weakness.

Bodily weakness. Inwardly weakness. I mean, there Paul is in that basket.

You've got people holding the rope. And they're putting them through that side. And it appears they didn't have troops all around.

It's just troops at the gate. Troops in different areas. You have Cain or Aretas, one in your head.

You've got the Jews, one in your head. Imagine being in that basket. Wouldn't it be a little nerve-racking? Is the rope going to hold? Am I going to make it? When I do make it down there, do I do what the spies did in Jericho? Do I hide in the forest three days and wait for all the troops to go out and then leave? What do I do? It's so easy to think about it as not a big deal.

It's so easy to think about Paul being invincible. Paul looks at that and says, that's how weak I was. The situation I was put in was one of weakness.

He left the city hiding in a basket that he had planned to come in there triumphantly to persecute Christians and lead them to death. What a turn of events! You know, that happens to some of us. You've got the person they're trying to conquer in the world, and then they get converted and they realize all these ambitions were but vanity.

And they turn around and they realize the world's going to think I'm nuts to go in this direction. That it's one fool of absolute weakness. I'm not going to make as much money.

I'm not going to this and that. But they realize, you know what? Christianity is full of weakness. And their decisions, I'm going to make that the world's going to mock.

The world's going to think we're fools. That's fine. So when Paul recounted this in 2 Corinthians 11, where was his emphasis? How does what happened in Damascus show his weakness? And one thing to note here, if you just read 2 Corinthians 11 and you don't know about Acts 9, you get to the end of v. 32 and what does it say? They were guarding the city of Damascus in order to do what? Seize him.

What does it say in Acts 9? They were guarding the city in order to do what? Kill. Kill him. Look, there are other places that talk about seizing someone and it didn't mean they're going to right away die.

I don't think Paul here in recounting it is trying to primarily bring to people's minds, hey, look how close I was to physically dying and the threat that I faced. It doesn't look like that was his prime emphasis here in recounting what had happened here. Here one thing is he focuses on in Acts 9 and in 2 Corinthians 11.

In both places, v. 33 in 2 Corinthians 11, he says, I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands. In both places, Paul talks about being in a basket. What if Paul's emphasis here is the means of escape and the situation he was in in that basket? He's looking at that and in his mind, that is really what he's saying that was so humiliating and weak and vulnerable.

I was put in that type of situation. I could have easily been killed and whatever he's emphasizing here, he says I'm not lying. So you would assume he's lying.

You would assume here he's defending his apostleship and he brings in this humiliating situation that happened right out of the gate as a Christian and he says I'm not lying in what I'm about to share. I'm not lying about that. It actually really happened.

Would someone with power hide in a basket? No. They wouldn't do that. They wouldn't hide in a basket.

It's kind of like Paul saying, look, the very first thing I did after I was converted was I ran away. I realize it looks like he went to Arabia first and then he came back, but there's a sense of running that's happening. And what delivered him from this situation? Was it his own power that got him out? No.

It absolutely was the providence of God. They did not find him and they did not kill him in that he got out. God allowed that to happen.

You think about Jesus. What did they do when Jesus is hanging on a cross? They mocked Him. Come down from there.

Deliver yourself. Right? Weakness. Naked on a cross.

And they're mocking Him and He has the power to do it. To deliver Himself. He doesn't in order to fulfill and finish the work that we could be redeemed.

So here Paul is hanging in a basket. Weakness. There Jesus is hanging on a cross.

Weakness. Why don't you come out and fight, Paul? Christ, why don't you come down from that cross? Right? But that's not God's way. Christianity is not some religion of a bunch of tough guys.

That's not it. And it's interesting, in Paul's day, there was something called the wall crown. This is a military honor.

Listen to what someone wrote about this. The wall crown was presented to the first soldier to go up and over the wall of an enemy city. And I'm assuming survive it.

Their reward was made of gold and fashion to look like the turreted wall of a fortified city. Right? So you're in a day and age where you've got soldiers. You're going to war.

You want the wall crown? Who's the first soldier up over that wall? Here Paul's doing the opposite. Going down a wall, hiding. It doesn't look like bravery, especially in the eyes of Roman people.

It looks like utter foolishness, utter weakness. You're saying your God is the King of the universe and that Christ is Lord? And you've got to hide like that in a basket and run away? That doesn't look that impressive. That's what they're telling Christ on the cross.

You're the Messiah. Come down and save yourself. Do something.

Unlike the proud, vain glory of military people, Paul's career opened up with a note of humiliation, as one person said. You join the military, right? I've heard of guys that join the military, they're planning to be special forces, and then one guy ended up breaking his foot and he ended up cutting potatoes or something like that. You don't write back to your family and say this is what happened.

The lost man would be tempted to lie and cover it up out of embarrassment. It's like Paul, he enters in as a Christian and in a way, he's writing his family and he's saying, I'm hiding in a basket, people are trying to kill me. It's like where are the powers of Christ? Where is the army of this One you say is the Messiah? Where is it at? I mean, it all appears so weak.

And this is with disciples at one point who they had the idea that Christ had come to set up some earthly kingdom. And they had this perception that there was going to be earthly power. Paul's a contradiction of that.

That's not happening in his life. So, Paul appeals to Acts 9 in defending his apostleship, boasting of things that show his weakness. And that shows us the way Paul thought.

Paul thought he was a Christian. Do you think this way? Do you look at the situations in your past where you were utterly weak? Do you actually look at that as something by which you could actually boast in? To glory in. To glory in a situation you faced where you lacked strength.

Because again, in God's eyes, that's precious. Because what happens, we're going to see, God comes in and gives the power. Then God gets the glory.

And as Paul says, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. Think of this contrast again. Think about Saddam Hussein.

Those who found him, they said this. He was in the bottom of a hole. This is the former leader of this massive military over there in Iraq? Afghanistan? Yeah.

He was in the bottom of a hole with no way to fight back. He was caught like a rat. It's very ironic that he was in a hole in the ground right across from the river of those places where he built palaces where he robbed the Iraqi people.

I mean, I looked at those palaces. They're impressive. He had all these palaces.

And there you've got Saddam Hussein dug a little hole in the ground with a pipe going out of it in order to get some air, and he's hiding there. What a contrast. And they wrote an article, Caught Like a Rat.

Now, he was there because he lost his power. His power, his government, his forces were defeated. Why was Paul in the basket? Was he in the basket because he had lost his power? No, he was there willingly joining forces with the weaklings of Christianity who were persecuted, hunted, hiding in caves, beaten, tortured, martyred, and he joins that group.

And he looks at that not embarrassed. Saddam Hussein, a picture of him coming out of that hole, it's embarrassing to think that man was a great leader over there. What a contrast.

Here, Paul is totally different. Willingly went from being a powerful Jew. I say willingly, but the Lord opened his eyes.

God transformed that man's life on that road. The Lord did it. Praise be to God.

He changed this person. And now he views his weakness and lack of strength as a good thing. He actually views it as something that is a credential of his apostleship that he could appeal to it and say, look at that weakness.

That's not something to be ashamed of. That's not something to hide. The Christian life is one of humiliation.

It really is. Again, we don't experience it. We just don't experience it much.

Are we going to in the years to come? I don't know. We'll see what happens in our country. But these verses will mean a lot more for us if that day comes.

So look at 2 Corinthians 12. Just right after this section, he says I must go on boasting. And then he talks about this thorn in the flesh that was given to him.

He says in v. 9, but he said to me, the Lord, v. 8, it says the Lord. He's asking Him to remove this thorn. Whatever this thorn is, we know it was there to keep Paul from becoming conceited and proud.

V. 7, and conceited and proud is the opposite of weakness. It's the opposite of being weak. It's the opposite of lacking power.

And he says in v. 9, but the Lord said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. Why? For My power is made perfect in weakness. Well, that doesn't sound that logical in the eyes of the world.

Therefore, in view of this reality that My power is made perfect in weakness, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, my lack of strength. Why? So that the power of Christ may rest upon Me. For the sake of Christ, then I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities.

Why? For when I am weak, then I am strong. You know, it's one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life. You feel so weak.

I love again that text in Chronicles that Jehoshaphat, you're just coming against this large army and you say, Lord, won't You execute judgment on our enemies? For they are many. And we're powerless against this great horde that comes against us. We don't know what to do.

But, our eyes are on You. In the same way, Paul is saying, yeah, I'm weak. I no longer have power in the eyes of the world.

They're trying to kill me. I have all these burdens upon me where there's an inner weakness, he says in the beginning of the letter. So it's to teach me to not rely on myself.

It's to teach me a lesson to rely on God who raises the dead. And here Paul is saying, because when you're weak, you're strong. Well, you're only strong in your weakness if that weakness drives you to Him.

Right? If you just sit there in weakness and self-pity, that's not going to do anything good. You've got to go to the Lord. Paul's mindset, it had changed.

He's now boasting in his weakness so that Christ's power will be channeled in his life. Is that your mindset? Is your mindset to boast in glory in your lack of strength, and by doing so, you magnify God's strength? Or does it subtly start to creep in? The self-reliance. You know what? Suffering makes it easy to not be self-reliant, right? You get hurt.

You get cancer. You get in a city where they're trying to kill you. You're not going to walk out the door and try to rescue yourself.

You've got one option and that's to go to the Lord in the midst of all of your weakness and ask for His help. So you see, Paul had this mindset. Paul glories in that which shows his weakness and lack of strength.

It's incredible. And this is not him boasting in something he should be embarrassed of. It's boasting in something that as he's weak, he's relying on the Lord.

This isn't weakness in the idea that you interview a sports player and the sports player, you say, what's your highlight of your career? And he says, well, the season when we lost every game. Right? And you say, wow, that's full of weakness. That's not the idea.

Paul's not doing that. Paul actually wins the game. Every game and as an undefeated season.

Because of the weakness, he relied on the Lord and therefore there was victory and there was not sin. So weakness, as one says, is a sure evidence that the power was of God and not of himself. You see, the Lord wants to get all the credit.

And He should. He absolutely should. I labored more than the rest, but it was not I, it was the Lord.

It's like Paul's constantly trying to have a right thinking about what's happening in his life, what's going on in his ministry, and pointing it back to the Lord. Even as he's defending his apostleship here, he's wrestling with what to say and how to say it and maintain humility and a right emphasis. You know, this is not really the standard of the false apostles.

Some would even say that everything written before here, it points the view that at Corinth, these people had come in with this idea that the whole Christian life was one of triumph. Right? Everyone speaks really well. There's a ton of authority that's going to happen.

Public speaking. Everyone's eloquent. Everyone's having all sorts of visions.

People are having all sorts of wonders and mighty works. It doesn't look like his opponents are bringing in weakness as something to boast in. They're not highlighting on that aspect.

And yet, Paul does. Paul does. So you can't assume that all churches have a right thought and mindset about viewing weakness as actually something that's going to glorify the Lord and point to Him.

There are many false teachers in this day and age who teach a prosperity Gospel. And you go listen to them, you sit there and you're thinking, man, there's going to be no suffering in our lives. I mean, it's all triumphant.

Everything is going to be great. Financially it's going to be great. I mean, the prosperity Gospel is the opposite of this.

You don't hear them boasting in their weakness and saying this is how weak and destitute we were. We had nothing and then the Lord provided. You don't hear them doing that.

And that's dangerous because there are false teachers with their overly triumphant views that are keeping you from having a right mindset. And if you don't have a right mindset of boasting in your weakness and seeing your weakness as an opportunity for the power of God to be on your life, then you won't have His power. And you're going to be sitting there wondering what's wrong.

The Christian life is supposed to be triumphant. And I'm supposed to be trying really hard, but there's not going to be the power because there's not the going to the Lord in the midst of that trial. So can you look back? Is this your mindset? Can you look back as an early believer and boast in your weakness? And not say I remained weak, but in the midst of my weakness, I took it to the Lord.

I went to Him. I relied on Him. If you've just been converted, it's amazing what God will give you thorns in the flesh.

He will do whatever it takes to get rid of conceited pride and self-reliance. He'll deal with you. And don't look at that dealing as a bad thing.

Look at it as this is a blessing. I'm a child and my father is disciplining me that I might share in His holiness. Weakness should drive you to rely on the Lord.

Paul said before Cana Grippa, this is when the Jews were going to seize Him in the temple, he said these incredible words in Acts 26-22. He said, to this day, I have had the help that comes from God. We can say the same thing.

To this day, I've had the help that comes from God. When do we not experience that help? When we look at our weakness incorrectly and we're going in our own power, in our own strength, and we're not saying, Lord, help me. We're trying to do it in our own power.

It fails miserably. Think about this, Paul here, what more so validates Paul being an apostle? His visions and heavenly journey? I mean, he brings out this heavenly journey, and he doesn't even accredit it to himself. You get the sense that it was his experience.

But what he really makes known to them is his weakness. His weakness, his sufferings. What he had to endure.

That validates him. I mean, you meet a Christian, what's one of the biggest things that encourages you that they're the real deal? I even remember Tim, he just got back from Manchester and he was telling me about a man over there he really appreciated. He felt like the man was like a certain godly brother.

And Tim said the reason the man impacted him was the man had humility. You see, humility. That speaks of a weakness, of a reliance on God, of recognizing that I'm insufficient.

That type of person is a Christian that makes an impact in people's lives. We need more humility. We need to think more in a correct way.

Well, think about this, what about the Old Testament examples of people escaping in a basket on the wall? Is there any type of parallel here? You know, the spies escaping Jericho. Well, I'd say this, if you wanted to try to think of a parallel, maybe it could be this. What did the spies do when they escaped from Jericho? Did they escape and never come back? They came back, and they brought the military, and they took out that city eventually, right? They walked around the city and the walls fell down and they had victory.

Was there any victory in Damascus? There was. But it was in the spiritual realm. Despite the fact Paul was hiding in a basket, going over the wall to escape, what did he leave behind? Did he leave behind a bunch of troops? He did.

He left behind people who were converted and he left behind the Word of God. And that Word of God can spread within those walls and bring people to the truth. So is there a parallel? Well, you know what, Jericho fell and ultimately Damascus to some degree it fell in the sense that people were brought to the knowledge of the truth and brought out of the kingdom of darkness.

Here's another question we should ask ourselves. Why was Paul hunted? Was he hunted because he was speaking strongly on the Internet about his political views? No. It was because he preached Jesus as the Messiah.

He was being evangelistic. If people are going to hunt us as a church, we want it to be the fact that we're preaching Christ and Him crucified. That's why they're going to put a target on our back.

It's not going to be something political. It's not going to be whatever. All these other different things.

It's going to be because we're evangelizing with the message of life. Ask yourself this, how much room for weakness does your idea of Christianity have? When you feel that weakness, that lack of strength, can you say you know the secret that Paul says in Philippians 4 for facing all circumstances? He said, I learned the secret. I have strength through Christ who strengthens me.

Do you know that? Do you experience that? Here's another question. How much room for the power of the Holy Spirit does your Christianity have? Do you want the power of the Spirit? How are you going to get it? Through hearing in faith? Through weakly relying on the Lord? To going to Him and saying, Lord, I'm not sufficient to kill sin this week. I need the power of the Spirit.

Lord, I need Your help. So we need a Christianity that has a lot of room for weakness, but not weakness where people are remaining in some weak self-pity spot of feeling like I have no strength, I cannot do anything. But they go out relying on the Lord, experiencing His power, and something happens and God gets the glory.

So weakness is not something you should run from. You should be content with it. 2 Corinthians 12.10 For the sake of Christ, I am content with weakness.

Physical weakness, inner weakness, a lack of strength. I'm content with being insulted. I'm content with hardships, persecution, calamities that happen like Job's.

I'm content with them. For when they happen, I am weak. I do feel overwhelmed.

But then I'm strong. Because Christ helps. He provides strength in the midst of weakness.

As one said, Paul's weakness has not stood in the way of the working of God's power, but rather has provided the very conditions in which it can be displayed. Let me read that again. Paul's weakness has not stood in the way of the working of God's power, but rather has provided the very conditions in which it can be displayed.

A proud, arrogant Paul would have only hindered the Gospel's advance. A humiliated, frail Paul, led as a captive in God's triumph, has accelerated the Gospel's progress so that the fragrance of knowing God spreads everywhere. Look, we've got a lot of new Christians.

What trial are you presently facing? And are you seeing this as an opportunity to yes, be filled with weakness, but to in that time learn to trust the Lord and have the Spirit's help and power strengthen you and rely on Him? Again, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1, this trial we had was so we would learn no longer to rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. And Paul, right as a new Christian, faces persecution, and he looks at it and says this shows how much strength I lack. It's not a bad thing.

You know, this passage and the Lord's words to Paul that He will suffer much for His name, this is a reminder to all of us we're going to have to suffer. We're going to have to suffer. Again, I already mentioned this, but think about the thorn in the flesh.

God gave Paul a thorn. Whatever it is, we know its purpose. To keep Paul from being conceited.

Do you have a thorn in your life? A thorn is not something... I'm not saying you have sin in your life. You know, a young person who says, yeah, the thorn in my life is lust. It's not the point.

It's not sin. Something non-sinful in your life. It could be physical suffering.

It could be something internal. The Lord gave that to Paul to keep him from being conceited. Do you view that thorn in that way? Or do you want it to be gone? Or is it actually there placed perfectly by a heavenly Father in order to teach you something specifically that you need to learn and you're struggling to learn? And actually to keep you in the race.

He gives you the thorn to keep you humble. And then when you're humble, there's power. And then actually something happens.

What if you're not a Christian here today? What if you're lost? We invite you to join a people who hide people like the Apostle Paul in a basket, lower them over the wall to get out of the city, to escape being killed. We invite you to join those who have no governmental power. We have no armies.

Most of us don't even have weapons. And those of us who have weapons, they're for self-defense. We're weak.

What's going to happen in the next couple of years? They could take massive advantage of churches. They already are to some degree. What's going to come? Do you want to join up with this? Do you want to join up with those who believe that there's a Jewish carpenter who lived a perfect life, who's the Son of God, He went to the cross, was hung there naked, mocked.

Come down. Save yourself. And He died.

But see, He died for His enemies. He died for those who mocked Him. And one of those thieves on that cross was mocking Him.

And one of those thieves saw that Christ, one moment he thought He was foolish, the next moment he saw that You're the Son of God. And that man was converted. In one moment, you can believe in the foolish message of the cross of Christ, of Jesus crucified, and have all your sins pardoned, and removed as far as the east is from the west, and you can be given life.

And Paul says the foolishness of God is wiser than men. The weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers.

Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were noble birth.

God took the foolish things of the world, the shame, the lies. So, that is the first recorded persecution of the Apostle Paul. Escaping in a basket from a city where a king, Aretas, and the Jews were trying to seize Paul and kill him.

And cut his head off, probably. And take his life. And Paul, years later, he looks back on that trial, and he says, you know what? Me in that basket, the suffering, trying to escape, people wanting me dead, that shows my weakness.

And I boast in that. He was not ashamed that Christianity is so full of weakness. He gloried in that weakness.

Because when he gloried in that weakness, there was power from God. The God who raises the dead. Father, Lord, we want to please You with our lives and everything that we do.

I pray, Lord, You'd help my brothers and sisters in the midst of all of their weakness, in the midst of my weakness. Lord, here we do these things in faith. And Lord, sometimes we do something in faith and even in the doing of it, we feel weak.

We feel a lack of Your presence and Your help. But Lord, nonetheless, we do it in faith. I pray, Lord, You'd help us all the more to be a people who rely on You.

Lord, a people who take our fears to You, our uncertainties to You. Lord, help us. Give us strength.

Lord, give us more of Your Spirit that we could leave that upper room and we could go out into this world and see this world turned upside down for the sake of Your name. Lord, we need You. We thank You that You provide us strength.

We thank You that You'll provide all of our needs. We thank You that You have all the riches in glory. Lord, we glory in Your name today.

We bless You and we thank You so much for being our God, for saving us. Lord, we're not ashamed of the Gospel. We're not ashamed of this foolish, weak message in the eyes of the world.

Lord, we think it is glorious, incredible, and that there's nothing greater than Christ crucified. And so we thank You for sending Your Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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