

Isaiah Chapter 9 v 6

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[0 : 00] Of course, our thoughts this morning and today and the coming weeks are, again, leading up to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the giving of God's Son to come into the world.

And how can we explain him? How can we describe him? Well, Paul does a wonderful job. Just listen to this description of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's in Colossians chapter 1.

The Son, that's the Son of God, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, with the thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

He's the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, but making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

[1 : 22] What an amazing description of this child to be born in Bethlehem. This one who is the Son of God.

We're going to sing a carol together. It's our carol service next week, but it's good to sing carols even before then. Verse 212, see amid the winter's snow, born for us on earth below.

And verse 2 particularly is astonishing. Lo, within a manger lies, or rather look within a manger lies, he who built the starry skies. We've just read that.

All things were created through him and for him. Let's stand and sing 212. Of course, as those who have trusted in Christ as our Saviour, we know that we don't only celebrate his birth once a year, we celebrate it all through the year, don't we?

So we can bless that day, rejoice on that day that Christ came, not just on Christmas morning, but every morning of every day, because he ever lives.

[2 : 34] And because he ever lives, we have a Saviour who is with us and to whom we can bring all our needs in prayer. Let's pray together now.

Let us continue to worship in prayer. Oh Lord, oh God, it's a cold evening for us here.

And yet, Lord, almost certainly when the Lord Jesus Christ was born in that country, that land in the Middle East, it wouldn't have been anything like this cold.

It would have been a pleasant day. An ordinary day for many people, a day which was of no consequence to them. But Lord, for us, for this world, it was the greatest day in the history of humanity.

The greatest day when into our world stepped the Son of God. Into our world came the One who has always been God from all eternity past, the One who never had a beginning nor an end.

[3 : 48] Somehow in the marvel, in the mystery, in the wonder of that day, you began life on earth. And Lord, we thank you that though you were just that very small and weak child, yet, Lord, in you and in that life was all the hope.

As one of the hymns writers put it, hope of all the nations. For, oh Lord, you came. You came for us. You came to us.

We could never come to you, oh God. We could never, as it were, climb a ladder or make a way up a mountain or somehow approach you. But Lord, you came to us.

You came down. You stooped so low. You humbled yourself. And as we've even sang there, what a tender love was thine to come from highest bliss down to such a world as this.

This world is a sin-sick world, a broken world, a world which seems at times just barely hanging on by its fingernails from destroying itself and one another.

[5 : 02] And yet, Lord, into this world you came. You came to bring life. You came to bring hope. You came to bring peace. Peace with God, firstly and foremostly.

For without that peace with you, we can never know peace with one another. Until we know the peace of our sins forgiven, then how can we know what it is to forgive the sins of others? Until we've known the love of God poured into our hearts so that we know that we're accepted just as we are, then how can we love others and accept them just as they are? We have prejudices. We have handicaps. We have hurdles. We have all sorts of things that taint us and mar us. But we thank you that by your Holy Spirit's grace and power, you've made us new creations. You've changed us and transformed us. Not that we are perfect. Not that we shall be perfect in this world. But Lord, you are transforming us into the likeness, the image of your glorious and marvelous Son.

[6 : 06] We thank you that is the work that you alone can do. You alone can take an angry, a bitter, an unforgiving, a hard heart. Lord, you alone can shape it and mold it into a heart that gives freely and generously and lovingly.

And we long for hearts like that, Lord. Continue to mold us and shape us. Continue to change us and transform us that in our lives, Lord Jesus, more of you would be seen, particularly as we seem to be in a world where less and less of you is known and less and less of you is proclaimed and declared.

Lord, we long that in our lives and through our lives, Christmas time, that those who are so full of the busyness of this Christmas time, oh Lord, may be stopped to think and stopped to wonder at the love of God come down in Christ.

Help us say, as we come to read it and to hear it preached, as we come to worship, we pray that in everything this evening, you would be at work in our lives, oh Lord, that you would be transforming and changing and shaping and molding us, that in our lives again, we may bring you the glory that you deserve.

Hear us as we ask these things, as we bring our prayers. In Jesus' name, amen. Don't remember that. Well, let's turn together in our Bibles and we're going to read from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians.

[7 : 38] So that's Colossians and chapter 1. And if you've got one of the red church Bibles, a little bit like this one, then you should be able to find that on page 1182.

Page 1182. Colossians and chapter 1. We're going to read the first 14 verses together. Those of you here last week know that we're not concentrating on this portion of God's Word, but on a particular part of the Old Testament that prophesied and looked forward to and promised the coming of the Son of God and what He would accomplish.

But we read this because God's Word is one unified book. When we return to one place, it has bearing upon another.

It is one revelation, as it were, of the very will of God and the salvation of God. Colossians chapter 1, verse 1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother. To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God, our Father.

[9 : 02] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.

The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we've not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the wisdom of his will through all the, sorry, with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified

you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

[10 : 37] For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Please be seated. One of the things that makes Christmas very special for many of us are the surprises that we have at Christmas, joyful surprises, pleasant surprises, an unexpected card from somebody we've not heard from in years and lost contact with or even a phone call, an unexpected gift under the tree that we never thought we would have or something that we thought possibly couldn't be afforded.

Pleasant surprises, enjoyable surprises. But of course, on the other side of that, Christmas can also have its unpleasant surprises. It can have its, those sort of surprises that sort of squash our Christmas joy, that burst our Christmas bubble.

One sort of surprise that is common to many parents, or at least it was, I don't know whether it still is, is to wake up on Christmas morning, not the surprise of being woken at three in the morning by the children because they're so excited.

You're too old for that now, of course. You'll stay in bed, don't you, Jake, until at least eight or nine because you don't get too excited about Christmas. But it's not that. It's a surprise, of course, that when the toy that you've bought, the electronic toy that you've bought for the children, it's opened and it needs batteries and you didn't buy any.

[12 : 18] And so this poor child has got this wonderful electronic toy but they can't play with it because it hasn't got any batteries and the shops are all shut and they're not going to open until at least maybe Boxing Day or the day after.

That can be a bit of a sour note, can't it? Surprises. But of course, power is not just needed for toys at Christmas.

Christmas, we need power in our lives. Every one of us depends upon power and relies upon power and in one sense in our generation we've never had so much power at our disposal.

Everything seems to be more powerful than it was before. Communications are so powerful that we can reach anywhere in the world in just a matter of seconds. What would have taken months or years even two generations ago?

Of course, power to travel at great speed as well and more and more that's increasing with the inventions of planes that will fly and touch the surface of the space and get across the other side of the world in just a matter of a few hours.

[13 : 22] But even now, we've got the power to go wherever we want to go. Whenever we want to go. As long as it doesn't snow of course. That can be a bit of an upset to that.

We've power over our bodies, power over our health, power over our fitness, power over our finances, on our phone, power over our choices. And so in one sense we are an empowered people more than ever before.

But of course, that power has limitations. That power is unable to control everything. It can't control our future.

No matter how much we plan or prepare, that can't happen. We can't control our happiness. No matter with what power we've got. We haven't got power over death.

We haven't got power over the weather. We began thinking just last week about this incredible promise that God gives to his people 600 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus through the prophet Isaiah.

[14 : 30] Isaiah. And we read it here in Isaiah chapter 9. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

In other words, he'll be someone who has authority. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And last week we thought about that first title, Wonderful Counselor. that the giving of Jesus Christ, the gift of God's Son, brings with it more gifts besides.

So the giving of Christ as the Wonderful Counselor gives us the counsel that we need, the wisdom, the understanding that we need to deal with life and to deal with God. It gives us insight that we could never have apart from him.

And then this evening what I want to do is to think about this title, this second title, which speaks about the work of Jesus, this babe born in Bethlehem, this man who lived in Nazareth and Judea, this title, Mighty Gods.

[15 : 36] It's an incredible thing to say, isn't it? To say this is the mighty God. It's got a sense of all power. It's something supreme, unlimited power over everything and in everything.

And yet we're told, and this is the paradox in one sense, we're told that to us a child is born and he will be called Mighty Gods. The very power of God himself is, we're told, found wrapped up in the tiny bundle of a baby boy.

That's completely inconsistent with what we know of babies. Isn't it? If you're a father or grandfather or if you've got a really good memory and can remember when you were a baby, it's a picture of weakness, isn't it, a baby?

One of the distinguishing characters of a baby is that it's helpless. It can't do anything for itself. A baby's totally reliant upon someone else for absolutely everything.

They can't feed themselves or change themselves or look after themselves or protect themselves. Without someone's provision, without someone's care, without someone's strength, that baby will die.

[16 : 58] It will die. They just can't survive. They can't last any real length of time. And yet, here we're told that this child that's born, this baby that's born into the world, this son that's given, is mighty God.

It's contradictory in our understanding of things. Not only because a child is called God, a human baby is spoken of as divine, but especially because he's called the mighty God, possessing the power of God.

And yet, it shouldn't surprise us then that when we read the events surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, is coming into the world, we call it the incarnation, it means the taking on of human flesh, it's not surprising then we find power is spoken of again and again in the Gospels, particularly in Luke where we've been of course looking these last few Sunday mornings particularly.

In Luke in chapter 1 and verse 35 when Mary is told that she's going to have a child though she is a virgin, though she has no sexual relations with a man, apart from the normal course of events, she's going to have a child, she asks, well how can that be since I'm a virgin, the Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

There's a power that's taking effect in the womb of this young woman. And later on when she sings as we look this morning, this incredible song, this incredible psalm of praise to God, what does she speak about God?

[18 : 37] For the mighty one has done great things for me. And later on speaks about him being the one who has performed mighty deeds. So in what for many people seems to be a lovely little sort of nativity scene of weakness and there's poor Mary and she's sort of, she's in, you know, heavily laden and with a child and there's this sort of lovely weak scene of them in the stable, they're very humble and poor.

There's power being spoken about here and might being spoken about here and God performing something glorious and turns our understanding of these things on their heads.

So the one who will be born is called the Son of God we're told and he is the mighty God. How is that even possible?

Well, when we come to the incarnation, the birth of Jesus Christ himself, in that we are already lost because how is it possible for us to comprehend that in one person there is God, his nature, and man, human nature, two natures in one person without either of them being lessened or weakened by the other nature.

In other words, when God came into the womb of Mary and was united, we want to put it in the, I don't know my biology, I gave up biology at 13 so you can put me right in this, but the egg in some mysterious way, the child who was born was 100% man and 100% God.

[20 : 32] He wasn't by his divinity less of a man than you and I or less of a human than you and I and not by taking on our humanity was he less God than he was before he entered into the womb.

Can you comprehend that? Can you explain that? Of course we can't. Therefore, it's not impossible for us to conceive as well that in one person there can be all the mighty power of God and the same time the utter weakness of a baby.

What we see as contradictory because we only know what we can see and touch and feel and hear in Christ is not so. Both the weakness of Jesus and the power of Christ are spoken of throughout the gospel records of his life unflinchingly.

You don't find that in every single one Matthew, Mark, Luke and John you find them talking about him being weak and about him having human weaknesses and human difficulties and struggles and you talk about him doing amazing and incredible things and you don't find the writers of the gospels excusing that or saying here's a big puzzle for you work it out.

They accept that this is the case. Think of how Jesus is spoken of as being someone who is hungry. He was hungry. We're told as well that Jesus was tired.

[21 : 58] John chapter 4. Tired as he was from the journey sat down by the well. How can God ever be tired? How can God ever be hungry? He was in Christ.

All these very natural human tendencies bear very little resemblance to this title mighty God. words. But then of course we know the reality too that in this person Jesus Christ in this person who knew weakness and hunger and thirst and tiredness and also broken heartedness he knew what it was to weep and to grieve and to mourn.

To be troubled in his heart there's several times isn't there? In the literal language of the day we're told that Jesus was moved inwardly. inwardly he felt that ache in the inwards as he looked upon people in their sorrow and grief.

But then we see this incredible Jesus walking across the scene of the pages of the gospels. The one who felt hungry was the same one who feeds 5,000 people with just five loaves and two fish by the power of his might.

the one who was so thirsty that it was said of him that his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth as he suffered upon the cross and all the very moisture as it were of his body was drained out of him is the one who at a wedding gives the very finest wine for the people to enjoy and to drink just by a word of command.

[23 : 40] And this same Jesus who's weary sleeps in the boats when it's on the stormy seas. The one who sits down at the well because of the journey that has fatigued him on three occasions at least is the one who raises to life those who've not succumbed to tiredness but to death.

These are this is the mighty God in Christ. There's only one conclusion that we're meant to come to. There's only one conclusion we can come to if we really are reasonable. That in this man, in this person Jesus Christ who walked upon the earth, who was seen by eyewitnesses again and again, whose life has been recorded on more than three occasions, four occasions at the very least, that here is someone who is doing the work of a mighty God.

Here is someone who is acting with the power of God in the world. Nicodemus was a religious leader who was puzzled and concerned about Jesus and he was a bit afraid as well of what people might think of him and so he went to speak to Jesus one night when nobody could see him in the dark but he said to Jesus, no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. and so when we come to this incredible declaration that to us a child has been given we are to understand that God has given to us in Christ all the power of God.

[25 : 19] One has been given to us who is mighty God and it means as I say not just that he is mighty but remember the gift is given to us he is the one who brings might and power into our lives.

The gifts that Christ brings to us are the gifts of power of strength of enabling of life and why do we need these things?

Well because the very fact is that we lack these things. As Paul writes his letter to the Christians at Rome he reminds them when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

Elsewhere when he talks about what it was like before Christ came into our lives he speaks about us being so weak that we are like dead men. You were dead in your transgressions and sins. with all of the achievements that the human race has accomplished throughout the millennia with all the great accomplishments in medicine and science the ability to fly around the world and to go into space and to land on the moon all those sort of things we still lack the real power that we need most of all.

[26 : 38] The power to come to God. The power to live beyond this earthly life. The power to keep God's commandments and live those lives of love which he desires for us.

The things that really matter in life we are powerless to do anything about. We've all experienced that. We all know that. And in Christ coming into this world and taking on our human weakness it was so that through his weakness we might be empowered with the power of mighty God.

That we might be empowered for these things that we ultimately need more than anything else power for. Be right with God to conquer death, to live in this world as God desires.

whilst we were powerless Christ died for us.

Becoming a Christian means that we receive power from Christ. It doesn't mean that we no longer have any weaknesses though. We still are weak in many ways.

[27 : 54] And yet the reality is this that the power that God has implanted to us, the power that Christ has come to bring us, is such a mighty power for every believer, for every Christian, that it's likened to the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead on that first Easter Sunday.

Here's Paul as he prays in Ephesians 1, praying that the believers may understand. Verse 18 of Ephesians 1, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he's called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. The same power in you, dear Christian, that has come from God as the power that raised up the corpse of our Lord Jesus Christ when he'd been three days in the tomb after his crucifixion.

That's the power that you and I have received. Except on Monday mornings, of course. It's not there, is it, Monday mornings, for some reason? There's no, yes, it's there.

Only one who is mighty God could give such power and might to those who are utterly weak and helpless to help themselves. That's not just the end of it.

[29 : 30] It's not as if, just as when we become a Christian, if I can put it this way, we're plugged in, given a charge up. I like old films, Mel will tell you that, because I make her watch them occasionally.

One of them I love is Frankenstein, the original Frankenstein, from the 1930s, much better than these new ones. In the original one, there's the corpse, if you can remember, you've seen things like it anyway.

There's the corpse that Frankenstein has sewn back together, all these bits of a criminal and all these sort of things. And he lifts it up to the roof during a thunderstorm, and eventually a bolt of lightning, bang, hits the conductor.

And I think there's a couple of crocodile clips on his head or something on his neck. Bang!

Becoming a Christian is a little bit like that, but it's not just like that, is it?

Becoming a Christian is not simply to get a bolt of God's power into us, which animates us to life, so suddenly, yes, I'm alive. It's an ongoing source of power. Remember when I was a boy growing up in Guernsey, and I think you had it probably here on the mainland as well, during the 70s, power cuts.

[30 : 45] Our power cuts weren't strikes, it's because we had these massive great diesel engines that were in the power station creating the power, and occasionally they broke down, and we'd have this power crawl across the island, and myself and my brother, we loved the power cuts, because get the candles out, it was really exciting, and there was only two channels on the telly, so nobody really missed that too much, and we sort of play games with mum and dad.

But of course the other problem was that no power meant not just no TV, but no heat, and no cooking, no kettle, but these power cuts would last just a matter of maybe 30 minutes, or maybe sometimes a little more.

Dear friends, that's not how Christ empowers us. It's not that we get a charge of electricity for a while, and then none. It's not that we're like the Duracell bunny, and we can keep going, keep going until our batteries wear out, and then we've got to have new batteries.

No, we're not like that as Christians. The power that Christ gives us is a continual power. It's not a power that's on and off, it's a power that is ours in every circumstance, in every situation, in everything.

That's why the apostle Paul, a man who knew what it was to be weakened and to face all sorts of troubles and difficulties, he was able to say in Philippians chapter 4, I can do all things through him who strengthens me, and the word strengthens me is literally the word empowers me.

[32 : 13] Wrapped up in that word is the word dynamis, dunamis, power, from which we get dynamite. I can do all things through him who empowers me.

It's great to go off on holiday, isn't it? To recharge your batteries, that's what we often say, I'm on holiday to recharge my batteries. As Christians, we don't need to do that. We may feel weak, but it's not because there is no supply from Christ.

We may feel we need spiritual power, but it's not because Christ is withholding it from us, or in some ways cut us off from the electricity power supply. Rather, it's like that illustration that Jesus uses of the vine and the branches, that we are connected to him, and the life-giving power of the vine is always being supplied and provided and given to us.

Not just topping us up from time to time. Here's what Jesus said in John 15, I am the vine, you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. nothing. The trouble is at times, though, it's not just non-Christians, but even as Christians, there are times when we do not draw upon the power that Christ has supplied for us, but we try to do it by ourselves, either consciously or subconsciously.

[33 : 39] We try to deal with the problems or the struggles of life, and we think, well, I can do this, I can work this out, or we worry ourselves into such a place that we do not look to the Lord, the power that we need.

And we wonder why we feel weak, we wonder why we fail, we wonder why things go wrong. But paradoxically, it's only as we appreciate and realize how weak we are, it's only as we realize how weak we are without Christ, that we are able to receive of his power.

The Lord Jesus assured Paul the apostle, and said to him, my power is made perfect in weakness. And so Paul's response or conclusion was this, when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

Unlike the athlete, unlike the bodybuilder, unlike the weightlifter who comes to the competition and says, I mean, peak performance, peak strength, I've been training hard, I'm really ready for this, I'm at the top of my game.

A Christian is somebody who is able to say, in every circumstance, without the Lord's help, I can't do anything. That's humbling though, isn't it? It's one of the reasons that we don't trust Christ, one of the reasons that we don't come to him, is because we don't like to admit, I'm weak, or I'm in need, or I need help.

[35 : 06] That's one of the reasons, of course, that many people who don't understand the Christian gospel will say, oh, of course, God's your crutch, isn't he? You need a crutch, so you need God to help you.

The reality is that they need God just as much as you need God, it's just that they're too proud to acknowledge it. God is not a crutch. He's much more than that.

He's a shepherd who carries us in his arms. He doesn't just give us something to lean on, he's the one who carries and sustains and supports and provides. It's only when we know how weak we are that really we will be aware of how much Christ provides and meets our needs.

In one sense, the weaker we are, the more we will look to him, the more we will draw from him the strength that we need, the more we feel ourselves helpless, the more help we will ask of him, and the more help he will give gladly, willingly, and provide.

That's why I read, as I did, from Colossians chapter 1, and why I've made mention of Ephesians chapter 1, because in both of those passages we have Paul telling the Christian believers about his prayers for them.

[36 : 21] Prayers of thankfulness, yes, prayers for many things, in fact, but particularly prayers for them that they might understand and appreciate just what power Christ has for them and is working in them.

So we read there, didn't we? In Colossians chapter 1, in our reading, Paul's prayer was this, that you might be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so you might have great endurance and patience.

In other words, facing the trials, the difficulties of this world. That was his prayer for them, to be strengthened with all power. That's why Paul, as we read there, prays that they might know that power, that incomparably great power for us who believe.

Don't we feel powerless?

Don't we feel weak? Don't we face, as it were, the world around about us and we see, as it were, militant atheism and we see all sorts of forces, as it were, and governments, all sorts of things happening in the world around about us that seem to be so insurmountable.

[37 : 41] We hear of churches being closed or churches and Christians in other parts of the world being persecuted and put to death and we look at the world and we say, what's the point? We're just so weak, we're just so inadequate, we're just so ineffective.

Look at our town. How can you and I make a difference in this world? How can we really expect the church to grow in the coming years?

How can we really expect that the United Kingdom will ever see a time when men and women are coming to faith in him in great numbers as they've done in the past? Let's be realistic.

Let's just sit back and sing our hymns. Let's just sit back and take it easy. It's because we feel weak. And dear friends, we need to have this prayer answered of Paul. We need this prayer to become a reality in our lives that you may understand his incomparably great power for us who believe that same power that raised Christ from the dead.

[38 : 48] And we'd only have to look to the scriptures again and again to see the evidence of what this means. Just have to go to Luke's other book, Acts, don't we? Read the first chapter of Acts and what you find, you find a group of people huddled together.

They've lost their leader, the great one that they follow, the Messiah, the Christ, that they put their hope in. And they don't know what to do. And Jesus comes and speaks to them in his resurrection power and he says to them, wait here in Jerusalem and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

These fishermen and a tax collector and a few other odd bods, because that's who they were, just like us. And on the day of Pentecost what happens is that they receive power.

And they're a bit different, aren't they? They're standing in the streets and they're shouting, they're not locked behind the doors, they're shouting and preaching, Jesus is the one you crucified, but he's God's son and you better repent.

Three thousand people have come to faith in that day. That power was the power that Christ gave them by the Comforter.

[40 : 08] The Holy Spirit, he says in John 15, whom I will send you. There's two things here, isn't there?

One is this. Am I, in my weakness, just going to despair? Just going to say, what's the point? God can't work in me.

God can't work in this church. God can't bring about change and transformation. God can't save.

And I can't be a witness for him in my workplace, in my school.

Who am I? I'm just a nobody. The second thing is, are we going to accept and realize that we have weakness, but are we going to look to Christ to provide the strength in our weakness?

us. I think this is a lesson that I need to learn every Sunday. I need to learn it.

[41 : 17] And we need to learn it. That it's not in our strength or power to follow Christ or live for him or serve him. It's the power of Christ in us. On our own strength, we'll always fail.

If in our own strength, we come and say, right, I'm going to make a new year's resolution this year, I'm going to read my Bible every single day, I'm going to make sure that I do that, then we're going to fail. I'm going to pray every day.

I'm going to fail. I'm going to serve the church and do this and do that. We're going to fail. If in our own strength, if in our own determination, if in our own resolution, we say, I can do it and I will do it, we'll fail.

But God has given us, dear friends, dear weak friends, frail friends, he's given us the gift of the mighty God. In this child, in Bethlehem, in this man who is Jesus, in this one we put our faith and trust in, he's given us the mighty God with all the might and the power that we need.

And so Paul, as he speaks to Timothy, this young man who's set before him this incredible challenge of pastoring the church at Ephesus, he says, the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, afraid, but he gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

[42 : 41] This isn't, please don't think for any moment in time that this is some sort of victory Christian living I'm talking about. That if you trust Christ and follow him and look to him for the power that all your problems will disappear and life will be cushy and everything will run smoothly for you, it's quite the opposite.

It's recognizing that life is tough and hard and difficult and painful, but that Christ gives us the power to press through and come through the other side. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet you're with me.

You're with me. There's Mary, do you remember that? Mary, as we thought about her this morning, when Gabriel goes to her and he tells her, look, you're going to have a child and you're not going to be married and you'll be pregnant and it's going to be really...

What does he say to her? Greetings. The Lord is with you. That's all we need to know, isn't it? That's all we need to know.

The Lord is with us. He is our strength. He is our power. He is our enabling. He is our sufficiency. Paul, as he looks on the churches, who's sufficient? Who is my strength?

[43 : 57] How can I do it? You see, sometimes we get this idea that Christians, and particularly Christians in the past, were superheroes. Oh, if only we could be like Spurgeon or Wesley or Whitford.

If only we could be like Augustine or like Apostle Paul. Oh, wow. They were superheroes. They weren't like us. Oh, but then it talks about about Elijah, doesn't it?

Elijah, the one that called fire down from heaven upon the Mount Carmel. And it says in James that Elijah was a man of like passions to us.

But he was a superhero, no, he wasn't. He was a weak, failing, foolish, scared, troubled. Troubled. But the God in whom he put his trust was the mighty God.

And the Savior that we trust in is the mighty God. And the one we follow day by day, and the one we seek to serve, and the one we seek to obey is the mighty God. The mighty God who gives us might.

[45 : 05] And so the word of God to us, dear friends, is the word of Paul. I can do all things, whatever it may be. And I don't know what your circumstances are, dear friends, as you approach this Christmas or approach this new year.

I don't know what you're facing. I don't know what challenges are before you that make you go weak at the knees. You don't know mine either. But I can do all things through him who gives me strength, through him who empowers me.

And so can all those who've received the child who is the Son of God. Dear Lord, our God, that what appears to men to be the weakest work of God was the most powerful.

That at the cross, as you gave your life to suffer and to die at the hands of wicked men, it was not that you were defeated, it was not that you were weakened, it was not that you were overwhelmed, it was that you, in powerful love, destroyed sin's power over us.

Your greatest victory was seen in that greatest moment of weakness. Now, Lord, you know the weakness that we feel in ourselves, the weakness that we struggle with daily in our own walk with you.

[46 : 43] Lord, we thank you that you have yet given us this promise, and again we rejoice in it. You have said to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout every generation, including our own, and forevermore. Amen.