

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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God's Power in Our Weakness

July 2, 2023

*The Mistake of Fearing
Weakness*

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 12:7-10

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

The theme Scripture for this series of messages is this:

2Co 12:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is**

made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

This world is a fearful place. Typically, many people work very hard at denying this. They want to believe that we are surrounded by goodness, that all is pretty much well, and that they can conquer just about any obstacle. But it takes a huge amount of energy to maintain that fiction.

We live in a fallen world. It is not Eden. Darkness has fallen and God's Word tells us that the "god of this world" is Satan. The Lord in

fact sent His Son into this enemy territory on a *rescue mission* – to rescue His people from this worldwide Egypt and bring us out in one final great Exodus. THEN He is going to destroy this world, the kingdom of Antichrist, and all who worship the Beast. That is how evil and dark this world is – that just as it was in the days of Noah when the flood came...

Mat 24:37-39 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, (39) and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

This world, in other words, is *so fallen and so wicked* that the Lord's remedy is to rescue His elect out of it, then destroy it once and for all in a burning, melting, inferno-

2Pe 3:5-13 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens

existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, (6) and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

(7) But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (8) But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (9) The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

(10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (11) Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for

and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (13) But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

This world is that evil. It is unredeemable. It must be destroyed, the wicked must be judged and cast into hell. If you have been following the Revelation Bible study mid-week, you know that even in the face of the world-wide, horrific 7 bowl judgments poured out upon the kingdom of Antichrist, we read this repeated refrain:

Rev 16:10-11 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish (11) and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. *They did not repent of their deeds.*

We should not be discouraged nor surprised when, in these last days in which we live, the mass of people around us refuse any interest at all in Christ.

It is a Fearful World

We live, therefore, in a fearful world. We have been talking these past few weeks, as we looked into God's Word, about this truth – *when I am weak, then I am strong. God's power is perfected in weakness.* **But how dare we be weak when we live in this fearful place?** Look around and you will see people working very hard to be strong;

- Physically – exercise craze, fighter training, health fads
- Economic superiority
- Intellectual superiority
- Military superiority
- Political superiority

Only the strong survive. Survival of the fittest. This is the world we live in and these things are all fueled by...FEAR. And to a degree it is wise to be fearful.

A nation in this evil world for instance that doesn't have a strong military is in trouble. And it is good to be able to defend yourself and to pursue good health.

But when we try to deal with fear, when we try to face the enemy – *without putting our ultimate faith in Christ, our fear will always lead to sin.* In fact, it will lead to actual *weakness, the very opposite of what we are pursuing!* Because only when we are weak, only when we acknowledge that the Lord is our strength, will we be strong.

Joh 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

NOTE: I want us to think very carefully about what Jesus is saying in this verse. He is the Vine, we are the branches...apart from HIM we can do NOTHING.

I remember nearly 40 years ago now preaching on John chapter 15. And I looked at that word "abide."

Looking at the Greek word behind it didn't help really – it just means "to remain." So when Jesus says: *abide in Me...* what does this mean? It certainly means to obey Him, to believe in Him, to love Him...but I think that it also means this:

Pro 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

It is the very thing we are looking at – to always believe and confess – *I am weak, He is strong. In my weakness, in my acknowledgment of my weakness and in my full trust in Christ, I abide in Him. Just as a branch is connected to the vine and has life and fruit, so we abide in Christ when we trust in Him with all our heart and acknowledge Him in all our ways.*

APART FROM CHRIST WE CAN ACCOMPLISH NOTHING. Boast in ourselves, trust in our own plans while giving at best just lip service prayers to the Lord, *and we will accomplish nothing.*

And it is our PRAYERLESSNESS which evidences more than anything else that we are trusting in ourselves and not abiding in Christ.

Let's Think About Fear

Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear leads us to trust in ourselves rather than in the Lord. And inevitably, that leads to sin. So just consider some of the things the world, the flesh, and the devil use to cause us to fear:

Here is the chief, spiritually “nuclear” weapon Satan launches against human beings to keep them in bondage and if we fail to trust the Lord, we can take hits from it as well:

Heb 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy **the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,** (15) and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Think carefully about this. ULTIMATELY, fear comes down to this – *the fear of death*. And I think that the Apostle here means more than just physical death, though that is a large part of his meaning. To have the power of death is to be able to accuse, to point to the Law which pronounces God's curse upon all those who are under the Law. God, in Christ, removed that curse, so that Christ is the end of the Law for all who are in Him. Satan, in other words, has no more grounds to accuse the Lord's people. His power of death – which the curse of the Law demanded – is gone now.

But let's just think now about how *death* is used by the enemy to cause men and women and children to fear. Just consider – what are we afraid of?

- Death (at the head of the list). Our own death or the death of loved ones
- Disease – cancer, heart attack, MS, and on and on and on. That mole on your arm. That headache.

- Accidents and tragedies – car wrecks, falling trees, drownings
- Wild, savage animals. Snakes and spiders.
- Wars – this is an ever present fear. World war. Nuclear weapons. Chemical weapons. Biological weapons.
- Economic fears – recessions, depressions. Loss of a home by foreclosure. Loss of a job. Fear of losing retirement funds.
- Fears of persecution for being a Christian
- Fear of being hated
- Fear of betrayal
- Fear of failure in general. How much anxiety do students feel, for instance, before final exams!
- Fear of growing old and losing our health. Elderly people really wrestle with fears that they didn't have when they were young.
- Fear of criminals
- Fear of being injured in some way.
- Fear of being shamed.
- Fear of the dark

- Fear of ghosts, demons, witches – some of which are fables, but which nevertheless have a basis in reality.
- Nightmares – there is a strange one! Fear comes to us even when we are asleep.

I am certain the list could be lengthened considerably, but I think you get the point: ***This fallen world is a fearful place! A place FULL of scary things. And while people sometimes have phobias so that they are fearful in an unreasonable and unrational way, nevertheless in reality we are indeed surrounded by tremendously fearful things.***

Mat 24:6-13 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. (7) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (8) All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. (9) “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will

be hated by all nations for my name's sake. (10) And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. (11) And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (12) And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. (13) But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

And yet, as frightening as this list is, we have not yet included the scariest, most terrifying fear of all which, ironically, man the sinner is quickest to deny –

The fear of God, the fear of the coming judgment, the fear of condemnation and hell.

Men and women are, in fact – though they try with all their being to deny it – **running scared** through this life. ***God is the scariest thing of all.***

Heb 10:30-31 For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands

of the living God.

Heb 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Let’s repeat it once more – if we try to deal with these fears apart from trusting in Christ, we will inevitably end up sinning and failing.

So then, *how does all of this – all of this fear – coincide with this: when I am weak, then I am strong. God’s strength is perfected in my weakness.* How does this make any sense at all for people living in such a horribly fearful place? Isn’t it more rational to be strong? Yes, it is, BUT – ***the key to being strong is to be strong in the Lord. And the path to that strength is to acknowledge our weakness and place our faith in Christ rather than in ourselves.***

2Co 3:4-5 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. (5) Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,

2Co 12:9-10 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Fear as the Path to Idolatry

Consider how often the Lord tells His people not to fear:

Deu 20:1 “When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

Jos 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Isa 43:1-3 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (2) When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (3) For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

The fear of the Lord and faith in His promises are the remedy to all of the fears this world launches at us. But if we yield to these fears and instead put our trust in ourselves or some other created thing, well, this is where all false religion and false gods come from.

Think it through carefully now – *fear leads to sin. It leads to sin when we do not trust that the Lord is with us wherever we go, when we fail to look to Him for our strength*

and instead we put our trust in ourselves. Listen again:

Pro 3:5-8 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (7) **Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.** (8) It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

But when we fail to do this, when man in his sin refuses to trust in the Lord and instead trusts in himself, what is going to happen? He will turn to evil and the most common way he does this *is to invent his own religion, to create his own god.*

Now, if you think carefully about this – *why do people create religion? Why is man a religious creature? It is because he is afraid.* He needs a god who is able to protect him from the many, many fears he has. That is why the religions he invents always include various ways to manipulate his

false god so that the god will protect him.

- Sacrifices
- Repetitions of prayers
- Gifts
- Mediators who can appeal to the false god
- A false priesthood
- A set of laws to keep to earn favor

All of these things are mimics of the true God and the means by which He has ordained for us to approach Him. Incredibly, man refuses to turn in faith to the only God, the Creator and sustainer of all things. He will rather call on a stick he carved into a god. All of this originates in his sin.

If you are in Christ, *you have nothing to fear.* Everything Satan throws at you is a lie.

- Death has no power over you – you, in fact, will never die
- The Lord heals all of our diseases
- He conquers our enemies

- He is sovereign over every molecule in the universe
- Satan is a defeated foe

Let's conclude with the Psalmist saying it:

Psa 103:1-22 Of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! (2) Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, (3) who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, (4) who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, (5) who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

(6) The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. (7) He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. (8) The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (9) He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

(10) He does not deal with us

according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. (11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; (12) as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

(13) As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. (14) For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. (15) As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; (16) for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

(17) But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, (18) to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

(19) The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. (20) Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! (21)

Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his
ministers, who do his will! (22)
Bless the LORD, all his works, in
all places of his dominion. Bless
the LORD, O my soul!