STRENGTHENING WORDS FROM THE SAVIOR'S LIPS

NO. 1287

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 2, 1876
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."
2 Corinthians 12:9

PAUL, when buffeted by the messenger of Satan, addressed his prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not, as he usually did, to the heavenly Father. This is a somewhat remarkable fact, but it is clear from the passage before us. He says, "For this thing I besought *the Lord* thrice," and that the Lord here is the Lord Jesus is pretty clear from the fact that he says in the next verse, "that the power *of Christ* may rest upon me."

His prayer was not directed to God absolutely considered, nor does he speak of the power of God, but his prayer was directed to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was the power of the Lord Jesus Christ which he desired to rest upon him. It is an infallible proof of our Lord's divinity, that He may be addressed in prayer. And this is one instance, with several others, which show us that we may legitimately present our petitions, not only to the ever-blessed Father, but also to His Son Jesus Christ.

There seems to me to be a peculiar fitness in a prayer to Jesus when the temptation came from a messenger of Satan, because the Lord Jesus has endured the same temptation Himself, and knows how to succor them that are tempted.

Moreover, He has come to earth to destroy the works of the devil. In His lifetime He manifested peculiar power over unclean spirits and was constantly casting them out from those whom they tormented. It was one of His few rejoicing notes, "I saw Satan like lightning fall from heaven." It was by the name of Jesus that devils were expelled after Christ had risen into glory. "Jesus I know," said the spirits whom the sons of Sceva endeavored in vain to exorcise. Devils felt the power of Jesus, and therefore it was wise and natural that the apostle Paul should, when buffeted of Satan, turn to Jesus and ask Him to bid the evil spirit depart from him.

It is not a little remarkable also that this prayer was not only addressed to Jesus, but was offered in much the same manner as the prayer of our Lord in the garden. The apostle prayed three times, even as our Lord did when He too was sorely buffeted by the powers of darkness. The thrice-repeated cry was intensely earnest, for he "*besought*" the Lord thrice.

And Paul, singularly enough, met with very much the same answer as his Master, for our Lord was not permitted to put aside the cup (it could not pass away from Him except He drink it), but an angel appeared unto Him strengthening Him, and so in Paul's case the trial was not taken away from him, but he was strengthened by kind, assuring words, and by being led to see that God would be glorified by his enduring the trial.

I see, then, the Lord Jesus reflected in His servant Paul as in a mirror. I hear the three-times repeated prayer, I mark the cup standing unremoved, and I see the strength imparted in the midst of weakness!\.

Our text fell from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself, and if anything could make its language more sweet than it is in itself it would be this fact, that He Himself delivered the words to His chosen apostle. It is Jesus who says in the words of the text, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." This truth casts a soft, mellow light upon the words, helps us to interpret them, and enables us to derive all the greater comfort from them. When Jesus speaks, a special charm surrounds each syllable.

The exact tense of the Greek words is not easy to translate into English. The apostle does not merely tell us that his Lord said these words to him fourteen years ago, but the tense connects the past with the present, as if he felt that the answer was not simply something past, but something which continued with him in its consoling power. The echoes of what his Lord had said were still sounding through his soul.

I should not miss the apostle's meaning if I read it, "He has been saying to me, 'My strength is sufficient for thee.'" The words had an abiding effect upon the apostle's mind, not merely for the time reconciling him to the particular trouble which had afflicted him, but cheering him for all the rest of his life, constraining him in all future trials to glory in his infirmities and render praise to God.

It is a sweet thing to have a text of Scripture laid home to the heart for present uses, but when God the Holy Spirit so applies a promise that it abides in the heart for the term of one's natural life, then are we favored indeed. Elijah's meat gave him strength for forty days, but what is that meat which endureth unto life eternal? What bread must that be which feeds me through the whole period of my pilgrimage? Here, then, we have before us food which Jesus Himself provides, so nutritive that His Spirit can cause us to remember the feast to our dying day. O Lord, feed us now and give us grace to inwardly digest Thy gracious word.

With this preface, which I beg you to remember during the discourse, since it indicates my line of thought, we now come to the text itself—a mass of diamonds, bright and precious. In the text we notice three things—first, *grace all-sufficient.* Secondly, *strength perfected.* And thirdly, *power indwelling.*

I. In the text, even the most superficial observer notices a promise of GRACE ALL-SUFFICIENT.

In the case of our Lord Jesus, the Spirit so rested upon Him as to be sufficient for Him at all times. Never did the Spirit of God fail to uphold the man Christ Jesus under the most arduous labors, the most terrible temptations, and the most bitter suffering. And therefore He completed the work which His Father gave Him to do, and in death He was able to exclaim, "It is finished." The Lord here assures His chosen servant that it should be the same with him—"My grace," saith He, "is sufficient for thee."

To bring out the full meaning of these few words, I will give you four readings of them. The first is a strictly grammatical one, and is the first sense which they bear. Taking the word translated grace to mean favor or love—for that also is included in the word *charis*—how does the passage run? "My favor is sufficient for thee." Do not ask to be rid of your trouble, do not ask to have ease, comfort, or any other form of happiness—My favor is enough for thee. Or as good Dr. Hodge reads it, "*My love is enough for thee*." If you have little else that you desire, yet surely it is enough that you are My favored one, a chosen subject of My grace.

My love is enough for thee." What a delicious expression. You do not need an explanation. Repeat the words to yourselves, and even now conceive that the Well-beloved looks down on you, and whispers, "My love is enough for thee." If you have been asking Him three times to deliver you from your present affliction, hear Him reply, "Why need you ask Me any more? My love is enough for you."

What do you say to that? Do you not answer, "Ay, Lord, indeed it is. If I am poor, if You will me to be poor, I am content to be severely tried, for Your love is enough for me. If I am sick, so long as You will come and visit me and reveal Your heart to me, I am satisfied, for Your love is enough for me. If I am persecuted, cast out, and forsaken, cheerfully will I bear it, if a sense of Your love sustains me, for Your love is enough for me. Ay, and if I should be left so alone as to have no one to care for me in the whole world, if my father and my mother should forsake me, and every friend should prove a Judas—Your love is enough for me."

Do you catch the meaning, and do you see how Paul must have been comforted by it if he understood it in this primary and most natural sense? "O Paul, it is sufficient for you that I have made you to be a chosen vessel to bear My name among the Gentiles. It is enough for you that I have loved you from before the foundation of the world, that I redeemed you with My precious blood, that I called you when you were a blasphemer and injurious, that I changed your heart and made you love Me, and that I have kept you to this day and will keep you even to the end by My inimitable love. My love is

enough for you. Ask not to be set free from this buffeting. Ask not to be delivered from weakness and trial, for these will enable you the better to enjoy My favor, and that is enough for you."

We will now read our text another way, keeping to our authorized version, but throwing the stress on the first word—"*My* grace is sufficient for thee." What grace is this? Note who it is that promises. It is Jesus who speaks. Therefore it is mediatorial grace, the grace given to Jesus Christ as the covenant Head of His people which is here intended.

Think of it a minute. It is the Head speaking to the member, and declaring that its grace is enough for the whole body. The anointing oil has been poured upon the Head that it may go down the beard and descend to the skirts, and lo, one poor member of the body is mourning and complaining, for it is fearful of being omitted in the plenteous anointing, but the Head comforts it by saying, "*My* anointing is enough for you, since it is enough for all My members."

It is the Head, Christ, in whom all fullness dwells, speaking to one of the members of His mystical body and saying, "The grace which God has given to Me without measure on behalf of all the members of My body is sufficient for you as well as for the rest of them."

Beloved, seize the thought. The Lord has made over to Christ all that the whole company of His people can possibly want. Nay, more than that, for "It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell." And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace, and from that fullness we hope continually to draw for evermore. This is the grace which is sufficient for us.

It greatly tends to help faith when you can see the relation that exists between the Redeemer and yourself. For Jesus is your covenant Head, and God has been pleased to give Himself and all His infinite riches to the Lord Jesus Christ as your federal representative. And as your covenant Head the Lord Jesus assures you that the stores laid up in Him on your behalf are sufficient for you. Can you limit the mediatorial power of Christ? Do you not know that God gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him? Be you, then, assured that Christ's grace is sufficient for you.

I will read the text again, and this time put the stress in the center. "My grace *is sufficient* for thee." It is *now* sufficient. You are buffeted by this evil spirit, but My grace is sufficient for your present need. Paul, you have been beaten with rods, and stoned, and shipwrecked, and in perils often, and in all these My grace has been sufficient. And now I tell you this present trouble, though it is somewhat different in shape from the rest, is nevertheless such as I am well able to meet. My grace is sufficient for you in this also.

The nearness of an object increases its apparent bulk, and so the affliction under which we are at present laboring seems greater than any we have known before. Past trials appear when we have passed them to have been small things compared with present troubles, and therefore the difficulty is to see the sufficiency of grace for present and pressing afflictions. It is easy to believe in grace for the past and the future, but to rest in it for the immediate necessity is true faith.

Believer, it is *now* that grace is sufficient, even at this moment it *is* enough for you. Do not say this is a new trouble, or if you do say it remember the grace of God is always new. Do not complain that some strange thing has happened to you, or if you do, remember blessings are provided in the grace of God to meet your strange difficulties. Tremble not because the thorn in the flesh is so mysterious, for grace is mysterious too, and so mystery shall be met by mystery.

At this moment, and at all moments which shall ever occur between now and glory, the grace of God will be sufficient for you. This sufficiency is declared without any limiting words, and therefore I understand the passage to mean that the grace of our Lord Jesus is sufficient to uphold you, sufficient to strengthen you, sufficient to comfort you, sufficient to make your trouble useful to you, sufficient to enable you to triumph over it, sufficient to bring you out of it, sufficient to bring you out of ten thousand like it, sufficient to bring you home to heaven.

Whatever would be good for you, Christ's grace is sufficient to bestow. Whatever would harm you, His grace is sufficient to avert. Whatever you desire, His grace is sufficient to give you if it be good for you. Whatever you would avoid, His grace can shield you from it if so His wisdom shall dictate. O child

of God, I wish it were possible to put into words this all-sufficiency, but it is not. Let me retract my speech, I am glad that it cannot be put into words, for if so it would be finite, but since we never can express it, glory be to God, it is inexhaustible and our demands upon it can never be too great.

Here let me press upon you the pleasing duty of taking home the promise personally at this moment, for no believer here need be under any fear, since for him also, at this very instant, the grace of the Lord Jesus is sufficient.

In the last reading which I will give, I shall lay the emphasis upon the first and the last words—"*My* grace is sufficient for *thee*." I have often read in Scripture of the holy laughter of Abraham, when he fell upon his face and laughed. But I do not know that I ever experienced that laughter till a few evenings ago, when this text came home to me with such sacred power as literally to cause me to laugh.

I had been looking it through, looking at its original meaning and trying to fathom it, till at last I got hold of it this way, "*My* grace," says Jesus, "is sufficient for *thee*," and it looked almost as if it were meant to ridicule my unbelief. For surely the grace of such a one as my Lord Jesus is indeed sufficient for so insignificant a being as I am.

It seemed to me as if some tiny fish, being very thirsty, was troubled with fear of drinking the river dry, and Father Thames said to him, "Poor little fish, my stream is sufficient for you." I should think it is, and inconceivably more. My Lord seemed to say to me, "Poor little creature that you are, remember what grace there is in Me and believe that it is all yours. Surely it is sufficient for you." I replied, "Ah, my Lord, it is indeed."

Put one mouse down in all the granaries of Egypt when they were the fullest after seven years of plenty, and imagine that one mouse complaining that it might die of famine. "Cheer up," says Pharaoh, "poor mouse, my granaries are sufficient for you."

Imagine a man standing on a mountain and saying, "I breathe so many cubic feet of air in a year. I am afraid that I shall ultimately inhale all the oxygen which surrounds the globe." Surely the earth on which the man would stand might reply, "My atmosphere is sufficient for you." I should think it. Let him fill his lungs as full as ever he can, he will never breathe all the oxygen, nor will the fish drink up all the river, nor the mouse eat up all the stores in the granaries of Egypt.

Does it not make unbelief seem altogether ridiculous, so that you laugh it out of the house and say, "Never come this way any more, for with a mediatorial fullness to go to, with such a Redeemer to rest in, how dare I for a moment think that my wants cannot be supplied?"

Our great Lord feeds all the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the cattle on the hills, and guides the stars, and upholds all things by the power of His hand, how then can we be straitened for supplies, or be destitute of help? If our needs were a thousand times larger than they are they would not approach the vastness of His power to provide. The Father has committed all things into His hand. Doubt Him no more. Listen, and let Him speak to you, "*My* grace is sufficient for thee. What if you have little grace, yet *I* have much, it is My grace you have to look to, not your own, and *My* grace will surely be sufficient for you."

John Bunyan has the following passage, which exactly expresses what I myself have experienced. He says that he was full of sadness and terror, but suddenly these words broke in upon him with great power, and three times together the words sounded in his ears, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my grace is sufficient for thee; my grace is sufficient for thee." And "Oh! methought," says he, "that every word was a mighty word unto me; as, '*My*' and '*grace,*' and '*sufficient*' and '*for thee.*'; they were then, and sometimes are still, far bigger than others be."

He who knows, like the bee, how to suck honey from flowers, may well linger over each one of these words and drink in unutterable content.

"Have we forgot the Almighty name
That form'd the earth and sea;
And can an all-creating arm

Grow weary or decay?

"Treasures of everlasting might
In our JEHOVAH dwell;
He gives the conquest to the weak,
And treads their foes to hell.

"Mere mortal power shall fade and die,
And youthful vigor cease;
But we that wait upon the Lord
Shall feel our strength increase."

II. Secondly, in the text we have STRENGTH PERFECTED—"For my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Now, running the parallel, still between Jesus and Paul, remember, beloved, that it was so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He was strong as to His deity, in Him dwells all strength, for He is the mighty God. But how was His strength as Mediator made perfect? The Scripture says, "Perfect through suffering." That is to say, the strength of Christ to save His people would never have been perfected if He had not taken upon Himself the weakness of human nature, and if He had not in that feeble nature descended lower and lower in weakness. Had he saved Himself, He could not have saved us, but His giving up of all that He had, made Him rich towards us, and His putting on of weakness made Him strong to redeem us.

O Incarnate God, You could not redeem till You were swaddled as a babe in Bethlehem. Nay, You could not redeem till You were made to bear a cross like a felon. Nay, You could not perfect redemption till You did hang a ghastly corpse upon a gibbet. Nay, it was even essential that You should be laid in the grave. Your work was not fulfilled till three days and nights You did abide in the heart of the earth amongst the dead. The Lord Jesus could say—"My strength is made perfect in weakness." This was to be realized in Paul, and is to be fulfilled in all the saints.

Of course the strength of God is always perfect. We do not understand that anything is necessary to make perfect the divine power, but the words fell from the lip of Jesus as our Mediator and Representative, and it is His strength which is made perfect in weakness.

In us this is true, first, because *the power of Jesus can only be perfectly revealed in His people by bearing them up, keeping them, and sustaining them when they are in trouble*. Who knows the perfection of the strength of God till he sees how God can make poor puny creatures strong?

Yonder is a timid, sickly woman who lives a life of agony. Almost every breath is a spasm and every pulse a pang. Each member of her body is subject to tortures of which others scarcely dream. But look at her cheerful patience! As much as possible, she conceals her pain that she may not distress others. You hear no mutter of complaint, but oftentimes she utters words as cheery as those which fall from persons in robust health. And when she must tell of her afflictions she always speaks of them in such a tone that you feel she has accepted them at the Lord's hands with complete resignation, and is willing to bear them as many years as the Lord may appoint.

I do not wonder when strong men say strong things, but I have often marveled when I have heard such heroic sentences from the weak and trembling. To hear the sorrowing comfort others, when you would think they needed comfort themselves. To mark their cheerfulness, when if you and I suffered half as much we should have sunk to the earth—this is worthy of note.

God's strength is perfectly revealed in the trials of the weak. When you see a man of God brought into poverty, and yet in that poverty never repining. When you hear his character assailed by slander, and yet he stands unmoved like a rock amidst the waves. When you see the gracious man persecuted and driven from home and country for Christ's sake, and yet he takes joyfully the spoiling of his goods and banishment and disgrace—then the strength of God is made perfect in the midst of weakness.

While the man of God suffers, and is under necessities and distresses and infirmities, then it is that the power of God is seen. It was when tiny creatures made Pharaoh tremble that his magicians said, "This is the finger of God," and evermore God's greatest glory comes from things weak and despised.

This is equally true to the man himself. *God's strength is made perfect to the saint's own apprehension when he is weak*.

Brothers, if you have prospered in business all your lives and have had an easy path of it, I will tell you something. You do not know much about the strength of God. If you have been healthy all your lives and never suffered, if your families have never been visited by bereavements, and if your spirits have never been cast down, you do not know much about the strength of God.

You may have read about it in books, and it is well you should. You may have seen it in others, and observation is useful. But a grain of experience is worth a pound of observation, and you can only get knowledge of the power of God by an experiential acquaintance with your own weakness, and you will not be likely to get that except as you are led along the thorny, flinty way which most of God's saints have to travel, which is described by the word "tribulation."

Great tribulation brings out the great strength of God. If you never feel inward conflicts and sinking of soul, you do not know much of the upholding power of God. But if you go down, down, into the depths of soul-anguish till the deep threatens to shut her mouth upon you, and then the Lord rides upon a cherub and does fly, yea, rides upon the wings of the wind and delivers your soul, and catches you away to the third heaven of delight, then you perceive the majesty of divine grace. Oh, there must be the weakness of man, felt, recognized, and mourned over, or else the strength of the Son of God will never be perfected in us.

Thus have I given you two meanings of the text. Others see the strength of God in our weakness, and we ourselves discover it when our weakness is most manifest.

I think the term "made perfect" also means *achieves its purpose*. Read it thus, "For My strength fully achieves its design in weakness." Brethren, God has not done for us what He means to do except we have felt our own weaknesses, as long as a portion of strength remains we are but partially sanctified. When our Lord has accomplished in us what He is aiming at, the result will be to empty us out and to make us discover the utter vanity of self.

If the Lord ever takes you like a dish and turns you upside down and wipes you right out, and sets you away on a shelf, you will then feel what He means you to feel. That is to say, you will feel as if you were waiting there for the Lord to take you down and use you, and then, be sure, He will come in due time and use you for His honorable purposes, laying meat upon you for His hungry people and making you an ornament at His banquets of love.

If you feel yourself to be a full dish, I will tell you what there is in you, you hold nothing but the slops and filthiness of depraved nature. The Lord will never use you till all that is poured out, and you are wiped quite clean, and put away with nothing of yourself remaining in you wherein you may glory.

All the saints who are ready to go to heaven feel themselves to be less than the least. But those professors who are by no means ready for glory are highly self conscious, and feel that there is a great deal in them which is very commendable. Those who enter heaven carry nothing of self with them, neither will any of us enter there so long as we talk proudly of our attainments. Those who claim to possess "the higher life" have been heard to boast of their purity, but those who enjoy the highest life in glory cry, "Not unto us! Not unto us, be glory."

It is a mark of fitness for heaven when self is dead and grace alone reigns. The strength of God is never perfected till our weakness is perfected. When our weakness is consciously and thoroughly felt, then the strength of God has done its work in us.

There is yet another meaning. *The strength of God is most perfected or most glorified by its using our strengthlessness*. Suppose the world had been converted to Christ by twelve emperors. The establishment of Christianity might have been readily accounted for without glorifying God. Imagine that Christianity had been forced upon men with the stern arguments which Mohammed placed in the

hands of his first disciples, the glory would have redounded to human courage and not to the love of God.

We wonder not that the gods of the heathen were dashed to the ground when the scimitars were so sharp, and were wielded by such ferocious warriors. But when we know that twelve humble fishermen, without arms or armor, without patronage or prestige, without science or sophistry, overthrew colossal systems of error and set up the cross of Christ in their place, we adoringly exclaim, "This is the finger of God." And so the other day, when the Lord took a consecrated cobbler and sent him out to Hindustan, whatever work was done by William Carey was evidently seen to be of the Lord.

If societies would send out distinguished scholars it is thought by some that in all probability heathen intelligence would recognize abilities and genius, and respect them. And convinced by reasoning and influenced by talent, they would bow before superior Western culture. Yes, and so they would be converted by a conversion in which the Lord would not be glorified, but proud man would have the praise. In what way would that increase the glory of God?

God uses weakness rather than strength, and so His power is revealed. All that you have that is strong, my brother, will be of small service in this matter, for the Lord will not exalt your strength and make you proud of your attainments. Your weakness and infirmities, in all probability, the Lord will see fit to use, for He delights to take the base things and the things that are despised, and use them to achieve His purposes, that the excellency of the power may be all His own.

Let me notice last of all on this point, that all history shows that the *great strength of God has always been displayed and perpetuated in human weakness*.

Brothers, what made Christ so strong? Was it not that He condescended to be so weak? And how did He win His victory? By His patience, by His suffering, that is to say, by those things wherein His human weakness appeared.

Now, look at Christ mystical, namely, the church. How has the church ever been strong? Of course you reply, "By the strength of God!" I know it, but what has brought forth the strength of God so that it has been undeniably manifest, and consequently, operative upon mankind? Has it been the strength of the church? No, but the weakness of the church, for when men have seen believers suffer and die it is then that they have beheld the strength of God in His people.

The sufferings of the saints have been the victories of the truth. The martyrs led the van. They suffered most, and consequently are the champions of the elect army. The weakness which allowed of their being destitute, afflicted, tormented, has been the battle-axe and the weapons of war with which the Lord has procured conquest for the Gospel.

When one of the pastors of a church in London was put to death in Smithfield one early morning, before the frost was melted by the sun, there stood around the stake a number of young people who had been accustomed to listen to his teachings. Strange thing for young believers to be up so very early to see their pastor burned to death!

What do you think they were there for? No idle curiosity could have brought them to such a spectacle. It is written that they went there *to learn the way*. Do you see? They saw him burn and came there with that intention, to learn the way to die for Christ themselves.

The church of Rome could do nothing with a people who from the weakness which compelled them to suffer gathered strength to die triumphantly. The weakness of the martyr as he suffered revealed the strength of God in him, which held him fast to his principles while he was gradually consumed by the cruel flames. Had not men been poor worms, capable of being crushed, and capable of agonizing sufferings, the upholding grace of God could never have been so conspicuously revealed.

Blessed be the name of the Almighty, He displays His might in our weakness even as He shone forth in the midst of the burning bush. He spake, and lo! the heavens and the earth stood forth. A marvelous creation! But then there was nothing to oppose the fiat of His power, His all-powerful Word was not hampered by using weak instrumentalities. How, then, is God to show yet greater power? How shall *omni*potence or all kinds of power be seen?

Why, brethren, He will not use His unfettered Word alone, but He will clog and encumber it by using instruments infirm and weak. He will in the Kingdom of grace work by men compassed with infirmities, and achieve His purposes by agencies in themselves unfitted for His ends, and then His power will be doubly seen.

The celebrated Quentin Matsys had to make a well-cover in iron one morning. He was a master in the art of fashioning the metal, and could shape it as though it were so much wax. His fellow workmen were jealous, and therefore they took from him the proper tools, and yet with his hammer he produced a matchless work of art. So the Lord with instruments which lend Him no aid, but rather hinder Him, does greater works of grace to His own glory and honor.

He takes us poor nothings who are weak as water, and uses us to accomplish His designs, and this is His almightiness gloriously displayed. Omnipotence, when it does what it wills by its bare word is one, but when it takes weakness into league with it and performs its powerful deeds by means of weakness, it counts for two and by the weakness it doubly manifests itself.

III. The most blessed part of the text remains—POWER INDWELLING.

Dr. Adam Clarke here furnishes us on the last part of our text with a most useful observation, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Now mark, the Greek word here used, interpreted "rest," is the same word employed by John, when he says, "The word was made flesh, and" as the Greek runs, "tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, all of grace and truth."

The passage before us means just this, "I glory in infirmities that the power of Christ may tabernacle in me." Just as the Shekinah light dwelt in the tent in the wilderness beneath the rough badger skins, so I glory to be a poor frail tent and tabernacle, that the Shekinah of Jesus Christ may dwell in my soul. Do you catch the thought? Is it not full of beauty?

See, then, what he means—First, he puts the power of Christ in opposition to his own power because if he is not weak, then he has strength of his own. If then what he does is done by his own strength, there is no room for Christ's strength. That is clear, but if his own power be gone there is space for the power of Christ. If my life be sustained by my own strength, and my good works are done in my own strength, then there is no room for Christ's strength. But the apostle found that it was not so, and therefore he said, "I glory in my strengthlessness, that the power of Christ may tabernacle in me."

But what is the power of Christ? Let the text I quoted tell you—"The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." What power, then, was this which Paul expected to tabernacle in him but the power of grace and the power of truth? It must be so, because God had said, "My *grace* is sufficient for thee." Paul catches at that promise and he cries, "this is truth, and I rely upon it." And he therefore expects that the grace of God and the faithfulness of God would tabernacle in him and shine forth within his soul. This is the power of Christ which he expected to rest upon him. What more could we desire?

What is the power of Christ? I answer next, it is Christly power, the kind of power which is conspicuous in the life of Jesus. There was a power in Christ peculiar to Himself, as all can see who read the New Testament, a power unique and altogether His own.

You know what the power of Alexander was, it was a power to command men, inspire them with courage for great enterprises and keep them in good heart when called to endure hardships.

You know what the power of Demosthenes was, it was the power of eloquence, the power to stir the patriotic Greeks, to break the fetters of the Macedonian.

But what was the power of Jesus? It was power to suffer, power to be made nothing of, power to descend to the very depths for love of God and love of men. There lay His power, in those five conquering wounds, in that majestic mournful face, more marred than that of any man, in that great agonizing heart which sent forth sweat of blood when men were to be pleaded for before the Lord.

Love and patience were Christ's power, and even now these subdue the hearts of men and make Jesus the sufferer to be Jesus the King. Therefore Paul says, "I glory in my infirmities that this same

power may tabernacle in me. I triumph in weakness, in reproaches, in poverty, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake, that I may suffer, and humble myself, and be obedient, and prove my love to God even as Jesus did. When I am weak then am I strong."—strong to prove his love by enduring the weaknesses and afflictions which I accept for my Master's sake.

What was this power of Christ? I answer again, it was a part of the "all power" which our Lord declared was given unto Him in heaven and in earth, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." Paul desired to have that power tabernacling in himself, for he knew right well that if he had to "go and teach all nations" he would have to suffer in so doing, and so he takes the suffering cheerfully, that he might have the power. Even as beneath the badger skins of the tabernacle the glory of the Lord shone forth, so the mighty converting power of Christ which dwelt in Paul was gloriously revealed while he endured reproaches and persecutions, sufferings and death for Jesus' sake.

What was Christ's power again? I answer, to complete my sermon, His power lay in His weakness, His humiliation, His dependence upon God, His faith in God, His self-abnegation, His perfect consecration to the Father. And Paul says that he was made to suffer, and to be weak, that this same power to become nothing that God might be glorified, might rest in him.

I have done when I say just this. Dear brothers and sisters, go home and never ask the Lord to make you strong in yourselves, never ask Him to make you anybody or anything, but be content to be nothing and nobody. Next ask that His power may have room in you, and that all those who come near you may see what God can do by nothings and nobodies. Live with this desire, to glorify God.

Sometimes when God honors us in His service a great "I" stands in the Lord's way. Tremble when you see a poor, weak preacher made useful in converting souls, then all the papers and magazines begin to blaze his name abroad, and silly Christians—for there are plenty of them—begin to talk him up as if he were a demigod, and say such great things about him, and describe him as wise, and eloquent, and great. Thus they do all they can to ruin the good brother.

If the man is sensible he will say, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God." And if God gives him great grace, he will retire more and more into the background, and lie lower and lower before his God. But if you once get a man to feel himself to be great and good, either a fall will happen, or else the power of God will withdraw from him, or in some other way the Lord will make His people feel that His glory He will not give to another.

The best of men are flesh and blood, and they have no power except as God lends them power, and He will make them know and feel this. Therefore, neither exalt others nor exalt yourselves, but beseech the Lord to make and keep you weakness itself, that in you His power may be displayed. God grant it may be so, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
2 CORINTHIANS 11:5-24 AND 12:1-9

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—909, 681, 745

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