

The Strength of Weakness – Matthew 26:36-44

I. Introduction:

- A. I am of the opinion that each of us are tri-part creatures.
1. There are some theologians who insist that man is made up of two parts – physical and spiritual.
 2. But I take Paul seriously when he says prayed for his friends in Thessalonica:
 - a. *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole **SPIRIT** and **SOUL** and **BODY** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” – I Thessalonians 5:23.*
 3. Before we were regenerated, our spirit was dead because of sin, but our eternal soul was alive and dwelling in our temporary, physical body.
 4. But now, by the grace of God, we Christians are alive in a triple way – body, soul and spirit.
 5. Sadly, very often our *“body”* – which the Bible calls our *“flesh”* – does not get along with our spiritual nature.
 6. **Galatians 5:17** reminds us that *“the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one the other; that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”*
 7. It was to this conflict that the Lord Jesus referred in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He said, *“the spirit indeed is willing but the **FLESH is weak**”* – it is very, very weak.
- B. This has probably never happened to you, because you are strong and spiritual.
1. But some of us older people, when we are silently praying – when we aren’t praying vocally and with other brethren – our exhausted flesh sometimes falls asleep when even while in the presence of our Saviour.
 2. We bow our hearts and even our knees with a spirit-guided, genuine desire to fellowship with the Lord.
 3. But as we pray, first our mind swerves from its intended purpose &, before we know it, we are in dreamland.
 4. If our born-again spirit is not surrendered to the empowering Holy Spirit, our flesh can prevail, and the *“good that we would – we do not: but the evil which we would not, that we do.”*
- C. This evening I’d like to take a couple minutes to consider the weakness of our flesh.
1. There are several scriptures which address this weakness – both before and after our salvation.
 2. But before you fall off to sleep, let me assure you that there is an upside to the weakness of the flesh.
 3. There is a special strength in the weakness of our flesh.

II. But first, what are some of the AREAS of our WEAKNESS?

- A. I hope you know that there is a weakness of flesh when it comes to **SALVATION** from sin.
1. The Bible defines *“sin”* as stepping over God’s law – transgressing the law.
 2. **I John 3:4** – *“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”*
 - a. I shouldn’t have to point out to you, but it is **because of sin** that **we need** to be **saved**.
 - b. *“The wages of sin is death”* and *“**ALL** have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*
 3. But our fleshly weakness takes deliverance from sin out of our hands, placing salvation squarely in the hands of the Lord.
 4. This is because, among other problems, *“What the law could not do, in that it was **weak through the flesh**”* God was forced into *“sending his own Son in the **likeness** of sinful flesh, and for sin,”* (to condemn sin in the flesh) – **Romans 8:4**.
 5. Human flesh is not capable of full and constant obedience to the law of God, making even God’s holy law incapable of preparing us to stand before the Lord – or to enter into His eternity.
 6. **Romans 7:5** reminds us, *“For when we were in the flesh”* (that is, while our spirit was dead and all we had in which to live was the flesh) *“the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members (our fleshly parts) to bring forth fruit unto death.”*
 7. This weakness in regard to the law is both a curse and a blessing.
 - a. We are cursed and condemned for our failure to completely obey.
 - b. But God, knowing our weakness in this regard, stepped in to save us by His grace.
 - c. There is no other way for us to be saved.
 - d. **But**, *“being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

B. Galatians 3 takes this first point into point number two.

1. Not only are we **not saved** by our flesh's ability to keep the law, neither is salvation **maintained** by the flesh.
2. **Galatians 3:1** – *“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?
a. This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
b. Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”*
3. The rhetoric answer is a resounding **“no,”** we are not made perfect by the flesh even after our salvation.

C. Let's pretend that there is a **rope** extending from where I am all the way **to heaven**. It is **up hill**, of course.

1. Even if the Lord Jesus holds my hand – holds both my hands – as I step out onto that tight rope...
 - a. Of course, He doesn't do that in salvation.
 - b. What the Saviour does is carries us from our spiritual graves all the way to glory.
2. But let's pretend for a moment that He helps us to step out onto that rope.
3. If I was required to maintain my balance for seventy years and seventy thousand miles, there is no way that my flesh is going to travel all that way, walking the tight rope of the law.
4. As Paul suggested to the **Galatians**, I am not so foolish to think that what the Lord began through the Holy Spirit I am going to bring to perfection through the works of my flesh.
5. The flesh is too weak to **commence** salvation, and it is too weak to **perfect** and **complete** it.
6. *“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, **NOT to the flesh,**”* but to the grace of God. (**Romans 8:12**).
7. Praise God that we are **kept** by the **power** of God unto salvation.
8. Praise God that we are **kept in the hand** of the Saviour.

D. Another area of fleshly weakness is in the matter of **judgment** and **important decisions**.

1. In **John 8**, the Lord Jesus was in another of His arguments with the Pharisaic Jews.
 - a. **Verse 12** – *“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*
 - b. With that the Pharisees called my Saviour a liar. *“Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.”*
2. But, *“Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record **IS** true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. **Ye JUDGE after the FLESH...**”*
3. The Lord Jesus, by that time, had spent a couple years ministering to the people of Israel.
 - a. He had been taking the Old Testament scriptures and clearly explaining their meanings.
 - b. He had been giving them new revelations which made perfect sense in the light of the Old Testament.
 - c. And He had been performing miracles which authenticated what He was teaching.
4. The Pharisees had been watching and listening to all this – but with only their human ears – human flesh.
5. They had not been regenerated, and therefore they had no access to the Holy Spirit – through whom spiritual principles are discerned.
6. Simply put, they were judging Christ *“after the **FLESH,**”* and **not “after the **SPIRIT.**”**

E. As a general rule, even when Christians try to grasp the things of God, if **THEIR** spirits are not submissive to the **Holy Spirit**, they are, more often than not, going to misjudge what God says, or what God is doing in their lives.

1. In **John 7** Jesus says to all of us, *“Judge not according to the appearance.”*
2. You may have **20/20 eye sight**, but your fleshly eyes are not capable of seeing the whole picture.
3. For example, I am quite sure, from what the Bible tells me, that there any angels in this auditorium tonight.
4. Can you see them? How many are with us? They are not detectable to the eye of flesh.
5. This is just one example of our fleshly vision and understanding.
6. Our ability to judge and discern is always limited by the flesh – due to its native weakness.

- F. Romans 7** takes the weakness of the flesh and applies it to our Christian living and general Christian service.
1. **Romans 7:18** – *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.*
 - a. *For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*
 - b. *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*
 - c. *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*
 - d. *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:*
 - e. *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*
 - f. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*
 - g. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”*
 2. This scripture is precious to my soul. Because I find that I am not alone in my failure to fly.
 - a. Paul, the great Apostle and servant of God confesses **my** confession.
 - b. He doesn't give me an excuse for my failures, but he does give me an explanation.
 3. There is a law – here is a principle – that evil and weakness are present in my flesh.
 4. They compete with one another, so that very often *“the **GOOD** that I would I do not: but the **EVIL** which I would not, **that I do.**”*
- G.** When the Holy Spirit tells me that I should go out and knock on a few doors, inviting the lost to church and to Christ, my flesh counters by saying, but there is so much I need to do in my study.
1. And when my conscience reminds me that I haven't spent nearly enough time in prayer today, again my flesh replies with a hundred excuses.
 2. I won't even mention the various temptations to sin which regularly come along.
 3. My flesh is weak, **and** I know from the word of God, that **yours is weak as well.**
- H.** But having said that, I must also say from **Romans 7** and **Galatians 6** – the flesh is not without its own power.
1. Turn to **Galatians 6**. Let's begin with **verse 13** – *“Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*
 - a. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
 - b. *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*
 2. *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*
 - a. *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*
 - b. *But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.”*
 3. Paul tells us that despite its weakness, the flesh does have power to fight against our regenerated spirit.
 4. And sometimes – many times – the flesh will win that fight, dictating to the spirit what it will do.
 5. This is why the Lord Jesus said to the twelve: *“Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*
 - a. Sometimes, the weakness of the flesh is able to defeat the potential strength of the spirit.
 - b. And what Jesus said raises the question: can we go one full hour with our spirit in total victory over our flesh?
 - c. Have we ever had that level of victory?
 - d. Can we go one hour with spiritual victory – even with the Lord Jesus just a few feet away?
- I.** All of this gives the appearance of constant, dismal failure.
1. *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”*

III. But I already mentioned that there is a **POTENTIAL BLESSING** in this.

- A. In our morning's Scripture I skipped over part of the text.
1. **I Corinthians 1:26** says, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*
 - a. *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*
 - b. *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*"
 2. There is an **opportunity** which **flows out** of our **weakness**. It is called **God's grace**, and it is **omnipotent**.
 3. The Lord loves to magnify Himself by using our littleness and our weakness.
- B. Turn to that familiar passage in **II Corinthians 12**, beginning in **verse 1** – "*It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.*"
1. *I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.*
 - a. *And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)*
 - b. *How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*
 - c. *Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.*
 - d. *For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.*
 - e. *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*
 2. *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*
 3. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
 4. *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*"
- C. When we are weak through the flesh, we become available for the Lord's use.
1. The Lord doesn't use people who are full of themselves, boasting of their powers and their knowledge.
 2. "*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*"
 3. When we are weak in the flesh, and we acknowledge it, we put ourselves into a position to accept the power of the Lord.
 4. There is great power in fleshly weakness, if we are willing to reach out to the Lord by faith.
- D. Some of you ladies won't like this illustration, so I'll offer the salt shaker, if you'd like to use a grain or two.
1. Wives, you are only as weak as your husband is weak.
 - a. If you can't open that pickle jar with the sticky lid, but he can, then you are as strong as he is.
 - b. If you need that heavy box lifted up to that shelf above your head, and he can do it, then measure your strength by his arm – not yours.
 2. And remember, greater than your spouse is your Heavenly husband. Measure your strength by Him.
 3. In more ways than one, "*greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*"

- E. In **Galatians 5** Paul gives to us what he calls *“the fruit of the spirit.”*
1. Before that, he gives us a short, disgusting list of the *“works of the flesh.”*
 2. But even before that, he says in **Galatians 5:16** – *“Walk in the Spirit,”* referring to the Holy Spirit.
 3. *“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall **NOT** fulfill the lust of the flesh.”*
 4. Just because we live in the flesh, this is no guarantee that the flesh will dominate our spirit.
 5. If I can put it this way, there are **two kinds of weakness** – the kind which **bends** & the kind which **breaks**.
 - a. It is not necessary that we give place to the devil or to the flesh. Nothing says we must be broken.
 6. So once again, you are being tempted toward your most besetting sin.
 - a. What is it? Worry? We worry because we are weak.
 - b. Is it anger? We get angry because we are weak.
 - c. Yes, you might be bent in that direction once again, because of the weakness of your flesh, but you don’t have to be broken.
 7. Before Paul says *“make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,”* he says, *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
 8. When we see ourselves to be sufficiently weak to turn to the strength of the Spirit of Christ, we will become as strong as David before Goliath or Samson in the temple of Dagon.
- F. Have you ever seen a drunk trying his best to tell the patrol officer that he isn’t under the influence?
1. The harder he **tries** to be sober, the less he **appears** to be sober.
 2. Similarly, the harder you and I try to appear to be strong in the flesh, the weaker we actually are.
 3. But if we will acknowledge our weakness and turn to the Lord for strength, then we are strong.
 4. For example, it is said that it is **weakness for men to cry**.
 - a. The reality is: when our tears are shed before the Lord, we may be at our greatest strength.
 - b. The Lord loves manly tears, and He responds with blessings.
 5. Some men think that it is **weakness to ask for directions**, or to **read** the **instruction manual**.
 - a. Accepting those instructions gives us the strength of the people who designed that project.
 - b. *“When I (admit that I) **am weak, then am I strong.**”*
- G. What I am trying to do this evening is to point out a proper balance between weak flesh and the strength of the flesh that is found in living in agreement with the regenerated spirit.
1. In ourselves we are nothing but defeated weakness.
 2. But in the Lord, *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”*
 3. We need to make sure we begin each day, each hour, each minute seeking to strengthen our flesh in the power of the Lord.