

**Sermon Notes of  
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on October 10, 2021:**

**"Strength in Weakness  
(Hebrews 4:12-16)"**

**[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman, at church in the Y, shows us that our weakness is our strength because it draws us to God.]**

Introduction:

- Last week, we talked about a significant paradox, and today we're going to talk about another paradox – strength and weakness.
- What are some strengths that come to mind?
- Audience answers: weight lifters; mental strength; willingness to speak; patience; self-discipline.
  
- Now, what are some weaknesses that come to mind?
- Audience answers: fear; doubt; shame and guilt; addiction; coveting; giving up; health; suffering.
  
- In October, we started off with “taming the tongue”, where the tongue being a paradox, because such a small member of the body can unleash “hellish fire” as the letter of James would say.
- And then, last week, we talked about finding perfection through suffering, which is a paradox.
- Now, today, “strength in weakness.”

Speaking of Life – the Midas Touch:

*In Greek mythology, Midas was a king who was obsessed with riches. After doing a good deed for the god Dionysus, King Midas was granted whatever he wished as a reward. The king asked for everything he touched to turn to gold, and his wish was granted. King Midas was overjoyed! He touched sticks, rocks, flowers. All of them turned to solid gold. He went to his palace and ordered a feast to celebrate his good fortune. That's when he realized his mistake. Every time he tried to put something in his mouth, it would turn to gold. In the myth, King Midas died of starvation. His love of wealth cost him his life. In the book of Mark, we are introduced to another man with an unhealthy attachment to riches:*

***As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in***

**heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:17-22)**

*In the verses that follow, Jesus does not say it is wrong to have riches. However, he does say that loving riches is wrong. Our possessions can become idols to us — things that get in the way of our relationship with God. This was the man’s problem. He was so entangled by his stuff that he missed an opportunity to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. He traded an eternal relationship with Christ for things that will fade away.*

*In this encounter, riches are a metaphor for anything we value above God. Some of us choose to work unnecessarily long hours just to earn confirmation through success. This is often at the cost of time with those most important to us: God, our family, and friends. Some of us are tied to our social media affirmations trying to get the most likes and views instead of getting our worth and value from God. All of these scenarios are forms of idolatry because they get in the way of our relationship with God and other people. Therefore, we should be willing to give up anything that gets between us and Jesus.*

*The good news is that whatever we give up for Jesus is never really lost. The sacrifices we make for him today are repaid with interest in eternity. Out of an abundance of love, God gives us true riches like joy, peace, and grace. These things are worth far more than gold and silver. We should be willing to set aside any wealth of this world for the eternal riches that are in Jesus Christ.*

*Jim Elliot wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” In Christ, we are already rich with blessings. Let us not let the things of this world distract us from all we have in Jesus.*

*I am Jeff Broadnax, Speaking of Life.*

### Analysis:

- Now, what was King Midas’ absolute strength? It was wealth and his ability to touch things and turn them into gold.
- So, then, what was King Midas’ absolute weakness? It was the exact same thing.
- Now, what was the rich young ruler’s key strength? His wealth.
- And, then, what was the rich young ruler’s weakness? The same thing – his wealth.
- Now, in the past, we used that passage as a way to say that God denounces wealth.
- However, the passage tells us that when Jesus looked at the rich young ruler, that He loved him.
- Since Jesus loved him, He wasn’t making a statement about wealth, per say.
- Now, interestingly, the rich young ruler was asking Jesus an existential (the practice of our being) question: “what do I have to do to Gain eternal life?”
- But, Jesus answered an ontological (the truth of our being) question, and asked, “Why do you call me good, because no one is good?”

- In this, Jesus was pointing out that there's more to the story and then Jesus gave him the ultimate challenge, which conveys the fact that it's a heart issue.

Picture of three actors:

- Now, what do these three actors have in common?
- They were all in the movie "The Incredible Hulk" where the person who became the hulk was called Bruce Banner.
- We all recognize this picture of the hulk from the movie, but not the pictures of the actors in the movie.
- This is probably, because society places such much more emphasis on strength and power than anything else.
- In our Hollywood driven culture, strength takes precedence over weakness.
- But we saw in the two examples of King Midas and the rich young ruler, their strength was their weakness.
- Now, as we go to the book of Hebrews, we don't necessarily know who the author was.
- But we know that it was written to dysphoria Jewish Christians who were struggling, because they were under persecution and struggling with the tendency to leave their faith in Jesus and to drift back to their Old Covenant practices of Judaism.
- At that time in their suffering, they didn't have a lot of hope because they were living in a state of weakness.

**Hebrews 4:12 (NASB), For the word of God**

- Now, when the W is capitalized, it means that this is referring to Jesus, but when it is a lower case w, it refers to the scriptures.

**12) For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword,**

- The Greek word translated sword means "a small dagger" not a long sword.

**12b) even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

- Now, it's been said that when we study scripture and look into the word, the word looks into us.
- So, when we have that state of curiosity and we're studying the word to find out more about God's ways, we're also finding out about our own ways.
- Scripture looks into our own heart and helps us to see those strengths and those weaknesses we have.

**13) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must answer.**

- Now, we're talking about Jesus.

**14) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let's hold firmly to our confession.**

- Those Christian Jews, in their weakness, wanted to shift back to what they thought of or held as their strength, which was in part, temple worship.
- Now, Jesus is the High Priest, but to them, the High Priest was Aaron.
- And Aaron was their mediator between them and God.
- Now, Aaron could only enter into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God, only once a year.
- So, the High Priest that they were shifting back to was an inferior High Priest compared to Jesus.
- Now, we can come to God directly through Jesus.
- So, Hebrews is showing us that those Jewish Christians, out of their weakness wanted to go back to what they thought was their strength.
- But, what was paradoxical, they were in the midst of their strength, but didn't recognize that.
- And so, that's a lesson for us today because any practice of ours that keeps us from our relationship with Jesus, is a weakness.

**15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,**

- Now, here's the other contrast – Aaron did not experience the contrasts the way Jesus had.
- Jesus, as our High Priest, went through every weakness we could imagine and took on every one of our weakness.
- And in that, we can find our true strength.

**15b) but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. 16) Therefore let's approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need.**

- In their Old Covenant practice, they didn't have the opportunity to approach the throne of grace directly, but it was through an intermediary, through Aaron.
- Now, in our relationship with Jesus, we can approach the Father directly.
- Let's notice what weaknesses do.
- When we're suffering or when we feel lowly and abased, or feeling weak, what does that have the natural propensity to lead us to?
- As a believer, we then reach out in prayer – we enter and approach the throne of grace boldly.
- So, in our weakness, we reach out to the Father, Son and Spirit in prayer.
- So, in our state of weakness, not in our strength, we have a natural propensity, to reach out and approach God in prayer.
- Now, when we're on top of our game of life, we normally don't think about God at that time.
- So, weaknesses are not something that we naturally welcome, or want or desire, but it's because we are human our weakness is the way Jesus transforms us and takes us from the truth of our being into the way of our being.

- And so, the message today is that in weakness, we gain glory – in weakness, we receive transformation – in weakness, we have a greater desire to reach out to our true strength, Jesus.
  - So, let's not be fooled by Madison Avenue, by Wall Street, by Hollywood that strength is what life is all about.
  - Because, as Christians, we have a different perspective.
  - Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, "In my weakness, I find strength."
  - Now, the average person isn't going to give us that message, because that's not what our society is all about.
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- In business school, they teach you to do a SWOT analysis, which is a tool to help you to decide what your strategies might be to outperform your competition.
  - In essence during a SWOT analysis, you look at your strengths, your weaknesses, your opportunities and your threats.
  - And so you analyze all four of those categories and through that analysis, you come to see a picture of how your company ought to move forward.
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- And so, strengths and weaknesses are internal to the company while opportunities and threats are external
  - Now, you can do a SWOT analysis on yourself by evaluating your strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats and chart your course of action.
  - Also, in business school, they also teach you to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses and to mitigate threats and to take advantage of opportunities.
  - But, Jesus would tell us that we've got to flip that SWOT analysis upside down.
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- In Jesus, it's our weaknesses that are maximized in strength and it's our strengths that are minimized in opportunity.
  - We saw that with Midas and we saw that with the rich young ruler.
  - But, this is not necessarily an easy message to receive, because it seems so counter – intuitive.
  - And that's the paradox of what Hebrews is telling us.
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- That's the paradoxical relationship that we have with Jesus.
  - Jesus came to turn the world upside down in their thinking and their thoughts.
  - And so, the next time you start thinking, "Woe is me, why can't I have it better than the person in the corner office, Jesus has a better way.
  - And so, we can find comfort in our weaknesses and also to be wary of our key strengths.
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- Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with wealth and there's nothing inherently wrong with our strengths.
  - And so, as we enter introspection about ourselves, we need to pause and say that our key strengths may not be key strengths.
  - And those weaknesses that we might want to shove under the carpet, we need to take pause over.
  - Now, we all know that there are good strengths and bad weaknesses.
  - Pastor Craig is not referring to those but rather, he is referring to those weaknesses that that may not always be as bad as we think they are.

### What is our strength?

- It's rhetorical question.

### What is our weakness?

- It's rhetorical question.
- Is it one of those that Paul would place in the context – that in my weakness, I find strength?
- Just as Jesus, who loved the rich young ruler, wanted something better for him such as committing his life in relationship with Him.
- The rich young ruler had the opportunity to engage as being one of Jesus' original disciples, but he turned his back to it.
- It was probably a simple decision to make, but not an easy one.
- Therein lays the challenge until we remind ourselves, "What is God really seeking to transform in those weaknesses?"

### Who is our strength?

- And at the end of the day, it's not a WHAT question, but rather it's a WHO question – WHO is our strength? It's Jesus.
- When we answer a "what" question instead of a "who" question we can get off track.
- When we answer a "who" question, "WHO is our strength?" that makes all the difference in the world.

Closing prayer: