

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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God's Power in Our Weakness

June 11, 2023

Gideon and the 300

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 12:7-10

Scripture Reading: Deut 8

This morning I want us to begin a new series of messages launched from this lesson learned by the Apostle Paul:

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.**

NOTE: Here is a call to attention – *if the Apostle Paul was in danger of becoming conceited, if this man whom God showed things so glorious that possession of them could cause him to boast in himself, should each one of us not tremble and fear that snare ourselves and beg for the Lord to keep us humble?*

An overview

This church was organized, according to old records, in 1957 and I have been told that it began as a Sunday School for children in the back of an old store – perhaps the remains of which are right across the street from us here. Eventually a church building was constructed on this site and then, after a fire, this present structure was erected. At some point in its history this church yielded to this trap of pride. Boasting in self. I know because I saw and witnessed it firsthand when I first came here 30 years ago. Pride is a trap that any of us can fall into if we are not on guard – Satan is always on the prowl. And many fell into it and the Lord removed His blessing and power. They forgot this:

1Co 3:6-7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

It is my intent in this series of messages to remind all of us that whenever the pride of man enters

among God's people, whenever we become like Nebuchadnezzar –

Dan 4:29-31 At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, (30) and the king answered and said, **“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”** (31) While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,

...we can expect the Spirit of the Lord to remove His blessing from us. Because here is true truth which the Lord always, always, always works through –

My power is made perfect in weakness

Zec 4:6 Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Churches do not die because people leave, they die because Jesus leaves. This sanctuary could be filled with people and yet Jesus have departed long before.

Now, in this truth, if we are truly the Lord's people, there is going to be great encouragement as well as admonishment. We are very few in number. We have at least begun to share in the Apostle Paul's experience:

2Co 6:4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,

Where is the encouragement? It is here:

My power is made perfect in weakness.

And here:

1Co 2:3-5 And **I was with you in weakness** and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible

words of wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

When we are weak, *and when we admit that we are weak, when we cease boasting about ourselves*, then we are strong. Why? Because then, and only then, does the Lord dwell among us and work His power among and through us.

1Co 1:27-29 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Isn't that amazing? Incredible! Almighty God, the Eternal God, maker of heaven and earth – *chooses to work through weakness. He saves us by a Lamb. He refuses to work through arrogant people who boast about how strong they*

are. This is a truth that is inviolable. It is a true truth that the Lord will never compromise. Any individual or any local church that boasts about its own power and ability will always be abandoned by the Lord. Look at it here:

Rev 3:14-17 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. (15) “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! (16) So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. (17) **For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,** not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Our strength, our wisdom, *all come from the Lord Jesus Christ.* Not from ourselves. We must look to Him. This is why we pray “in Jesus’ name.” Understand? By praying in Jesus’ name, we are looking to Him, not to ourselves.

A Warning

Before we proceed, let’s heed a warning very soberly. It is this – if this all seems to be foolishness to anyone, if anyone hears these words and is offended, then heed this Word of God:

1Co 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Refusal to accept God’s Word, regarding it as foolishness, is a sure sign of an unregenerate, still dead-in-sin heart.

My power is made perfect in weakness

Zec 4:6bNot by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Are we ready to acknowledge our weakness? Then listen and be encouraged by this first of many Scriptures:

Judges 7:1-25 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

(2) The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, **lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’** (3) Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’” Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

(4) And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ shall not go.”

(5) So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink.” (6) And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water.

(7) And the LORD said to Gideon, “**With the 300 men who lapped I will save you** and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home.”

(8) So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

(9) That same night the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. (10) But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. (11) And you

shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.” Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp.

(12) And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.

(13) When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, “Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat.” (14) And his comrade answered, “This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.”

(15) As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its

interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand.” (16) And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. (17) And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. (18) When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”

(19) So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. (20) Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”

Gideon across the Jordan.

(21) Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. (22) When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

(23) And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian. (24) Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.

(25) And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to

Gideon was weak, but he was strong. Why? He trusted in the Lord, and the Lord fought the battle. He knew he was weak. And therefore he knew he was strong.

Think carefully – very, very carefully now. *If Gideon had said, "I have to raise a huge army and come up with a brilliant plan in order to win this fight."* What would he have been doing? Boasting in himself. Operating on the assumption that if it was going to happen, he had to do it.

What do you think we need to do in order to become strong as a church? In order to do something significant for the Lord? *Our tendency is to think that unless we recruit a large number of people, we can't do anything. And that such recruiting has to be done by us. We have to think something up to make it happen.* That is trusting in ourselves. That is boasting. It is trusting in the flesh. *But the Lord says:*

*NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER
BUT BY MY SPIRIT*

Do we get it yet?

The Lord has accomplished some great works through us the last decade. WE didn't plan it. We didn't "make it happen." The Lord did. There is no room for boasting on our part. None.

Up Against the Red Sea

Let me show you still another example of the Spirit of the Lord working when His people had no might or power:

Exo 14:1-14 Then the LORD said to Moses, (2) "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. (3) For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' (4) And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over

Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." And they did so.

(5) When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" (6) So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, (7) and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. (8) And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly.

(9) The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. (10) When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the

LORD. (11) They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? (12) Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

(13) And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. (14) **The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.**”

The Lord will fight for you. When we are weak, then we are strong. My power is perfected in weakness.

Do you understand that? *My power is perfected in weakness.* God’s power is unleashed when no one can boast, when we are weak and when we admit we are weak.

What does it take for people around

us in this community – or anywhere - to be broken, humbled, terrified of the wrath of God, and start seeking Christ? What does it take? *It takes the mighty power of God.* Not some gimmick. Not some slick advertising. Not a new church building. It takes – *weakness.* Weak people who have nothing to brag about except this:

Jer 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

I have no doubt that the Lord has been working now for a long time among us to show us our weakness. To bring us to a point at which we can no longer trust in ourselves or boast about our abilities. To bring us up against the Red Sea. To cleanse us all of this horrid

business of pride and lead us to confess that the only reason any of us are saved is because salvation is of the Lord alone. Because in eternity past He chose to save me before I even existed. The only thing I deserved was hell.

I don't know what the Lord has planned for this church. But I do know this – any work that He chooses to use us for is only going to be done by His Spirit, not by our supposed power or might. And I know from this plain-as-day message in His Word that if we cling to any boasting, if we claim might or power for ourselves, *then be sure of this – His power will not work. The Spirit will be quenched.*

Churches do not die because they didn't work hard enough, or because they didn't raise enough money or because they didn't launch programs that draw lots of people in, they die because they boast about themselves, take glory for themselves, and Christ departs from them.

Understand? ***Churches do not die because people leave, they die***

because Jesus leaves. Many churches today are corpses. They may have huge buildings, huge memberships, happening events, but like Laodicea, they are dead because they boast about themselves and Jesus left them.
He left, be sure of it, because they walk in pride, trust in themselves, and boast of their accomplishments.

In contrast-

Psa 8:2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

Isa 40:28-31 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. (29) **He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.** (30) Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; (31) **but they who wait for the LORD shall renew**

their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

1Sa 14:6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, **for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.**”

We are few. Does that hinder the work of the Lord or His ability to save? If we think it does, then we still have a lot of pride to repent of.

Deu 8:17-18 Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ (18) You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.