

Email Subject: There is Strength in Weakness

From: Samson (strongman@bible.net)

Judges 16:22-31

Dear Christian,

“What will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?” I guess you could say that I am a fitting example of Jesus’ warning to his disciples. My name is Samson. My reputation was built on my great strength, but in reality I wasn’t very strong at all. God had a plan for my life. Before my birth, God told my mother that no razor was to touch my hair and that I would begin to deliver my people from the Philistines, a persistent thorn in Israel’s side, a thorn that was more self-imposed than anything else. Just read the opening chapters of what you call the book of Judges and that becomes very obvious. Yet God still would not abandon his people as he sent judges like me to deliver Israel.

God had blessed me with great physical strength to do just that. As a result, I became known for accomplishing great feats such as tearing a lion apart with my bare hands and striking down a thousand Philistines with only the jawbone of a donkey. But the key to my strength was in my hair. As long as my hair remained uncut, I was strong, but as time went along I was really growing weaker - not physically, but spiritually. I began to think that it was my own strength that made me strong and I began to boast about my strength. “With the jawbone of a donkey, I have struck down a thousand men!” I boasted. Relying on my own strength, I eventually gave up the secret of my strength to a woman I loved, Delilah. One night it became clear she didn’t love me in return. She was just trying to get the reward the Philistines would give her if she found out the source of his strength. “What will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?” I had the world: strength, fame, power. Yet I was losing my soul.

My friends, like me, you can begin to rely more on your own strength and even boast that it is your own strength that makes you strong. The world would approve of that thinking. The world tells you that strength is found in yourself. If you think you are weak, you have the power to make yourself stronger. Since you can make yourself strong, the world says you should trust your own strength and then hold it up as something you can boast about. But that way of thinking only makes you weaker. As my hair was cut, he allowed my physical strength to leave me so that I might understand how weak I really had become trusting in myself. I had to learn the truth the hard way. There is strength in weakness.

After I told Delilah the secret to my great strength, my head was shaved in my sleep. The great strength God had given to me as God left me too. Now I was weak and alone. The Philistines took me captive. They gouged out my eyes. They declared victory and offered a sacrifice to their false god, Dagon, saying it was he who gave me into their hands. I knew differently. They brought me into their temple while thousands of people celebrated so that I could “entertain” them. As they ridiculed me, it was there I began to understand how weak I truly had become. I wasn’t just physically weak but the weakness of my sin was evident trusting my own strength and boasting in that strength. I had relied on myself instead of relying on God as the one who gives me strength.

I may not have been able to see, but I saw my weakness clear as day. So I asked the young man who led me there to put me where I could touch the pillars that supported the building. As I leaned, I called out, “Lord God, remember me!” Weak and alone, I had no choice but to admit how weak I really was. All I could do was trust God and his strength. So I cried out to the God of grace with a repentant heart relying on his saving strength.

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Following Jesus means to completely lose sight of self and your own interests no longer trusting yourself. It means daily denying your own strength to save yourself by admitting the weakness of your sins. It is focusing your attention on him depending solely on his strength to save. It is in what appeared to be weak as Jesus took up his cross that we see God's strength to save. There you find forgiveness for your misplaced trust and prideful boast. That was what I was doing as I called out to God with a weak sinner's plea of remembrance. I cast myself completely upon God's grace, his undeserved love. In my weakness I was given strength to take up my cross and follow serving with God's plan in mind.

People often speak about any kind of affliction as a cross, but really a cross as Jesus spoke of it refers to the troubles, distresses, and shame that comes our way precisely because you are following him and doing God's will - even if that cross includes death. For me, what God allowed me to endure calling me to repentance became the cross I was to take up following him. So taking up my cross of weakness, blindness, and ridicule, I asked the Lord to permit me to be what I was born to be - his servant on a special mission to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. "Give me strength, I pray, this one more time, O God. Let me get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes in one act of vengeance." Putting my hands on the pillars which held up the building, I was willing to give up my own life in full recognition of the role God had given me from birth. "Let me die with the Philistines," I prayed and then I pushed.

It may appear that my final act was a selfish act of self-destruction. I had already committed that sin when I gave away the secret of my great strength. As I pushed with the physical strength God once again gave me, the pillars gave way and the building fell on all those there. I guess you could say I died better than I had lived as now finally I was trusting God's saving strength and not my own. I followed having in mind what God wanted and died in service to my Savior.

Jesus' cross was necessary to save. Your cross is a necessary result of trusting in the strength of his cross and following him. In your weakness, you find strength in the cross of Jesus to follow knowing that after the cross comes the glory. It was that way for Jesus as he said he would not only suffer the apparent weakness of suffering and death, but the strength of his victory would be seen in his rising from the dead. It is that way for you. First comes the cross. Then comes the glory. Dear Christian, take up your cross and follow with a life of service carrying your cross.

Your cross may not be the same as mine, but you still bear crosses for your faith. Things will not always be easy or just exactly the way you want it to be living your life following Jesus. Knowing that causes you to continually deny yourselves admitting just how weak you are without the cross of Jesus. It leads you to acknowledge just how much you need to rely on his strength and not yours every day. You are only strong when your faith draws strength from his cross - something that appears to be weak but really is God's strength to save you. That's why you place crosses in your church, in your homes, and maybe even around your necks. Even though you may look weak to the world, you are made strong by the Lord through forgiveness and salvation. The psalm writer said, **"My strength and song is the Lord, and he has become my salvation." (118:24)**

My friends, there is strength in weakness. The world would say otherwise. There was even a time when I would have agreed. Standing there before my enemies enduring the ridicule and the shame, I began to understand this. I pleaded for remembrance and strength to take up my cross willingly and serve one more time. This time not boasting in my own strength, but the strength God gave to me. It is reliance on God's saving strength which leads you to boast not in yourselves and what you can do, but in the cross of Jesus as you take up your crosses and follow him. May the prayer of the Apostle Paul be your prayer every day, **"Far be it from**

me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Chrsit, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

Your fellow cross-bearer now in glory,

Samson