

Be Strong in the Lord

This morning I am going to continue in a series that I started last week on spiritual warfare. Now, as we found last week, we cannot really understand our lives or the history of the church or the history of the world without setting it against the backdrop of a gigantic cosmic battle between God and Satan. It is the desire of Satan to destroy, mar and hurt everything that God loves.

We pick up this morning in Ephesians 6:10 where Paul writes:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Paul says two things here, right off the bat. To be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power and, then, put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the devil.

I would like to ask you a question. Why is it so important to be strong in the Lord? To learn about the strength of the Lord? To lean into the might of God and, then, to put on the full armor of God? Why do we need to concern ourselves with the power of God? Or the armor of God? Isn’t it enough that we love one another, or have love of doctrine? That we seek to be authentic and real in our feelings? Aren’t we doing a credible job as Christians by going to church, by caring for our children, by seeking to work hard at our jobs, by trying to guard our speech or writing out our tithe checks? Why must we, in addition, learn about the power and might of God?

See, I believe that we just skim over verses like Ephesians 6:10 about being strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. We zoom by what Paul is saying without fully

embracing it because we don't fundamentally understand our need for the power of God's might.

What I would like to do in introducing this subject today about finding God's power is to rub in your need, for a moment, for the strength of God. The reason why people have inadequate answers (and we are going to go through a number of inadequate answers for the problems that we, as individuals have, and that we as an American society have), the reason why we regularly come up with inadequate answers and empty solutions for our problems is that we don't fully grasp the power of the opposition arrayed against us. You see, we would immediately run to Ephesians 6:10, being strong in the Lord and his might, if we had a glimpse for a moment regarding the power, the mighty power that is at work in the opposition.

I want to give you just a little window so that you can see something of Satan's power this morning. To do so, what I would like to do is to flip back to the book of Job 1:6 It says:

“One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord. Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the Lord, ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.’”

We learn that Satan is not omnipresent, he is not everywhere, he must travel from one point to another. And in the same way that he is not omnipresent, he is also not omnipotent, that means he doesn't have all power. But as we are going to see, he has great power.

The apostle Peter calls him a “roaring lion seeking people to devour.” John, in the

book of Revelation, calls him the “great dragon.” He has great power. And if you want evidence of the power of Satan, understand that he didn’t hesitate to attack and go after Jesus Christ, the Son of God, himself. So much confidence did Satan have in his power that he went after Jesus.

Still, his power is a limited power. Anything that Satan does only comes by the permission of God. The message of the book of Job is clearly that the Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice. But in the mystery of God’s reign, he has given Satan permission to do evil. So, we read in Job 1:8,

“Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on the earth like him. He is blameless and upright.’ And Satan insinuates, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face.’ The Lord said, ‘Very well. Everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself, do not lay a finger.’”

Now, let’s consider the following experiences of Job. Remember, we are looking at Job to understand the great power of Satan, and why we desperately need the might of God when we are facing a power like Satan’s power.

As we read through the chapter we find that Satan is able to stir up people to attack you. It says in verse 13:

“One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, a messenger came to Job and said, ‘The oxen were

plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

When it is “What’s happening here? Why are these people coming against me? Why is my mother or my father hurting me suddenly? There doesn’t seem to be any reason for it, any rationale that I can come up with for it. Things seemed so peaceful; I thought we were getting along better.” Really? Do you know that Satan can stir up attack through people? You wonder about the hateful, mean-spirited things that people sometimes say - the unfair criticisms; slandering you or someone you love. Satan can stir that up.

And we go on and we see a power that Satan has that many of us don’t think about. It says in verse 16:

“That while he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, ‘The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants and I am the only who has escaped to tell you.’”

The fire of God is lightning. Do you know that Satan has a certain amount of power over nature? Now, it is clear that not all lightning comes from the hand of Satan. But some of it does. This one did. And I believe that when Jesus was in the boat traveling across the Sea of Galilee to go to the other side and the winds came to sink the boat, I believe that that storm was stirred up by Satan. It was energized. Certain natural disasters come from Satan. God is over all, but there is a certain limited amount of power that he has given to Satan including the power to hurl lightning bolts.

Then read on in verse 18:

“While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, ‘Your sons

and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the older brother's house when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house and it collapsed on them and they are dead.”

Not only lightning, but a mighty hurricane. Again, it is certainly not the case that every hurricane comes from Satan. The winds are at the commands of God. But in this case, Satan was given the power to stir up a mighty wind and to murder.

Tremendous power, imagine, over nature. You see in the case of the Gadarean swine that Satan has power over animals from time to time. And, of course, we know that Satan exercises terrible power over the minds of men and women. Lying and discouraging and driving people to suicidal thoughts, to homicidal thoughts, to violent thoughts—we must come to grips with the power of the enemy. His power to assault you with lust. To stir up our pride. To cause you to desire something that 2 minutes ago you weren't even thinking about. To have two people fighting with each other violently. You know, folks who stood at an altar at a church and said, “We will love one another until death us do part,” fighting like cats and dogs.

Now, we need to go further than a simple recognition of the power of the enemy. In order to discover, I mean really discover, our need for what Paul is saying in Ephesians 6:10, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power,” we also need to come to a very frank and honest recognition of our own profound weaknesses. Not only look at the enemy, but then we need to take a look at ourselves.

You know, we often talk to you about the danger of introspection, about sinking into yourself and digging at yourself. But like everything, we don't want to go to an extreme. It is absolutely appropriate, in fact God commands us, to examine ourselves as Paul

writes in 2 Corinthians 13:5, to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith and to look at ourselves as he tells us in 1 Corinthians 11 before we take communion. When we do so, we frequently find that there are points of entry that the enemy can easily access our spirits through a particular weak door or weak veins. There seems to be this almost completely unguarded, open highway right to the center of our beings that an enemy army can just march upon and grab a hold of us and wreck us.

Do you see that in your life? Are you in touch enough with yourself to say, "Here are the weak places. These are the places where the enemy has access to me." There are places the enemy has access to you. You ought to have enough self-awareness to be in touch with your weak points. Perhaps it's a possible emotional attachment that is growing with someone who is inappropriate for you to be attached to. Perhaps you and your spouse have just gotten more and more distant; it would take very little to push you over the edge. You are just toying with a problem - an area of unforgiveness in your life. You have allowed bitterness to grow, unchecked lust drawing you aside by the desire for more, the inability to ask forgiveness from others, unchecked ambition for position-there are weak points in all of us.

We look at the power of the enemy and we look at our own weakness and, then, I often examine the weakness that is in the church. And sometimes, at least for me as a pastor, it can become overwhelming.

A few weeks ago, (Some of you know in addition to pastoring this church, I also have responsibilities in the Vineyard movement to oversee twenty other churches. And that is only in a general way, but pastors, if they are having problems can talk to me and I try to provide some general level of counsel and care for these other pastors.)-in any case, I had

a day in which one of the pastors that I am caring for and overseeing said that he needs to withdraw from the Vineyard movement. He no longer believes that spiritual gifts exist for today. This was after trying to process with him and work with him. We discovered that we had reached an impasse and there was no way around this. This is a bottom-line, bedrock issue for us.

We believe in all of the biblical gifts of the Spirit. We believe that they are absolutely necessary for the building up of the body of Christ and his witness in the world. And so, this pastor's decision to move against that is going to split his church.

After that, I heard about several individuals who were having affairs. And then I went into some counseling appointments with individuals who have been severely abused in their pasts - physically, emotionally, sexually.

After that day, and days like that, I am so terribly in touch with the profound need and weakness in the church, the hurt that is present in us and the pain that we drag in from our pasts. I look around at the church at large and what do I see? I see fighting and defensiveness, charges and counter-charges and people who are going through divorces. Kids being divided up and wrestled over. Many, many people in the church at large, succumbing to the spirit of the age. Compromising and yielding to various fads and fashions, in terms of thought processes and philosophies.

You see, we have no idea of our need for Ephesians 6:10 unless we take some time to consider the power of Satan and the weakness, the impotence, of the church and ourselves. When you consider those two facts, you realize how utterly inadequate the answers are that are proposed over against the spiritual might of temptation and insinuation and subversive philosophies, natural disasters. What is raised?

You know what is being proposed as answers. The Surgeon General recently said that the problem in America today, and I quote, “Is that we retain a puritanical mentality when it comes to sex.” She went on to call for “a more explicit discussion of sex” because in the mind and perspective of our Surgeon General, we do not focus on sex enough in America. You know, I can’t laugh at that because it is so sad.

Then, you hear of calls for pilot programs and what is being done with teenagers in this one city, and if we could just get behind that, then the kids in our inner cities who have no real hope, no sense of meaning, will find hope and meaning. There is always a call by the government, for additional funding of this or that educational program and the latest way to have kids feel good about themselves and a new self-esteem, believe-in-yourself program. The church, of course, responds with pronouncements and condemnations.

Paul says, “Forget about your flimsy answers, your calls for education, your moral pronouncements, your rules, your codes of ethics, your restructuring of the church and countdown 2000 campaigns. You are just reorganizing the chairs on the deck of the Titanic while it is going down. Forget about that. Every man-centered, humanly powered solution is inadequate!”

In dealing with the power of the demonic forces that are arrayed against you, your only hope is the power of Almighty God. Take refuge in Ephesians 6:10. Maybe you are here today, and you are going down for the third count. You were barely keeping your head above water and then someone threw an anchor around your legs, in your marriage, at your work place, financial worries, dating problems, family problems, the enemy has come and assaulted you. Maybe he has assaulted your body, he has assaulted you with discouragement or depression, relational strife. The only answer is to find refuge in the

words of Ephesians 6:10, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Let’s explore the dimensions of this verse together.

Some of you may know that the head of the Association of Vineyard Churches that we are a part of is named John Wimber. And John, several years ago, wrote a number of books with the word “power” in their titles. One was called “Power Evangelism” and another, “Power Healing” and a third was called, “Power Encounters.”

Well, some folks in the church world decided to take it upon themselves to critique John’s books, which is fine and fair if there was really something to critique. So a group of critics came out with a book called “Power Religion.” And the cover of the book says this, “Power tie, power lunch, power broker, [and then they ask] power religion?” Here is the sub-point on the cover: It says, “Contemporary society is on a quest for power. Few would argue that. But what happens when the evangelical church follows that path?” And then they go on, in the course of this, to discuss the danger of religion that concerns itself with power.

Well, the absurdity of their critique about seeking power never hit me to the degree that it did until I was meditating on Ephesians 6:10. “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power [or his strength].” Actually, in the sentence, there are three Greek words for “power.” Paul tells us that God’s power is the key to dealing with the power of the evil one and our own personal weakness.

So, I pulled out my Greek concordance. Many of you know that the New Testament was not written in English. It was not even written in King James English with a lot of “thous and thees” and “doths and shall nots”. The New Testament was written in Greek.

I pulled out my Greek concordance and lo and behold, I discovered that “power” was

one of the central concepts running through the entire New Testament. One of the words for “power”, *dunamis*, is found 118 times in the New Testament. Add to that the word “*exusia*”, authority or might, and “*kratos*”, strength, “*iscus*”, power-and you literally have hundreds of references to power. The vast majority of them deal with the power of God. Words for “power” are literally found everywhere in the New Testament.

Consider just a few of these references so that you understand the importance of the central concept of “power” in the New Testament. In Romans 1:16, Paul writes, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. First for the Jew and then for the Gentile.” There is power in the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul says, “The message of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” There is power in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Paul wants us to know that what we are into as Christians is not just talk - words upon words upon words, massive heaps of words piled up high until we all choke on words. He says, “No, my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power so that your faith may not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power.

He makes this claim again to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1 saying, “The gospel came to you not simply with words and more words and more words, but with power and with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”

Paul says that his weapons included truthful speech and the power of God - 2 Corinthians 6. You talk about the one-two punch: truth and the power of God.

The other apostles were not ashamed to pray for power. They didn’t critique it. They

didn't engage in all of these fine distinctions and debates. When they were opposed, they said, "Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your Word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your Holy Servant, Jesus." It says, "After they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken and men were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly." Power!

So, I looked at it more closely because I thought, "My goodness, it is everywhere, this word 'power' in the Bible. Why are portions of the church almost blind to this as a central defining principle of New Testament Christianity? Why are there books being written and why are people so upset when you start talking about the power of God as absolutely necessary to live effectively in a world dominated by the enemy? And as I read through my Greek concordance, I found, "Oh my, guess what it is that defeats Satan."

Yes, Satan is defeated by truth because he is a liar. But over and over again, the scriptures say that he is defeated by the power of God. In Luke 11, Jesus says,

"If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you...[and then he goes on and says]...when a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe."

Note how he talks about Satan. He talks about him as being a strong man. He is powerful. He is not going to be dealt with in our lives, in the life of this church and the world - his subversive influences, his philosophies, his attacks are not going to be dealt with by the paper thin, flimsy instruments of Kroger gun buy-back programs or more explicit talk about sex. Jesus says, "It is only when someone stronger attacks and

overpowers him.”

“He takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.”

What is it friends, that is the Biblical mark of false religion? Paul tells us what it is. He says, “Watch out, because there are many who have the form of religion, the form, the appearance, but they deny the power.” You see, it is the power of God that is one of the main weapons, the main hopes, the chief refuges for the weakness of the church when we come into dealing with the power of the evil one.

Understand this: That the only way anything is going to happen that is going to be good on your behalf in defeating the work of the enemy, in whatever way he is assaulting you, the only thing anything good is going to be done on behalf of the church, this church and the church at large and the way that the enemy is assaulting it, or the larger society, the American culture that we live in and watch daily disintegrating around us, our only hope is the power of God. And that is a big hope! This is the reason for the joyful optimism of Christians. This is why Christians can say, with Paul, that we are not discouraged. Never. Never, ever, should a Christian lose hope, because of the power of Almighty God!

Let me put it more simply. The Old Testament had a way to express the power of God in impossible situations when things looked bleak. There was a man named Abraham who, at 100 years old, was promised a child. His wife was 90 years old. I believe 90 is sometime past menopause. The Lord comes along and says, “You are going to have a child.” Sarah laughs. And here is the way the power of God is described in Old Testament words. The angel of the Lord comes along and says, “Why did Sarah laugh?” Why throw up your hands and say, “It doesn’t make any sense at all.” Here is the key

phrase: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” That is the power of God. There is a description for the power of God. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

The prophet Jeremiah has the same experience. The city of Jerusalem is being attacked. They have siege ramps by the Babylonians up against it. They are firing over the walls. Jerusalem’s leaders are fleeing the city. It is like Sarajevo; it is under siege. The Lord comes along in that impossible situation and says to Jeremiah, “I want you to go out and buy a field.” In the middle of this war, “Jeremiah, I want you to go out and buy a field.”

Jeremiah goes before the Lord and says, “Don’t you see the siege ramps of the Babylonians? Don’t you see that your people are being led out to be slaughtered? Don’t you see their weapons? Don’t you see the power of the enemy? And, yet, O Sovereign Lord, you say to me, ‘Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed.’” Jeremiah 32:26 says,

“The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, ‘I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?’”

Your measly little problem? The marital conflict that you are currently experiencing? The depression? The boyfriend or girlfriend struggle? Your grades in school? Your rent payment?

“I am the Lord, your God. Is anything too hard for me?”

In New Testament language, Jesus says, “Whatever the scope of your problems, and the opposition is massive, as is the case with man, it is impossible. But with God all things are possible.” Is that the God you believe in, a God for whom nothing is impossible, nothing too hard?

So, let me bring this home for you so that you can begin to understand the very practical and pragmatic ways that the power of God can be of assistance to you in your life when you are doing battle with the enemy. We, first of all, need to bring to mind the power of the blood of Christ in dealing with the enemy. You know, Satan gains power in our lives through sin. That is what gives the devil the upper hand in our lives. If we never sinned, if Adam in the beginning never sinned, Satan would have no leverage point in our lives. We would be able to keep him at bay. But the truth is that we frequently open the door of our lives through sin and we invite the devil in.

What is our remedy when we have invited the devil in? The power of the blood of Christ! You know the hymn, “There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the Lamb. There is power, power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb...”

Revelation 12:11 says,

“They overcame him, the serpent, the devil, by the blood of the Lamb.”

Here is how it works. You have sinned. You failed to be the mother or father you wished you were. You failed to be the husband or wife you should have been. You failed. You are up in the middle of the night and you hear the stream of accusations. “Look at what you have done. You blew it. You are a failure. You are worthless. You are never going to amount to anything. You know you never should have done that and you did. You missed your opportunity to serve God. Here is another area where you aren’t doing enough. You are not fulfilling your obligations. You are not a good enough mother. Your children wouldn’t have turned out the way they did if you were a better mother, or if you were a better father. You are a loser as a husband. You are a loser as a

student. You are not a good provider. You are a hypocrite. Why can't you overcome your emotional problems? You made your bed, now you must lie in it."

Have you heard that voice? "Worthless, failure, loser? How could you have been so stupid to get involved with that person?" Ever hear that voice? Satan would want you to continue to agree with him and to beat up on yourself as the way to deal with his accusations. Satan would want you to deny that they are true.

"No, I haven't done that. No, what you are accusing me of isn't true."

Or, perhaps, to try to balance out the accusation of guilt with some protestation that you have done good in another area. Satan would want you to attempt to look inside and discover how sorry you are for what you have done.

"Well, I am really remorseful."

Or, to resolve to do better in the future.

Those are all paper-thin defenses. There is only one way to deal with accusation. Any failure, anything at work; your failure as a parent; failure as a student; failure to do your duty; failure to obey God - there is only one way to deal with past sin and past failure and the accusations that come with sin and failure. You admit that all that is being said is true.

"Yes, I am vile. Yes, I have failed. I don't deny it. Yes, I am a sinner. All of this is true. I have nothing. I am nobody. And I have no hope, except that the Son of God loves me and gave himself for me. And in the bloody death of the Son of God, God, my great Judge, is satisfied. Satisfied completely.

The justice of God, the righteousness of God, the judgment of God is completely satisfied by the blood shed by his Son. So utterly satisfied that when I hold the blood of

Christ up, God, my Judge, says to me, ‘You are innocent in my sight. Absolutely free. Not vile, not worthless, not a failure. Free, free, free.’”

That is why so many of the hymns center on the blood of Christ.

“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.”

“There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins. And sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. He died, he died.”

So, when you are accused of being a failure, you don’t present the paper-thin defense of your own remorse, your own faith, your own resolve, your own repentance, your own good deeds - “I am trying to do better. I have tried to change” - None of that is enough to deal with the power of guilt. Just answer every accusation with the power of the blood of Christ. “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.”

You say, “Well, that is great for the past and even present failures. But what about the future? With what is arrayed against my family right now, I am so afraid for the future. With what is arrayed against my kids and the state of the world - the crime, the violence - I get so anxious. With the scope of problems and the way the enemy seems to be battering our marriage, I just don’t know. Maybe God can clean up my past, with so many broken relationships with men or with women, but I don’t know if I can have hope.”

Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” In this case, I would remind you of the mighty priesthood of Christ. Look at Hebrews 7 for a moment. About the mighty priesthood of Jesus Christ, it says,

“And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek

appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life...[look down at verse 23]...Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. [And here is the key verse] Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to make intercession for them.”

You say, “What if the economy crashes? What if I never get married? What if your spouse really leaves?” It says in Hebrews 7:25 “He is able.” That is the key.

Our hope is not in the fact that we are able, that we have lots of faith, that we won't fail when we are tried in the fire. My confidence is in the simple fact that he is able. Jesus is able. That is what I am relying on. His might. He is able to do what? It says, “He is able to save completely.” That word “completely” literally means to save to the uttermost. Jesus is able to save absolutely to the uttermost. And he means that there is no circumstance that the enemy could bring you, no way, no problem, no storm, no lightning, no wind gusts, no deaths, no future horrible event that Jesus cannot save you from. If all of your wildest fears, whatever you dread right now, came true; you lose your job; the diagnosis is, in fact, malignant cancer or arthritis or Alzheimer's; all the prophecies of doom - the economy and global warming and AIDS - that are sweeping this country; if it all came true, Jesus is still able to save. He is able to save to the uttermost. No circumstance can keep him from saving.

When he says, “He is able to save for all time to the uttermost” he means that salvation for you was planned from the beginning. It stretches into the present and it continues into

the future. In all circumstances, for all times, he is able to save you.

Then, Hebrews 7:25 goes on to say,

“And now this is the reason you can have such total peace as a Christian in the might of God. He is able to save you because by his powerful, indestructible life, he always lives to intercede for us.”

Remember, I spoke about our weakness at the beginning of this talk. All the weak veins that Satan can travel up in my body. All the entry points. All the hooks that have not yet been removed from my personality, from my past, from your personality, from your past. All the weaknesses that I see in the church, in the Vineyard and in the church in America, why can I be optimistic? Because Jesus, my indestructible high priest, at this very moment is standing in heaven, while I preach to you and while you sit there and when we go to sleep at night and when we are driving in the car with our radio on and when we are looking over our bills, when things are unraveling about us, at every moment and at this moment, Jesus is praying for me. And he is praying for you. And he is praying for the whole church and for every church in this city, every church in this country, and every church in the world. Think about it. It is awesome. While we sit here, Jesus our indestructible powerful high priest is in heaven praying for us.

That is what gave Paul confidence. You know the passage in Romans 8 where Paul makes the declaration that he is convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor demons, nor things present, nor things future, nor any powers, nor height, nor depth or anything else in all the creations can separate from the love of Christ. How can he say that with such confidence? That nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Because he says that, “I am convinced that Christ is right now interceding for us.” Think

about this. This is your security. This is the battering ram against Satan's discouraging thoughts, but more particularly his anxious thoughts that flood your mind and grip you and obsess you. "What about...What if...What's going to happen..." Jesus Christ is praying for you always.

What is it that distinguished Peter from Judas? Both of them betrayed Jesus. Why did Peter fall and then get back up whereas Judas fell and never got back up? What was the difference between Peter and Judas?

There is only one answer. Jesus prayed for Peter. But for a reason known only to him, he didn't pray for Judas. That is what Jesus said in Luke 22:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith won't fail. And when you have turned back strengthen your brothers."

I prayed for you that your strength wouldn't fail you. I know that you will get back up. You are going to turn back to God. This is my hope when I see someone, a teen, an adult, drifting from God. Not my prayers alone, but Jesus' prayers.

This is Jesus' prayer for the church. John 17 - What is Jesus' great prayer for the church? One of his great prayers is "Father protect the church. Protect it. I know what is coming against it. I know how big Satan is. Protect the church by the power of Your name. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by the name You gave me. Now, Lord, protect the church from the evil one." The power of the blood, the power of his priesthood.

Then I want you to note finally that the power of God that we are to be strong in is not just the power that is at work for us. But this power is in us.

It is so important that you understand that the great power that we have been describing, the might of God, is not just out there on the planet Mars and that somehow you have to reach real far to tap into it. It is not only that you look back at the cross and claim the power of the blood. And it is not only that you look up as you consider your powerful high priest. The scripture says that that power is in you. That your great hope for defeating the mighty enemy named Satan - God's power - is in you.

Look at Ephesians 3:20:

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us.”

Paul piles on the superlatives. Literally, he is saying, “To him who is able to do super abundantly [King James says exceedingly abundantly] above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is at work in us.” He comes to the limit. You know, I think he probably began to speak in tongues at this point. He comes to the limit of the Greek language. There is no way to describe the power that is at work in the believer. Exceedingly abundantly, you know, he can't contain the thought in language regarding what is at work in you.

Take one of your individual problems, you know, whatever the weak vein is in your life that Satan plays upon over and over again. You know, always pulls the same chain. Always pulls the chain of anxiety or always pulls the chain of depression, or always pulls the chain of lust or pride or unforgiveness. You know, he just reaches right into you and yanks on the chain and leads you by the nose to wherever he wants you to go. And you say, “Oh, goodness, I have no strength to fight this. I slip into the same thought process all the time. What is my hope?”

In my morning reading, I have been reading through the scripture (I do that, once a year I read through the Bible and we hand out here in the church, because it has been such a blessing to me, we have handed out for years a Bible reading plan for the church to just systematically take a half an hour each morning or twenty minutes and read through the scriptures). Well, a few weeks ago the reading was in Colossians 1 and I was reading about Jesus Christ, of whom it said in Colossians 1,

“he is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation, for by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, powers, rulers, authorities, all things were created by him and for him. He bore all things and through him all things hold together...”

It has this wonderful picture of Jesus Christ. And then I read down in Colossians 1:27 and it says:

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of his mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

I was just stopped in my tracks as I read, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Because suddenly the Lord connected up in my mind what is obvious in the context of Colossians 1, that that same Christ who was before all things, and in him all things hold together, who is the head of the church, who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation, who is above every ruler and authority—that same Christ is in me. That is my hope for defeating the personal problems that I have.

This is always pointed to by the New Testament writers. That is why the apostle John, in 1 John 4:4 it says:

“Dear children, you are from God and have overcome them, because the one that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.”

Do you understand what is in you? Or rather who is in you if you are a child of God, a believer in Jesus Christ? Of course you don't. That is why you walk around discouraged and depressed and defeated. And that is why I walk around beaten down because I have no idea of who is in me. I think the only thing that is in me is my own evil heart. When something comes against me, I don't often remember that He that is in me is greater than he that is in the world. I don't understand that the same Christ who is Lord of all is in me, by the Holy Spirit.

Christ in you can give you the power to love someone you find difficult to love. Christ in you can give you the power to forgive someone who has hurt you beyond the human capacity to forgive. The apostle Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened, that we might know the power that is at work for us and I believe also in us. This should be our prayer:

“Lord, open my eyes like Paul prayed in Ephesians 1 that I might know the power that is at work within me. You say ‘greater is he that is in me.’ When I am dealing with a problem, instead of looking at my own insufficiency, will you stir up my hope and my morale by reminding me that I have power to overcome this problem because of you who is at work in my life?”

The power that is at work in us.

Then, to be fair to the New Testament message, when we are talking about power that overcomes the evil one, we must also always remember the power of signs and wonders. How often these are neglected in the evangelical works about defeating Satan. Many,

many evangelical works will describe the power that overcomes Satan as simply confined to the power of the truth or the power of the Word of God. I hold on and believe that the Bible teaches the power of the Word of God and the power of truth to punch through the lies of the enemy. But the scripture also teaches the power of signs and wonders as punching through the armor of the enemy. As I said before, Paul always hits with the fist of the truth in the left hand, the fist of the power of God in signs and wonders with the right hand. He always gives, as the scriptures do, the one-two punch.

Jesus Christ was a word-worker. Words and deeds. Teaching and miracles. Unfortunately, what we have, in the desire to lift up the Bible, is an unbalanced emphasis that denies the power and the effectiveness of signs and wonders.

You say, “What is going to beat back the enemy in our culture?” The truth of the Word of God and the power of signs and wonders. That is why Paul said,

“I won’t venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and what I have done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.”

Romans 15:18

There is a blindness over people’s minds. Satan blinds the minds of people so that they cannot hear the Words of the gospel. Any of you who have been out on the missions field, certainly know that. Any of you who have tried to share your faith, certainly know that cloud that comes over the minds of an unbeliever so that they cannot hear the words of truth. How will that be punched through?

Well, certainly by anointed speaking, by the power of the truth, but also by the power of signs and wonders.

Here is the way it works. Somebody's mind is blind to the gospel, and they are ill. So what do we do? We pray for them. We ask, "May I pray for you along with sharing with you my faith?" On occasion, we have seen God heal people. We pray for them. The power of God comes. You don't expect that, I know that. Because this is not the model that most of us have been taught, but this is the model of the New Testament. We pray. God comes and God heals.

Now, what has that person learned of God? The person has learned that God is good. That God is gracious. That God's heart is for them. That is the first step to believing that the heart of God is for them in the forgiveness of sins.

Most of us don't know, even as Christians, that God's heart is for us. That God is good. Signs and wonders are like the display window on the store. You walk by and you say, "Huh, should I go into that store that is titled, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ", is this where I want to end up?"

What we see displayed in the window are the deeds of God. We see his awesome power at work in signs and wonders. In service, in giving to the poor, in handing out a bag of groceries—all of these things display the heart of God and draw people into the store so that they say, "Yes, I will walk in and go farther and farther into the store." In the store I find the cross of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

Most of the time we have nothing in the store window. So we stand on the street screaming at people, "Come on into the store. Come on in. Inside is the forgiveness of sins." We try to convince them that it is good for them to come in and have the forgiveness of sins. Some, out of curiosity, wander in and come to the cross. Many walk by uninterested. Why should I come in just because you are inviting me? We have to put

something in the store window. Service, loving kindness, ministry to the poor, ministry to those with AIDS, and signs and wonders.

I will tell you this is the way that the evil one is going to be overcome. If you look at the encounters in the Bible where Satan was driven out it was not simply a truth encounter, it was a power encounter. God grants us the power of signs and wonders.

Well, let me apply all that I have said. We are going to look at this much more extensively next week. But I want you to know, right now, that this power that I have been describing, the might of God, the power of the blood, the power of the priesthood, the power in you, the power of signs and wonders—it is this might that is your answer for the might of Satan and the opposition coming against you and against the church and against your family. It is this might that you are called to be strong in. Are you strong in it?

Let me finish with this thought. I am going to pick up the theme of this particular note next week. But the might of God, you may have discovered, is not automatically realized in our lives. God's might, His power, the power that I have been describing, needs to be reached into by believers, by you. The problem of Christians is that we run to extremes. We either say that it is all us, it is all up to us to deal with all the problems and to deal with Satan, or we say that it is all God. I just need to let go and let God.

Neither of these is true. I picture Christianity like a dance in which God invites me to follow His lead. Now the truth is that God does not dance alone. At the same time, He says, "Don't you dance alone. You come and you follow my lead."

To use a different image: The other night I woke up and I had this picture in my mind of a bank machine that just kept spewing out money. You are saying, "Where is that

bank machine?” Immediately the thought came to my mind, this was very clear, this bank machine just kept pouring money out as I woke up. I thought, “If there were such a machine, I wonder how much time I would spend by it just popping my card in and drawing money out?” It struck me that I would probably spend the whole day there, popping my card in. I would be able to pay off all my bills and then I would have enough resource to give just loads of money away, meeting other people’s needs. I felt like the Lord said, “This is the way it is with the power of God. There is this exceeding abundance of might available for the church - resource, efficiency, competence, ability to deal with our problems. But my people never come to Me to have that resource. They deal with stuff on their own.” Why don’t we pray? Why do we always go back to purely human answers and human counsel?

We complain that we are defeated, that we are getting beaten up by the enemy. We must come to God. If only we knew the resource of God, the might of God, and we tapped into that, we would have the kind of joyful optimism that Paul displays in the book of Ephesians.

“Be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.”

Let’s pray.