

Exchanging Strength



Strength Through Weakness (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme for this week, "Strength Through Weakness." Yesterday I pointed out that there are two totally different kinds of strength. One is a strength that the world understands and acknowledges; the other is a strength that the world knows nothing about.

The strength that this world recognizes is represented by political and military power. It masters, it controls, it subjugates, it dominates, it enforces its own will. Its motives are basically selfish. It is concerned for its own ends, its own good—not the good of those who are subjugated. One might call it the strength of the jungle, the strength of the beast of prey: the lion, the tiger, the leopard.

It's very significant that in the Bible's prophetic preview of the close of this age, various political powers that arise are represented by wild beasts: the lion, the bear, the leopard, and so on. These all picture the kind of strength that the world understands and strives after. The indications are that this kind of strength will play an increasing role in the unfolding of events that will bring the age to its close.

On the other hand, in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation where all of God's purposes are worked out to their triumphant conclusion, Jesus is presented as the sovereign Lord of the universe and the title given Him is "The Lion of the tribe of Judah." But when John the revelator actually sees the one so designated, he sees not a lion but a Lamb, a Lamb looking as if it had been slain. This is what we read in Revelation 5:5–6:

> "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." (NIV)

There at the very center of the universe, at the place of ultimate authority and honor, there was a Lamb looking as though it had been slain. John expected to see a lion but he

saw a slain lamb. That really says, as briefly and as clearly as it can be said, the difference between the world's view of strength and God's view of strength. The world sees the lion as the strong, mighty beast. But God sees a different kind of strength in a Lamb that's been slain.

This Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, which it says are the seven spirits [or the sevenfold spirit] of God. In the Bible, horns typify strength and eyes typify wisdom. With the lamb, both alike are spiritual. They are the sevenfold spirits of God. They're spiritual and of a different order from that which this world recognizes or understands.

This is a kind of strength that the world regards as weakness and a kind of wisdom that the world regards as foolishness. But let's remember what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:25:

> "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (NIV)

This strength from God comes to us from only one channel. I spoke about this yesterday. The channel is the cross of Jesus Christ. At the cross, a divinely ordained exchange took place. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, took upon Himself the evil that due to us as sinners and rebels. That, in return by the other aspect of the exchange, we might receive the good that was due to Jesus. Jesus died our death that we might have His life. He was made sin that we might be made righteous. He was made a curse that we might receive the blessing. He was wounded that we might be healed.

There are so many aspects to this exchange, but the one that's relevant to our topic today is that Jesus, through the death on the cross, was made weakness and foolishness that we might receive in exchange the strength and the wisdom of God. Through the cross God offers us His strength to replace our weakness, His wisdom to replace our foolishness. They come as we wait patiently in faith at the foot of the cross.

There's a beautiful passage in the 40th chapter of Isaiah which expresses the difference between natural strength and God's strength and the way that we can exchange our own limited natural strength for the limitless strength of God. This is what Isaiah says, Isaiah 40:28–31:

> "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. [That the limitless resources of strength of God.] His understanding is inscrutable. [That's His limitless wisdom. Now listen:] He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary." (NASB)

There we have the clear contrast between natural strength and divine strength. Natural strength is represented by the youths and the vigorous young men. But their natural strength is not sufficient. "Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly…" The lesson is natural strength is not sufficient. There's an alternative: as we wait for the Lord we will gain new strength. The literal translation in Hebrew is, "we will exchange strength." That's what it really means. We've come to the end of our own strength and then for our own strength, we'll exchange God's strength in place of our weakness. When we've come to the end of all that we can do, God's strength is made available to us.

Notice what that strength will do for us. We will mount up with wings like eagles, we will run and not get tired, we will walk and not become weary. There are three pictures of strength. There's the tremendous surging flight of the eagle that soars high up into the sky, far above all other birds. That's tremendous and dramatic. Then there's the intense activity—we will run and not get tired. But let's remember also we will walk and not become weary. Which do you think is harder? To soar, to run or to walk? Believe me, the hardest of the three is to walk. The daily plodding existence, when it seems hum-drum, monotonous, when we wonder if things are worthwhile; but as we wait upon God, as we wait at the foot of the cross, we receive strength for all three: to soar, to run and to walk.

To close this talk today I'd like to read to you Paul's personal testimony about how he found strength out of weakness. These words are found in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. They sum up in a very beautiful way the message that I'm trying to communicate. Paul was a man who had tremendous revelations. He received tremendous truth from God that's been a blessing to all Christians of all subsequent ages. But he had to pay a price for it. This is what he says:

> "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. [There was some spiritual force at work in Paul's life that was unnatural, it was demonic. And in many times it caused him great agony, and tremendous personal

> problems. He says:] Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But the Lord 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (NIV)

That's the paradox, isn't it? When I am weak, then I am strong. When I've come to the end of all my own strength, all my own wisdom, all my own cleverness, all my own ability, when I have no more answers, when I'm pressed right down the ground; that's when God's strength is made available to me. And God was so gracious and merciful to Paul that He wouldn't lift the pressure, because He knew it was the pressure that drove Paul to the place where he was open to receive God's supernatural strength and power.

What a vital secret that is for every one of us to learn, that there must come a place in our Christian walk where we've come to the end of our own strength, where we can't do it. And then we don't give up but we turn to God. And through the cross and through waiting upon the Lord, as Isaiah says, God's divine supernatural strength and wisdom are made available to us. Listen to these last words of Paul again:

> "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Have you ever realized that? Have you realized that your weakness is the way the God's strength can come into your life through the cross of Jesus?

Our time is up for today. Tune in again tomorrow at this time. I'll be speaking tomorrow about the miracle and the mystery of the grain of wheat.

Radio Program

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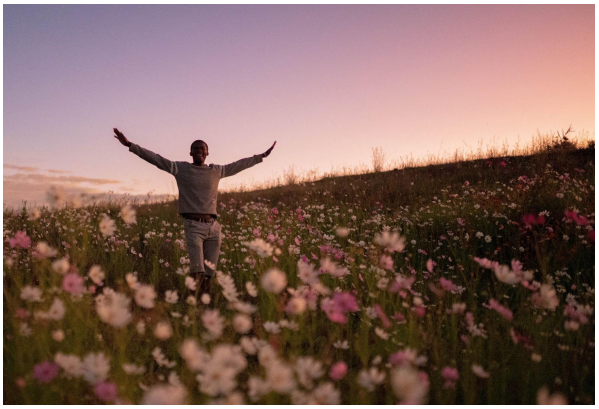

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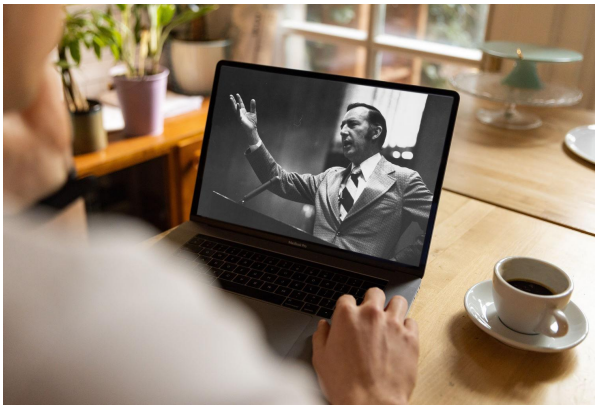

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