

God's Strength Through Our Weakness

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In John 5, we have a story given to us in which Jesus heals a man at the pool of Bethesda. This story, even though it is not a parable, unfolds the Truth like a parable -- because in these actual events we see illustrated the Truth of God's strength through Jesus Christ, despite the weakness of men.

I hope that we will get out of this story some practical guidelines and principles that will explain to us why our relationship with God is the way it is -- and answer some questions as to why God does, or does not do, certain things within His will. This will not only tell us a lot about our own nature, but also the nature and character of Jesus Christ, who dwells in us: God's strength despite our weakness.

Healing in the New Testament

I want to start reading in John 5:1, but before I do that, I need to mention something having to do with the text itself. In John 5, the latter half of verse 3 and the entirety of 4, are not actually part of the original inspired word of God. In many translations these verses are omitted, and there are usually notations to that effect. In my King James translation, it is here as if it belongs in the text -- but it does not. This portion of the passage was actually a later addition to the Word of God by some ambitious scribe or monk. Now, in case you are wondering how we know that, we have a whole bunch of copies of manuscripts of the Gospel of John, going all the way back to only a hundred years after Jesus lived. If you lined up all of those on a time line, according to the date written (copied,

in other words), the earliest of those manuscripts do not include this passage. The later ones do. So that proves to scholars that, at some point in time, these two verses began to show up in copies, when in fact they were not there before. Thus it is an addition. Now, this is not the only place in scripture where this happens -- but I am not going to get into these other places. Needless too say, none of the places where this happens -- even if we were completely ignorant of the fact -- would effect our walk with Jesus Christ. But it is worth noting because as I read this passage, I want to skip over the latter half of verse 3 and all of verse 4 -- and I want to read it as it ought to read from the original text.

So, beginning with John 5:1:

After this there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having five porches. And in these porches lay a great number of impotent folks.

Now, that is King James English. But the word translated, "impotent," really means, "without strength." These were people who were so sick with some sort of ailment or disease that they could not even walk under their own power. In fact, the guy that Jesus is going to heal had to be carried around in a stretcher or a bed. There were a lot of people like that lying there around this pool. And you can use your imagination as to what kind of ailments would cause that. This guy had one of those diseases. He and the other sick people were without physical strength.

Now, John 5:5, as we are skipping the omitted part:

And a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, He said unto him, "Would you like to be made whole?"

Now, let's note something significant here. Jesus Christ takes the initiative for this man's healing. This man did not know Jesus and there is no evidence that he had any faith whatsoever. We don't have him coming, as some others did in the gospel accounts, and asking Jesus for healing.

If you look into the gospels and you make a list of all the times Jesus healed people, you will find a bunch of times where Jesus likewise took the initiative to heal someone. They didn't ask Him, or even know to ask. There are other times when the people came crying after Jesus and He says to them, "Great is your faith!," or "Your faith has saved you." But it is not so here in John 5.

From this we can see that the Bible gives no pattern to follow with regard to physical healing. You can't make a formula and expect God to follow it. This idea that people teach nowadays that if you, "just do this, or do that," that you are going to get healed is a bunch of nonsense. We have these kinds of false teachings in ministry everywhere. Some of them even say that if you send in a check to them that God will heal you. Others say that they are going to have, "a miracle service on Sunday night at seven o'clock," and if you come you will be healed. But you find no such guarantees in the New Testament at all. God does not schedule miracle services. People do that.

If you look into this subject in the New Testament, you will see that what I am saying is the case. God decides when to heal, how, and if -- for His glory and our benefit. Most often we do not know why God doesn't heal -- or even why He does heal. He doesn't heal all the time. In fact, I would say that in this day and age, because of the sad condition spiritually of the Body of Christ, there are not many miraculous healings -- even though I believe that God has mercy on people from a whole bunch of different angles. He can use doctors, or allow things to happen to our bodies, and we might carry that for a while, and then get relief from it. Sometimes God just flat out heals people. I always say that the greatest miracles of all are the ones that seem the most natural; that we can easily dismiss. I really believe that. But we do not have God turning healing into an event, or in other words, into, "show business" -- which people have done today.

Now, one other point before I move on. One of the cardinal doctrines of the heretical Word of Faith movement is that healing is guaranteed, in this age, in the atonement -- which to them means that if you are saved, then you can be healed right now. You just have to have enough faith. That is a lie. The reason it is a lie is that your body in this age -- your physical body -- is not saved, is it? If it were saved, you would never get older, or never even get a cold. But your physical body is not saved. Therefore, your physical body in this age is not experiencing the atonement in fullness -- if I can put it that way. Not at all. Therefore to say that the healing of that physical body is guaranteed is nonsense. The healing of your physical body is guaranteed only at the resurrection of the body. How many understand

that you have to physically die first, before your physical body can be made of incorruptible, eternal material? So, we need to get it out of our thinking that physical healing is guaranteed in this age for our bodies. It is not.

Now having said that, God can heal -- as I have noted -- and sometimes He does. I think there would be a lot more healing if the Body of Christ was in communion with Christ and glorifying Him. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11, makes an association between the general physical health of the Body of Christ the spiritual health. I am not saying that if we as believers are sick that there is something wrong with our relationship with God. There may be nothing wrong. I am just saying, in a general overall sense, that there is an effect there. So, if you are not healed, you may be spiritually, one hundred percent, in the will of God. I would also say, that if you are healed, that is no guarantee that you are in the will of God. God is the God of grace and does what He pleases for His glory and for His purpose in our lives. We need to get these things straight.

Christ is the Only Solution

Jesus took the initiative to approach this man and said to him, "Would you like to be made whole?" Now let's read verse seven, because in a way it is a study in human nature:

The impotent (without strength) man answered Jesus and said, "Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me in the pool. But while I am coming, another steps down before me. (John 5:7)

Now how many see that this guy has absolutely no clue whatsoever of the possibilities of Jesus healing

him? It is not even on his radar screen -- if I can put it that way. He is not thinking that Jesus is someone who can lay His hands on him and say, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." No, he is thinking, "Gee, maybe this fellow asking me if I want to be made whole will help me over to the water and put me into the pool." So, he is very much, "pool conscious," and is still looking at the pool as the solution. In fact, he thinks that maybe Jesus will HELP him to get into the pool.

There are a couple of principles here that I want to talk about -- that stick out from this story. The first principle is the most obvious: The only solution for what ails mankind is the Person of Jesus Christ. We see this illustrated loud and clear in this story. Jesus heals this man without the aid of anything else; without need of the water and the pool -- or even the need to carry this guy over to the pool. Jesus alone is the solution.

But what does this mean, that, "Jesus only is our strength?" Well, it does NOT mean that Jesus Christ wants to merely GIVE us strength. No. Rather, God wants Jesus Christ in us to BE our strength.

Of course, we all ask, "How does that work?" How do we get to where Jesus can actually BE our strength? The way that it works is that we have to first be brought into the Truth of our own weakness. We have to be utterly and completely exposed as having nothing in us. Then, if we see that Truth, and embrace that Truth in Christ, we will abide in Him by faith. Then, everything that He is will be our strength. It is just that simple.

Somebody is going to ask, "Well, how do I get there?" God has to bring you there -- this is not a, "how-to." People often ask, "How do you lose your life?" Or, "How do you get to the place where you live in and out from Christ as your life?" We can read in the Bible that this is the goal, and we can read descriptions of some of the things that God does to get us there. But in the final analysis, we are talking about being brought into the reality of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God Himself has to do this. Our responsibility is simply to ask Him, "to do whatever it takes," to get us there, and to yield to Him as He does.

So, Jesus Christ is to BE our strength. This is an overall governing Truth that is revealed in this story. However, there are other Truths revealed in this story as well. For example, notice the Truth about this man's ignorance -- which is part of his weakness. It is important to notice his ignorance because he is a type of ourselves before we know the Truth. He doesn't know Jesus Christ or who He is -- let alone the fact that Christ could heal him, or be his strength. He is completely without strength physically. But he is likewise without strength spiritually. He is in the dark -- does not recognize the Person who has initiated contact with him.

Notice what this guy does because he does not know that Jesus Christ is his only solution: He resorts to looking for other solutions -- solutions to which other people look -- and in this case he is looking to the pool at Bethesda as his solution. Now, isn't this what we do? When I say, "we," I am not just talking about us as unbelievers. Obviously unbelievers, when facing trials and tribulations, are going to look for natural solutions that make sense to them to solve the problems of sin and weakness

that are inherent in natural man. Unbelievers look for physical solutions to physical problems -- and for life's difficult circumstances. A person who does not know Jesus Christ is going to look within himself and his own strength. That is what man DOES.

But so do many of professing Christians. Today many professing Christians are seeking and striving after THINGS that they believe will cure sin; that will bring to them, "inner healing;" that will supposedly give them what they need. There are all kinds of things offered as these substitutes for Jesus Christ. We have, "12 Step programs," in the church today. We have all these ways and means of so-called, "inner healing." We have other techniques. People are told, "Send in a check and God will heal you and/or take care of your personal finances and will lift, 'the spirit of poverty.'" Of course, you can't find in the Bible that there is any such thing as a, "spirit of poverty," but I guess when you need people to send in money, you dream up such things to get them to do so. So, we have all of these different versions -- if I can put it this way -- of the pool at Bethesda being offered to professing Christian people today -- our, "pool of Bethesda," is that which will supposedly give us the strength we need, and will cure what ails us.

A Picture of Humanity

There is in this story another big Truth. This man thought that if he could get into this pool at Bethesda that he would be healed. He believed this pool would impart to him the strength that he needed to live a normal life. But there was a problem: This man was too weak, in and of himself, to reach the pool -- too weak to reach the very pool which he thought would give him strength.

Now, isn't this an incredible picture of man in his lost condition? We have no strength in ourselves to reach ANY solution. We cannot muster up any strength from out of ourselves. Indeed, we have no strength to even reach God. We are indeed those who have no strength by which we can reach any place of help.

That is the Truth about humanity. We do not have what we need and we have no way to get it. And what makes it worse is that we don't realize it. So we continue to struggle and strain to try to reach our pool. And we cry out to Jesus Christ to help us. But the help that we think Jesus will give us is NOT Himself; not life in Himself. The help we expect is that Jesus will help us get into our, "pool."

Now ask: How does God usually respond to our cries? He is usually silent. He cannot say much to us because we are not in the Truth. We still think that we need God to help us find a solution – a pool at Bethesda. So God will allow us to go on until we come to the end of this nonsense. But it is His mercy to do so – He is actually guiding us into the Truth.

We all begin with God from a condition of sin and unbelief. That is the only place we can start because it is what we are in Adam. So God has to start with us in our sin and unbelief. He has to start there because it is where we start – it is where we are. It is in our sin and unbelief that God has to begin to show us the Truth. And what is the Truth? That our condition is hopeless in ourselves – yet there is deliverance in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Most of us think that a normal believer ought to be strong. Indeed, we think that it is God's will to make us strong. This is error. God wants to reveal the Truth: We are weak. If we want to see the Truth, we will have to see that God's normal believer is absolutely weak and without strength -- but whose faith is in Christ. In other words, God is not going to give us strength. He is going to expose us as weak so that Christ can be our strength.

The World's Techniques

The man at the pool in John 5 saw Jesus there and really did not know Him; didn't know the possibilities in Christ, and so he figured that Jesus would simply help him into the pool. He knew of no other possibility. But this is exactly what we do, even as believers. Today, there are 12 Step programs, paths to inner healing, different techniques for prayer, contemplative prayer, and many other things that people think will help them. And just like the man at the pool of Bethesda we think that Christ wants to put us into these things; use these things -- use them to heal us.

There are many such remedies being offered in the church today. For example, I hear about, "accountability groups." I heard about one recently, where a group of men gather together with the goal of purifying their thinking. They seek to be free from addictions to things such as pornography, anger, depression, etc. Together they are taking a systemized course that is supposed to teach them how to get free. They pay a great deal of money to buy the necessary materials to participate in this course. Those who sell this course promise that in two to five years your brain will be, "reprogrammed." You will then be free of all of these bad thoughts

and addictions. As part of this program, the men in this accountability group also call each other during the week to check up on each other -- to see whether any of them have sinned and fallen back into these various addictions. To them, they are keeping each other, "accountable."

I can guarantee that many of these guys are absolutely convinced that this program works. I can also promise you that some of them, as far as their actual conduct is concerned, are probably not doing as badly as they did before they were in this group, taking this program.

There is something about thinking that are being helped -- that in itself -- lifts a person's spirits to where they actually feel helped -- at least for a time. It is sort of like going to the doctors for a physical illness and being told that a medicine will cure you. Your hope and expectation will make you feel better for awhile. The illusion of being helped is all through false religion. A person can spend years walking in darkness, and yet feeling better; feeling like they have found the answer. Believing that you are helped by something or someone other than Jesus Christ is always part of deception. Always.

There are people who have made themselves part of the most unbiblical religious systems -- all in the name of Christ -- who will tell you that it has set them free. Some of these systems are legalistic. Others constitute involvement in the occult. They THINK they are helped and so they embrace it as the Truth. But what has really happened is that their system has given them -- their flesh and natural man -- what they crave. How many realize that if we do not know Jesus Christ, and have not put our faith in Him, that we can be governed by what feeds our

religious flesh? We can give ourselves over to utter and complete deception and never realize what we are doing.

It is not the purpose of God to make us feel better about ourselves. Neither is it God's purpose to simply provide a system that will improve our conduct. God's purpose is to bring us into the fullness of Christ – to make us a new creation who have Christ as our life. Religious systems cannot do this. But they can substitute for Christ – and that is deception.

It is a fact that even unbelievers can alter their conduct and gain a measure of help using some of these techniques. We could talk about Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, or any other kind of therapy. I have known of unbelievers who have had addictions to some horrible things and they have gone to therapy and found some freedom. Some go to rehab for drugs and get free of their addiction. As a result they have less destructive behavior for themselves and for others.

The best that can be accomplished by these programs is to bring a person OUT of one problem into another problem – hopefully less severe. Man's methods can do that. But ask: If I still have no knowledge of Jesus Christ, and He is not my life, of what lasting value can there be? None.

Today Christians have simply adopted the world's methods and pasted on them the name of Jesus. Many are proposing some version of the pool at Bethesda as God's solution to what ails us. But this is a lie. God doesn't want to get us into a POOL. He wants to get us into Christ Himself – and for us to come into HIS fullness.

The goal of Jesus Christ is not to simply give you laws so that you can rearrange your conduct so that you stop sinning. No. The goal is not to rearrange and reprogram your brain so that in two to five years you can be free from an addiction. NO. The goal of Jesus Christ is that we may know HIM and experience HIM. The goal of Christ is not that we are merely set free FROM sin. Rather, it is that we are set free from sin UNTO HIM.

Jesus said, "If the Son of Man set you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:36) To be "free indeed," means that we are not only set free from the negative and harmful. Rather, to be, "free indeed," means that we are set free INTO Jesus Christ – by knowing Him. To merely get free FROM harmful and destructive habits – but not free INTO Jesus Christ is NOT true freedom; I will not be, "free indeed." In fact, I will continue to be in unbelief and in darkness -- and even though this may SEEM better, it is nevertheless just another form of deception.

How many understand, going back to John 5, that if Jesus had picked the man up and thrown him into that pool and he had been healed, that he may have had a much better life after that – but he would not have known Jesus Christ any more than he did before? Is that what God wants? Does God want the world's methods in the church – in many cases exactly the same programs used by unbelievers? Does God want the name of Jesus pasted on those methods and used in His church? Or is it possible that Jesus Christ alone – by faith in Him – remains not only the perfect solution, but the ONLY solution that is the will of God?

If we do not lose our lives into the hands of Jesus Christ under the work of the Cross, then it does not matter whether any of the world's methods help us – we will NOT be free of the life in which all sin and addiction is rooted. Thus, that old life will manifest in us one way or another. If we get free from drugs, or porn, we may be addicted to self-righteousness. If it is not one manifestation of the flesh, it will be another.

Such things as accountability groups are a substitute for Christ. It does not matter how much people enjoy them, or how much they think they are helped. They are simply another form of LAW. Lots of Christian folks think LAW helps them. But such programs cannot touch the root of sin: Self-possession.

Christian people ought to support one another as members of His body. But what we are taught in the Bible is to edify each other IN CHRIST. We are to point each other to Christ – we are to help each other to personally and individually find life and Truth in the Living Christ. Many of these programs, rather than edify the individual's personal relationship with Christ actually subtract from it, if not destroy it. For if the only reason that I do not sin is because I am afraid of having to tell you that I did sin – then what personal relationship with Christ do I really have? Am I really free? No. All that I have is a life which is plugged into a legalistic system. That is not freedom – it is bondage

“Confessing your faults one to another,” is never the means by which we find freedom in Christ. It is actually the OUTCOME of freedom. It is simply an open honesty – when the situation calls for it – and if it helps and edifies others. It is not a law or

mandate that is necessary to follow if we want freedom. There are many sins and faults that we should never confess to others – doing so helps NO ONE. Confess to GOD. Freedom is the result of knowing HIM and embracing HIM by faith.

Freedom in Jesus Christ is real. It is the result of coming into a inward realization of Christ Himself. It is individual and personal. It cannot be imparted by a proxy. It is not the product of the world's techniques being used upon our natural man. It is not the product of taking a course that, "in two to five years will reprogram my mind." If we want to minister to each other in the Body of Christ, then what we need to teach is that each of us can find true freedom in Christ alone.

Preoccupation with Ourselves

As I noted earlier, Jesus completely bypassed this man's beliefs having to do with the pool of Bethesda. He completely ignored the pool and just healed the man. If we get nothing else from this, we ought to see the Truth that Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, without aides or programs, is the solution. God will ignore all of our other purposed solutions. Indeed, God is ready and willing and desirous of being the ONLY solution for each and every one of us.

But most of us need to LEARN this Truth. We need to learn it by experience. God must teach us this Truth by bringing us to the end of all of our efforts and programs. He will deliberately – and with purpose -- bring us to the end of faith in all else.

For example, have you cried out to God to give you strength? To give you some solution? God will

usually be silent. Why? Because God cannot and will not give us a power or strength. Rather, He must show us that we are utterly weak. Then He will reveal in us CHRIST HIMSELF as our strength.

To the degree that I believe I am strong I will be blind to Christ. Even if I think that God has imparted to me a THING called, "strength," through some program. But to the degree that I am shown to be weak – and I embrace the Truth -- I will put my faith in Christ. And to the degree that I put my faith in Christ, He will be my strength. It is an eternal Truth.

If you look around the church today, there is less and less faith in Christ, and more and more faith in programs and other solutions. Indeed, any suggestion that such programs are not the will of God – and that what people need is Christ -- is usually met with mockery, a roll of the eyes, and at times, pure animosity. This is a sign of apostasy.

This man was understandably overwhelmed and governed by the fact that he was sick and had no strength. Chronic physical illness can come to govern your attitude; it can wear on you; dominate your life in every way. But just as physical illness can have this effect on us, so can spiritual problems. We can become preoccupied with ourselves -- to the point of being overwhelmed and in despair with regard to sin, temperamental problems, or emotional issues. There are many malfunctions in our soul man. We can be governed by them as far as faith is concerned.

For example, believers have a tendency to focus more on our sin than we focus upon Jesus Christ. We can become so upset, so conscious of our

fallibility and sin, so focused upon what is wrong with us – so preoccupied with our lack of strength and inability to walk with Jesus Christ -- that all we ever think about is getting free, getting free, getting free, getting rid of this sin, making sin go away, and fixing our old man in Adam so that it behaves. We can become so occupied with ourselves in that sort of a negative way that we lose complete sight of life in Christ. We lose sight of the Person who has already delivered us from all of that -- if we would just believe, enter in and abide in Him.

We can become so preoccupied with ourselves and our weakness that we are liable to begin looking to some version of pool of Bethesda. We may begin to look for solutions in various programs and various forms of law. We may even think that God's goal is for Jesus to use some of these – that God wants Jesus to carry us over and drop us into our pool. Or perhaps we think that God is going to somehow ACT UPON US and impart to us a THING called, "power," to overcome our problem. He never will. What He wants to do is undercut the problem at the root. He wants to set us free from ourselves by exposing us as hopeless – He wants to set us free from being preoccupation with self. And rather than give us a THING called power, He wants to give us Jesus Christ, who IS the power of God.

A New Creation

If you look at Christianity today, much of what is going on is based on the unspoken assumption that Jesus came to fix up our old man in Adam. We may not say it in those terms. But what we practice is the outcome of being blind to the fact that Adam is dead. There is no fixing up Adam. There is only the need for us to take our place in the death of Jesus,

and to be raised to newness of life. That alone is the solution for what ails us.

Jesus did not come to fix all of your emotions, to fix all of your thinking, to straighten out your soul man so that it works correctly. He did not come to do any of that. What He did come to do is to crucify you in Christ and to bring you into the fullness of life in Him – into a new creation.

Do you want freedom from sin and bad habits? You are wasting your time asking God to give you some power to overcome. Do you doubt that? Well, go ahead and try. God will be silent. But if you really want freedom from sin and bad habits then lose your life to Christ. For if you lose your old life to Christ then all of the problems rooted in that old life will dissipate. The Cross dealt with the ENTIRE old man of sin. Indeed, if we lose our lives to Christ, and find Christ as our life, we will come into an inward realization of Jesus Christ – and begin to be governed by Him.

Of course, when Jesus Christ joins us to Himself in spirit at salvation the old man in Adam is still there. It hasn't been eradicated. But the old man in Adam has been PASSED OVER as it pertains to the new creation. That is what Paul said. He said, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have been passed over. Behold, all things have become new – and all things are out from God." That is the Greek. Thus, despite the continued presence of the old Adam nature, none of that old nature is incorporated into the new creation. It is PASSED OVER.

Now, all of that being the case, can we see the folly of turning upon the old nature and trying to fix it up

so that it behaves like a Christian? Can we see that this is equal to trying to prop up a dead body? That to use various programs to rehabilitate the old man is folly? Rather, we ought to build up the believer in Christ, so that HE might govern.

God's purpose is to bring us to the place where we see the Truth about our old nature: That in it is no strength, but only death. That is has indeed been PASSED OVER. It has been completely set aside in the Cross. God wants us to see this Truth, and if we do, we will no longer try to fix up the old, dead creation. Rather, we will LEAVE IT ALONE – we will pass over it as God has passed over it. We will leave it alone BY FAITH – because we have seen that we can do nothing about it, and that Jesus Christ has done all there is to do through His death. This will set us free to grow to know Jesus Christ and live from out of HIM.

The Christian life is a growing inward realization of the Living Christ. As we grow to know Him, we learn to abide in Him, and live from out of Him by faith. And even though our old nature continues to be present with us, as we more and more are governed by Christ, we less and less are governed by the old nature. We will be set free from the old through a growing and knowledge of Jesus Christ – who is our strength and our life.

The Promised Land

Just one more thing here before I move on -- regarding this idea of being obsessed with sin. Let's go back to the example God gives us in the Old Testament -- of Israel entering the Promised Land. Do we remember why Israel did not enter the Promised Land? Hebrews says it was because of

UNBELIEF – unbelief towards God. Notice something: There is no mention whatsoever that Israel could not enter their inheritance because of SIN. Didn't they have plenty of sin? You bet they did. They were sinners; they were filled with flaws and all kinds of sin. But it does not say they could not enter because of those things. Rather, it says they could not enter because they would not believe God -- despite all of their sin.

Many Christian people think that in order to put faith in Christ we must first obey Him. We think that obedience is the key to faith. But this is backwards. We must first believe – despite any sin -- if there is any possibility of freedom from sin. We can believe despite our sin because of the Redemption and God's grace. By faith we abide in Christ, who is the source of all victory. But unbelief separates us from Jesus Christ. But it is not that Christ withdraws from us because of our unbelief. No. Our unbelief is OUR withdrawal of ourselves from Him. And if we withdraw or stand aloof from Jesus Christ then there is no solution for our sin.

In the example of Israel, we see this Truth – that we enter in by FAITH alone – and not on the basis of anything about ourselves. When Israel did finally enter the land under Joshua, it was solely by faith. It was solely by faith in God despite all of the same sins they had forty years earlier. Do we think that Israel no longer had sin? In fact, Israel under Joshua entered the SAME land, occupied by the SAME giants. They were no more equipped within themselves to enter the land under Joshua than they had been forty years prior. But during those forty years in the wilderness God had accomplished something. It was not to purge Israel of what we normally call sins. No, the forty years in the

wilderness purged them of UNBELIEF -- so that they could enter solely by faith in God.

Now, what that says to us is that God knows your sin and my sin. He knows it more than we do. In fact, I often like to put it this way: If you want to list sins, flaws, or weakness to God? God will mention to you five thousand more that you don't know are in you. In fact, He will show you that the entire body of sin that you are fussing about has no hope in it -- and that it all needs to be under the cross. God already knows about all of our sin. He already knows that we are not good enough to take possession of Christ and all that is in Him. He already knows that we are not righteous enough. Much of the Christian life is a matter of His showing us that we are not, bringing us to an absolute end of our obsession with ourselves; bringing us to the end of our hesitance and refusal to enter into our inheritance in Christ because of our own flaws.

We just said that Israel could not enter the Promised Land because of unbelief. Do we remember why they had this unbelief? Well, they said there were giants in the land. They were giants that they could not overcome. This is an example of ourselves as we say, "God, I can't take possession of Christ because I have too much wrong with me. I have giants in my land that I can't conquer." And so, we won't enter in.

Can we see that this is faith in ourselves? It is a frustrated faith -- but it is failed faith in ourselves. THAT is unbelief towards God. We look at ourselves and conclude we are not able. And we are right: We ARE unable. But God never said we were supposed to be able. Indeed, He has been trying to show us we are unable. But instead of

rejoicing in the Truth that we are unable and then putting all of our faith in Christ – we keep trying to muster up faith in ourselves. This is deception. It is unbelief.

The Truth is that God says, “I know all about your sin; I know ten times more. I’m telling you to put the whole thing aside under the Cross and to enter into Christ solely by faith in Him – enter in and take full possession by faith of all that He is -- to the complete disregard of your disqualifications. Enter in anyways! Put yourself aside, leave yourself alone.”

Jesus said, “Whoever would lose his life for my sake will find true life in Me.” Leaving yourself alone is central to that. Stop fussing around with what is already declared dead. This doesn't mean that you don't care about sin. It doesn't mean that God doesn't care about it. It means you do care -- such that now you are going to leave it in the hands of the One who died for it. You are going to get into business with Him as your new life.

The only way that you and I will ever have freedom to walk with God is to operate from a position of victory by faith in Christ. We stand in Him by faith – despite our sin -- just as Israel put all of their fallibilities aside and entered the land by faith. Indeed, God commands us to do so. It is the **ONLY** way in which we can enter into fullness of Christ.

So, God says, “Put yourself aside. Leave yourself alone. Stop trying to have enough strength to reach the Pool of Bethesda and stop thinking that I am going to put you into that pool. Put the whole thing aside and believe that you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. Believe that the old man in

Adam has been crucified with Him. Put it all aside and leave it alone and lose it. On the basis of Jesus Christ alone, and solely on that basis, enter in and take possession of all that God has for you.” Now, one of the mistakes people make is to expect that the moment they put their faith in Christ that all of their flaws are going to disappear. We need to understand that NONE of them are going to disappear. No. The old man remains. But what will happen is that as we grow to know Jesus Christ HE will come to govern. The old man will still be there – it is always going to be possible to sin – but the life of Jesus Christ will grow to override.

There are many believers who lose heart because they do not understand the separation between soul and spirit. They do not understand that they are united with Christ in spirit, but that outside of that spiritual union there remains the body and soul – these are not united with Christ. Indeed, God has passed over them – has not incorporated them into the new creation in this age. Therefore, the Christian life is NOT a matter of God fixing up and purging out the body and soul – the Christian life is NOT a matter of God making the natural man look like Jesus. The body and soul are NEVER the source of new life. Rather, the Christian life is a matter of growth in Jesus Christ – which will be the means by which the believer lives out of, and is governed by, the NEW LIFE, rather than the old. Thus, rather than look to the body or soul as the source of new life, we need to realize that the body and soul are merely earthen vessels through which the NEW LIFE is manifested. Focus and live by faith from out of CHRIST. The sanctification of the body and soul will be taken care of. He is the Vine. We are the branches.

Christians look to fruit and not the Vine. This is a disguised form of self-occupation, and unbelief. No branch ever produced fruit by trying. No branch ever produced anything of value by fussing with itself. No. Jesus simply tells us to abide in Him as our Vine. The fruit will then grow. Thus, we need to stop being obsessed with ourselves. Become obsessed with Christ. Much of God's dealing with us as His people is to bring us to this point. We must decrease that He might increase. Our lives need to shout, "Yet not I, but Christ." (Gal. 2:20)

Do we want strength? Do we want power? Do we want victory? God doesn't give us any of these as THINGS or as attributes. Strength is not a thing. Power is not a thing. Victory is not a thing. What God does is give us CHRIST. (I Cor. 1:24) God will show us the Truth that we are utterly and completely weak. If we see and believe then we will then put ourselves aside. We will put ourselves aside and abide in Christ to the complete DISREGARD of ourselves. Then we will discover that Christ is our strength, our power – we will see that Christ is the only victory there is. Faith is the victory, as it says in First John, and that faith is IN CHRIST.

God's Original Purpose for Relationship

I want to turn back to the Book of Genesis and see what is revealed there as far as man's original relationship with God. What we need to see there is that God Almighty made the Adam race to BE weak - - to be completely without any strength in itself. God made humanity to completely depend, rely upon, and draw upon God for all. This was God's original design and it was GOOD.

We know the creation story -- I am not going to read that. I want to read Genesis 2:25, which is AFTER God created Adam and Eve, but BEFORE the sin:

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, but were not ashamed.

Now again, this is how God originally created man. It was before the sin. He created them naked -- and yet, despite being naked, were not ashamed. What does that mean? What lesson is there in that for us?

First of all, what does it mean to be naked? It means that you have nothing in yourself that you can call upon as an asset. You have no strength in yourself. You have no life in yourself. You have no Truth in yourself. You have no righteousness in yourself. You are completely naked and void of all of that. God never made man to have his own life, to have his own righteousness, to be, WITHIN HIMSELF, all that he needed. God never made man that way. No, the suggestion that all of those things could be found in ourselves was the temptation to Adam and Eve – and that delusion continues since the sin. People, including some believers, continue to think they can find strength within themselves. That is why folks keep trying to fix up the old creation – keep trying to bring out some supposed latent strength or greatness in natural man. No, God MADE man to be dependent. God made man as a naked creature before Him. God never created any capacity in humanity for life apart from God.

You will notice that even though Adam and Eve were naked they were NOT ashamed. Why? It was because God was in them. They were not ashamed of having nothing because God was their ALL. How

many understand that likewise today – that even though we are naked, that if we are fully satisfied in Christ that we are not going to be, as it were, ashamed? In other words, we are not going to be preoccupied or tormented by the fact that we are empty. We are not going to be fussing with ourselves because we are going to be filled with Christ.

So Adam and Eve were created this way: God created humanity to be weak in themselves; to be naked. But because they were joined to the Lord and one spirit with Him, they were not ashamed. God created these naked, weak people to be one with Himself. That is the purpose of God in humanity - that He might be our all.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is to be our life. He is to be our Alpha and Omega. This is the same relationship which God originally created way back there in Genesis 2 -- that man would be naked, but unashamed, because he is consumed and obsessed with the God with whom he is one.

The Sin

Adam, through Eve, was told he could have life in himself. Thus, when Adam sinned, he rejected his oneness in spirit with God in favor of himself. He walked away from God. So instead of being one with God, instead of being naked and unashamed, what do we find AFTER the sin? We find that Adam was still naked – just as he was created -- but now he IS ashamed. Why? Because he has lost his relationship with God. God no longer completes him and fills him up.

What we see here, after the sin, is the Truth about humanity without God. In Genesis 3:7, it says that AFTER THE SIN, “the eyes of them were both opened and they knew they were naked.” And what did Adam do? Adam tried to fix his nakedness -- he tried to sew fig leaves together in an attempt to cover his nakedness. This is a picture of man unwittingly and ignorantly trying to find a solution for himself other than Jesus Christ. We sew fig leaves together to try to fix what ails us. We use programs, laws, systems, and many forms of earthly Christianity. Or, if we plug this into John 5, Adam was trying to get into his own Pool of Bethesda -- because for him, this would cure what ailed him.

We all have many problems. We are, after all, born into a fallen creation. Some of our problems are self inflicted. Others are not. We are, in some cases victims of our upbringing – even victims of abuse. But it does not matter how we got into the shape we are in, and it doesn’t matter what kind of twisted, corrupted version of humanity has popped out. The solution, regardless of how we got that way is the same. It is not a fig leaf. It is Jesus Christ.

Seeing the Truth

God created us to be naked and dependent upon Him. But if we are dependent upon Him, then we will not be conscious of our nakedness; of any lack – because God will be our all. But all of this being the Truth, how many realize where God must begin in revealing to us the Truth? He must begin by exposing our true condition of nakedness in the light of His Son.

When God opens our eyes and introduces us to Jesus Christ, one of the first things He has to do is to begin to peel off the fig leaves. He has to show us that we are naked without Him. He has to show us that we are empty and void without Jesus Christ. But when God does do this, a lot of us are shocked at what we see. We get panicky and try to sew back on the fig leaves. We try to use a program or a law to fix ourselves. This is contrary to the Truth. God is showing us our true condition without Christ. And yes, it is horrible and it is awful. Paul himself said, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" But then he said, "Thanks be to God, in Jesus Christ." And there it is. Jesus Christ is to be our life and our focus. God has to show us that we need Him by exposing everything about us so that we will finally come to the end of trying to get into the Pool of Bethesda and finally stop sewing fig leaves. He has to bring us to that end. But once He does, we can begin to put on Jesus Christ, instead of fig leaves. We can come into that inward realization of Christ and be set free.

Paul's Experience

The last place I want to turn is 2 Corinthians 12. There Paul speaks about his own weaknesses being the path through which Christ was strong in him. He talked about all of his inabilities. In fact, he said that a lot of them were God ordained:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 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. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (II Cor. 12:7-10)

God had GIVEN Paul, “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” Paul asked God to remove that from him. But God’s answer was, “My grace is sufficient for you. For my strength is made perfect in your weakness.” So there you have it...God’s strength through our weakness.

This weakness was GOOD – because it was the path for God’s strength. Because Paul was exposed as weak – brought down to the weakness that is already in each of us – Jesus Christ was able to be the power of God in and through him.

If we finally see that there is nothing we can do about ourselves – and if we embrace this as the Truth, and put our faith in Christ – this will result in freedom. If we finally see that we don’t have what we need and that there is no way of getting it -- just like the man at the pool – we will also see that in Jesus Christ alone is life. We will actually rejoice, as did Paul, that we will always be weak – because it is then that Jesus Christ will be our strength. This is the relationship that God is after. It is a relationship of God’s strength in Christ through our weakness.