

As a boy growing up, I was convinced that the strongest man in the world was my dad. In fact, even though he's now 75 years old and outfitted with a couple new knees and a new hip, there's a part of me that knows he could still take me. And if you asked my three sons who they thought was the strongest man in the world, they'd probably answer that it's me. At least until a few weeks ago. Now, I'm not so sure. You see, in November, the four of us participated in what is becoming a ritual; going to see the newest superhero movie. As you might expect, the movie consisted of heart-gripping action, good guys and bad guys with all kinds of powers, and incredible special effects.

As the movie ended and we rolled out of the theatre as we usually do, my boys immediately taking to the hallway to reenact every battle sequence and super move they had just witnessed. And as we turned the corner, we all stopped in unison, and stared. There, in the lobby of the Cinemark at Legacy, was a movie display beckoning our testosterone-fueled quartet. Why? Because, contained within it was a real...punching bag. As we approached it, it got even better. This was no ordinary punching bag. This thing measured your punching strength, it had a high score to beat, and we were all in. My boys each took a few turns, and then it was dad's turn. I received two kinds of encouragement: One son assured me I could break the high score. One son bet me I couldn't. I'm glad I didn't take that bet because, as hard as I tried, I could not break the high score.

It was a humbling day. I obviously didn't possess any of the superpowers I saw on the big screen. I lacked the strength to get the high score. And, for good measure, the frailty of my body was made clear to me because, what I haven't told you is that, while I wasn't able to break the high score, I did think I had broken my hand. In an afternoon, my weakness was made clear to me.

700 years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah delivered a message clarifying weakness. It was a message to a broken Kingdom, full of spiritually and physically weak people. And included in it was a warning that the powerful Assyrian army was on the march and would eventually wind up in Judah.

And while, today, we may not be fearful of the oppression of an invading army, we too, left to ourselves, are a spiritually and physically weak people. Our lives are invaded by forces both internal and external, some of which we can influence, and others we can't. They are things that reveal, expose, manifest in, and prey upon our weakness.

But unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders, and he shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We continue our Advent series this morning with those comforting and inspiring words of Isaiah.

Last week we looked at Wonderful Counselor, that this child would be the source of divine guidance. This week, we will consider Mighty God. Isaiah uses that name to convey two things

to us. By “Mighty”, he’s communicating this child will be powerful, a heroic champion, one who fights for his people. Isaiah follows that by using the name for God. Some have suggested many names include the name of God in them like Ezekiel or Daniel. But in chapter 10, Isaiah, when speaking about God, calls him this very same name of Mighty God. And while he may not completely understand it, this one who is to be born is God.

And so, this morning, I want to talk about this Mighty God, the one to come who will fight for you, who will make possible all that he has for you, and I want to really focus in on how he manifests his power in light of our weakness.

God’s power is made perfect in your weakness.

Our weakness goes beyond just the lack of physical strength to hit a punching bag. Some of you may be dealing with physical weakness, where your body is breaking down in some way. Some of you are in emotional pain, living each day with hurt. Some of you want to walk more closely with the Lord but are struggling to do so. I’m not guessing about this. I know it, because every week our prayer cards are filled with requests crying out to a Mighty God to come and intervene in these things. It is a privilege to pray for you regarding those things. We will continue to do so and I know God will answer them. But we must consider how he may do so. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of how God’s power shows up in his own weakness.

[2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10] ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ 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.

If you know this passage, you know that Paul has what he calls a thorn in his flesh. He has pleaded with God multiple times to remove it, but it’s still there. Paul is content for it to stay though, because through it, God transforms him.

Paul uses an interesting word that gets translated “made perfect”. We might read that as something that is improving, but it’s a word that means “to be brought to completion or fruition” or “to be made fully present”. Our weakness is a platform for God’s power to fulfill its purpose. And when it does, two things happen.

The first is that God alone is glorified and praised. When we are powerless in our weakness, our Mighty God shows who he is by providing his sufficient grace.

Have you ever met someone who was severely ill but you’d never know it by their disposition? I made a hospital visit to a very sick man. “Well, every time I wake up and open my eyes, I’m really hoping to see the face of Jesus, and am a little disappointed when I don’t. But if he still has me here, it’s for a reason, and he’ll get me through whatever is next.” This was a man staring death in the face. This was a man sustained by the grace of God, and as he boasted in the Lord, he magnified the power of God.

The second is that we know him more intimately. Paul wanted to know God more and more, and so he boasts in his weakness because that's where God's power shows up and shows off. "Rest" is literally "take up residence."

I'm not encouraging you to seek out difficulty. But understand, our weakness is the black canvas from which the brilliance and majesty of God's power is seen and experienced most vividly. You may be praying like Paul for God to take away some pain in your life. He may answer your prayer in the exact way you are asking him to. But our Mighty God knows best, and he wants you to know him deeply, so he may answer the prayer by allowing your weakness to continue, supplying you with his abundant and sufficient grace, so that you may experience his abundant power, causing you to know him abundantly more than you ever would otherwise.

There have been times of great pain in my life, and I prayed that God would change them. He answered every one of those prayers, sometimes the way I asked, sometimes not. But he made himself known through his power in all of them, and I know him in a way I never would have had those circumstances not come.

God's power works through you in spite of your weakness. In John 15, Jesus is masterfully instructing his disciples by using imagery they would understand. He calls himself the vine, and calls them the branches, and he tells them if they are to bear fruit, they must abide in him, they must stay attached to him. He then makes the implication explicit. Jesus acknowledges their weakness by telling them "apart from me you can do nothing." Left to ourselves and to our weakness, we can have no impact.

[EPHESIANS 3:7] ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Paul's commission as a minister of the gospel was given to him as a gift of grace, and it was accompanied by God's power to fulfill his calling. The word Paul uses here for power is where we get our word for "dynamite"! The strength of our God is not a slight shove in a certain direction. It's explosive, and it's what we have been given to fulfill our calling.

I was reminded of this a couple times recently. We are in a season of change and I have been running pretty hard these last few months. And about a month ago I felt like things had just stalled for me. I wasn't nearly as effective as I wanted to be and I was exhausted. In a casual conversation with Martha, I made the comment "I've gotten enough sleep the last two nights, but I'm still exhausted." And she asked me a question that stopped me in my tracks. She said, "Do you think you're exhausted because you're trying to work in your own strength and power?" My first impulse was to quickly object. But when I spoke, all I could muster was a "huh."

Because she was right! Look, when we started this season of intense work, I was on my knees daily praying that God would be at the center of all we do and accomplish what he wanted to accomplish. Any time I talked to my team, I reminded them that we were completely dependent on the grace and power of the Lord to have success. But as things progressed, my days got longer and my quiet times got shorter, and my reliance on the power of the Almighty diminished and I grew more dependent on my own strength. So of course I lost effectiveness. I was trying to do on my own what only God can do. Of course I was exhausted...it's pretty tiring trying to do the

work of the Almighty! I detached from the vine and was no longer accessing the power of Jesus.

And then, just this week, one of our elders was praying for me and for today and said “Lord, please remind Kurt that it’s not his words that he is to speak but that it is the Holy Spirit speaking through him.” He didn’t know the impact that had on me, but it came at just the right time (On a side note, if you don’t like this sermon, you are more than welcome to take it up with the Holy Spirit).

God gave me both of these people to remind me that, in my own strength, which is really weakness, I will not accomplish what God is calling me to do. But by the working of his power, he’ll accomplish whatever he wants through me.

We’ve begun talking about purpose around here and, starting next year, we’re going to talk about it a whole lot more. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have a testimony similar to Paul’s because you too, by the gift of God’s grace, are a minister of the Gospel.

The Christmas story is more than just a rescue mission where our Mighty God saves us from eternity in hell. It’s about the Almighty breaking into time and space to make it possible for us to be a participant in his story and work of redemption.

And if that’s the case, there are two false ideas we need to eradicate from our thinking. Some of you may think there’s no way God could use you. You’re just too broken, you’ve done too much bad stuff, you’re not very talented, you’re just full of weakness. But God knows who you are, how’s he’s made you, and exactly what he’s calling you to, and it’s through the working of his power that you will fulfill it. Some of you think you have to do it all on your own. You may never make the statement “I don’t need God.” But you may be operating in a way that makes it clear you think it’s all up to you. That’s not strength, it’s weakness. Apart from our Mighty God, you can do nothing. Your purpose from God will only be fulfilled by the power of God.

God’s power ultimately overcomes your weakness.

In Luke 8, we read the story of the hemorrhaging woman who’d had a bleeding disorder for twelve years. This was more than a mere physical weakness. Her condition had spiritual consequences. Her bleeding caused her to be ceremonially unclean, so she wasn’t allowed to enter the synagogue to worship. Her condition had emotional and relational consequences. Anyone who touched her would have been ceremonially unclean. She likely had very little physical contact for all that time. Her condition had cultural consequences. Luke tells us she spent all her money to find a cure. This was a woman who needed a Mighty God.

And one day he showed up on a boat. As he walked through the streets, full of people who wanted to see him, she secretly came up behind him, touched the fringe of his garment, and was instantly healed. It didn’t go unnoticed by Jesus, though. He asked who touched him but Peter objected by observing that the whole crowd was pressing in on him. But Jesus replied, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.”

This was an act of mercy by Jesus to heal this woman. Her Mighty God fought for her. It was a display of power to confirm that he was the one Isaiah had foretold. But it was also a sign of something to come. You see, the Christmas story is act one of a two-act play.

[Philippians 3:20-21] ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Many of us celebrate Advent as a time of waiting and reflection for the birth of this promised son, and it is sort of a countdown clock to Christmas. But ever since Jesus commissioned his disciples and ascended into heaven, we entered a new time of waiting and anticipation. You see, our Mighty God came to us the first time to declare the Good News and provide the means for our salvation. But he's coming back. And when he does, he's going to restore all that is weak, and broken, and hurting, and in decay. And that includes our bodies.

I don't know exactly how that's going to go, but I just wanted to maybe give you an idea of how that's going to look so that you can leave with a bit of hope today. There's a picture of me, a forty-year-old man, full of weakness and decay. But when Christ returns and transforms that lowly body to be like his glorious body, this could be the result. Isn't eternity going to be awesome!?!?

Why is that important? Because, until then, our weakness is going to be a reality. Jesus healed the hemorrhaging woman, but not permanently, and she eventually died. Jesus raised Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus from the dead, but they eventually died again. Jesus healed the lame and the blind, but they still passed away. And we are no different. Our weakness is part of who we are until he comes again in power, so our hope in our Mighty God must be an eternal one.

There are some of you who've been struggling with illness or physical ailment for a long time and, for his reasons, God has not healed you. And while his grace is sufficient for you now, there's coming a day where God's power will make your body perfect. No sickness. No weakness. Perfect. There are some of you here who struggle with depression, anxiety, shame, and fear. And while his grace is sufficient, while his power is available to sustain you now, there's coming a day where there will be no more tears, no mourning, no more pain. There are some of you here battling the bondage of addiction or with a particular sin. And while his grace is sufficient and his power is available to break you free of it now, there's coming a day where there will be no more chains, no more temptation, no more struggle. That means we can live with the hope that our Mighty God will return and defeat our weakness once and for all.

There's one more thing I want us to consider, and I'll close with this. If I was an Israelite in the days of Isaiah, fearful of the coming Assyrian hordes, and I heard his words about this promised son, this powerful, mighty deliverer, I most assuredly would have expected him to come onto the scene as a dominating military and political figure.

But a beautiful thing happens in the Christmas story, because God's idea of power is not our idea of power. And 2,000 years ago, God's power arrived in the form of weakness. This Mighty God put on the limitations of the flesh, born as a powerless and vulnerable baby to a powerless and

penniless family, covered not in fine cloth but in burial rags, asleep not in his bed in a palace but laid in the feeding trough of a farm animal. And that was just the beginning of He came as a baby, he lived as a servant, and he died as a criminal, subjecting himself to the religious and civil powers of the day, body weak and broken and hanging from a tree. That's our Mighty God? Yes, it is.

And three days later, his power exploded in time and space. The power that brought life where there was none at Jesus' conception was the power of God brought life where there was none at Jesus' resurrection. And in that moment, our Mighty God, who fights for his people, defeated the real enemy. It wasn't the army of an invading nation. It was the enemy known as sin and death.

Our Mighty God fights to give you new life in Him, to sustain you in your suffering, to propel you in your mission, and to give you an eternal hope, knowing that the child born unto us will make all things right. We are weak, but he is strong.