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Sermon Notes

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## Hearts Strengthened by Grace

### Hebrews 13:9-12

Introduction: Various Displays of Strength

The Summer Olympics are about to start... on display before us will be astonishing displays of strength. The Olympic motto is *Citius, Altius, Fortius*: “Swifter, higher, stronger.” Every four years, men and women from all over the world gather in some city to try to live up to that motto—to run faster, to jump higher, and to lift stronger than anyone ever has before. These athletes have made extraordinary sacrifices, putting everything in their lives on hold to win the coveted Olympic Gold Medal. They will be testing the limits of their own physical, mental, and emotional endurance... they will dig deep for strength that they weren’t sure they had... and the champions will be seen to be the strongest in the world

Back in the first century, they had those same kinds of athletic contests as well... there were the Isthmian Games named after the Isthmus of Corinth, in addition to the Olympic games and the Pythian Games... runners and wrestlers and chariot racers and boxers would come to compete for the victor’s crown, a wreath of olive branches

The apostle Paul likened the Christian life to a race run by athletes:

***1 Corinthians 9:24-25 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.***

Paul then described the kind of strength it takes to finish this race:

***1 Corinthians 9:26-27 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize***

He uses the same ideas in 2 Timothy 2:

***2 Timothy 2:5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.***

The author to the Hebrews also likens the Christian journey to a race that takes great endurance:

This is the STRENGTH we need to finish the Christian life...

Not physical strength, like that of the weight-lifters or long-jumpers or rowers or archers who will walk away from London with gold medals

Neither is it the natural strength of will and mind and emotion commonly called the "heart of a champion"... for that type of strength

Frankly, the kind of strength we are talking is a SPIRITUAL ENERGY that surges into our hearts and enables us to be renewed in the Christian pilgrimage, and it comes only by the grace of God mediated to us by faith in the work of Christ. Isaiah described it well:

***Isaiah 40:28-31 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and no***

My purpose this morning is to use Hebrews 13:9-12 to point you to this STRENGTH OF HEART that you MUST HAVE to take even another step in the Christian life. I want to describe the heart that is the focus of this strength. I want to show how the heart cannot be strengthened by FOOD but only by grace. I want you to understand what this means... I want you to YEARN for this strengthening, and to expect it, to wait upon the Lord for it daily

Context:

After twelve marvelous chapters of doctrine describing how a Superior Mediator (Jesus Christ) brought a Superior Covenant (the New Covenant) resulting in a Superior Life (the life of faith), the author is now getting very practical in the Christian life

He sets before his hearers a simple promise from God:

***Hebrews 13:5 "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."***

And

***Hebrews 13:6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"***

And again:

***Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

This is the central purpose of the Book of Hebrews and the key to our salvation: God speaks a PROMISE (***Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you***) and then gives us the faith to receive this promise. Our faith feeds on this promise, this word from God and we are strengthened. Thus

BY FAITH IN THIS PROMISE... we can ***Keep on loving each other as brothers*** (vs. 1)

BY FAITH IN THIS PROMISE... we can ***Love strangers and show them hospitality*** (vs. 2)

BY FAITH IN THIS PROMISE... we can ***Minister to those in prison and not forget them*** (vs. 3)

BY FAITH IN THIS PROMISE... we can ***Honor marriage and keep the marriage bed pure sexually*** (vs. 4)

BY FAITH IN THIS PROMISE... we can ***Keep our lives free from the love of money and be content with what we have*** (vs. 5)

The Christian life flows from this wellspring: the promises of God, received by faith, giving us strength to do these hard things

Now, we focus on the ongoing strengthening of the heart that underlies all of this

***Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.***

## I. What is the Heart?

A. The Strength This Passage Commends is HEART Strength... Not Physical Strength

B. What is the “Heart”

1. The “inner man”, the “inner nature”, the new self created to be like God

2. Key passage: Ephesians 3:16-19

***Ephesians 3:16-17 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***

***Ephesians 3:19 that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

3. So also Romans 7

***Romans 7:22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law***

4. So, the strength we need is the strength of the INNER MAN...

5. aa

C. The Heart is...

1. The part of you that thinks... that reasons... that loves... the believes... that chooses... that feels
2. It is from the heart that you live your lives on earth... the heart navigates everything

***Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.***

## II. Why Does it Need to be Strengthened?

### A. The Way is Long and Arduous

***Hebrews 12:1 ...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.***

1. The road we are travelling is an infinite journey
2. It continues every moment that we are alive in this world
3. It is the journey of the Christian life... and the race of holiness and sanctification
4. it is a marathon race that requires constant power and strength to make even a single step of progress

### B. The Heart is Under Constant Assault

1. The world is alluring the heart constantly... pulling it by the “lust of the eyes, of the flesh and of pride” to abandon Christ
2. Satan and his demons are crafting the most ingenious set of temptations
3. It takes IMMENSE STRENGTH to stand firm in the day of testing, to bear up under the assault of temptations

### C. The Heart Needs to be STRENGTHENED DAILY...

### D.

## III. What Does it Mean to be Strengthened by Grace?

### A. The Word “Strengthen” = Establish or Confirm

***Mark 16:20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.***

[So, “confirm” here means to prove His word to be true]

***Romans 15:8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs***

[Again, the idea is that Christ's ministry among the Jews CONFIRMED or PROVED the promises to have been true]

***1 Corinthians 1:4-7 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge-- <sup>6</sup> even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you-- <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift***

[The idea here is that, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Corinthian believers, complete with the gifts of the Spirit, had the effect of CONFIRMING Paul's testimony about Christ; he came in weakness, fear and much trembling, and preaching the simple message of Christ crucified—that testimony was CONFIRMED AMONG THEM by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, including the gifts of tongues, prophecy, healings, and other things that gave clear evidence that the gospel of Jesus Christ was TRUE and powerful from God]

***1 Corinthians 1:7-8 as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will sustain confirm you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ***

[Paul uses the exact same word here two verses later; the same God who confirmed the WORD to be true will CONFIRM YOU to be true to the end as well; just as the gospel was vindicated as truth by the Holy Spirit, so you also will be proven to be true disciples to the end. This happens by an ongoing INFLUX OF SPIRITUAL POWER by the Holy Spirit]

***Colossians 2:6-7 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.***

[Here the word is used in the sense of BUTTRESSED and STRENGTHENED in the faith by ongoing ministry of the word of God; “just as you were taught”... as “the faith” is taught in an ongoing sense, the Colossian believers are made stronger and stronger]

1. Summary: to have our hearts “strengthened” means to have them buttressed day by day by the power of the Holy Spirit, receiving ongoing spiritual nourishment through the word of God and the gifts of the Spirit, so that we are CONFIRMED/VINDICATED as true disciples of Jesus Christ

#### B. What Does it Mean to Be Strengthened BY GRACE??

1. Grace is the commitment of God to save us to the uttermost
2. It flows by various avenues, channels of grace
3. Every day we need two types of grace
  - a. Looking to the Past: Covering Grace

b. Looking to the Future: Strengthening Grace... or “Future Grace”

4. Covering Grace:

- a. We are daily mindful of our failures and weaknesses
- b. They are the things that SAP OUR STRENGTH the most
- c. As we begin a day, our consciences may begin accusing us of our sins
- d. We remember our failures, our weaknesses, our limited gifts and abilities
- e. We look back at missed opportunities and we feel defiled and weak and powerless and hardly desire to get up and begin another day
- f. We need COVERING GRACE:

***Psalm 32:1-2 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.  
<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.***

***1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***

C. Future Grace: Confidence that the Power of the Lord Will Be Sufficient for the Trials We Will Face That Day

1. We look ahead at the day... or beyond it to the road ahead and it seems so daunting
2. How do we know that we will have the strength to meet the challenges??
3. We must have FAITH IN FUTURE GRACE... grace that God WILL GIVE US when we need it

***Hebrews 13:5 because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."***

***Exodus 3:11-12 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> And God said, "I will be with you."***

IV. By Grace, Not by Food

***Hebrews 13:9 It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.***

A. The Author Contrasts Grace with Food!!

1. The idea is simple

2. We are weak... we need strength... in order to renew your strength you need to look after your body
3. Get a good night sleep, and have some nourishment

***1 Kings 19:3-8*** *Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> ¶ while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." <sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.*

#### B. Two Types of Food Regimens in the World for Strengthening

##### 1. Physical (dietary)

- a. Low cholesterol
- b. Low fat low sugar
- c. Gluten-free
- d. Vegan: "all the health troubles came when we starting eating animals! In the Garden of Eden, all they ate were fruits and vegetables; if we could just get back to that perfect diet, our problems would be solved!! No more listlessness, no more energy problems, etc."
- e. Vitamin supplements... GNC (General Nutrition Center)

##### 2. Spiritual

- a. Fasting
- b. Religious diets based on spiritual convictions

#### C. Context: Ceremonial Foods Associated with the Sacrificial System

***Hebrews 13:9-10*** *Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. <sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.*

1. Some kind of false teaching related to ceremonial foods
  - a. The Greek just speaks of FOODS... NIV adds “ceremonial” though the word is not there
  - b. BUT the concept IS there; vs. 9 speaks of a pattern of eating that people “walk in”, but which never benefitted them
  - c. Those strict rules about eating were of NO SPIRITUAL VALUE to them
2. In the OT sacrificial system, the worshipers were usually free to eat from the flesh of animals they had offered to God
3. So the author speaks of eating from an altar in verse 10!
4. The home base for these ideas were Jewish legalistic dietary requirements, which called some foods clean and other foods unclean
5. Jesus declared all foods clean, and the eating of FOOD does not strengthen your INNER MAN, your HEART
6. The statement that such a strict religious commitment to eating these foods and not those foods are of NO SPIRITUAL VALUE to those who walked in those ways is similar to the dismissal of asceticism by the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:

***Colossians 2:21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"***

***Colossians 2:23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.***

#### D. Food Cannot Strengthen the Inner Man

1. The strength we need for the spiritual journey has nothing to do with food
2. In fact, sometimes food can get in the way of it
3. Take the morning quiet time: You may be tempted to say “I don’t have time to get my heart right with the Lord, to feed on His grace through the word, prayer, and worship...” But then you make time for BREAKFAST or for your morning cup of coffee because you need the energy; or maybe you resort to a “Five-Hour Energy” drink
4. Food cannot help you run the Christian race with endurance; it cannot help you withstand the day of temptation! It cannot help you be a witness at work, or trust God for your cancer, or solve the problems of a troubled marriage, or

simply enable you to walk another day with Jesus, filled with the Spirit and doing the good works he has ordained for you to do!

5. Your heart needs to be STRENGTHENED BY GRACE, NOT BY FOODS

## V. Jesus Suffered to Spread a Banquet of Grace

***Hebrews 13:10-12 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.***

### A. The Altar of Grace

1. The animal sacrificial system was OBSOLETE, made so by the death of Jesus on the cross
2. There were still priests and Levites carrying on this obsolete system, thinking that eating these sacrificial meats was somehow helping them spiritually
3. They were acting in RANK UNBELIEF concerning the promises and purposes of God
4. “We have an altar”... we = we Christians; the altar is the altar of grace by which our hearts are strengthened

### B. The Day of Atonement

1. I said a moment ago that the worshipers USUALLY were allowed to eat from the flesh of the animals they offered in sacrifice
2. BUT the Day of Atonement had a major exception
3. On that day, the Lord perfectly symbolized the death of Christ on the cross for our sins
4. One bull and two goats were selected
  - a. The bull was sacrificed for the sins of the priest... he had to offer sacrifice for his own sins
  - b. One of the goats was sacrificed for the sins of the people
  - c. The other goat—called the scapegoat—was led out into the wilderness where he was let go as a symbol of the perfect forgiveness of sins Christ would work

- d. Some of the blood of the sacrificed bull and goat, however, were carried into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant
- e. Then: the flesh of the bull and goat were carried OUTSIDE THE CAMP to be burned there... they were NOT EATEN

C. Christ Fulfilled this Picture Perfectly

***Hebrews 13:12-13 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Let us, then, go to him outside the camp***

D. Christ Spread a Banquet of Grace for Us to Feast Upon Every Day

- 1. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened BY GRACE day after day, and not by food
- 2. Christ crucified and risen gives us the ongoing fountain of grace that we will need for strength upon strength upon strength for the Christian race

VI. How Can We Be Strengthened by Grace Every Day?

A. Non-Christians: Come to Christ to Begin with

B. Christians: Desire to Have Your Heart Strengthened

- 1. The text says

***It is GOOD for our hearts to be strengthened by grace...***

- 2. So if I were to ask you, “Are you strong spiritually?” you would probably have a sense of your sinfulness and weakness and answer “No...” But the better question is, “Do you WANT to be strong spiritually?”
- 3. It all starts with WANTING TO BE STRONG
- 4. When we are weak spiritually, we are vulnerable to Satan’s vicious attacks; we are listless, weak in worship; weak in service, self-focused, unable to fight off temptations
- 5. We should yearn to get stronger and stronger by grace in the Christian life
- 6. So... start with desire

C. Next: Come to Christ Daily for Grace

***Hebrews 4:15-16 we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach the throne of grace with***

*confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*

D. Seek Christ for the Two Types of Grace

1. Looking backward: COVERING GRACE
2. Looking forward: FUTURE GRACE

E. Get Your Hearts Ready Every Day for the Challenges of the Day

1. Basic pattern of Quiet Times: daily time in the word and in prayer and in worship
2. BUT so easy for it to become rote, dry discipline that is not ministering to your heart

F. When You're Weak, then You're Strong

1. The areas you feel strongest in are the areas you probably feel like you don't need Christ... "Hey, Lord... I got this one; I can handle this one on my own!"
2. The Apostle Paul understood the incredible danger of self-confidence, and came to realize how totally dependent on Jesus he was
3. Therefore, whatever issue in his life that made him feel overwhelmed and totally over his head and drove him to Christ in complete dependence was his strongest part of the day

***2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

4. So, cultivate a different mentality about your weaknesses... use them as springboards for grace to flow into your lives... let your weaknesses drive you to Christ again and again in prayer
  - a. Forgiveness: "Lord, I have a hard time forgiving this person for what he did to me... I'm going to see this person today. If you don't help me, I will fail... I will be hard toward this person and unforgiving. Would you please help me to forgive and to love as you forgave me and love me?"

- b. Struggle with weight: “Lord, I confess to you that I love food too much. I don’t want to overeat, but I am in such a bad pattern right now that, unless you help me, I will eat too much today. I don’t want food to be my idol... please change my heart; please help me to find my significance and joy in you not in food.”
- c. Finances: “Lord, I struggle so much with materialism and with anxiety about money. I feel so weak in that area, Lord. Would you cure my heart of covetousness? Would you please help me to live for your glory and your purposes, and to find pleasure and satisfaction in you rather than in what money can buy? Help me not to be anxious about the future. Help me to live by faith in future grace when it comes to money.”
- d. Witnessing: “Lord, I feel so weak when it comes to witnessing. I haven’t invited anyone to church in over a year. I don’t want to go on outreaches, because I am afraid of what people will think of me. I don’t witness at work, because I am afraid of losing my job or the respect of my coworkers. I don’t want people to think of me as some Jesus weirdo... I know this whole way of thinking is wrong, Lord, but I can’t seem to conquer it. I am so weak!! Please change my heart and make me a witness for you.”

#### G. Go from Strength to Strength

***Psalm 84:5-7 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. <sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. <sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.***

#### H. Strengthen Each Other

1. We are supposed to be vehicles of grace and strength for each other
2. This is a big part of the ENCOURAGEMENT ministry that Hebrews commands

***Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. <sup>13</sup> "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.***

3. Know and be known so that we can strengthen each other by grace

***1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.***