

Sermon for Feb 14, 2021, “When I am weak, then I am strong”

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 ⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep^[a] me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power^[c] is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Introduction: The Apostle Paul boasted of his weaknesses

Twenty one years ago, I had a vision for a mission to Mongolia, so I traveled to Mongolia in the year 2000. Mongolia is a country in Central Asia famous for Genghis Khan. About an hour's drive north of Mongolia's capital Ulaanbaatar is the famous resort called Nairamdal (friendship) Park. At that time, I enjoyed horseback riding in the meadow of Nairamdal Park. But while riding a horse, I saw an old woman sitting in a meadow and looking at the surrounding landscape. By the way, the old woman's face looked very peaceful. The peaceful old woman's face remains unforgettable to me. Mongolia is a poor country and 20 years ago it was much poorer. However, I was not able to see the deficiencies in the image of the old woman I met during the trip.

Most Mongolians are people who believe in Tibetan Buddhism. The peace I found on the faces of other religionists in poor countries shocked me as a Christian. This was not because I had been ignoring poor countries, or out of some kind of religious prejudice. Rather it was because there was no such peace within me at the time.

At that time, the thought I had was, "**Can I see the peace and relaxation that the old woman shows even in my appearance as a Christian?**"

The reason this was important for me to understand was that a lot of people in the modern world suffer from disease, broken relationships, frustration in dreams, and imperfect spirituality as believers. However, most people have negative preconceived notions about words like “limit”, “lack”, or “deficiency”. But, I think these negative associations need to be overcome.

What seems not well understood is the paradox that limitation, lack, and deficiency can represent precious blessings to us. The Apostle Paul in today's biblical text shows us what this means. The Apostle Paul confesses that "When I am weak, then I am strong." I hope that we learn the lessons of God's Word about how we can be strong as Christians.

Body: Identity as a Christian

The Apostle Paul is always attacked by apostolic authority in the process of preaching the gospel to the world after his conversion. And he excuses himself for his apostolic authority. 2 Corinthians chapter 12 also mentions the amazing visions and revelations the Lord showed him as the basis for his apostolic authority.

However, the clear identity of the Apostle Paul as God's called missionary is that he realized that God's power is revealed when he is weak. So, the Apostle Paul clearly confesses that the power of a Christian is not revealed through our abilities, but through God's grace in our lives. This identity of the Apostle Paul led him to carry out his ministry as a faithful servant of God. In addition, today's text shows that the physical limitations of the Apostle Paul served as a blessing to him and was used as a positive factor in his union with Christ.

Many people today think of what is overflowing rather than what is lacking, having more than others, and being satisfied with our greed represents a successful life. If we live with these thoughts, we cannot experience the satisfaction of life unless our greed is satisfied.

But when we learn that God's power is revealed through our weaknesses, we can be free from greed. That is why it is important to be able to clearly acknowledge and accept limitations in our lives. The Apostle Paul did his best to ask God to solve the problem of his physical suffering, but God did not grant Paul's wish. However, Paul learns that the grace of God's work is through his weakness instead of resentment against God. So, what are some of the things in our life that can be freed when we recognize our limits?

1. Limitations of dependent human relationships in society

The paradox that we experience when it comes to human relationships is that the presence of others leads us to live smoothly as members of society, but the people we rely on prevent us from living independently. When everything becomes too dependent on the other person, the relationship causes difficulties.

In social life, people often use others for purposes. But what we need to know is that others cannot fully meet our expectations. So the people we depend on are bound to disappoint us sooner or later. What we learn from these experiences is that others cannot save us from our deepest fears, cannot keep us safe in a dangerous world, and cannot make us happy. But ironically, the experience of these relationships is an important starting point for us to live more independently. Humans cannot truly love others in a dependent relationship. True love blooms only in freedom. So, a relationship that started dependably because of our anxiety cannot be kept healthy in a relationship with others. A relationship can remain healthy only in an independent relationship that separates me from others and separates others from me.

The Holy Spirit reminds us how precious we are who are created in the image of God, and helps us build healthy relationships with others as healthy and independent members of society.

While it is important for us to acknowledge the limitations of dependent relationships within society, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of married couples at home, which is the foundation of society.

2. Limitations of love between couples that form the basis of the family

In general, the reason people seek love between men and women is because of the joy of love itself and the sense of security it brings. But everyone has something called a 'Boundary'. This is your own area that cannot be invaded by others.

However, there are times when these 'Boundary' areas are temporarily broken. It is when men and women fall powerfully in love. Eventually, however, all humans will restore this 'Boundary' again at some point. So in order to get to know the other person in depth in a relationship between a man and a woman, we have to go beyond the stage of passionate love and move to the stage of devotion. The love referred to in the Bible is not just about passionate love, but building up the other with dedicated love.

As you know, passionate love has its limits, and if we insist on passionate love in a relationship, it will eventually wither.

So, we must be on the lookout for selfish choices we make in love between men and women. That is why we must realize our selfish nature and seek the help of the Holy Spirit to move on to the stage of building up others with dedicated love.

As mentioned above, the reason people live in relationships in society and at home are because they seek pleasure in life. By the way, there are limits to all enjoyment in the world.

3. The limits of pleasure people seek in the world

There is a limit to all the joys in the world. Whether it is physical, mental or spiritual enjoyment, there are limits. We describe this limitation as 'weariness'. But there is also a paradox here. This is what makes us grow, because worldly pleasure no longer satisfies us. The limits of worldly pleasure keep us looking for new pleasures and, in the end, we realize that no worldly pleasure can satisfy us. King Solomon's experience in the Old Testament leads him to write the book of Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. King Solomon confesses, **“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?”(Ecclesiastes 1:2-3)**

Those who have experienced this world's vainness have an opportunity to grow. If humans find God (who is transcendent) because of the limit of worldly pleasure, nothing will be as blessed as that. However, even in the limits of the joys of the world, we also see foolish people who cannot find God, the creator of the world.

So we must be able to discover the **‘solitude’** that King Solomon experienced at the end of the vanity of worldly joy. And in the experience of solitude, there must be a deep encounter with God. This goes beyond thinking and reflecting on the elements of our life's deficiencies, but standing before God with the existential suffering of life. And it is to meet the Lord who gives us grace through our weaknesses. The Apostle Paul wanted us to realize this.

Conclusion: God's power works best in weakness.

Now let's summarize today's sermon. People think of their lack and deficiencies as negative. And people work tirelessly to fill them. However, these efforts do not lead us to satisfaction. People don't even know that, and even if they do, they can't accept it with their hearts. True integrity and perfection does not come from trying to satisfy our desires, but what we experience when we try to fill our weaknesses through the grace of the Lord. Faith and confidence in this will bring joy and happiness to all of us. I hope that all of us will live like that.