

Empowered By The Power Of His Power

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[0 : 00] But very often in life I'm sure you'll agree that we are prone to compare ourselves to other people. Even in the last week, was there a time when you looked at a colleague and thought to yourself I wish I could do what they did, what they can do.

Was there a time when you looked at someone else's house and thought I would love to live somewhere like that? Or for the younger folk here, maybe you're playing football or riding a bike with a friend and they can do stuff and you think I wish I could do that as well.

We're very prone to make comparisons in life and as Christians and as a church we do exactly the same. So as a church we might compare ourselves to other world views and you can see that in 21st century Scotland there's some seriously powerful movements and opinions all around us. It looks as though they have far more influence than we do. People can say things and everyone listens and yet it never happens that way for us. And not all of that is bad, a lot of it is good but not necessarily.

We can compare ourselves to other nations. So the church just now looks a lot stronger in North America, South America, Africa, Asia, pretty much everywhere to be honest.

[1 : 23] Or maybe we compare ourselves to other generations. And sure many of the folk here tonight are watching at home can think back to days gone by when the church was busier, more people coming and everything looked a lot healthier.

Or as individual believers we can look at other Christians and compare ourselves to them and we see knowledge, experience and gifts in them that look far superior to what we see in ourselves. We are so often drawn to compare ourselves with others and when we do that I think it's the case that we nearly always come to the same conclusion that we are weak.

And I think I can prove that because would anybody here stand up and say I think that Scotland is a really strong Christian nation? Or would anybody here stand up and say I think I'm a really strong Christian?

I don't think any of us would. So if you are discouraged because today the church looks weak or if you're disappointed or crippled by your own feelings of weakness then I really hope that this sermon tonight will help you because this is exactly what we're going to be talking about, this whole issue of weakness.

[2 : 56] And our sense of weakness can manifest itself in several ways. And I want to just give you three examples as the last wee bit about introduction. So number one, our weakness can manifest itself by a lack of strength to do a task.

So that can apply in lots of parts of life. Sometimes I go to my email inbox on a Monday morning and I'm like I don't know if I can do this. And I'm sure it's the same for you in your work but evidently a lack of strength to do a task.

And it's the same as Christians. You might see a friend who doesn't know the gospel and they need someone to tell them. Or you might see a young Christian who needs a more mature one to come alongside them and help them to grow and to disciple them.

Or you might look into your community and see people who are suffering, whose lives are going through awful trauma and you think someone needs to help them. And we see all these needs around us and then we look at ourselves and think I can't do it.

Our capacity is too weak. Our weakness manifests itself in a lack of ability. Another way that weakness shows itself is in terms of a lack of influence to make a difference.

[4 : 12] So we might see opportunities around us as a church. We might feel that we've got something to say maybe to our friends, to our community or even to our nation as a whole.

And when we speak, no one pays any attention. Our voice is too weak. Our weakness manifests itself in a lack of authority.

And maybe you find that in general at work. Maybe you try to say something no one listens to you. Maybe at school you want to say something, no one pays attention. It can happen in every part of life.

It can definitely happen to us as Christians and as a church. So there's a lack of sense to do a task, the lack of influence to make a difference. The last example is a lack of power to make things happen.

So maybe we do get an opportunity to speak or act. And maybe people will give us an attention for a while. Maybe we get a moment's respect where people want to hear what we've got to say.

[5 : 15] Sometimes we do get that chance to speak to others or to involve ourselves in their lives. We get an opportunity to be an influence for good. But in those moments our initial efforts seem to be going great.

And then we run out of steam. We run out of things to say. We run out of energy. And it's a huge struggle to keep going.

Our reserves are too weak. So weakness manifests itself in a lack of ability, lack of authority, and in a lack of resources.

Now you probably think, well, ministers never feel like that. Yes they do. I feel like that all the time. I don't look at myself and think, you know, I'm a really strong Christian.

And my life savings isn't very much and I don't gamble. But if I did gamble, I would bet my life savings that you feel exactly the same. And if you do, then you desperately need to listen to the words of our text tonight.

[6 : 23] Which is from Ephesians chapter 6 verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Now Ephesians is an amazing letter. You can very often, Paul's letters, you can spit them into two halves. Ephesians is kind of your classic two-half Paul letter. Chapters 1 to 3 are kind of full of theology.

Chapters 4 to 6 are full of instructions. So in the first bit, Paul gives this incredible description of the fullness of God's work of salvation. He goes all the way back to the eternal purposes of God.

Comes right through to the risen Jesus reigning over all the universe today. And he speaks about how God is establishing a new humanity, Jew and Gentile together.

And we are being restored into one family, a dwelling place for God and a light to the world.

[7 : 23] And then in chapters 4 to 6, he goes on to some specific instructions as to how that should reflect itself in our lives. So he talks about things like serving in church, he talks about relationships in the home, in the community and in the workplace.

Now in Ephesians chapter 6 and at verse 10, we come to Paul's final word. You can see that from the finally that we have there. He's just been giving lots of specific instructions.

And now he closes with a section on spiritual warfare, which is where he talks about the armor of God that we played about a moment ago. And that I'm sure you may be familiar with.

I want us just to focus on verse 10. These are the words that he uses to introduce this final section. He says, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

And we'll just tundle through this verse together and we're going to just ask three or four questions as we go through it. So I want to start by asking, how do you react to those words?

[8 : 25] So you see those words on the screen, you hear me say them. What is your instinctive reaction? Are they are they rousing words? Do they fire you up?

Are they inspiring? Do they make you think, yes, I want to be strong like Jesus. I want to follow his example. In other words, do these sound like the words of a coach?

So you might be thinking of, if we think of an athlete preparing for the Olympics that are about to start, their coach will be filling them with rousing words saying, you can do it. Go for it.

And there's times when that kind of message can be very helpful. We need to be motivated. We need to be challenged and inspired. But what if you just feel weak?

What if you just feel like you're rubbish? And instead of thinking, yeah, I can do it, you're thinking, I wish I could be strong.

[9 : 26] But I will probably fail. Are the words of a coach inspiring or intimidating?

Well, what I want us to see is that this kind of maybe idea, go for it. You can do it. This kind of message that that might inspire us or might intimidate us is probably what well, it's quite legitimately what you might first think Paul is saying, but it's not precisely what he has written.

Because these are not the words of a coach. They are the words of a theologian. So that brings us to our next question.

What is Paul saying? Well, if you look at verse 10, you can see that there's a command in it and the command is there, be strong. But the key thing is that in the original Greek, the grammar or the way the word is spelt, tells us that that command is passive rather than active.

Now, you may remember the difference between active and passive in terms of grammar. Active means that I do something so I hit. Passive means something gets done to me.

[10:47] I get hit. And here, strictly speaking, the command is passive, which means it's not actually saying be strong.

It is saying be strengthened. And that might sound like a very minor difference, but I think it's crucial because it means that Paul is not saying do something.

He is saying, let something be done to you. He's not saying be strong like Jesus.

He is saying be strengthened by Jesus. That means that this verse is not about being charged with a command. It is about being recharged with amazing theology.

Paul is saying be strengthened in the Lord and in the power and in the strength of his might. Now, I want us to unpack that a little bit further.

[11:53] And you'll see that in these verses, Paul uses three different words for strengthened, strength and might.

Now, I had some arrows on here, but I don't know if it'll work because most scenes are we would squash. But you've got might at the end, the third one, and you've got strength and you've got strengthened.

So all three of them are different words in Greek, but they could all be translated with the English word power. So this could be translated be empowered in the Lord and in the power of his power.

Now, that might sound confusing. I've said it that way because I hope it'll actually make things clearer and be helpful. Paul is saying that Jesus's power, the third one, is so powerful, the second one, that you can be empowered by it.

Be empowered by the power of his power. So I want to look at each one of these in reverse order. So first of all, his might that we have on his power.

[13:05] That's pointing us towards the strength, capability and power of Jesus. Now, when you think of Jesus, I hope that you think of the gentlest, kindest, warmest, most tender person you could think of.

But I also hope that when you think of Jesus, that you think of the strongest and most capable person. His power is phenomenal. We see that when we read through the Gospel narratives. You think of his power to perform miracles. He speaks and diseases are healed. Demons are silenced. Storms are calmed.

Think of his ability to resist temptation. 40 days of starvation and yet the devil can't make him blink. Think of his ability to deal with people. He was confronted by awkward questions, by people trying to catch him out, by people who didn't like having him around and they never came close to catching him out.

Think of his ability to withstand abuse, physical violence, verbal insults, huge psychological onslaughts, but he kept going. His ability to suffer pain, physical agony, emotional anguish, spiritual desolation.

[14:24] He took it all. Think of his ability to bear the curse of sin. He was crushed for our inequities, but he carried them all.

And think of his ability to conquer death, buried on Friday, risen on Sunday. Who else has that kind of power?

Secondly, his strength, the middle one. This is a really interesting word because it can also be translated Dominion. It appears in 1 Timothy 6, 16, it says to him, be eternal, honored and eternal dominion.

And it was in the verse we read at the very beginning talking about power and dominion going to God. And so it's a word that speaks of the rule and authority of Jesus.

Now Paul had already spoken about this back in chapter 1 when he speaks about God's great power. You can see that in Ephesians 1, 20 and 21.

[15 : 30] It talks about the great power that God has that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead, seated at his right hand, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. There it is, the same concept above every name that is named.

Paul is reminding us that the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus means that he now has total dominion.

Some of you might be familiar with a very famous quotation that comes from Abraham Kuiper. Abraham Kuiper was a Dutch theologian in the late 19th and early 20th century. He was also Prime Minister of the Netherlands for a wee while.

And he's got a very famous quote that I want to put on the screen. He said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign overall, does not cry, mine.

Jesus's dominion has no limitations or weaknesses. And that means that Jesus has authority and if Jesus has authority, then that means Jesus has influence.

[16 : 40] The incredible power of Jesus is not confined to 2,000 years ago. And now that power extends right across heaven and on earth to all creation.

In other words, his power is so powerful that there's no way that it cannot reach. We go back to the verses that we have. His power is so great, there are no limitations.

And that's why prayer is so powerful because we pray in the name of the one who has dominion.

That's why the gospel is so relevant to everyone because nobody lives outside of Jesus's territory.

And that's why you can have confidence because Jesus has both ability and authority. It's easy to think that Jesus's power is a bit like electricity.

So if you think of electricity, there's some parts of the world where you can get electricity, no bother. But there's other parts of the world where you can't get it so easily and it's out of reach. But Jesus's power is not like electricity.

[17 : 45] The truth is Jesus's power in terms of planet earth is like gravity. There is nowhere where it does not reach.

So we see Jesus's power in terms of his mighty ability. We see his power in terms of his total authority. And thirdly, this verse is showing us Jesus's power in terms of its accessibility.

It's saying to be empowered, be strengthened. Jesus's power is so powerful that it can empower you.

So not only does he have a startling power himself and not only does he exercise that power in total dominion, he also shares that power with you.

In other words, he uses the strength of his might to strengthen you. Remember, he's not saying be strong like me. He's saying be strengthened by me.

[18 : 48] And that's the amazing, one of the many amazing realities of our union with Christ. Not only are we united to his love, his friendship, his mercy, his grace, we are also united to his power.

That's why the apostles in the early church were able to perform miracles like Jesus was. That's why the message of the gospel has spread from 120 people in Acts chapter 1 to millions upon millions of believers across the globe today.

And that is why God can do incredible things through ordinary people like you. The power that Paul speaks about in Ephesians chapter 1 is a power that he is working towards us who believe.

In other words, Jesus' power is so powerful that it's accessible. It's not out of reach. It's not beyond you. In fact, where is the power of God seen today? It's seen in the lives of believers.

It is seen in people like you. The power of Jesus is seen when lives are transformed by the gospel.

When the addict becomes the evangelist. When the arrogant becomes the encourager.

[19 : 59] When the grump becomes the gentle one. When the tyrant becomes tender. When the greedy becomes generous. When the timid becomes a teacher. When the wanderer becomes a worshiper.

Jesus' power is immense. It extends to every inch of his creation. And that means that there's never a moment when it can't reach you.

And that is why he doesn't say be strong like me. He says be strengthened by me.

Jesus' dominion and power is the source from which we are strengthened. And the key truth that that reveals to us all is that you are not doomed to be weak.

And if you feel weak, or if you think the church is weak, then you need to let the words of Ephesians 6-10 saturate into your thinking.

[21 : 11] And you need these words to be carved onto your heart. And of course it all makes perfect sense. We said at the start that in this letter Paul has been saying that through God's saving work in Jesus he's making a new humanity.

That new humanity is going to be a dwelling place for God the Holy Spirit. So God himself comes to dwell in our hearts. And one of the key things that the Holy Spirit does in the lives of Christians is to empower them.

In fact, whenever you think of the Holy Spirit, one of the things you should be thinking of is power. And the Holy Spirit gives us all different gifts. But as he does that, he is empowering us to serve. And Paul speaks about that in 1 Corinthians 12 verse 4. He speaks about being varieties of gifts, varieties of service. It's the same Lord, varieties of activities. But it's the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

And that's why when it comes to living for Jesus as a church or as individual Christians we should never be asking the question, are we able? We should be asking the question, is Jesus able?

[22 : 31] So think of evangelism. Think of your friends, your family, your colleagues, this community. We feel so weak.

But it's Jesus. Think of pastoring. There's people whose lives have been battered. People who are isolated, people who are in desperate need.

We feel so weak. It's Jesus. Think of discipleship. We need to help Christians grow in their faith. We need to get the older ones supporting the younger ones and helping them on.

We need to teach and learn and grow. But we feel so weak. Is Jesus? Think of serving a church or in the community. We feel weak. Is Jesus?

Think of mortifying your sin. We struggle with temptation. We repeat the same mistakes. We see so many failings in our lives. We feel so weak. But is Jesus?

[23 : 29] Jesus is never weak. In fact, when you think of all of this, when you think of our weakness and we think of what God is saying about empowering us, do you know what the real truth is?

The real truth is in Ephesians 3.20, where it speaks about the fact that Jesus is able to do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or think.

According to what? To the power that's at work within us. You think of all that stuff I just mentioned.

You think of trying to reach out to people around us. You think of trying to pastor people going through difficult circumstances. You think of discipling Christians as we seek to grow in our faith.

We think of serving. We think of trying to overcome that battle against sin. Ephesians is saying that Jesus is empowering you and he is going to do far more abundantly than we can ask or think.

[24 : 46] Jesus' power is immense in its ability, total in its authority and God forbid that we ever forget that it's accessible in its availability.

And that's why Paul can say he is empowered by the power of Jesus' power. Our last question is what difference does all of this make to the week ahead?

Well I want to just give you three things to think about. One, this should challenge the I can't mindset that so often we can have as Christians.

So many times we think of things that we want to do as a church or as individuals and we can just find reasons why we can't. I can't do this, I can't do that, I can't speak, I can't explain. I won't be able to answer questions, I won't be able to do this, I won't be able to do that.

I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't. Paul is saying forget it, forget it, forget I can't be empowered by the power of Jesus' power.

[25 : 56] And this is where we have to really believe our theology, like really believe it. Because when Paul says he is empowered in the Lord, he's not joking. And when it's not for the moments, these kind of verses are not for the moments when we feel strong, they're for the moments when we feel weak.

And we need to trust and believe, really believe what we claim we believe. These theological truths need to saturate our minds. It must challenge the I can't mindset that I often have, that we can all have no more.

Number two, all of this should shape every single part of life. And that's one of the fascinating things, if you were to go home just now and read through Ephesians 4, 5 and 6, like leading up to this verse, up to verse 10, you'll see that Paul has just given a huge long list of stuff from everyday

life.

So he's talking about family relationships, work place, children, parents, all that kind of stuff. So as you go into a new week, does God empower you to be a better colleague, or a better boss, or a better wife, a better husband, a better sibling, a better friend, a better neighbour?

Of course he does. And if our faith doesn't make a difference to these areas of life, then something's far wrong. All of this should shape every part of life.

[27 : 31] And then last of all, let me ask, how are you going to react to feeling weak this week? If you feel weak this week, how are you going to react?

What's Paul telling us to do? Well as I've said a few times already, he's not telling you to be strong as though you have to stir yourself up and sort yourself out.

He is saying be strengthened through all the strength and power of Jesus. So in the week ahead, if you're overwhelmed at work, if you're facing a big decision, if you're hurt by someone else's behaviour, if you're trying to share your faith with somebody, if you're wanting to help someone grow in their faith but you don't know what to do, if you're doubting, if you're struggling to pray, if you're battling against sin, if you're crippled by fear, in those moments I want you to pause and I want you to think about this verse and I want you to be empowered by the power of Jesus' power. And if anyone maybe at home or even here is not getting a Christian or not sure, I don't know what is maybe holding you back or making you a wee bit hesitant.

Some people feel they're too strong, so they feel that they don't need Jesus and if that's how you feel then I guess I would love to know how you can explain that.

[29 : 32] But I think it's more likely that you feel too weak, that you think I'm not going to live up to this, but I'm not going to be good enough, but I'm not able to do what I need to do to follow Jesus.

If you feel like that then please know that God is not saying to you, be strong and come. You shouldn't come no matter how weak you feel.

And I'll stay. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that Jesus our Savior is risen and exalted and we marvel at his power in all that he was able to achieve and we rejoice in his dominion over every inch of our lives and of this universe.

And we pray that every one of us would be empowered by the power of his power. And we just acknowledge that that's the power we need more than anything else. Amen.