

Strength In The Cross

- *I Corinthians 1:18-29; II Corinthians 12:9-10*

- **If you got to choose between a new Cadillac or a beat up pickup truck, what would you choose? What about having to choose between your favorite pajamas or a 3 pc. suit? If you could choose between a weekend at a spa clinic and a weekend camping in the desert at the hottest time of the year, what would you choose?**
 - Obviously these are easy answers, right? And they are also easy based on one common denominator ... comfort.
 - Society today places a high price & importance on comfort.
- **Comfort is not necessarily a bad thing. I think we all prefer comfort & we do our best to develop a lifestyle for ourselves & our families that is comfortable.**
 - One of the biggest things that drives my generation and the generation ahead of is the importance we place on giving our families all that we can & to make them feel comfortable.
- **But there's a danger in loving comfort too much.**
 - Too much comfort has a tendency to spoil us and to cause us to let our guard down.
 - There comes a point where we begin to think we deserve more than we do.
 - Being too comfortable can cause us to become unappreciative for what we have.
- **It seems that as we've continued to put more and more of an emphasis on being comfortable in society, the problem is our faith has followed suit. We've become Christians accustomed to comfort.**
 - Case in point. Those of you that are 60 +, what was the church building like as a child?
 - We come to our buildings that are warm in the winter and air-conditioned in the summer.
 - Our pews and chairs are padded.
 - Our songs have become loud & our sermons have become soft.
 - And what has happened before we know it, churches around our world today are no longer preaching messages that convict about sin & warn of hell, now we have begun to crave messages & sermons & a Christian lifestyle that are padded as well, and that cannot happen.
 - I have heard people say it & you have to, "Well, I would go to that church, but he preaches to much about sin & hell."
 - "I want a preacher that encourages me & lifts me up, not one that tells me how bad I am."
 - Well let me just say if those words have come out of your mouth or crossed your mind before, if it were NOT for the cross ... we would be headed to hell with our sin.
 - And the best way I know to encourage you this morning is not to brag on you & tell you how good of a person you are. If you find encouragement this morning, find it in the cross & God's love for you, AMEN?
- **In Luke 9:23, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."**
 - This is a powerful passage of scripture where Jesus is not only compelling some folks to follow after Him, but He goes as far as to remind them to weigh the costs when they pick up their cross.
- **Let me ask you a question. What do this verse mean to you? Have you ever thought about that? I mean, it's pretty hard to avoid the cross when you're a Christian, right? What can you do with a phrase like, "take up your cross"?**
 - What the religious community has done is attempted to make the cross comfortable. They have made it convenient. They create a comfortable idea of the cross and what it means for us today to take up our crosses.
 - They will use the phrase, "Well, we all have our crosses to bear", and they use that to describe going to church 3 times a week or being challenged to change some of their

sinful habits.

- Let me tell you something. The cross was not comfortable for our Lord. It was not convenient for Him to carry. But it was something He knew He had to do.
- The cross has become one of those things that we don't talk about much anymore in churches & for the life of me I don't know why. For us as Christians, the cross is EVERYTHING to us! And when we do talk about it, we do our best to make it as comfortable and as easy as we can.
- **But for a lot of people, the cross is a difficult thing to grab hold of.**
 - There are Christians & even churches that find the cross offensive & they refrain from talking about the importance of the cross.
 - Well my friend, let me remind you today that though the cross has its gore & its share of blood & death, the Cross of Calvary is my way to freedom. I will gladly cling to the Old Rugged Cross. Why? Because that is where my Precious Savior gave His life for you & for me.
 - People will say, "If you preach the cross too much, it will hinder our ability to get new people in the church. We need to preach that God is good & He wants to bless His people so we can have large crowds."
 - Well friend, I will agree with both statements, God is good & I believe He desires to bless His people, but we first must accept the cross before we can expect His blessings.
 - You may push the cross aside to get a crowd, but what have you sacrificed in return? If you take the cross out of the message, you have nothing!
- **READ SCRIPTURE - In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 Paul talks about how the world sees the cross in verse 18 he writes, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."**
 - For those living in the first century the cross was the ultimate symbol of weakness. For many, then and now, the message of the Gospel – that God came to earth in the form of man and was crucified – is complete foolishness.
 - I mean why would God use a symbol of torture, of death, of weakness to save the world? We have crosses in our windows, crosses in our church, crosses around our neck, crosses hanging in our homes, crosses even on our cars. We are used to seeing the cross as an ornament, decoration or a piece of jewelry. But if a first century Jew came in and saw an illuminated cross hanging from our walls – they'd think there was something wrong with us. For the Jews the cross meant weakness.
- **But that is the very thing that makes the cross so beautiful.**
 - God takes what, from a human perspective, is foolish. He chooses what has no glory and carries no honor. He finds the least likely symbol for love and life and says, "I'll use that." God takes what the world says is foolish, demeaning, and shameful, and says "watch this" and turns it into the power of salvation.
 - Picture of Babe Ruth's bat.
 - Picture of a van Gogh painting canvas.
 - What about this picture? Its 2 pieces of rough wood & a few rusty nails. It's nothing special ... until they hung our Savior on Calvary's cross ... and from that moment, that old rugged cross became our salvation.
 - Look down at verse 22 of I Corinthians 1 – "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;"
 - Go down to v.25 – "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."
 - Who else but God could take a cross that represented defeat – **and turn it into a symbol of victory?**
 - Who else but God could take a cross that represented guilt and shame – **and turn it into the symbol for grace?**
 - Who else but God could take a cross that represented condemnation – **and turn it into a**

symbol of freedom?

- Who else but God could take a cross that represented pain and suffering – **and turn it into symbol of healing and hope?**
- Who else but God could take a cross that represented death – **and turn it into a symbol of life?**

○ No one else could, but God can.

- What the world saw as the ultimate moment of God’s weakness was in reality the ultimate moment of God’s strength. Here’s why that matters.

➤ **Here’s what I don’t want you to miss. This is our one point for today, and it’s so important, it’s the only thing you need to get from this morning: What God Did For the Cross, He Can Do for You.**

○ When you are at your weakest – you are exactly where you need to be for God to be the strongest.

○ The upside down truth of the cross is that when you are weak – you are strong. Look at verse 27... “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;”

- Throughout Scripture God continually chose the weak over the strong. I came across some examples of that:

-) Abraham was old,
-) Jacob was insecure,
-) Leah was unattractive,
-) Joseph was humiliated,
-) Moses couldn’t speak,
-) Gideon was poor,
-) Samson was proud,
-) Rahab was immoral,
-) David had an affair,
-) Elijah was suicidal,
-) Jeremiah was depressed,
-) Jonah was disobedient,
-) Naomi was a widow,
-) Peter was impulsive & hot-tempered,
-) Martha worried a lot,
-) the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages,
-) Zacchaeus was unpopular,
-) Thomas had doubts,
-) Paul had poor health,
-) and Timothy was timid.

- But, thank God, what you find in the Bible is that God is not out here looking for the perfect Christian who has never made a mistake to follow after Him ... He is looking for someone like you.

- The Bible is a long list of imperfect misfits who discovered that weakness is strength. So what weakness will you bring to God? Don’t be burdened by a past of mistakes & wrong choices. Instead, just ask God to do for you what He did for so many others.

➤ **Paul had a unique insight to the power of God & he referred many times to it in his writings. God teaches us that when we think we’re strong we’re really weak – but when we acknowledge our weakness and humble ourselves before God we put ourselves in a position to receive His strength.**

○ II Corinthians 12:9-10 – “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. 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.**”

- **Most people don't enjoy acknowledging their weaknesses, much less talking about them.**
 - I have been through a few job interviews, and one of the questions I dreaded them coming to was this one, "What's your greatest weakness?"
 - How do you answer that? What are you going to say?
 - I'm never on time – I constantly procrastinate – I have trouble getting along with coworkers – I am not sure how to turn on a computer." You can't say that.
 - But you have to say something. Well you try to come up with a weakness that sounds more like a strength:
 - I can be a little bit of a perfectionist.
 - I tend to be a bit of a workaholic.
 - I like to get here early & leave late.
 - Why do we do that? Because we don't want to recognize or admit that we have a weakness, right?
- **You can go to Barnes & Nobles & find a large collection of books that will tell you that you have the power to do whatever you want to do or how you can find inner strength to accomplish your goals. But Paul says strength comes when we realize our weakness.**
 - How many of you remember going on trips with your kids when they were small?
 - A lot of our vacations include either the beach or amusement parks or both, which requires a lot of walking.
 - No matter where you go, it seems like kids automatically bring a lot of things with them, right?
 - And when you get to the park, they want to carry
 - Their jacket in case they get cold.
 - Their cup in case they get thirsty.
 - Their Ipod in case they have to wait in line for more than 30 seconds.
 - After a few hours of walking, they normally get tired of carrying all these things around so they look up at Mom or Dad & ask, "Will you carry this for me?"
 - As the trip goes on after you are carrying all your stuff & half of the car on your back, your children will become tired and ask you to not only carry their things, but to carry them as well, right? And in that moment their weakness shows your strength.
- **Well let me tell you, I want to see God's strength in my life more than anything. I want Him to do for me what he did for the cross. It's part of my pride that I want to carry my own load – and I refuse to admit my weakness. But the cross makes it clear that I am weak, but when I am weak – He is strong.**
 - And therein lies the test for us today. Will you trust God enough to let your weakness be His strength? Because it's when we let go of our need for comfort, our need to be in control, our need to glory in our strengths or accomplishments or our paycheck or our trophies or our co-workers' approval or whatever it is that keeps you from abandoning a comfortable version of the cross—it's then that God does in our lives what he did in Christ's death.
 - It's then that God does in our hearts what He did for the cross. And He takes followers who were hanging by a thread and bolsters their spirits. He takes followers who were at their weakest moment and uses it for enormous kingdom good. He takes followers who were all but defeated and He turns their testimonies into life-giving messages of truth and hope, all to His glory.
- *God, do for us what you did for the Cross. Do for us what you did for the Cross. Do for me, do for this church, do for this city, do for this nation, do for this world what you did for the Cross, that we might begin to understand why you chose such an uncomfortable means of self-sacrifice. Do for us what you did for the Cross.*