

Strength in Weakness: Embracing God's Unconventional Ways

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

January 7, 2024

In "Strength in Weakness: Embracing God's Unconventional Ways," we embark on a transformative journey through the Scriptures to explore a compelling theme: finding strength in our weaknesses. This sermon delves into the paradoxical wisdom of the Bible, where power is perfected in frailty, and victory emerges through humility and sacrifice. Through a series of thought-provoking sections, we examine biblical narratives and teachings that challenge our conventional understanding of strength and success. From the humble reliance of the widow in 2 Kings 4 to the profound humility of Christ in Philippians 2, each segment reveals how God's power shines brightest in our vulnerabilities. This message encourages us to reframe our perception of weakness, inviting us to see it as an opportunity for God's grace to be magnificently displayed. Embrace this journey of faith, and discover how embracing our weaknesses opens the door to a deeper reliance on God's transformative power.

Keywords: Bible, strength in weakness, humility, faith, God's power, vulnerability, sacrifice, paradox, Scripture, reliance on God, spiritual growth, Christian teaching, divine wisdom, grace, sermon, biblical narratives, transformative journey, spiritual understanding, resilience, trust in God.

Introduction: The Paradox of Divine Power

Good morning, beloved congregation. Today, we gather to explore a theme that is as challenging as it is comforting, a paradox that lies at the very heart of our faith: finding strength in weakness. This concept, as we will see, is not only counterintuitive to our worldly understanding but is also deeply and profoundly rooted in the teachings of the Bible.

In a world that champions strength, power, and self-sufficiency, the idea of finding strength in weakness often seems contradictory. Our culture idolizes the strong, the successful, the self-made individuals. We are taught to rely on our own capabilities, to forge our path with our strength, and to see any form of weakness as a deficiency to be overcome. But as we turn to the Scriptures, we find a remarkably different narrative.

The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is replete with stories, teachings, and truths that turn our worldly wisdom on its head. It speaks not of human triumph through strength but of divine triumph through weakness. It's a narrative where the least likely heroes are chosen, where the smallest acts of faith yield the most miraculous results, and where our vulnerabilities become the very channels through which God's power flows.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, the Apostle Paul shares a profound truth he received from the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Here, Paul highlights a divine principle that runs counter to every human instinct: it is in our weakest moments that God's power is most evident, most perfect.

As we delve into the Scriptures today, we will journey through various passages - from the Old Testament to the New, from prophets and kings to disciples and apostles. We will discover how this paradox of strength in weakness is not just a fleeting

theme but a foundational truth upon which many of God's interactions with humanity are built.

So, as we embark on this exploration, let us open our hearts and minds. Let us be willing to challenge our preconceptions about strength and power. And most importantly, let us be ready to encounter the divine power that is so uniquely displayed in our weaknesses, in our insufficiencies, and in our total reliance on God's unending grace and mercy.

Beloved, let us journey together into this paradox of divine power, exploring how our great God manifests His strength in our weaknesses.

Section 1: The Widow's Oil - Trust in Scarcity (2 Kings 4)

As we turn to the pages of 2 Kings 4, we encounter a story that beautifully encapsulates our theme: the story of the widow's oil. This account is not just a tale from the past; it is a living testament to a timeless truth about God's provision in our times of scarcity.

The widow in this story faced a dire situation. Her husband, a man of God, had passed away, leaving her in debt. In the ancient world, debt could lead to her sons being taken as slaves. Imagine the depth of her despair and helplessness. Yet, in this moment of utter scarcity, we see the unfolding of a divine principle.

The prophet Elisha asks her, "What do you have in your house?" Her response is simple yet profound: "Your servant has nothing there at all... except a small jar of olive oil." Notice her situation. She perceives her possession as 'nothing' when compared to her need. But God is about to show her, and us, that what we consider 'nothing' is enough for Him to work a miracle.

Elisha instructs her to gather empty jars from her neighbors. Not just a few, but many. Then, she is to go inside her house with her sons, shut the door, and pour oil into all those jars. The widow, in faith, follows these instructions. And as she pours, the oil doesn't run dry. Jar after jar is filled until there are no more jars left. It is at this point, and only at this point, that the oil stops flowing.

Brothers and sisters, there are profound lessons here. First, God's provision often begins with what we already have, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem. The widow had a bit of oil, and God used it as a seed for a miracle. It's a powerful reminder that God can use our limited resources, our small acts of faith, for His grand purposes.

Secondly, the widow's act of collecting jars was an act of faith. She didn't see the oil first and then believe; she believed first and then saw the miracle. This is a call for us to step out in faith, even when the outcome seems uncertain, trusting that God will provide.

Lastly, the oil stopped when there were no more jars to fill. This speaks to the boundless nature of God's provision. As long as there was capacity to receive, God kept providing. How often do we limit God's blessings by our limited expectations or faith?

In times of scarcity, whether it be financial, emotional, spiritual, or physical, let us remember the story of the widow's oil. It teaches us to trust in God's provision, to start with what we have, and to expand our capacity to receive from Him. It reminds us that our God is not a God of just enough; He is a God of more than enough.

As we reflect on this story, let us embrace a faith that looks beyond our limitations and trusts in the God who provides beyond human calculations. Let the story of the widow's oil be a beacon of hope, reminding us that in the kingdom of God, scarcity is but an opportunity for His abundance to be displayed.

Section 2: God's Wisdom vs. Worldly Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1)

In 1 Corinthians 1, the Apostle Paul presents a stark contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. This passage is a profound exploration of how the divine perspective often stands in direct opposition to human understanding and expectations.

Paul writes, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Here, Paul acknowledges a fundamental truth: the core message of Christianity, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, seems utterly absurd to the worldly mindset. The idea that salvation and power come through someone who was crucified – a form of punishment reserved for the lowest criminals – is completely counterintuitive.

The world values power, influence, intelligence, and might. These are the metrics by which success and wisdom are often measured. Yet, God’s wisdom turns this completely upside down. Paul continues, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” In God’s economy, weakness is not a liability; it is an asset. It is not something to be shunned but embraced, for in our weakness, the strength of God is most clearly seen.

This divine reversal is not just a matter of contrasting strength and weakness but is about redefining them. The world sees power in self-reliance, in human might and intellect. But God sees power in reliance on Him, in admitting our need for His grace and strength. The world pursues a wisdom that leads to self-exaltation, but God offers a wisdom that leads to humility and the exaltation of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, Paul underscores this: “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the

weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

This passage invites us to a radical reorientation of our values and perspectives. It calls us to find strength not in human wisdom or power but in God’s wisdom and power. It challenges us to embrace what the world might view as foolish – faith, dependence on God, humility – knowing that these are the very things that reveal the power and wisdom of God.

As we navigate our lives, let us hold fast to the wisdom of God, even when it seems foolish to the world around us. Let us find our strength in our weaknesses, our victories in our vulnerabilities, and our wisdom in the simplicity of the Gospel. For in doing so, we become vessels of God’s power, living testimonies to the truth that in the kingdom of God, the foolish confound the wise, and the weak shame the strong.

Section 3: Gideon's Army - Victory in Reduction (Judges 7)

The story of Gideon and his army in Judges 7 provides a striking illustration of how God's ways diverge radically from human expectations and strategies. In this narrative, we see a vivid demonstration of the principle that victory does not come through human might or numbers, but through divine power.

Gideon, called by God to deliver Israel from the Midianites, initially gathers an army of 32,000 men. This number, although significant, was still small compared to the vast Midianite forces they were to confront. Yet, in a move that defies human logic and military strategy, God tells Gideon that his army is too large. God's reason is profound: “The people with you are too many for

me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'”

God instructs Gideon to reduce his army, first by sending home those who are afraid. This reduction leaves Gideon with 10,000 men. Yet, God deems this number still too many. Through a further test, the army is reduced to a mere 300 men. It's important to note that these reductions were not based on skill, strength, or experience, but on simple acts like how they drank water from a river. God's selection criteria were not about human efficiency but about His divine purpose.

The lesson here is profound. God was teaching Gideon, and us, that victory in His kingdom is not about human resources or prowess. It's about His power, His plan, and His glory. By reducing Gideon's army to a mere 300, God ensured that the victory could only be attributed to Him. It was a clear demonstration that our dependence should be on God, not on our abilities or resources.

Furthermore, the strategy God gives Gideon for the battle is unconventional. With trumpets, jars, and torches, Gideon's army confuses and frightens the Midianites into turning against each other. The victory was won not through traditional warfare but through a strategy that only God could orchestrate.

The story of Gideon teaches us several vital truths. First, God often works in ways that are beyond our understanding. His strategies and plans are not bound by our logic or expectations. Second, God's power is made perfect in our weakness. When we are weak, then we are strong because it is God who fights for us. And third, God orchestrates events in such a way that His glory is displayed and His people learn to trust in Him above all else.

As we reflect on this story, let us remember that in our lives and in our battles, be they personal, spiritual, or communal, our victory

does not depend on our strength or numbers. It depends on our God. Let us, like Gideon, learn to trust in God's power, follow His lead, however unconventional it may seem, and give Him the glory for the victories we achieve. Let us embrace our limitations as opportunities for God to display His limitless power.

Section 4: David and Goliath - Triumph of the Underdog (1 Samuel 17)

One of the most iconic stories in the Bible, the encounter between David and Goliath, stands as a powerful testimony to how God uses those who seem insignificant to achieve great things. This narrative, found in 1 Samuel 17, resonates with the theme of divine power manifesting in human weakness.

Goliath, a giant warrior from the Philistine camp, had instilled fear in the heart of the Israelite army. His sheer size, battle experience, and formidable armor made him an intimidating adversary. On the other side stood David, a young shepherd boy, without armor, without a warrior's experience, armed only with a sling and a few stones. By all human assessments, David stood no chance against the giant Goliath. Yet, what unfolds is a story of extraordinary faith and divine intervention.

David's confidence was not in his own strength or fighting skills, but in the Lord Almighty. He tells Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." Here lies the crux of the story: David's trust was not in weapons but in God. He saw the battle not as a physical confrontation but as a spiritual one, where faith in God was his greatest weapon.

The story of David and Goliath teaches us several profound truths. Firstly, it illustrates that God's criteria for using people are not based on outward appearances, physical strength, or societal status. God looks at the heart, and He often chooses the unlikely, the overlooked, and the undervalued to accomplish His purposes. David, a young shepherd, not even considered by his own family to be a candidate for kingship, was chosen by God for this significant moment and, eventually, for leading His people.

Secondly, the story demonstrates that faith in God is a powerful force. David's victory over Goliath was not a testament to his skill with a sling; it was a testament to his faith in God and God's power to deliver. When we face 'giants' in our own lives – be they challenges, obstacles, or fears – our victory comes from putting our trust in God, not in relying on our own abilities or resources.

Finally, David's encounter with Goliath is a reminder that God's plans and purposes are often fulfilled in ways that defy human logic. God delights in using what the world considers weak or foolish to accomplish His will, displaying His glory and power in the process.

As we reflect on this story, let us be encouraged that no matter how insignificant we may feel, no matter how insurmountable the challenges we face may seem, with God, we are more than conquerors. Let us, like David, approach our battles with faith in God, knowing that it is His strength, not ours, that leads to true victory. Let the story of David and Goliath embolden us to face our giants, not with fear, but with unwavering faith in the God who delivers.

Section 5: Higher Ways and Thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9)

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 8 and 9, we find a profound declaration from God that invites us into a deeper understanding of His divine nature and workings. God says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

This passage in Isaiah beautifully captures the essence of God's transcendence – His ways and thoughts are not just different from ours; they are vastly superior. This difference is not merely in degree but in kind, as high as the heavens are above the earth. It is a humbling reminder that the wisdom and knowledge of God far exceed our human understanding and limitations.

God's higher ways and thoughts often lead to unexpected paths and solutions in our lives. When we face situations that seem insurmountable, when our human logic and strategies come to an end, it is precisely in these moments that God's superior ways can become most evident. His solutions are not bound by our problems; His answers are not confined to our questions.

This divine transcendence is not just about God being greater in power but also in perspective. He sees the end from the beginning. He understands the full tapestry of our lives, where we only see individual threads. This perspective allows God to work in ways that may initially seem puzzling, unnecessary, or even counterproductive to us. Yet, in His wisdom, He orchestrates circumstances for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory.

Furthermore, Isaiah 55:8-9 encourages us to trust in God, especially when His ways don't align with our expectations. It's an invitation to surrender – to give up not only our problems but also

our plans, to trust that the God who created the universe has a better plan for our lives than we could ever devise.

In application, these verses call us to approach our lives with humility and faith. Humility, in recognizing that our understanding is limited, and faith, in believing that God is working out His perfect plan. When we face trials, instead of asking why, we can ask what – what is God teaching me? When we encounter delays or detours, we can see them as divine interventions, guiding us to God's best for us.

As we meditate on Isaiah 55:8-9, let us embrace the truth that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours. Let this truth bring comfort in confusion, peace in turmoil, and hope in despair. May we find rest in the assurance that the God whose ways are higher than ours is lovingly and powerfully at work in every aspect of our lives, leading us to His perfect purposes and plans.

Section 6: The Beatitudes - Blessed are the Meek (Matthew 5:1-12)

In the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus presents the Beatitudes, a series of profound declarations that challenge and invert the conventional wisdom of the world. Among these, the blessing upon the meek is particularly striking in its reversal of worldly values.

The Beatitudes, each beginning with "Blessed are...", portray a kingdom that operates on principles diametrically opposed to those of the world. In this kingdom, strength is found not in power, assertiveness, or dominance, but in qualities like meekness, humility, and a thirst for righteousness.

When Jesus declares, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," He is introducing a radical idea. The world often associates meekness with weakness, but in the vocabulary of the kingdom of Heaven, meekness is a strength. It is not about being timid or passive; rather, it is about having strength under control. The meek are those who have submitted their strength to God, who trust in Him rather than in their own abilities or status.

This beatitude, like the others, turns the prevailing cultural and religious expectations upside down. Jesus is saying that those who might be considered least in the eyes of the world are esteemed in the kingdom of Heaven. The meek, those who may not seek to assert themselves, who are gentle and humble in spirit, are promised the earth - a promise that speaks of ultimate vindication and inheritance in God's kingdom.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is painting a picture of a community that finds its identity not in power, riches, or earthly success, but in qualities like poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and enduring persecution for righteousness' sake. This community is marked by a radical dependence on God and a counter-cultural approach to life.

For us today, the Beatitudes offer a template for Christian living that is as challenging as it is transformative. They call us to examine our values and priorities, to seek strength not in dominance or self-assertion, but in submission to God and service to others. They invite us into a way of life where we are blessed not because we are powerful, but because we recognize our need for God; not because we have attained, but because we seek; not because we are full, but because we hunger for what is right.

As we reflect on the Beatitudes, let us embrace the call to meekness and humility. Let us find strength in surrendering to

God, in acknowledging our spiritual poverty, and in hungering for righteousness. May these blessings reshape our understanding of what it means to be blessed and guide us in living out the values of God's kingdom in a world that so often values the opposite.

Section 7: Paul's Thorn in the Flesh (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, we find the Apostle Paul grappling with a profound personal struggle, referred to as his "thorn in the flesh." This passage provides a deep insight into how God's power is not only displayed in our weaknesses but is actually perfected in them.

Paul describes how he pleaded with the Lord to remove this thorn, this source of anguish, yet the response he received was not one of removal but of reassurance: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." This response from God is rich with meaning and offers a radical perspective on suffering and weakness.

The nature of Paul's thorn has been the subject of much speculation. Whether it was a physical ailment, an emotional burden, or a spiritual trial, what's clear is that it was a source of profound distress for Paul. However, God's response to Paul's pleas is a powerful lesson that our weaknesses, rather than being mere obstacles, can become conduits for divine strength.

God's statement that His power is made perfect in weakness turns our conventional understanding of power and strength upside down. It suggests that our frailties, far from disqualifying us from being used by God, are actually the very context in which His power is most clearly displayed. It is in our inability to solve our problems, heal our own wounds, or change our circumstances that God's grace shines most brightly.

This principle of power in weakness is counterintuitive. We often think that we must be strong, capable, and self-sufficient to be effective or to be of value. Yet, Paul's experience teaches us that it is often through acknowledging our weaknesses, our insufficiencies, and our dependence on God that His power is most fully realized in our lives.

In verse 10, Paul says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." This paradoxical statement encapsulates the transformative experience of finding strength not by overcoming weakness, but by embracing it. In recognizing our weakness, we open ourselves to the sufficiency of God's grace. We allow His strength to be manifested in our lives in ways that human strength could never achieve.

For us today, this passage invites a reassessment of how we view our limitations and struggles. Rather than sources of shame or frustration, our weaknesses can be viewed as opportunities for God's grace to be displayed. When we face trials, rather than relying solely on our efforts to overcome them, we can lean into God's grace, trusting that His power is at work in even the most challenging circumstances.

As we reflect on Paul's experience with his thorn in the flesh, let us find comfort and encouragement in God's promise that His grace is sufficient. May we see our weaknesses as opportunities for God's power to be perfected, and may we, like Paul, find strength in our weaknesses, knowing that in our most vulnerable moments, we are most open to the transforming power of God's grace.

Section 8: The Humility of Christ (Philippians 2:5-8)

In Philippians 2:5-8, we find a profound exposition of the humility of Christ, which serves as the ultimate example of strength displayed through weakness. This passage not only describes Jesus' earthly journey but also encapsulates the essence of the Christian faith – the divine made human, the Almighty taking the form of a servant, and life emerging victorious through death.

The Apostle Paul urges believers to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.” This statement begins with a remarkable assertion of Jesus’ divine nature, immediately followed by a startling revelation of His humility. Jesus, though possessing all the power and glory of God, chose not to cling to these attributes. Instead, He emptied Himself, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

The humility of Christ is further exemplified in His willingness to undergo death, and not just any death, but the most humiliating and painful death of that time – crucifixion. It is this willingness to embrace the ultimate weakness, the vulnerability of human life and the ignominy of a criminal's death, that marks the pinnacle of His strength.

In this profound act of humility and submission, Jesus turned the world's concept of power and strength on its head. The cross, a symbol of shame and defeat, became the ultimate symbol of victory and power. Through His death, Jesus triumphed over sin and death, offering salvation to humanity. His resurrection is the ultimate vindication of His humility and the definitive demonstration of His strength.

What we learn from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is that true strength is not found in domination, coercion, or earthly

power, but in love, humility, and self-sacrifice. Jesus showed that the greatest power lies in giving oneself for others, in serving rather than being served, and in aligning one's life completely with God's will, even to the point of death.

For us, Jesus' example is both an inspiration and a challenge. It invites us to reconsider our own ideas about power, success, and achievement. Are we seeking to climb the ladders of power and prestige, or are we willing to take the path of humility, service, and sacrifice? Do we measure our strength by our ability to control and dominate, or by our capacity to love, to serve, and to give of ourselves?

As we reflect on the humility of Christ, let us strive to emulate His example in our lives. May we have the courage to embrace humility, to find strength in service, and to trust that, in our own vulnerabilities and sacrifices, we are most closely following the path of Christ. Let the humility of Jesus inspire us to live lives marked by love, compassion, and selflessness, demonstrating the true nature of divine strength.

Section 9: The Heroes of Faith (Hebrews 11)

Hebrews 11, often referred to as the "Faith Hall of Fame," presents a litany of individuals whose lives exemplify extraordinary faith. This chapter is not just a historical recounting of great deeds but a profound testament to the power of reliance on God rather than personal strength.

The chapter begins with a definition of faith: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." It then proceeds to illustrate this definition through the lives of various figures from biblical history, each demonstrating faith in God's promises and power.

Abel offers a better sacrifice than Cain, not because of the sacrifice itself, but because of his faith. Enoch is taken up to heaven without dying because he walked faithfully with God. Noah, in reverent fear, builds an ark to save his family from a flood that was yet unseen, trusting in God's warning about what was to come.

Abraham is a central figure in this chapter, exemplifying faith in numerous ways. He obeys God's call to leave his homeland without knowing where he was going. He lives as a foreigner in the promised land, fully convinced that God would fulfill His promises, even when they seemed impossible, like having a son in his old age. Sarah, too, is commended for her faith in God's promise, despite her initial doubt.

Moreover, the chapter recounts the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, each demonstrating trust in God's future promises. Moses is highlighted for his faith in leaving the privileges of Pharaoh's palace and enduring hardship with the people of God, valuing disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater worth than the treasures of Egypt.

The list continues with Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and shut the mouths of lions. They were people who, despite their flaws and weaknesses, placed their trust not in their abilities or circumstances but in the God they served.

Hebrews 11 shows us that faith is not a passive acceptance but an active living out of trust in God. These heroes of faith did not rely on their own strength, wisdom, or resources. They relied on God, who is faithful to His promises. Their faith was not a guarantee of a trouble-free life; many faced trials, persecution,

and martyrdom. Yet, their faith was the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

For us today, Hebrews 11 is an encouragement and a challenge. It encourages us by showing that ordinary people can live extraordinary lives of faith. It challenges us to live not by sight but by faith, trusting in God's promises and His character, even when our circumstances are difficult or God's promises seem delayed.

As we reflect on the heroes of faith, let us be inspired to put our trust fully in God, to live by faith in His promises, and to find our strength not in our capabilities but in our reliance on Him. Let their stories embolden us to walk the path of faith, confident in God's guidance and provision.

Section 10: The Lion and the Lamb (Revelation 5:5-6)

In Revelation 5:5-6, we encounter one of the most profound and powerful symbolisms in the Bible – Jesus Christ depicted as both the Lion and the Lamb. This dual imagery captures the essence of Christ's nature and His work of redemption, illustrating how true victory is achieved through sacrifice and humility.

John, the writer of Revelation, weeps because no one is found worthy to open the scroll or look inside it. Then one of the elders says to him, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." The Lion of Judah, a symbol of royalty, power, and authority, resonates with the Old Testament prophecies about a Messiah who would come as a conquering king from the lineage of David.

Yet, when John looks, he sees "a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne." This imagery of the

Lamb is strikingly different. A lamb symbolizes gentleness, vulnerability, and sacrifice. This Lamb, appearing as slain, represents Christ's sacrifice on the cross, where He surrendered His life for the redemption of humanity.

The juxtaposition of these two images – the Lion and the Lamb – encapsulates the paradoxical nature of Christ's kingship and the manner of His victory. As the Lion, He embodies majesty, strength, and the rightful rule. As the Lamb, He displays meekness, submission, and sacrifice. Christ's victory and His worthiness to open the scroll are not despite His sacrifice but because of it.

This dual representation challenges our understanding of power and victory. In human terms, victory is often associated with overpowering strength, dominance, and aggression. However, the victory of Christ, as portrayed in Revelation, comes through His willing vulnerability, His ultimate sacrifice, and His profound humility. It is through His death, the act of being slain as a Lamb, that He conquers sin and death.

The imagery of the Lion and the Lamb also speaks to us about the nature of Christian discipleship. It suggests that our call to follow Christ involves embracing both aspects of His character. We are called to exhibit the courage, authority, and strength of the Lion while simultaneously embodying the humility, gentleness, and sacrificial love of the Lamb.

As we reflect on this rich symbolism, let us draw inspiration from the knowledge that our Savior is both the mighty Lion of Judah and the sacrificial Lamb who was slain. May this understanding deepen our faith and shape our lives, encouraging us to live with boldness and conviction, yet with humility and self-giving love. In our personal battles, our community struggles, and our journey of faith, let us hold to the truth that true victory, true strength, comes

not through force or domination, but through sacrifice, service, and surrender to God's will.

Section 11: The Upside-Down Kingdom (Matthew 19:30)

In Matthew 19:30, Jesus utters a phrase that encapsulates a key principle of the Kingdom of Heaven: "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." This statement, both paradoxical and profound, turns our conventional understanding of power, success, and priority upside down.

In the context of this verse, Jesus had just finished speaking with a rich young man and then discussed with His disciples the difficulty for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples, puzzled by this teaching, wondered who then could be saved. Jesus' response culminates in the statement that in God's Kingdom, worldly status and human standards of success are not the metrics of true greatness or spiritual priority.

The idea of the first being last and the last being first challenges our natural inclinations and societal norms. In a world where status, power, and success are often pursued and celebrated, Jesus presents a different view of what is valuable and honored in the eyes of God. In the economy of Heaven, the values are inverted – humility is exalted over pride, service over dominance, and giving over receiving.

This teaching encourages a re-evaluation of our aspirations and pursuits. It questions the pursuit of personal glory, power, and position. Instead, it promotes a life characterized by humility, service, and selflessness. In God's Kingdom, those who lower themselves – serving others, prioritizing others' needs, and not seeking personal glory – are the ones who are elevated.

Moreover, this principle has profound implications for how we view others and ourselves. It encourages us to value and respect all individuals, regardless of their social status, wealth, or power. It invites us to adopt a servant's heart, seeking to serve rather than be served. It also warns against pride and self-exaltation, reminding us that our true worth and identity are found in God, not in our accomplishments or societal status.

In practical terms, living out this principle means prioritizing God's values over worldly values. It means finding joy in serving others, being content with being unnoticed or unapplauded when we do God's work, and valuing the eternal rewards of Heaven over the temporary accolades of the world. It also means recognizing that our true worth comes from our identity in Christ, not from our achievements or social standing.

As we reflect on the idea of the first being last and the last being first, let us embrace the call to live counter-culturally, following Jesus' example of humility and service. May this principle guide our actions, relationships, and decisions, reminding us that in the Kingdom of Heaven, the way up is down, and the path to greatness is through serving others.

Conclusion: Embracing Our Weakness as Strength

As we draw our journey through these powerful scriptural insights to a close, let us reflect on the overarching theme we have explored: Embracing our weakness as a conduit for God's strength. This message, counterintuitive to so much of what the world teaches, is a fundamental truth of our faith, a truth that calls us to a deeper trust and reliance on God.

The stories of the widow's oil, Gideon's army, David and Goliath, the Beatitudes, and the examples of faith in Hebrews 11, among

others, all point us towards this profound principle. They show us that in the Kingdom of God, our limitations are not liabilities; they are opportunities for God's power to be magnificently displayed. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the ultimate Lion and Lamb, exemplify this principle in the most profound way.

As we go forth from here, let us carry this message in our hearts. Let us look at our weaknesses, our struggles, and our insufficiencies, not as reasons for despair, but as opportunities for God to work powerfully in and through us. When we feel inadequate, let us remember that our adequacy comes from God. When we face challenges that seem insurmountable, let us recall that with God, all things are possible.

Embracing our weakness as strength means changing how we view ourselves and our circumstances. It means relying not on our own understanding or ability but leaning wholly on God's grace and power. It involves surrendering our pride, our desire for control, and our self-reliance, and instead, cultivating a posture of humility and trust in God.

Let us be encouraged to live out this principle in our daily lives. In our workplaces, in our homes, in our communities, and in our church, let us be vessels of God's power by acknowledging our need for Him. When we are weak, then we are strong – not because of who we are, but because of who God is.

So, beloved congregation, as we conclude, let this message resonate in our hearts and minds. May we embrace our weaknesses, not begrudgingly, but joyfully, knowing that they are the very places where God's strength and glory shine brightest. And as we do, may our lives become a testament to the power, the grace, and the sufficiency of our Lord.

May God bless us with the courage to embrace our weaknesses as the path to experiencing His strength. Amen.

