

(Hebrews) 7-Power in Weakness (is.41_14-15)

by Leonard Ravenhill

The sermon explores the theme of finding strength in weakness through God's promises and the example of Christ's humility and suffering.

Duration: 1:15:55

Topics: "Weakness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the life and discipline of John Wesley, a Methodist preacher. Despite not being physically strong, Wesley dedicated his life to God and everything he had become the Lord's property. The speaker highlights Wesley's commitment to redeeming time and his fearless nature. The sermon emphasizes the importance of surrendering one's ambitions and desires to God, and the power of God to use even the weakest things to confound the mighty. The speaker also contrasts the idea of strength and self-development with the biblical concept of waiting upon the Lord to renew one's strength.

Transcript

I guess most people that use it don't know where it comes from. The tumult and the shouting dies, the captain and the kings depart. Saying that because I was thinking a few minutes ago of the tremendous stir around the world when the Olympic Games were on.

And I guess one of the main secrets in that those performances, whatever you're doing, is strength. Be strong, strong legs to run, strong arms to wrestle, strong arms to swim, so forth and so on. The captains and the kings have departed, they've gone to the ends of the earth.

Nobody lays much capital on either weakness or meekness. Often meekness is identified with weakness, and it's the very opposite. Meekness is strength.

Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth. There's a tremendous emphasis on meekness in the Word of God. But it's the other thing I want to talk about tonight.

I'm breaking in this sequence of speaking on Hebrew because some of the folks said we don't want to miss Tuesday night, we can't come. So I hope it's as good. And then next week, by the grace of God, we'll take one of the major characters in history, which of course will be Abraham.

Tonight I want to take a verse that's very dear to me and very stirring in the prophecy by Isaiah. Martin Luther called this the Gospel of Isaiah because you get that perfect picture of the crucifixion in the 53rd chapter. But I want to take a verse out of the 41st chapter.

Isaiah 41. Or maybe else, wait a minute, let me see. Let me take it out of 40 here and use some of the other.

Isaiah chapter 40. Let me change again. I'm repenting a lot.

Again 41. We'll use the other context in 40 in a minute or two. Chapter 41 and verse 14.

Fear not thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel. I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee.

Make who? The worm. Or will he make it? Well, more powerful than an instrument of war, because in verse 15 he says, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth. Thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

We don't think of worms as having much might, do we? And then if you think of it here, I'll give you one of my masterpieces. Here you've got a mountain, okay. Here's the wriggling little thing called a worm.

The Lord says that this thing can shake that thing. Well, how does it do it? Now, I don't know much about worms. My sister used to call me one when she was angry.

She knew to get me furious, she'd say, you worm. Boy, I squiggle like a worm too. But you know, a worm is the only thing that can go in this side of a mountain and come out at that side.

A lion can't do it, an elephant can't do it, but a worm can do it. What happens when it goes through everywhere it goes, obviously it leaves a hole behind it. What happens? The wind comes in and drives the substance, and then the stronger wind comes and drives the mountain away.

And this is likened, God likens this amazing man. Fear not thou worm, Jacob, and ye men of Israel. I will make thee, saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth.

Thou shalt thresh the mountains and beat them small, and the whirlwind shall carry them away. It shall fan them and the wind shall carry them away. The whirlwind shall scat them, they shall rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Now, one of the best known verses most often preached on in out of the scripture is in the end of the 40th chapter. Oh, everybody can quote that nearly. They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength.

The question is, how well do we know the Lord to wait on him? The 40th chapter, I consider the 40th chapter of Isaiah, one of the most majestic chapters in the whole of the word of God. They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength. Who is this God that we wait on? Verse 22 says, it is he that sitteth on the circle of the earth, the inheritance thereof are as grasshoppers.

Verse 23, he is the one that brings princes to naught. Verse 28 says, hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary. He's talking about those that are weary, in that last verse.

They shall mount it with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. The thing that gets me here is this, that when God dealt with Jacob, he changed his name from Jacob to what? Israel. A prince with God.

Now if you haven't learned this, you better learn it tonight, because you might learn it in rougher circumstances. God never flatters us. We can do that very well ourselves.

Your grandmother comes and hear you preach for the first time, she says, you know Spurgeon couldn't have done better. Well he couldn't, he's dead. But I mean she meant when Spurgeon was alive, he couldn't have done better.

Oh that was a marvelous sermon you preached. And we can get conceited. I remember G. Campbell Morgan, Dr. Campbell Morgan, maybe the greatest Bible teacher in the world 60 years ago, I heard him often.

Fantastic teacher. And he said you often hear a preacher when you say, how did he get on Sunday? How did he get on preaching? Oh I enjoyed myself. So that's what he did.

He enjoyed himself. Enjoyed his eloquence. Enjoyed the stuff he was giving up.

Oh these people should really feel, you know, very, very, very favor that they're listening to me. There's a very famous atheist in Italy, let me think, I guess about 1925, one of the outstanding atheists in a Catholic country, which is pretty unusual. He got marvelously saved.

His name was Giovanni Papini. He has a thick volume, The Life of Christ. It sold out almost as fast as they printed it.

It was reprinted 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, every year it spread and spread. And he was a genius. He went into one of the great libraries there, some of the libraries in Europe, you know, they have a ladder that runs on a, what do you call it, a rail, you move it over.

And he would climb up there, and like the absent minded professor that they say put his, he put his watch in the pan and timed it with his egg. Well this is what this man did. He'd get up the top of the ladder and get a book and forget where he was, and he'd study it at the top of the ladder.

Then he'd put that between his knees to hold it so he wouldn't lose it. Then he'd reach for another, before long he'd have one under his arm, one between, and here he is. And people would look and say, oh he's crazy, but oh you should hear him teach.

He's a genius. He's another prophet. But you know he had an answer.

He said the thing is it's not that I'm such a good preacher, he said it's the fact that all the other preachers in Italy are so bad. You know if I walked into the Arturi forest in the middle of Africa, a forest which you could drop England into and lose it, if I walked in there everybody would look up to me. The average people are not more than about four feet six, the tall men are five feet six.

But when I was out in Australia, there's a race of men in the north of Australia, and women, just elegant, jet black, walk as straight as you could ever imagine. Beautiful looking people, but there's hardly anybody under seven feet. Now if I went into the Arturi forest, I'd be looking down on the folk.

When I go in north Australia, I've got to look up and say, well how are you doing, is it cold up there brother? I'm glad to see you. It all depends where you are. It's the same with teaching, it's the same with so many things.

Fear not thou worm Jacob. Well you can't get much lower than a worm can you? It's an amazing little thing, I've looked at them, I can't find that they have any eyes. They have no legs.

They have no wings. They have no hands. They can't run away, they've no speed.

They're victims of almost everything. And yet they do a job again that nothing else can do hardly, except other creeps in that realm. They can take the mountain and go through the mountain, and then the wind goes in and drives up the soil and then the other wind comes and drives the mountain away, noiselessly.

Does it work without being seen? Does it work without any proclamation? Again it can be trampled on, it doesn't fight back. It's a perfect picture of someone else, who? Jesus. Look at Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the cross. Like Isaiah 53, it's a picture of Jesus. So let's say here it is, the uh, let's say here it is, it's a Psalm of the cross.

The next Psalm is the Psalm of the crook. Oh that's not a good going, let me do it this way. That's a shepherd's crook.

He gets this under the leg of a creature that's down there, the lamb usually, and he can lift it to safety, and not hurt it. He can even get that around the the sheep, so it heads out here and lift it to safety. Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the cross.

Psalm 23 is the shepherd's Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd. So you get the cross in 22, the crook in 23, and 24 is the Psalm of the what? The crown.

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands. The seven lift up your heads, O ye gates, be lifted up, ye everlasting doors. The king of glory comes.

It's the triumphant march of Jesus in glory. The resurrection, resurrected Christ, king has dominion over everything. Now look at this 22nd Psalm here.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Isn't that what he said on the cross? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my Rory? O my God, I cry in the day of time, that thou hearest me not. And in the night season, and I'm silent, that thou art holy. O thou that inhabitest the praise of Israel.

Verse 6, I am a worm and no man. A reproach of them, of men, and despise of the people. You know that's a fascinating word.

The Hebrew word there is Tolaath, which is T-O-L-A-A-T-H, which is hard to difficult to pronounce in English. It's mentioned at least 31 times in the Old Testament. The same word is also translated scarlet, though your sins be a scarlet.

There's a little thing in Mexico in the um, some of the cactus or cacti I suppose you say, a conchineal, you know what a conchineal is? It's a tiny little bug, and it works in the uh, it works in the uh cactus. And the people get them and they shake them till all these things come out, and then they crush them. When you're in Mexico you see they've got vivid colors.

Often the garments they wear, they have a brilliant red. They're made out of conchineal. It's all, in fact they used to use it for lipstick at one time for coloring.

Now I guess they use other things. So you ladies that use it, remember your lips are covered with bugs. But anyhow, that's what it's used for.

It has to be crushed. He had to be crushed in order that we didn't have to be crushed. The scarlet came from him, his blood, his red blood like crimson was shed in order that you and I might be purified and made white, have a garment of righteousness.

He says I'm a worm and no man, a reproach amongst men. Now this psalm actually is divided. It's got two portions.

Psalms 21 divides it. Save me from the lion's mouth for thou hast stirred me from the horns of the unicorns. Now as you read up to verse 21, it's all pain, suffering.

From 21 and onward, it changes from pain to praise. All the agony comes right down to verse 21. Again verse 6, I'm a worm and no man.

Verse 7, all they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip and shake their head saying, he trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him. Let him deliver him, seeing that he delighted in him.

Verse 12 says, many bulls have compassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me. They gaped upon me with their mouths. Now Amos uses the same word there, for the fury of the priests and others.

And he's using this figure here, just like those people who were baying for the blood of Christ when he was there in the judgment hall. They wagged their heads, they went past, they ridiculed, they scorned him. Verse 16 says, the dogs have compassed me.

Verse 20 says, deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dogs. Verse 15 says, my strength is dried up like a pot third, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws. And thou hast brought me into the dust for death.

Well that's exactly the picture of Jesus on the cross when he thirsted, and somebody put a potion on a spear and held it up to him, and he refused it. In other words, he wouldn't take a drug, he wouldn't take a narcotic to ease his pain. He took it raw, as raw as men could give it.

And the dogs were all around there. All the priests and others were barking for his death, crying for him to end in misery. In verse 21 again he says, save me from the lion's mouth.

Now notice he talks about all these beasts here. The bulls of Bashan. He talks about the lions.

Verse 15, my strength is dried up like a pot third, and my tongue cleaveth to the roof of my mouth, or to my jaws. The dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet.

Now come on, let's remember, crucifixion was not invented until nearly a thousand years after this psalm was written. How could it be such a perfect picture except by divine inspiration? The dogs are barking round about me, they're crying for my blood. They've nailed my feet there, they've pierced my hands and my feet.

In verse 21 he says, save me from the lion's mouth, for thou hast heard me from the horns of a unicorn. I've never been such a creature. Creatures of unicorns in Greek mythology, you know, like a horse with one horn.

So I wonder why, why should that word be used here? Because in the early translation around 1611, I guess the Hebrew wasn't as good as it should have been. The same word which is used here of unicorns, the Hebrew word is reem, r-r-r-e-e-m. It means a wild ox.

Or the same word is used for those wild bulls that they have there in Africa, you know, enormous bulls they have with great horns. But the wild ox was unique in this. It had a tremendous span of horns, something I guess like the, what they call them here, long horns, that they came to a needle point, sharper than any other horns that are known.

There are still some of them in the world. And the way to make a criminal suffer was to impale him on the horns at one end, maybe pierce his feet right through that horn, and then at the other end it was into his back. And then the thing was turned loose in a field, and it was whipped until it jogged and jogged and jogged that man into incredible pain and suffering until he was bloody and half mad with pain.

Maybe it was something that he hadn't done, could be falsely accused. Or even if it were right, it was the most lingering form of death that there could be. And yet prophetically again, nearly a thousand years before this thing was done, there's a word picture of that crucifixion here.

They pierced his hands and his feet in that excruciating pain. They used to take a copper spike and they drove it right through the tender part of the the hand, across the feet and drove it right through the most tender part of the feet. So this is a description, a perfect description of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 18, they part my garments among them and cast logs upon my vesture. The whole picture again, if you read it careful and it's worth a lot more time than we can give to it, is that this is almost a photograph, it's a word picture, let me put it that way, of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a hymn that talks about thy bloody sweat, thy grief and pain, thy cross and passion on the tree.

I tried to preach Sunday night in a country church on a subject I'd like to preach on for 50 Sundays, I'd get something new out of it. Again on the Lord Jesus standing there in the temple. I think one of the most courageous things he ever did.

My Sunday school teachers told me about heroes in the Bible, who? Every teacher told me the same. Daniel in the lion's den, David slinging a stone, Samson pulling the house down. I never remember a Sunday school teacher describing Jesus in his moral majesty, in his glory.

He was the victim. But remember again when he goes there in the seventh chapter of John, on the last day, the great day of the feast. There have been six days before when the priest went down to the pool of Siloam.

They had a big vessel made of pure gold and they dipped it in the pool, put it on his shoulder and then the whole choir and orchestra followed him there into the temple. Singing Psalms 135 into Psalm 150, the great Hallel as they call it. Unsurpassed glory and majesty.

What were they doing? They were remembering when God split the rock and the water went out and it followed them with us wherever they went. A type, the word of God says the rock that was smitten was

Christ. It was the type of the Lord Jesus.

God gave them manna from heaven, it was called angel's food in the scriptures. He gave them water, they would have died without bread and without water. Now in John what, John 6, Jesus says I am the bread of life, that made them angry.

It says in the second chapter of John that he went into the temple. In the first part of John 2, it says what? That he turned water into wine. In the latter part it says he went into the temple and what did he do? He cast out the money changers.

If you take the same story as it's recorded by Matthew, he says not only did he go in and kick over the money chamber tables of the money changers, he pointed to all the celebrities there, the high priest, the hierarchy of the Jewish religion and he called them a den of thieves. How in the world does he dare to go through Jerusalem, there's a million people there, get past the temple guard, go up to the desk and take his place there in authority and it says he taught. As I came up the road I was thinking of that.

We haven't got a clue as to what he taught. I know it was amazing. How do you know it was amazing? I know they were stunned.

Why? Because the scripture says they were all amazed. And they said whence hath this man letters having never learned? In the next chapter he says I'm taught of my father. In the sixth chapter they said who is this man in the temple? He's arrogant, he's a usurper, he isn't ordained.

Why does he stand in the place of the high priest? It's sacred. And then they sneered at him, they got their, you know, vengeance. Why? They said we know who he is, we know his father and his mother.

They were ridiculing the virgin birth like the big shots doing seminaries today. We know his father, we know his mother. You know I've often thought of that little girl, some people give too much credit to Mary, I think we don't give enough sometimes.

How did she explain the pregnancy to her relatives, to her parents, to other people? Oh come on now, that's about the most ridiculous story we've ever heard. She said I've no relationships with that boyfriend she's been going, I know he's a very lovely man, but listen come on there's no exclamations. Either he was the one that impregnated her or someone else.

No, we know who her father was, we know who his father was, we know who his mother was. Now he had said to them before this, before he walked in the temple on this occasion, he'd been in before, and he says this is a den of thieves. You know in the first verse of chapter 7 in John there, it says what? They had a contract as we would say on him, as soon as we get the chance we're going to kill him.

He walks up there, he has no bodyguard unless there's invisible angels, and he stands there, and yet in the middle of the chapter again it says the people said, you said when the next time you tried you'd kill him. He's standing there, why don't you kill him? I think this is one of the most amazing, I see this as being more, demanding more courage than Daniel in the lion's den. I think it's the most beautiful picture in one sense that we have of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was the meekest of all men, but meekness is strength. What did it say of Moses? Moses stood up against that wild battalion, hundreds, thousands, maybe two or three million people, and it says he was the meekest man in all the earth. But remember there came a moment when that meekness kind of turned

sour, what does it say? The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, why? Because the anger of Moses was kindled against the people.

I am meek and lowly of heart, but revelation talks to me of the wrath of the Lamb. You see, the option that people have today is to accept the blood of the Lamb, or at the end of the trail, accept the wrath of the Lamb. And people never think of that.

When God's fury is turned, it's the most devastating thing that man has ever known at all. You know, Robert Louis Stevenson that wrote those wonderful children's storybooks, he took that little phrase out of Hebrews where it says, uh, I'm trying to get the connection, okay, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. I only know of one thing more fearful, he says, that's when you fall out of the hands of the living God.

When God says of an individual, my spirit won't strive with him anymore, or God says of a nation, my spirit will not strive. There's a cut-off point. I think America, England, and so-called Christian countries are very near to that cut-off point.

We've sinned, violated laws, the news tonight was shocking, murders, explosions, all these embassies around the world being dynamited, and we've got to sit and watch it, there's not much we can do about it. This wife beating, children being sent even to Christian schools where they're sexually molested, two of them on TV recently named, two types of Christian schools. Iniquity is flooding, and the only thing is a massive repentance or the judgment of the living God.

There's no alternative. Well there is an alternative, there's only one alternative of course, and that is that God in infinite mercy pours his spirit out upon us. Meekness, weakness, who's the strongest man in the New Testament? Surely after Jesus, the Apostle Paul.

He goes out, he has one of two things in any city, you can tell when he's going on his trip, he's going to have a riot or a revival. Nothing less than either. What kind of man? Was it Colossus? No, he quotes, you see how much he cares for public opinion, he said, when they saw me they said, his bodily presence is weak.

He could have left that out of his monthly letter, couldn't he? Why tell everybody what your enemies are saying? Flatter yourself. His bodily presence is weak, his speech contemptible. Paul wasn't an orator, the orator of the early church was Apollos.

Some say I'm of Paul, he's the wizard, he's the genius, he has a colossal intellect, he writes wonderful epistles. Oh, he loses me, he's too profound, I'm of Apollos, I love his eloquence, his cadences, his perorations. Oh, well I'm not of Paul, and I'm not of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, because he's the only one that actually saw Jesus alive.

He walked around with Jesus, personal friend of his, and I happen to be a personal friend of the personal friend, isn't that lovely? I don't know, I thought of it one day, about my second trip to America, an old lady came to me, she said, can I touch you? I said, sure. Some thought you'd kick me without asking, so since you asked, yes, stroke, oh, she stroked me. Could I shake your hand? Yes.

Oh, my great hero was Dr. Tozer, and I never got near to him, but now I can say I shook hand with a hand that shook hand with Dr. Tozer. We were up in the hills of Kentucky, went to an artist's home, a big beautiful home, he had an art gallery outside, wonderful, I like an art gallery too, don't buy me one for

Christmas, but anyhow. The lady said, oh, the man that took us in said, I'd like you to go in the house, it's full of gorgeous American antiques, and it was loaded.

Did you happen to see my old uncle at the back? He's, I don't know, 18, 19? No. Oh, please go and see him, so I went in here, he's sitting there, you know, wrinkled, roughed up. Hello.

I said, hello. You're the uncle? Yeah. I shook hands with him.

He said, now you can tell people you shook hands with the hand that shook hands with Jesse James. Oh, wasn't I happy? I didn't want to shop, wash it for a week. I touched him, and he touched Jesse James.

Oh, wonderful. Now, don't tell anybody you have a friend who once shook hands with Jesse James, you've got it mixed up. But we glory in strength, don't we? Physical strength, intellectual strength, verbal strength.

If a man has a great vocabulary, if he gesticulates wildly, if he expresses himself through his personality, he's got strength. We adore strength. Who adores weakness? Paul, you know, tradition is not very trustworthy, I know.

Tradition says that he had a slight hump on his back, he was five feet two in height, and he was pretty ugly. Well, in the name of the Lord, what do you expect? You put him in a corner and let everybody throw rocks at him. What do you think, he was tall and dark and handsome? I guess he'd slits all over his face that healed up.

I most likely had an eye that was sagging. Most likely he limped. His bodily presence, weak.

His speech, weak. They called it contemptible. But come on, has there been a man ever walked the earth like him since? He minimizes himself on every occasion that Christ may be exalted.

All he says I want to do is that Christ may be magnified by my body, whether by life or death. But to me if you like, if it will bring glory to God. Now look how he emphasizes this.

Sorry, in 2nd Corinthians chapter 12. Or let me go back, same 2nd Corinthians but chapter 11. And verse 29.

Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory in the things concerning mine infirmities. Paul, come on, forget it. Drop it out of your vocabulary.

Nobody needs to know. Let everybody after this think you're a superman. You've got a greater brain than Aristotle.

You may not be as eloquent as Demosthenes, but you're certainly smarter than Plato. Leave a record of your genius. Come down into chapter 12.

And verse 9. Or verse 7. Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations. That's the only clue you get. Why in the world didn't he write a whole book on the period he spent in heaven? It would have been a bestseller, wouldn't it? I was caught up in the third heaven.

I saw things that blinded me with their glory. I saw things that my vocabulary, I can't reach for anything to tell you about them. He covers it up so beautifully.

No, he doesn't boast of his trip to heaven. He doesn't write a book on it. He keeps emphasizing for your sake and mine.

In this 9th verse of the 12th Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians, my grace is sufficient, my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in taking world trips.

I take pleasure in what? Standing before kings. Oh, I don't always stand in the street and have a riot. I go to royal palaces, I talk to Felix, I talk to Festus, I talk to Agrippa.

Do you know when I talk, men tremble, kings tremble, terrified? These stalwart men with their breastplates and bodyguards, and here's a man hasn't got a sword or a breastplate or anything, and he speaks, and they're terrified, they shake. You're almost persuading me to be a Christian. He said, I would to God you were, except for these bonds.

That's the only thing I don't like about it, for your sake. For my sake, they're no handicap, they're no impediment. I glory in what? In my infirmities.

Anybody else do that? That's verse 10 of this chapter 12. I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions. Oh Lord, come on, don't pile it on, spare us something.

Paul, you're talking a language we don't know. If we get a hangnail, we expect the church to have a night of prayer for its healing. People don't know what I suffer with this hangnail, and have an ingrown toenail that's worse.

Oh, if only we could have a night's prayer over the thing. No, forget it. He isn't appealing for prayer, is he? Isn't it Wesley that says in his hymn, Jesu, lover of my soul, thou of life, the fountain art, freely let me take of thee, spring thou up within my heart.

Jesus says to the woman at the well, I'll be in your well of water. Wesley got hold of that. Paul already knew it.

He says, Christ liveth in me. So I can embrace infirmities, and reproaches, and necessities. Again, this is language we don't use.

We can't. We didn't. I'm weak.

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses. For when I am weak, then am I strong. See, what we want, we want God to keep pouring in the strength, pouring the strength.

He says, you don't use what you've got. What do you need more strength for? You dissipate it. Sometimes I think when I'm preaching, I'm adding condemnation to people.

They've listened to preaching for 25 years, done nothing with it. I'm adding to their condemnation every day. They get more like, oh, the Lord said something, the Lord showed, somebody said this weekend, oh, I saw something I've never seen.

I've been puzzled about it for years. And like that, it opened up when you were speaking. So what? You've got more responsibility.

But he says, if you want strength to be made perfect in weakness, he could have left that out. I need more strength. I need more help.

Instead of that, he says, I take, I take what, joy? I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses. And what does that bunch of things do? It does what the hammer, and the file, and the furnace does. It purifies, it brings into shape, it builds character.

Do you think anybody else was ever brave enough to plead and say, let me fill up the sufferings of Christ? We expect to become six feet tall and muscle and athletic by two weeks or two months or two years in the seminary. It doesn't come that way. It comes through obstacles.

It comes through trials. It comes through infirmities. You know, I think sometimes, oh, won't it be wonderful? Supposing the world ended today.

Boy, I'm not in much shape for it to do that. But if it did, and God suddenly took away the veil that's been hiding all the saints in Russia for the last 30 years, boy, I tell you, there's going to be some characters there. You know, we talk as, oh, when I get to heaven, oh, that will be glory for me.

I think somebody should change that around and say, oh, that will be glory for thee. What do I deserve glory for? You know, the way that they teach the Word of God today, oh, now don't worry at all. I mean, if life snaps like that, you go through the pearly gates and all the, as Bunyan said, the trumpet sounded for him on the other side.

Oh, when the saints go back, won't it be wonderful? You know, John Wesley had a very, very marvelous partner by the name of John Fletcher. If ever you see a live story of him by, the classic live story is called Wesley's Designated Successor. John Wesley said of John Fletcher, he is the holiest man that has lived since the Apostle Paul.

I don't know how he knew that. Obviously there was nobody around that had the same perception, same strength, same wisdom as this man who was rather pale. He was of French descent actually.

His name is spelled F-L-E-C-H apostrophe E-R Fletcher. John Wesley said, I can die comfortably now. Methodism is rolling in the power of God.

I could die today and hand it over to my friend John Fletcher. He's superior in grace, superior in wisdom. He is superior in every aspect of the Christian life.

Dear Lord, that must have been something. I consider John Wesley one of the Don, D-O-N, a Don at Oxford University, which means he was a professor. A man of impeccable morality, a man of great scholarship, a man whose family was almost next to the royal family in England.

He had every physical natural attribute. He wasn't too tall, sure enough. But he says, I can gladly die and hand over my, this ministry God has given me.

I could die joyfully if I knew it was in the hands of John Fletcher. I trust God will grant me that. What happened? He buried John Fletcher, spoke at his funeral and lived about 30 years after.

Where, pardon me, Fletcher again, a man of superior grace and superior strength. This man would have designated, as he called him, his designated successor. It is my wish that this man take over.

Now come on. I love the old hymn, that good old English writer, William Culper, that wrote, there is a fountain filled with blood. I like the verse that says, the dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day.

I think we should change the tense and sing, and there have I, not there may I. There have I, though vilest, he washed all my sins away. The dying thief, he's on a cross. Jesus died between criminals.

He was baptized between criminals. He associated with criminals. The dying thief said, one railed on him, the other one, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

And Jesus says, that'll be all right, I'll see to that. So the dying thief goes into eternity, into a paradise. He'll be there because Jesus said so.

Are you suggesting when he goes up to the great final tribunal, where Jesus is sitting on the throne of majesty, are you suggesting he'll get the same reward as John Wesley? John Wesley was converted when he was 35 years of age. If you turn that round, it makes 53. That's when he died.

That's how I remember it, it's so easy. He died in his 88th year. That was in 1791.

From being 35 years of age, he disciplined himself. He lived on the poverty level practically. The only thing he ever bought were horses that he had to travel on.

When he died, he left six English pound notes, all worth five dollars each. No ostentatious funeral for me. Give a pound note to six men, poor men, let them carry me to my grave.

And he left six silver spoons. And he left a Geneva gown that he used to preach in. And he left a library, just a handful of books, much smaller than yours or mine.

Just a handful of books, maybe 20 books. Six pound notes, six silver spoons, a handful of books, a faded Geneva gown, and what was the other thing? Methodist church. He traveled thousands, tens of thousands of miles even, and never once was molested when the British roads were everywhere you turned, there were highwaymen.

They wore velvet suits, bright red and purples and greens. They wore shoes with great big silver buckles. They wore belts to show, you know, cowboy big belts, with a big buckle on.

Their pistols had jewels in them. People were shot everywhere. Never once in the stagecoaches that Wesley traveled in was the stage held up.

He traveled through the night. Bright English moonlight in winter. When Baldwin was the Prime Minister of England, that was in my day, he read a biography of Wesley.

And he said, some people consider me the busiest man in the British Empire, because the British Empire was flourishing then. He said, I have just finished a biography of John Wesley. And he said, compared with Wesley, I'm unemployed.

No man ever lived that redeemed the time more than John Wesley did. On horseback at night, he'd be reading a Greek primer or Latin or something. With the rhythm of the horse in the moonlight, straining to read it.

He often said he was fearless. One day some men said they'd test him, and so they put sheets over their heads and got some cans. As he came through the trees, they sprang out in the moonlight and shrieked.

So the little guy, he's only five foot one, he stood in the stirrups and looked over his head and said, who are you? One of them hollered out, we're the sisters of the devil. I don't know where the brothers of the devil, I mean, we're the brothers of the devil. Who? We're the brothers of the devil.

He said, oh well, stand on one side, let me through, I married his sister. He had the tyrant of a wife. One biographer says he went, he knocked at the door and Mrs. Wesley came to the door, her fingers were full of his grey hair, she dragged him round the floor with the hair of his head.

You see, he was going to marry a Quaker girl that washed the dishes in the kitchen at the back. And his brother Charles said, you falling in love with that peasant girl? Yes, she is a saint. Oh, she's not got our social standing, she has no education, she hasn't been to school, never mind university.

Oh, you can't do that, you'd downgrade the family. And poor old John listened to him. She married a Quaker after and became one of the outstanding spiritual women in England.

That's the biggest blunder Wesley made, I think. But all his time, it's not mine, it's the Lord. Money is not mine, it's the Lord.

My mind is not mine, it's the Lord. My affection is not mine, there are laws. He gave it all down.

Now he was not physically strong, but all that he had became the Lord's property. And so the day he handed over his life, he lived a life that changed me, one of the most disciplined lives that any man has ever lived since the day of the apostle. But it was nothing when he was in the marketplace or somewhere to push him off a box.

There's a series of books called The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers. In America, they're published under the title of The Lives of Wesley's Veterans. They're still published, a friend of mine publishes them.

They're fabulous reading. How the men will be standing in the marketplace when cattle are sold and somebody come behind and clobber them and the police wouldn't interfere. One man, John Nelson said, I was pushed off a box and a man had his clogs, they're things with pointed toes and they have a steel rim all around.

He said, and he jumped on my chest and said, I'll kick the Holy Ghost out of you. He said, I was sore and bruised. But I got up and prayed for him, Father forgive him.

Didn't call for help, didn't ask for the police. When a man went home and said to his wife, well dear, I got to hear John Wesley. Of course, there's an enormous crowd there.

Some say 5,000, some say 20,000. But I cut my ear and the wind was bringing, I heard that amazing man. And darling, I told him I'd done some preaching myself.

But I heard he was needing some men to travel with him for a season. And I told him I was willing to forsake my little farm and all our little country store, whatever it was, I was willing to forsake them. I've signed up to be a Methodist preacher.

And his wife would burst into tears. Well, you know what that means? I understand in the first 50 years of Methodism, not one preacher lived after 32 years of age. They rode horseback, got wet through, there was nowhere to dry, change their clothes, often rode through the night, often the frost came and there they were half paralyzed.

And they said we prove constantly, not that you have to go to that degree, we prove that his strength, what does he say? Verse 9 of chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, my strength is made perfect in weakness. Oh, I want to get intellectually strong. You ever read a great biography of Hudson Taylor? I once had a church in the town where he lived, he'd been dead years of course.

There's no marker on the wall, just the big old stone house there. He went to inland China. I can't draw a map of China obviously, but let's, let's say this represents China, this is China here.

All the missionaries went and settled on the coast, where the boats were always coming in, there was plenty of trade. He went inland here, Yunnan province, province in Canton and Shanghai, what have we got? He went inland and established the China inland mission. He came home to get some recruits, met a man on the streets of Barnsley, and I used to wonder if I was treading in the same place often enough, and the man said I hear that you're going back to China again.

Yes, I'm going, God has called me there. Well, do you have a lot of equipment? No, I don't have a lot of equipment or not many, much clothing or anything to take. You must have plenty of money.

What are your resources? Are you going to inland China? Yeah, isn't it expensive? Yes, you have to get men to carry your packs, you have to get porters and all kinds of, oh, it's expensive, it's expensive. Well, you've been home? Yes, I've been home a good while. You've raised some funds? Well, how much do you have? Fifty dollars.

Yeah, well, you have money in the bank, of course, that will be sent to you after you get out there. No. You mean to tell me you're going to inland China and all you have is fifty dollars, that's all? Are you honest? Yeah.

All you have is fifty dollars, that's all he said and, oh, I knew something else. Yes, I have what? All the promises of God. Another way to train people.

Fifty dollars and all the promises of God and from that day to this, the China inland mission has never taken an offering, not even a box at the door like the worldwide evangelization crusade. I preached at many of their conferences, they don't give you a stack of money. You don't expect it.

No box at the door, no monthly letters, no appeals. When I am weak, we don't teach people to be weak, do we? Be strong, develop your personality, develop your mind, do this, do that. There's a premium on strength today.

We want to try and run a spiritual Olympics. It's not God's way. There are some wonderful scriptures.

Okay, they that wait upon the Lord renew their strength. Let me go back to that. And in chapter 41.

Oh, thank you so much. Okay, somebody's letter. I'd better keep it.

I have to answer it. Why does this man have the strength? Why does God say, they that wait upon the Lord, the one who sits on the circle of the earth, the one who, as Isaac Watts said, he made the stars,

those heavenly flames, he counts their numbers, calls their names, his wisdom's vast and knows no bound, a deep air, all our thoughts are drowned. I read it again today, a scientific statement where you put a one and then 36 zeros, that is one sextillion.

And science says there are 40 sextillions of stars, 40 times one, 36 zeros. Think that out when you go home. Try it out on your computer, it may break down.

This is the God that I'm asked to trust it. He sits on the circle of the earth, his wisdom's vast and knows no bound. He knows the names of every star, even if there are small stars hidden away that we don't know a thing about.

He knows them all. What is the earth? It's like a drop in a bucket. The nations of the earth are like a drop in a bucket.

I didn't read the book, but I do remember years ago, there's a book written by J.B. Phillips, who later gave us a translation of the New Testament. I think I have the book, I'll have to dig it out. Never read it.

Your God is too small. That's the trouble with our God. Our God is too small.

Our theology is too strong. Our personalities are so strong. Our vocabularies are so good.

We have so many interpretations of the Bible. We're loaded up to the gills with things from then. Don't tell God you want to be strong, he may strip you to the very bottom, to leave nothing.

We want to be clothed, who wants to be stripped? The things of God are reverse logic. Do you want to go up? Go down. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

He that exalted himself shall be abased. Save your life, you'll lose it. Lose your life, you'll save it.

Wasn't it Wesley himself who said, what I kept, I lost. What I gave, I have. It's contrary to all the logic of the world, and teaching of the world, and philosophies of the world, and ways of the world.

We're isolated from them all. The longer I live, the more I live, the longer I live, pardon me, I notice there's only two areas to live in. This is the world, Dublin.

And we'll put a K, that's the kingdom. And as Kipling said, east is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet. These two, Jesus didn't come to bridge those two together, any more than he came to put a bridge between heaven and hell.

He came to reconcile us to God. He came to help us to realize again, the majesty of our God, this God in whom we can trust. And as the, what was he about to say, I shall trust and not be afraid.

Back a minute here, who is weak and I'm not weak, who is offended and I have done not. If I must needs glory, I have glory in the things which concern my infirmities. I'm again down to verse nine, my strength is made perfect in weakness, most gladly therefore will I have infirmities.

For what, what do you mean I have infirmities? The weaker I get, the stronger he gets. The more I disown myself, the more he owns me. The more I cast myself down, the more he lifts me up.

The more I blind my eyes to all the dazzling things of the world, the more glory he reveals from heaven. We live in such a cockeyed world, such a cockeyed church as far as I'm concerned. Who wants to be

despised and rejected? I remember the first time I was in an alliance meeting and they sang a hymn, to be like Jesus.

Oh, I want to be like Jesus. And immediately I thought, do you? Do you really? You want 40 days in the wilderness with the devil? Do you want to be considered mad by your relatives? Would you really like a Judas in your life? Would you rather like a Thomas in your life that would doubt you? Do we want to be like him? He was the master of a situation like this. His strength is made perfect in weakness.

Somebody slapped him on the jaw. He could have breathed on him and shrunk him like a fly dying. He never exercised his authority for his own defense or his own success.

You men that have beards, somebody plucked your jaw and grabbed that and pulled the flesh out, you'd jump. They did that to him. Somebody got a mouthful of phlegm and spit in his face or in his eye.

Doesn't do a thing. You trusted in God. As that 22nd Psalm says prophetically, if God delights in him, let him deliver him.

To wind this up, I think one of the greatest temptations to modern Christians is, you say, I remember a time when I laid myself out before God. Telling somebody today, I preached in a Baptist church in Martha, I remember, I don't, somewhere, Fort Worth some years ago. I preached in Isaiah 6, one of my favorite chapters.

A tall, handsome young man. He's behind the iron curtain right now, preaching. He said, Mr. Raven, he said, I want to meet God.

He said, I've got to die tonight. He said, would it be all right if I laid on this platform all night seeking God? I said, sure. I'll ask the pastor, I'll ask the janitor.

He spent the whole night through with God. God did a tremendous work in his life. He said, God did a job of stripping and emptying.

He just finished as a pretty high-class student in one of the big seminaries out there. But that night he said, God got, God brought out of my life what he wanted. Paul says, I glory in my infirmities, infirmities what? That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Lord, take what I have. I don't have five loaves and two fishes, I own the bakery. I'm not coming in poverty, it's the only way to come.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the weak, contrary to all our human philosophies. Edge your way to the front, climb up the ladder, be successful, make a name. I finish again here, okay.

You may remember a crisis experience in your life, and it may be as radical tonight as it was when you did it two years, ten years ago. But isn't it true there's a constant temptation to the believer. One man gets tempted in one area in the flesh, another man in another.

But there's one that's got nothing to do in one sense with flesh. It is the biggest, I believe the biggest trick the devil tries to put. It's the constant thing, come down from the cross and save yourself.

You said you're the resurrection and the life, why not pull a trick right here, startle this crowd. Get down from the cross, save yourself. I wonder how many people have done that, made vows to God and never

kept them.

I've known a number of young men who, daddy's built up a colossal business, oh it's worth so many millions. I want you to take it over. Now don't let me down, I mean I don't mind you going to prayer meetings once a week and going to a Christian camp or a conference, but don't come that business and saying after I've handed you the business that my daddy handed me and it's now worth 10 million dollars, don't tell me you're going to mission field.

I remember a young man in Ireland not far from where we lived, his daddy was wealthy, had a big farm and the young man rode the best pedigree horses in the country. He was handsome, attractive. He went to a meeting that a friend of mine Bill McClintock, who at that time was the Minister of Agriculture for that state.

He went in and everybody said, oh look who's in. Oh he's come to hear McClintock. Of course McClintock for years has been the captain of the Irish rugby team, played international rugby, he's a star.

He's come to hear him, he came and he didn't hear him at all, he heard God, he got saved. Went home and told his father, does that mean you're not going to ride with the hounds anymore? Yeah daddy. You're not going to come to my club? Daddy when I go to the gentleman's club in London I'm cutting out all the social life daddy.

Oh I suppose you won't take a glass of sherry or something at a dinner? No I'm quitting that. No smoking, no social events. My life belongs to Christ, my hands, my heart, my mind, everything belongs to Christ.

Okay we'll see. Well his father and brothers got into him, his relatives, you know this is one of the greatest ranches as you'd say, most lovely farms in Ireland. Your dad has herds of pedigree cattle, those Herefords and Aberdeen Angus and what have you got? You're going to break your daddy's heart, already he's showing signs.

Your mother says he wakes up in the night calling your name and saying and he's failing me, he's failing me, he's failing me. Are you going to go on that business of preaching like McClintock and those others? They may be smart fellows, government officials, daddy has something much better. You're going to be one of the wealthiest most important men in Ireland.

He wore him down, started innocently you know. Well Aunt Mary's come, she'll think you're a snob if you don't take a drink, he took a drink, before long taking more. One night he was caught in a storm and he got into, he got soaked through riding his horse I guess.

He got home and changed but it was too late, he began to sneeze and cough. Caught pneumonia, began to go downhill rapidly, his physique, that marvellous physique began to deteriorate. He got incoherent when he was speaking.

His dad kept coming and saying dad, laddie come on rally, rally, rally. Mother implored him, come on put yourself together. One day the doctor said he's not going to make it, he won't last through another week.

My boy's got to last, he's got to inherit this estate and the money, he's got to pay me back for all the training in the university and his dad goes through the whole rigmarole. The doctor said I'm sorry. Mother said one day, John, if there's anything we can get that money can buy you know it's yours.

Is there anything? Yeah. Well whisper it, don't try and, don't strain, tell me what it is. I want to see Bill McClintock.

Bill McClintock. Yeah. Bill said I went to that great big gorgeous home with its servants and everything laid on and there he was lying on that bed just a shadow of what he'd been six months before.

Tuberculosis was ravaging his body. And he knelt at the side of him and took him by the hand and he said I began to say to him, John, you know God is merciful. I failed God, yes, but God, no, no, no, no, he said no.

You're a good man, McClintock. You've been a great friend, you helped me, you got me on the right road but I got back into the ways of the world, into society, into sin. Well you know God will heal your backs.

No he won't. Why not? He said there was a cutoff point. He was striving with me and I resisted God.

Didn't Aaron Burr miss the presidency of the United States by a vote? I think he did. Somebody said to him one day there's something greater than being the president of the United States. What is that? Becoming a Christian.

It's not for me. Oh yes it is, whosoever will may come. No, no, no.

He mentioned a certain preacher a certain night when he said people went forward and the preacher said there's just one other person here tonight. The Lord gave me a number, I think it was 30, 29, I've got there's one more man to come. He said I was that man and I wouldn't go.

He said I said if you leave me alone God I'll leave you alone. And he said he left me alone ever since. You can talk to me but God doesn't.

Oh how easily the intellect can crumble, the body can crumble, perishing things of clay born but for one brief day. There are people away in Africa and China and India and Afghanistan and mention the countries and they're not intellectually great. They never had social standing.

They never got degrees but they got a vision of the Christ. They got a strength that the athlete knows nothing about. They got a wisdom that men in colleges don't know a thing about.

And with that wisdom and that strength they've gone to some hell hole, they've gone to some place that some of these bread men dare not go. I remember being up and I'm through right off here. I remember going into north uh where am I thinking of now? Oh come on I know that big country right above Australia there, New Guinea, Papua.

I went up there where the wild men, they told me the men over the mountain where I wanted to go they wouldn't let me go. That was 15 years ago because of some cannibals there. They said there's a woman down in those valleys and recently they had a touch of revival.

Was it revival or you know just yes I want to take Jesus. No real revival, revolutionized it. Why? Because one afternoon she said oh bring your spears, they have a spear taller than themselves.

They can throw it with accuracy, almost hit a bird in the air. But they throw them at people too and empaul them with those spears. Or bring your spears next Sunday afternoon at three o'clock and they put them up like this.

Three thousand warriors burned their spears that afternoon. And those who had gods bought their gods and burned them. Wouldn't you rather be that woman than uh at the judgment seat than some of these fancy film stars and just folk of nothing but wealth and style and creature comforts and magnificent homes and they're famous in the lists of men.

God takes again the weak things of the world to confound the mighty and the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are so that no flesh shall glory in his presence. All I have to is to be burned, consumed. When God's fire upon the altar of my heart was set ablaze, my ambitions, plans and wishes at my feet in ashes lay.

But God can do more through the ashes than we can do with total personalities. Burning every plan, every desire, everything that we think is valuable and God says maybe but not in this context of the kingdom of God. It's something to get to the place where honestly I take pleasure in the fact that people despise me.

People don't want me. I got preachers won't let me. One preacher said to another, oh you're having next year, this was about 10 years ago, I've got Ravenhill coming uh I think about April or May.

Ravenhill? You mean that fella that writes in the heddle of his coming? Yeah. I'll tell you what, that guy couldn't come in my pulpit if he paid me. So what? It's nice to be thrown out sometimes.

They threw Jesus out. I'd be insulted if some of these big churches wanted me. Some of these big preachers wanted me.

I wouldn't go near them. See what a snob I am. Lord we thank you we take the things that are not.

We don't have to be royalty in the eyes of the world. We don't have to be distinguished philosophers or even brilliant linguists. We don't have to have dazzling accomplishments that hit the headlines.

You take the things that are not. You find a John Baptist in the desert amongst wild beasts and so forth. Or you hide an Elijah in a cave, a dark dirty damp cave.

You take the things that are not to bring to naught to the things that are. So that we can't boast of our accomplishments in the flesh that we did this by intellectual power or superior wisdom or something. But Lord we thank you that a man can be saved from death by drinking out of a cup that has a crack in it.

It doesn't have to be a gold cap. And there are vessels to honor and some to dishonor. We bless you for that day Lord when the nobodies will be somebodies.

And meet in the glorious fellowship of saints for all eternity. Give you thanks in Jesus name. Thank you I ran over a bit tonight.

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