

Power through weakness

by John Stott

This sermon focuses on the theme of power through weakness as seen in the Corinthian correspondence. It highlights the weakness of the message of the cross, the weakness of the Corinthian converts, and the weakness of the evangelist Paul himself. The central message is that God's power is best displayed in human weakness, emphasizing humility and reliance on the power of God rather than human strength or abilities.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:17, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Romans 5:8, Philippians 2:5

Topics: "Power in Weakness", "Humility and Reliance on God"

Description

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Transcript

Well, good morning, everybody. Good morning. Our second Corinthian study was the passage read to us by David just now.

I hope you have your Bible open at 1 Corinthians chapter one. And you may like also to turn to the outline on the convention program, which is on page 32. Our topic this morning is power through weakness.

Now, at first sight, as we read these verses, you would think that they all had to do with power, especially the power of God. Consider these five verses quickly. Chapter one, verse 17, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Next, verse 18, the message of the cross to us who are being saved is the power of God. Verse 24, to those whom God has called, Christ is the power of God. Chapter two, verse four, my message and preaching were with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

And verse five, so that your faith might rest on God's power. And for the sake of completeness, I think we could add a couple of verses from 2 Corinthians. That is chapter four, verse seven, to show that the all-surpassing power is from God.

Or again, chapter 12, verse nine, so that Christ's power may rest upon me. So here you see are seven references to power. The power of God, the power of Christ, the power of the cross, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this concentration on power makes an immediate appeal to us at the beginning of the 21st century. Because we live in a society which positively worships power. Indeed, the three major human ambitions, the pursuit of money, fame, and influence, are all a concealed drive for power.

We see this thirst for power everywhere. In politics, and in public life. In big business, and in industry.

In the professions. In primitive societies, in which the shaman or witch doctor trades secret power for money. And unfortunately, we also see it in the church.

In top-level ecclesiastical power struggles. In denominational disputes. In some local churches, in which the clergy hold all the power, the reins of power, in their own hands, and refuse to share it, either with lay people or still less with young people.

We see it in parachurch organizations which dream of expanding into world empires. And we also see it here in the pulpit, which is a very dangerous place for any child of Adam to occupy. Power.

It's more intoxicating than alcohol, and it's more addictive than drugs. I think it was Steve Brady the other night who quoted that well-known epigram of Lord Acton. Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Now, Lord Acton, you may know, was a 19th century British politician, a friend and advisor of Prime Minister Gladstone, and he was very disturbed in his day to see democracy being undermined by this lust for power. You may not know that Lord Acton was also a Roman Catholic. And in 1870, which was the first Vatican Council, he opposed the decision of the council to attribute infallibility to the Pope.

He saw it as power corrupting the church. Now, moving from the Roman Catholic scene to the evangelical scene, I want to tell you frankly that I'm scared of the contemporary evangelical hunger for power. Even the quest for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Be honest. Why do we want to receive power? Is it honestly power for witness? Power for holiness? Power for humble service? Or is it really a mask for personal ambition so that we may boost our own ego, minister to our own self-importance, extend our influence to impress, to dominate, to manipulate? The lust for power is a very dangerous thing. I go further and say that even some evangelism can be a disguised form of imperialism because it can build human empires instead of building the kingdom of God.

Friends, there is only one imperialism that is Christian, and that is a concern for his imperial majesty, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And all other imperialisms are sinful. So, the Bible contains clear warnings about the use and abuse of power, and one of them is our text for this morning.

But before I come to it, I just mention that in the Old Testament, we read of Uzziah, or Azariah, King of Judah. Do you remember this? He was greatly helped until he became powerful. And after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.

And in contrast, in the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect symbol of humble weakness, the weakness of humility. Of course, he said, you know, that those who are regarded as rulers over the

Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so among you.

Let everyone who wants to be great among you be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you be the slave of all. Because he went on, even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. In other words, Jesus came not to wield power, but to renounce it.

Not to be served, but to serve and to give. Tell you, friends, that at no point does the Christian mind come into more violent collision with the secular mind than in its insistence on the weakness of humility. The wisdom of the world does not greatly value power.

It does not, I'm sorry, greatly value humility. We've drunk in more than we realize of the power philosophy of that German philosopher, Nietzsche. Nietzsche dreamed of the rise of a ruler race, an Aryan race, that would be tough, masculine, brash, and oppressive.

Nietzsche worshiped power. Nietzsche despised Jesus for his weakness. The ideal of Nietzsche was the *übermensch*, the superman.

The ideal of Jesus was the little child. There is no possibility of a compromise between those two images. We have to choose between them.

I'm sorry for the long introduction. I thought it was necessary, again, to see what we're going to study in the light of the contemporary lust for power. So the central theme of the Corinthian correspondence is not power, as I may have seemed to indicate so far, but power through weakness.

Divine power through human weakness. That is the major theme of the Corinthian correspondence, and particularly of the text in front of us this morning. The Apostle Paul brings together three striking illustrations of this very same principle.

First, in verses 17 to 25, power through weakness in the gospel itself, because the weakness of the cross is the power of God. Secondly, in verses 26 to 31 of the first chapter, we see power through weakness in the converts. Because God has chosen the weak people to shame the strong.

And then thirdly, in chapter two, verses one to five, we have power through weakness in Paul the evangelist. Verses three and four, I came to you in weakness, looking to a demonstration of the Spirit's power. Thus the gospel, the converts, and the preachers, or if you prefer it, the evangel, the evangelized and the evangelist, all exhibit the same fundamental principle.

God's power operates best in human weakness. Weakness is the arena in which God can most effectively manifest his divine power. That's the theme.

God help us to absorb it and to live it out in our lives. So we look at the first example, power through weakness in the gospel itself, verses 17 and 18 to verse 25. Well, every communicator, every Christian communicator, and every non-Christian communicator has to answer two questions.

What have I got to say, and how am I going to say it? The first is the message, and the second is the method of communication. Well, we need to know that in the first century A.D. of Greco-Roman culture, these two questions were readily answered. The what of communication was philosophy.

The how of communication was rhetoric. An elaborate ornamentation of language and style. But Paul immediately renounced both.

He refused to preach the gospel, as we saw yesterday, verse 17, in wisdom of word. In place of human philosophy, he put the cross. In place of human rhetoric, the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the cross was both the wisdom of God and the power of God. And Paul enlarges on this position twice over. First in verses 18 to 21, and then in verses 22 and 25.

It's the same message, repeated, the hammer blows of repetition that is so important in all our communication, even today. I'm going to take verse 21 only in the first example, because it's a beautifully chiseled sentence. The summary of it is this, that whereas the world, the non-Christian world, the secular world, failed through its own wisdom to come to know God, it pleased God through the folly of the gospel of the kirugma to save those who believe.

We could meditate on that for a long time. So beautifully is it chiseled and constructed. But I want to go on to the repetition of it in verses 22 to 25.

Here Paul elaborates the same thesis, namely wisdom through the folly of the cross and power through the weakness of the cross. And to do so, he divides the human race into three sections, Jews, Gentiles or Greeks, and Christians, and he pinpoints the essential difference between them. First, verse 22, at the beginning, Jews demand miraculous signs.

They were expecting a political messiah who would drive the Roman legions into the Mediterranean Sea, and he would reestablish Israel's lost national sovereignty. And so from every revolutionary, every messianic pretender, the Jews demanded appropriate evidence. Give us a sign of power to indicate to us that you are able to do what is expected of the messiah and drive the Roman legions out of the country.

So Jews demanded miraculous signs. They demanded appropriate evidence. They wanted signs of power in order to give plausibility to the messianic pretender.

That's why the Jews kept asking Jesus, what signs do you do that we may believe in you? If you are the messiah, we need these signs of power to indicate and give evidence that you are. So that's the first thing. The Jews demand miraculous signs.

Secondly, the Greeks look for, search for wisdom. Well, we all know that. Greece had a very long tradition of brilliant philosophy.

The Greeks believed in the autonomy of the human mind. They listened eagerly to every new idea, every speculation, so long as it seemed to them to be reasonable. So the Jews demanded power and the Greeks were in search of wisdom.

Now over against them, there is a third category of Christian believers. Whether Jews or Gentiles, we preach, this is verse 23 if you're following, Christ crucified. So notice the contrasting verbs.

The Jews make demands. The Greeks are seeking and searching, but we proclaim somebody. We proclaim the messiah crucified for us on the cross.

So there the contrast is very clear in the three verbs. What is characteristic of Christian preachers is that they're not demanding something, they're not seeking something, they are proclaiming someone. But a crucified messiah was a contradiction in terms.

If he was going to drive the Roman legions out of the country, how could he be crucified on the cross? The very word messiah meant power, splendor, majesty, triumph, victory, all those involved in the word messiah. But crucifixion was the very opposite. The word crucifixion meant weakness, humiliation, and defeat.

So the message of Christ crucified provoked different reactions to the Jews. First, he was a stumbling block. They were expecting this military messiah riding on a war horse at the head of an army.

And what were they offered instead? They were offered a pathetic, crucified weakling. Why, it was an insult to their national pride. How could God's messiah end his life under the condemnation of his own people? How could he end his life under the curse of God on a cross? It was impossible.

It was inconceivable. A crucified messiah, you can't put the two words together. They make a nonsense.

The cross was an absolute stumbling block to those who worship power. Now, secondly, to the Gentiles, Christ crucified was foolishness. Crucifixion in the ancient Roman world was not only a painful execution, it was also a public humiliation.

It was reserved for the dregs of society. It was reserved for slaves and criminals. No free man or citizen was ever crucified.

It was inconceivable to them that the son of God should end his life on a cross. Cicero, the great Roman orator, said on one occasion, the very name of the cross, the very word of the cross is absent, not only from the body of Roman citizens because they're never crucified, but also from their minds. They wouldn't even think about it or imagine it from their eyes.

They would never watch a crucifixion, and from their ears, they would never listen to talk about it. So horrific was the concept of crucifixion to them. But thirdly, to those who are called, verse 24, that is to God's own people, irrespective as to whether they were Jews or Gentiles ethnically, Christ crucified is not weakness, but the power of God.

It is not foolishness. It is the wisdom of God. Verse 25, for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Now let me pause a few moments for some application. Friends, this whole text is embarrassingly relevant to us today. To be sure, there are no first-century Jews or no first-century Greeks who have survived to today, but there are many modern equivalents.

First, the cross is still a stumbling block to all those who, like Nietzsche, worship power, who are confident in their own ability to get to heaven under their own steam. They are confident of themselves, or at least if they cannot earn their salvation, they're convinced that they can contribute to it. We have to say no, eternal life or salvation is a totally non-contributory gift of God.

Do you know the great saying of William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, until he died in the 40s? He said this, the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is, is there anything we can contribute to our redemption? The only thing of my very own that I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed. That's all, otherwise it's a non-contributory gift of God, and we have to humble ourselves to receive it as a free gift. I remember trying to explain it to a fellow undergraduate in Cambridge, he was very smooth and aristocratic, and I was trying to humble him, tell him that he couldn't

do anything to earn his own salvation, and suddenly, without warning, he shouted at the top of his voice, horrible, horrible, horrible! Do you know, I was quite surprised.

I didn't know I'd said anything horrible, but I've often thanked God for that experience. It gave me a glimpse into the arrogance of the human heart, because we worship power. We want to get there ourselves, make our own contribution.

But the cross tells us it's impossible. Christ came and died to save us because we cannot save ourselves. So the cross is a stumbling block to the morally proud.

But secondly, it's a stumbling block, or it's foolishness to the intellectually proud. It makes no sense to them. The best example I've found in our own day is A.J. Ayer, author of that, the Oxford Philosopher, author of a book called Language, Truth, and Logic, one of the pioneers of so-called logical positivism who became Sir Alfred Ayer before he died, and here he hated Christianity.

He lost no opportunity to be rude about the gospel. And this is Sir Alfred Ayer. He said, of all the historic religions, there are good reasons for regarding Christianity as the worst.

Why? Because it rests on the allied doctrines of original sin and vicarious atonement, which are intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous. That's our precious gospel, intellectually contemptible, morally outrageous. That's the wisdom of the world.

But to God's people, the cross is not weakness, but power, and it's not folly, but wisdom. It's the power of God because through it, God saves those who cannot save themselves, and it's the wisdom of God because through the cross, God has solved not only our problem of sin and guilt, but his own problem. And it is not wrong to speak of a divine problem or a divine dilemma.

We cannot avoid doing so. It arises from God's character of holy love. God's dilemma was how could he express his holiness in judging and punishing sin without compromising his love for sinners? Or again, how could God express his love in forgiving sinners without compromising his justice in the judgment of sin? How could God be at one and the same time a just God and a savior? And God's answer was and still is the cross because on the cross, he took our place, bore our sin, died our death, and so paid our debt.

And on the cross, God demonstrated, as we read in Romans 3 and 5, he demonstrated his justice, Romans 3, 25, and he demonstrated his love, Romans 5, verse 8. And in that double demonstration of love and justice, the wisdom of God is displayed. Wisdom, his wisdom in the foolishness of the cross and his power in its weakness. Well, all that is power through weakness in the gospel itself.

Now, a second example, more briefly. Power through weakness in the converts, verses 26 to 31. Paul had been inviting the Corinthians to reflect on the gospel and its weakness, and now he invites them to reflect on themselves and their weakness.

Consider the situation in Corinth, verses 26 to 28. Not many of you were wise by human standards of education, that is. Not many were influential in the community.

Not many were of noble birth. In other words, wisdom and power were not conspicuous among the Corinthians. Indeed, the opposite had been the case.

Verse 27, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He chose the weak things to shame the strong, and he chose the lowly things of the world, the despised things, the nothings, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are. It's the same theme, wisdom through folly and power through weakness.

So what was the purpose of God in this action? Why did God choose the weak and the foolish and the nonentities? Well, we're told the answer, verse 29 to 31. He did it so that nobody might boast in his presence, so that it might be clear beyond any doubt that the credit for their salvation belonged to God and to God alone. They couldn't strut round heaven like peacocks, displaying their plumage that they'd got there under their ins.

No, it was God chose the weak and the foolish to demonstrate that no human being may boast in his presence. And so, verse 30, it is because of him, God, that they, the Corinthians, were in Christ Jesus. They hadn't put themselves in Christ Jesus.

God had put them in Christ Jesus, and that's where they were. Consequence, Christ Jesus has become for us, on the one hand, the wisdom of God, and on the other, the power of God implied, namely, our righteousness, which is justification, our holiness, which is sanctification, and our redemption, which is the redemption of our bodies or our glorification. So all three tenses of salvation, past, present, and future, justification, sanctification, glorification, are all found as being due to God's sheer grace, to his wisdom and power, displayed in and through the cross.

It's wonderful. Therefore, I hope you always notice the therefores of scripture. Verse 31, therefore, he quotes Jeremiah nine, let him who boasts, no man boast in his wisdom, let the strong man not glory in his strength, or the rich man glory in his riches, but let everybody boast in the Lord, for all other boasting is excluded.

Well, it's evident, isn't it, from this paragraph, that most of the Corinthian converts were drawn from the lower ranks of society. Mostly, they belonged neither to the intelligentsia, nor to the city's influential leaders, nor to its aristocracy. On the whole, they were uneducated, poor, socially despised, and probably most of them were slaves.

The fact that the gospel reached, saved, and changed them was a dramatic illustration of this principle of power through weakness. God's power displayed in human weakness. And what's the application of that? What is Paul implying? Is Paul saying that God never calls and saves those who are clever, and wealthy, and influential, or socially prominent? No, I hope you'll agree it can't mean that.

I mean, Saul Tarsus himself was a notable exception. He had a powerful intellect and personality, and yet he'd been saved. And even in Corinth, Luke tells us in Acts 18, Crispus was converted, and he was the ruler of the synagogue.

And in Romans 16, we read greetings from Gaius, who was wealthy enough to accommodate and give hospitality to the whole church in his house. And then there was Erastus, who was the city's director of public works. And both letters imply that some Corinthian Christians were wealthy because Paul appeals to them to give generously to the impoverished church in Judea.

So we can't say that God never calls and saves these people. Now, the key to the interpretation of these verses is that, verse 26, Paul writes, not that not any of you, but that not many of you. Selina, the countess

of Huntingdon, the 18th century evangelical aristocrat, the personal friend of John Wesley and George Whitefield, used to say, because she was trying to introduce the British upper classes to the gospel, she said, I thank God for the letter M in the word many.

I hope you get the point. So what do we conclude from this? Is it wrong to take the gospel to such elitist groups as students and professional people? No. Paul's emphasis is that God's power operates only in the salvation of the weak, and therefore, if there's strong hope to be saved, they've got to become weak first.

They've got to acknowledge their inability to save themselves. Oh, they may be influential in the community, they may have wealth, they may be very clever, but they've got to humble themselves and admit their weakness in this area that they cannot, by anything they do or contribute, save themselves. Otherwise, God's grace will never reach them.

As Jesus put it, the kingdom of God belongs to children, and therefore, if you adults want to get into it, you've got to become like a little child, because the only citizens of the kingdom of God are children and the childlike. It's exactly the same message. Luther understood it.

Listen to this. Only the prisoner shall be free. Only the poor shall be rich.

Only the weak shall be strong. Only the humble shall be exalted. Only the empty shall be filled, and only nothing shall become something.

Well, so far, we've looked at the two illustrations that Paul gives us, power through weakness in the gospel itself, power through weakness in the Corinthian converts, and his third example is power through weakness in the evangelist, verses one to five. Not only were the Corinthian converts weak and feeble, but the apostle was himself weak and feeble too. As the great Hudson Taylor sometimes said, all God's giants have been weak people.

And this was in contrast to the false teachers who like to think of themselves and call themselves super apostles. They were nothing of the kind. They were proud, arrogant, conceited, self-confident.

They boasted of their wisdom and their authority and their power. So notice the cultural background to this situation. Rhetoric, which I've already mentioned, was a systematic academic discipline taught and practiced throughout the Greco-Roman world.

I'm quoting from an authority. I don't need, perhaps, to give you the references, but in fact, in the first century AD, rhetoric had become the primary discipline in Roman higher education. In public debates, in the law courts, and at funerals, the rhetoric of display and ornamentation was tremendously popular as a form of public entertainment.

Dr. Donald Carson, well known in Keswick circles, has written, it is difficult for us at the beginning of the 21st century to appreciate how influential was this allegiance to rhetoric, ornamentation of speech. Gradually, it became an end in itself. Mere ornamentation with a desire to please the crowd, but without any serious content and without any serious intent.

A sophist was an orator who emphasized style over substance and form over content. That was the situation in Corinth. The Corinthian Christians had assimilated the rhetorical culture of their day, and they were evaluating Paul's speech according to the commonly accepted criteria.

But Paul was resolved not to use ornamental rhetoric, lest the audience focus on form rather than on content. And in this situation, Paul made that double renunciation that I have already mentioned. He said, not with words of human wisdom, chapter two, verse one, not with eloquence of superior wisdom.

So in both texts, he uses the same vocabulary. Sophia, wisdom, is human philosophy. Logos, utterance, is human rhetoric.

And he renounced the philosophy and the rhetoric of the Greeks. But the Corinthians loved both, while Paul rejected both. In place of philosophy, nothing but the cross.

In place of rhetoric, I came to you in weakness. As J.B. Phillips puts it, nervous and rather shaky. So he relied on the demonstration, the apodixis, which the Holy Spirit gives to words spoken in human weakness.

Well, I don't know about you, but I think that these words would not be a very accurate description to many of us contemporary evangelists. Weakness is not an obvious characteristic of ours, no. And in theological colleges, homiletics classes, classics in the topic of preaching, aim to inculcate self-confidence in nervous students.

If Paul had enrolled in one of our Bible colleges or theological colleges today, he would have been regarded as very unpromising material. And since he was supposed to be a mature Christian, we might even have rebuked him and said, Paul, you've got no business to feel nervous. Don't you know what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit? You ought to be strong and confident and bold.

But Paul was of a different opinion. Listen, Paul was not afraid to admit that he was afraid. He came to them in weakness and fear and trembling.

True, he had this massive intellect and strong personality, but he was physically frail. We've not forgotten his thorn in the flesh. And he was emotionally vulnerable.

Second century tradition says that he was unattractive, small, and even ugly, with a bald head, beetle brows, bandy legs, and a hooked nose. That's second century tradition. His critics said that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible.

Chapter 10, verse 10. So he was nothing much to look at, and he was nothing much to listen to. And these disabilities would have disqualified him from succeeding in rhetoric.

So consequently, in his human weakness, he relied on the power of God. He called it a demonstration of the Spirit and the power, which the commentators seem to think that really means a demonstration of the power or by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because every Christian conversion involves a power encounter between Christ and the devil, in which the superior power of Jesus Christ is demonstrated.

And the Holy Spirit takes our words, spoken in human weakness, and carries them home with power to the heart, the mind, the conscience, and the will of the hearers, in such a way that they see and believe. This is the apodixis, the demonstration by the Holy Spirit and his power. Now, don't misunderstand this.

It's easy to misunderstand. This is not an invitation to suppress our personality. It is not an invitation to pretend we feel weak when we don't.

It's not an invitation to cultivate a fake frailty or to renounce arguments. Luke tells us in Acts 18 that the apostle continued to argue in Corinth and in the following cities that he visited. Look, the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Jesus, not in spite of the evidence, but because of the evidence, when he opens their eyes to attend to it.

Argumentation and the work of the Holy Spirit are not mutually incompatible. The Holy Spirit uses the truth of our argumentation to bring people to Christ, and we mustn't give up that thoughtful kind of proclamation of the gospel. So it isn't those things.

What it is rather is an honest acknowledgement that human beings cannot save souls, whether by their own personality or their rhetoric or any other power besides. Only the power of God can give sight to the blind and life to the dead, and he does it through the gospel of Christ crucified, proclaimed in the power of the Spirit. So the power in every power encounter is in the cross for content and in the Holy Spirit for communication.

I still have a little time, so before I conclude, I think I want to take the liberty of giving you an example from my own experience. I don't like speaking about myself, but perhaps you'll understand that this is intended to illustrate what Paul writes here in his letter. It's many years ago, it must be around about 1958 before many of you were born, that I was leading a mission in the University of Sydney in Australia.

It was a whole week-long student, university mission. It began one Sunday, it finished the next Sunday, and on the final Sunday afternoon, I lost my voice. Entirely and suddenly, I wasn't able to speak.

I didn't know what to do, but in the end, it was decided that I would do my best. The meeting was in the great hall of the university that seated more than 1,000 people, and just before it began, we were in the side room, and I invited the student leaders to come round me and lay their hands on me and pray for me along the lines of 2 Corinthians 12. Most gladly will I rejoice in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

So they prayed that that scripture might come true and that in my weakness, the power of Christ might come upon me. Well, the time came to give the address. I walked to the microphone.

I had to get as close to it as I could, and I croaked the gospel like a raven. I croaked the gospel. I couldn't, I could not demonstrate my own personality in any way, just on a monotone, I croaked the gospel.

Now, I'm not exaggerating. When it came to give the invitation, immediately, people rose from all over the room to come forward, but the point really, I want to come to is this. I've been back to Australia about 10 times since then, and every time I've been, somebody has come up to me and said, oh, do you remember that meeting in the great hall of the university? I said, I should jolly well think I do.

Well, they said, I was converted that night. Every time, every time I've been, somebody else has come up and said that. So I think I've learned, too, that it's in our human weakness that the power of God is demonstrated.

So now, allow me to sum up and conclude. The central theme of the Corinthian correspondence is power through weakness. We have a weak message, the cross, proclaimed by weak preachers, full of fear and trembling, and received by weak hearers, the socially despised.

But God chose a weak instrument, Paul, to bring a weak message, the cross, to weak people, the Corinthian working classes. But through that triple weakness, the power of God was and still is displayed. So in conclusion, you remember in the Judean desert, the devil offered Jesus power, and he declined the offer.

Instead, he gave himself voluntarily to that ultimate weakness and humiliation of the cross. Now, in Revelation 4-7, when the door is opened in heaven, the first thing that John's eye lit upon was a throne, symbol of power, and on that throne, or sharing the throne with God the Father, was a lamb as he had been slain, symbol of weakness on a throne of power. In other words, power through weakness, dramatized in God on the cross or the lamb on the throne, lies at the very heart of ultimate reality, and even of the being of God himself.

And I pray with you, for you, as I hope you pray for me, we pray for one another, that this mind may be in us, which was and is in Christ Jesus. The Christian leaders who are needed in the church today, those who've seen the lamb on the throne, follow the lamb wherever he goes, knowing that power is best displayed in weakness. Let's pray.

We've struggled to listen to the Apostle Paul. It's not congenial to our fallen human nature and our native pride, but he is calling us to humble ourselves at the foot of the cross, where the lamb is, and to ask that in our own experience, we may increasingly come to know that power is displayed in weakness, divine power in human weakness. Let's pray in silence for a few moments.

Lord Jesus Christ, we come to you in humility, and we desire to thank you that you humbled yourself, renouncing many of your powers in order to be weak, and we hear you calling us to adopt the same mind that is in you, and to humble ourselves at your feet. We want to ask your forgiveness for every expression of pride and arrogance of which we've been guilty, which are many, and that you will work within us by the Holy Spirit so powerfully that we may grow in humility. Hear us, Lord Jesus Christ, as we pray for the glory of your great and worthy name.

Amen. Amen. Ladies and gentlemen, may I just have your attention for one moment.

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