



STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

“In our current state, we must look forward, anticipating the promised day of satisfaction, laughter, and reward.”

As Americans, we don't often feel powerless. We are a society that celebrates the powerful. We are people who aspire to be on top. But there are moments in our lives when we are forced to realize we are not in control. We are not as powerful as we imagined. The coronavirus pandemic is such a time.

In a matter of days our securities have come crashing down around us. Routines have been disrupted. Paychecks have stopped coming. Our social networks have been exchanged for isolation. Our lives have come to a screeching halt. And we are powerless to do anything about it.

This sickness—this invisible enemy—has taken our security, our sense of normalcy, and our loved ones. And it has left us powerless.

Where do we turn in the midst of our struggle? We can't turn to the church as we traditionally have. We can't go to our sanctuary and gather together; we can't even meet with our pastor.

I have tried to listen and learn from my brothers and sisters who felt powerless long before this crisis. We forget the global church exists in places of great persecution and believers around the world face unimaginable hardship each day. It is through hearing their voices and following their example that

we, as those so used to being in power, can learn to have perspective and how to see and show the love of Jesus in this crisis.

God Sees the Powerless

As the Lord prepares to deliver His people from captivity, He declares His plan saying, *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them . . . ”* (Ex. 3:7–8a)

The stories of the refugees who have come to faith often have a miraculous component. Jesus speaks in a dream or a vision, provides a needed medication, or brings healing. The resulting testimony is often consistent—“when I cried out, God heard me.”

In a world that has tuned out the cry of the poor and turned a blind eye to injustice, the testimony of the powerless is that God still hears, God still sees, and God still acts. As He saw and heard the cries of His people, Israel, so He hears and sees the suffering of His world today.

God Redeems Suffering

In Luke 6, Jesus is caring for those who are suffering—the sick, diseased, and demon oppressed, *“and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all”* (Luke 6:19). And to that crowd, Jesus offers these words:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven (Luke 6:20-23a).

Hope is a crucial component of faith for the powerless. *We will be satisfied, we will laugh.* But sometimes that day seems far off. The oppressed and the sick often can’t do anything to change their circumstance. They live lives of loneliness, neglect, and fear—feelings many of us are experiencing for the first time.

But the powerless have learned to hope in a God who fulfills His promises, a Lord who is powerful and merciful, just and compassionate. The Scriptures say people came out because of the healing power of Jesus. Yet it was in His power that He told those in the valley to look forward. In our current state, we too must look forward, anticipating the promised day of satisfaction, laughter, and reward.

God Uses the Powerless

Like many of us, Paul was in a position of power. He was an Apostle of the Church. But the Lord put something in his life, a thorn in his flesh, to remind him of his ultimate powerlessness. He writes:

. . . but [the Lord] 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

We depend on our titles, finances, talents, degrees, etc. Paul had those things. But he realized the lesson I often see manifest in the powerless—that God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Life transformation, gifts of the Spirit, miraculous works, and gospel proclamation: these are evidence of the all-powerful God working through our weaknesses.

If this pandemic has made you feel powerless, listen with me to the voices of those who have experienced powerlessness before. Learn from those who have seen God in the midst of suffering. And prayerfully allow God to use your weakness for His glory.

by an Alliance international worker serving in the Middle East

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