

## Strength in Weakness

- This morning I want to talk to you about a few women in the Bible
- The stories that I want to remind you of are not very pretty
- These are some of the most uncomfortable parts of the Bible
- The parts where we scratch our heads and wonder why God chose to include this story, and what lesson He could have possibly intended
- The parts that we often don't understand, and leave with more questions than we started with...
- You might wonder why I dredge up these bad memories, but stick with me, I think that there is a wonderful lesson for us at the end...
- The first story may not be one of the saddest, but frankly is one of the sickest stories in the Bible:
- Tamar is Judah's Daughter-In-Law, but her husband, Er, is evil and God destroys him, leaving Tamar a widow
- Judah gives Onan to Tamar as a husband, but Onan defiles God's commandment and God destroys Onan also
- Judah promises another son, Shelah, to Tamar, but secretly decides not to give him to her, for fear that another of his sons will die, and effectively Judah abandons Tamar to a life of poverty
- But, the story hasn't reached the low point yet:
- Eventually one of Judah's own wives dies, and he is so consumed in grief that he goes off to drown his sorrows and get drunk
- Tamar pretends to be a prostitute, and Judah is the one that ends up getting her pregnant

- Leaving us shaking our heads and wondering what it is all about...
- What a sad story to be included in the Bible...
- Next we turn our attention to Rahab the Harlot
- Another story full of questions
- I always wondered why the spies turn in to the house of a Harlot?
- Rahab must have run a large, successful business, because it occupied a space in the city wall, and yet why is she never criticized for it?
- Why did God choose Rahab of all the people in Jericho?
- Odd that she would be the one spoken of in the Bible...
- The story of Ruth is generally a good story to consider, but there remains a few pressing questions there also
- There should always be a Red Flag that goes up when the children of Israel abandon the Promised Land to go live in a foreign country
- Not only does Elimelech and Naomi make this unfaithful decision, but they also allow their sons to marry outside of the Faith, and to take Moabite women as their wives, very clearly against the Laws of God
- Regardless of how well things turn out for Ruth, we are stuck remembering that she was a Gentile, a HEATHEN, and not one of God's chosen people
- It's hard to read Deuteronomy 23, and not think of Ruth:
- Deuteronomy 23:3
  - 3) "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever,
- The Bible is so very clear about the position of a Moabite woman, so why does Ruth take such a prominent position in the Bible story?
- Lastly, our thoughts turn to what could be described of as the saddest story in the Bible, the story of Bathsheba
- We have talked often of the Sin of David, and have lots of insight to his thoughts,

actions and even repentance

- David's discussions with Nathan the Prophet, and his Psalms on the topic are good windows into his soul
- But, did you ever wonder what Bathsheba thinking?
- We'll never know about whether she was forced, or chose to sin on her own
- We don't know about her state of mind, or the repentance process that she would have had to go through
- But, we can imagine how terrible the experience must have been
- The evening of sin was over soon enough, but the pregnancy that followed must have been excruciating, and then to watch your husband, an incredibly faithful and upright man murdered could not have been easy
- Then to marry the man who had him killed, just in time to see the baby boy die...
- What a tragic part of God's message to us...
- These are all confusing, sad and tragic stories
- What do they have in common?
- Why would I bring them all up this morning?
- Please turn with me to Matthew 1:
  - Matthew 1:1-6
    - 1) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
    - 2) Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
    - 3) and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by **Tamar**, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram,
    - 4) and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon,
    - 5) and Salmon the father of Boaz by **Rahab**, and Boaz the father of Obed by **Ruth**, and Obed the father of Jesse,
    - 6) and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon **by the wife of Uriah**

- Did you catch them all?
- They are all right there!
- When God chose to bring His own son into the world, he didn't randomly pick who he was going to be born to
- The Lineage of Christ wasn't an accident
- God planned it!
- God knew precisely who and why He chose everyone in Christ's Lineage, and God takes the time to point them all out to us several times
- Depending on which Lineage you read, you will find over 70 different men's names mentioned in the list
- But, aside from Mary, the Mother of Jesus, there are only **Four** other women mentioned!
- **THESE** four women!
- Each one came from a compromised relationship
- So, here in the lineage of Christ, the line of God's own son, we see Prostitutes, Adulterers, Gentiles, Victims, Sinners...
- Not a normal, straight-up, happily-married-in-the-Truth person in the bunch!
- *Clearly, isn't God trying to send us a message?*
- Have you had some real life in your life?
- Do you find yourself in a situation that isn't ideal?
- Are you in a position that you thought you would never be when you happily walked down the aisle in the Ecclesial Hall so many years ago?
- God wants us to know that He not only **CAN** work with people in the worst of all possible circumstances, but He actually **PREFERS** to!
- This is the lesson that Paul learned after a long period of feeling down about a debilitating illness

- Like most of us, Paul prayed and prayed for God to heal him of his pains
  - And like many of us, the answer to Paul's prayer was not what he wanted

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7-10

- 7) So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
- 8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
- 9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- 10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with **weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

- Verse 9 is the lesson that each one of us needs to learn

- Listen to Verse 9 from another translation:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:9 (NLT)

- 9) Each time he said, "My gracious favor is all you need. **My power works best in your weakness.**" So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me.

- God's power works best in Man's weakness
- All through Mankind's history God has continually showed his power through people who not only would **YOU** not consider them the type of people that God would choose to work through, but they, themselves, wouldn't even consider themselves fit for the glory that God reflected in them
- Consider for a moment the long list of the types of people that God chose to work with:
  - **Abraham** was so old that he laughed at the idea of God working with him
  - **Sarah** was infertile and she laughed also when she heard the message
  - **Joseph** experienced severe child abuse like few other children ever have

- **Moses** stuttered so badly he couldn't even speak to Pharaoh and needed a translator to accompany him
- **Samson** was clearly a codependent and had a terrible habit of spending time with prostitutes
- **Hannah** was another one of many woman who was infertile and emotionally crushed by her inability to bear a son
- **Elijah** was suicidal
- **Jeremiah** was chronically depressed
- **Jonah** was an extremely prejudiced bigot
- **Naomi** was a widow, radically poor and virtually a street person
- **John the Baptist** was an eccentric (**to say the least!**)
- **Peter** was hot-tempered
- **Martha** worried too much
- The **Samaritan Woman** had seven failed marriages
- **Zacchaeus** was unpopular (**and short!**)
- **Thomas** had doubts
- And on, and on, and on...
- But, God loves making His strength shine through weak people
- God **LOVES** to use Weak People
- Everyone has weaknesses
- In fact, I have a **BUNCH** of weaknesses, flaws and imperfections
- And, I'm sure, that if you were to be honest with me, you would too
- It's not that important to God that you have weaknesses
- It's important to God what you do with them

- Usually we deny our weaknesses, defend them, excuse them, and hide them
- This prevents God from using them the way that He wants to
- God has a different perspective on your weaknesses
- We think that God only wants to use our strengths, but he also wants to use our weaknesses for His glory
- Your weaknesses are not an accident
- God deliberately allowed them into your life for the purpose of demonstrating His power through you
- God has never been impressed with strength
- He is drawn to people who are weak and **ADMIT IT**
- People who are not afraid to cry out to Him, and admit that they are frail, battered, in trouble, and **NEED HIS HELP!**
- Even Jesus, whose death we are about to remember wasn't a strong, imposing figure from a mere physical sense
- Look at how Isaiah describes him:
- Isaiah 53:1-3
  - 1) Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
  - 2) For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; **he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.**
  - 3) He was **despised** and **rejected** by men; a **man of sorrows**, and **acquainted with grief**; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was **despised**, and we esteemed him not.
- There was nothing in his appearance that we should desire him
- He wasn't a handsome, polished leader
- He wasn't that beautiful, blue eyed, loving man you've seen in the paintings
- He had no form or majesty that we should look at him

- He was a nothing
- An Everyman
- And he was despised and rejected
- He was a man of sorrows, familiar with grief
- At the moment he closed his eyes in death every single one of his followers had abandoned him
- One of the 12 that he had spent his past three years with had actually just betrayed him to his killers with a kiss!
- One of the strongest of the 12 had just denied him on three separate occasions in the past 6 hours!
- The throngs of thousands who had gathered around him were all gone
- The only thing that remained of them was the echo of their cries, **“Crucify Him!”**
- He was utterly and totally alone, beaten and sad...
- But God’s Strength is made perfect in Man’s Weakness
- Out of that humiliating, exhausting, painful and pitiful crucifixion God wrought a remarkable victory
- **The moment that Christ felt the weakest is when God showed His strength**
- God delivered Jesus from death and established a way by which we can all be saved
- God’s best work is done through people who feel that they are too weak to do it
- The Bible is filled with stories about how God loves to use imperfect, ordinary people to do extraordinary things in spite of their own weaknesses
- My favorite story from this weekend that perfectly expresses this concept, is the story of Gideon
- Can you think of anyone more shot through with self-doubt?
- In the story of Gideon we see just how much God is willing to work with us



- God didn't simply condescend to Human Weakness **ONCE** with the Sacrifice
- He does it a Second Time with the Fleece
- And then! **A THIRD TIME** with the Fleece!
- Think about that!!!
- Wow, that rock that spontaneously burst into flames and consumed an entire goat and a whole bushel basket full of bread – all soaked in broth – Was pretty convincing... But, can you make the dew fall only on this fleece and not on the ground around it?
- OK, but now can you keep the fleece dry and have the dew fall on everything else?
- That is how much God is willing to work with us!
- **God is the one who fights the battles!**
- He does so **THROUGH** us, but only when we are humble enough to step down and let him take over
- Only when we realize that no amount of resolutions, or will power, or personal commitment will see us through
- Only when we realize that God's power isn't there to supplement our Strengths
- God's power is **MADE PERFECT** in our **WEAKNESS**
- The Bible is just full of stories just like this, about how God loves to use imperfect, ordinary people to do extraordinary things in spite of their own weaknesses
- Adulterers, Prostitutes, Victims and Sinners are the types of people that God chose to bring salvation into the world through...
- So, if you are feeling down, feeling beaten, feeling like your life is so full of problems that God would never be interested in a weak person like yourself
- If you are feeling like you have failed...
- Over and over and over again...
- Think of our Lord that we are here to remember today

- When you reach out for this bread and wine, think about the picture of our Lord on the cross
- Despised, rejected, forgotten and ignored by those who called themselves his friends
- Hebrews 12:2-4
  - 2) Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
  - 3) Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.
  - 4) In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
- If you are not feeling very strong, and don't think that you could ever possibly do what you are called to do
- If you are feeling like you have made mistakes in your life, and are now living in a compromised position that makes unsuitable and useless to God
- Just think of **Tamar**, **Rahab**, **Ruth**, and **Bathsheba**
- Think of the great things that God has accomplished through weak, sinful, lost, compromised and confused people...
- And think of the great things that God can accomplish with someone like **YOU!**