

The Invincible Weakness

4th Sun. after Pent. – 06/24/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 7, [Jeremiah says,] **“O Yahweh...You are stronger than I, and You have prevailed.”**

v. 11, [Jeremiah says again,] **“But Yahweh is with me as a hero/champion; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me ... they will not succeed.”**

Introduction

✘ Though our world teaches that any and all weakness is a bad thing; a thing to be ashamed of and even to hide; our LORD God teaches you and me today through His prophet Jeremiah that weakness can actually be an advantage.

→ While those who are strong are often too proud to admit that they need help, it is the ones who are weak that often possess a humility that allows them to rejoice in receiving the aid of one who is more powerful.

✘ And it is Jeremiah, when he wrestles with his own weakness in relation to God, that leads you and me today to see that it is ultimately Jesus that unites the power of God and the weakness of man into Himself, to overcome the Devil and all of his temptations in the world and even more important, in our lives today and into eternity.

I. Man must acknowledge his own weakness

✘ But our human nature, which we all have had from the moment we were first conceived in our mother's womb, certainly doesn't make it easy for us to acknowledge our own weakness in relation to God.

→ Jesse Ventura, the famous professional wrestler from the 1970s and 80s and the former governor of Minnesota was also known for saying that “Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people...”.

→ In fact, our modern culture rebels against the very idea of God more and more because “it's not cool or acceptable” in the world to show any sign of weakness or to admit that there are some things that we can't do; let alone that we acknowledge that we might actually do anything “wrong”.

✘ Yes, we are taught from the time we are children that we must “buck up and be strong”; “be your own man/woman”; “make your own decisions for yourself”. “If you believe and trust in God and let Him tell you what's right and wrong – that's only proof that you are a wimp; a weakling; a mere puppet on a string”.

→ The pressure our world puts on us is often so enormous; compelling us to idolize and think of ourselves as our own gods. “Each of us determines our own destiny”, we are told. At least that's the illusion that our culture and world want us to believe.

✘ But then reality hits every time that someone dies and for the person who is willing to recognize that reality, the world's false illusion is then instantly shattered.

→ For the truth is that none of us is ever really in charge of our own destiny. Every single human being is actually weak before God; filled with imperfections and subject to self-centered and sinful thoughts and deeds and fully in need of God and His help, both for this life and for the life to come.

✘ When we come upon the prophet Jeremiah at the beginning of our Old Testament Reading today, we see him wrestling deeply with his own weakness – before the people to whom the

LORD directed him to proclaim God's judgement and truth and before Yahweh in his own faith too.

→ In verse seven, Jeremiah is struggling to reconcile his original call from God to be His prophet with the extreme difficulty – including the physical harm he has had to endure from the people when they rejected God's Word of judgment for their sins.

→ Though our English translations have Jeremiah confronting God and claiming that Yahweh "deceived" him when he was called to be God's prophet, the actual meaning of the Hebrew word "פָּתָה" (patah) is more accurately understood here to be "persuaded". And that fits when we go back to the first chapter of Jeremiah and see that God called and consecrated Jeremiah from the womb to be His prophet. Yet Jeremiah initially tried to wiggle his way out of the job saying, "Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). And so Yahweh had to "persuade" Jeremiah to realize that it wasn't about his age or his weaknesses, but about God and His presence and strength. Yahweh said, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you" (Jer. 1:7-8).

✘ Now, in the second half of verse seven, Jeremiah admits his own weakness, saying to Yahweh, "You are stronger than I, and You have prevailed." Yet he still struggled with the way that the people treated him for his faithfulness to the Lord, "I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me," he said.

→ It has become so difficult, in fact, that Jeremiah admits in verse nine that he has contemplated the idea of just keeping his mouth shut; in other words, doing what so many Christians do today when they know that talking about God's Word and their Christian faith might bring a negative response.

✘ But he quickly confesses that keeping quiet about God is not a viable option in the end. He says, "If I say, 'I will not mention [Yahweh], or speak any more in His name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (v.9).

→ King David described a similar struggle in Psalm 39:1-3. He said, "I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, so long as the wicked are in my presence. I was mute and silent; I held my peace to no avail, and my distress grew worse. My heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:"

→ And Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:16, speaks of the compulsion and attitude that every faithful preacher should have, "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

→ So in the end, Jeremiah sees that he must continue in God's mission; that he must speak of God, just as he must breathe. Yes, God prevails, and Jeremiah, like every one of us, sees he has no control over his own destiny.

✘ In that way, Jeremiah is for you and me today, a picture of Jesus, who willingly put aside His divine power for a time in order to share with us in mankind's weakness.

→ Philippians 2:8 tells us that Jesus, "being found in human form...humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Allowing Himself to be whipped and beaten and physically humiliated to the point of being nailed to a cross – that was not Jesus' desire as we heard Him pray to the Father in Gethsemane, but it was the Father's plan for the salvation of all sinners. And so Jesus obeyed. Hebrews 12:2 even says, "Jesus...for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross."

II. Human weakness invites the devil's attack.

- ✘ But you see, that's where Jesus is far superior to any of us, though He calls us to trust in Him and follow His lead. How could He find "joy" in suffering and persecution – even when it is for the sake of the truth; for the salvation of all mankind?
 - ➔ After all, when the devil and the sin-filled world of his unbelieving followers see human weakness it's like a shark that smells blood – the devil must then attack.
- ✘ That's exactly what happened to Jeremiah as we see it in verse ten. Even his "close friends" were quick to "denounce him" and were "watching for [his] fall". Why? For the same reason that people today are so eager to attack and call names and put Christians down when we proclaim God's Word of truth. They want to spread and try to advance the illusion that they are actually more enlightened; more in control of things than God.
 - ➔ For Jeremiah, his weakness inspired the people to attack him, thinking that the more pressure they applied, the more they could control not only Jeremiah, but even God.
- ✘ And that's what happened even with Jesus, isn't it? When Satan saw that the Jews could actually arrest and convict and torture Jesus, he smelled blood and he attacked.
 - ➔ He got both the religious and government leaders, and even the general population to all fall in line and nail Jesus to the cross. Satan saw Jesus as just another man that he could control; just another weakling hanging there in shame and filled to submission under the weight of all mankind's sin.
 - ➔ And oh, when Jesus died, Satan certainly had to be rejoicing; jumping for joy at the thought that he had conquered God after all.

III. God's power overcame weakness with victory.

- ✘ But here's the deal: what the world sees as weakness and shame in the person of Jesus whipped and beaten and nailed to a cross and even buried in a tomb, that is actually God's mightiest display of His unsurpassed power!
 - ➔ In verses 11-13 of our text today, we see that Jeremiah's weakness actually brought Him victory over his enemies, not because of anything that Jeremiah was able to do, but because his weakness opened the door for Yahweh to come and work, as verse 11 says, "as a dread warrior".
 - ➔ This is the only time in the Bible that God is described this way. The Hebrew word is "גִּבּוֹר" (gibor); a word that actually describes a "hero" or a "champion". Yahweh is Jeremiah's hero and champion over all that Satan and the world have to throw at him in the way of persecution and trouble and even physical harm. And in the end, verse 11 says, "they will not overcome"; "they will not succeed" in their attempts to silence God's Word of truth and even more God's eternal plan for the salvation of all who believe and follow Him in faith.
- ✘ Just look to our Savior Jesus, for the clearest picture of this. Out of the weakness Jesus displayed, and what the world thinks of as the foolishness of the cross, our hero; our champion, Jesus actually wins the victory for the Father and for all mankind.
 - ➔ Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:27 that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." His victory started when Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" (Lk. 23:46); taking His last breath and paying the ultimate price for sin in His death.
 - ➔ And then, on the third day, He crushed the devil's illusion of control, along with the devil's head when He burst forth from the tomb into new life and eternal victory over all sin, shame, persecution all of this world's worthless lies!

✘ Now, that same victory has been given to Jeremiah and all who believe in and worship Jesus as the conqueror of all that once mocked us for being so “weak”.

→ In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul shows us how to faithfully view weakness. When he struggled like Jeremiah with his own weakness, even asking God three times to take away, the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” “Therefore,” Paul said, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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.”

✘ That, my dear Christians, is what I call, the Gospel of “invincible weakness”.

Conclusion

✘ God’s power and grace alone work in the midst of our weakness, showing it, in Christ to be a great advantage.

→ He has shown us this through all of Scripture: Through Joseph’s weakness, God accomplished salvation from a worldwide famine; through Israel’s weakness, Egypt and hard-hearted Pharaoh were overcome; through David’s weakness, God’s power was revealed against the oppressor Goliath; and finally, through Jesus’ willing submission to the Father, all sin is forgiven, death is overcome, and the devil is bound and robbed of all that he once thought was his.

✘ So what is our response today? The same as Jeremiah’s in verse 13, “Sing to Yahweh; praise Yahweh! For He has delivered the life of the needy” – that’s you and me – “from the hand of evildoers.” Amen.