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Teaching Notes

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Power through Prayer

Opening thoughts: “Are my best days behind me?” Psalm 90

Psalm 90:10 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength

Caleb: ***Joshua 14:10-11 So here I am today, eighty-five years old! ¹¹ I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.***

What is this “strength”? Where does it come from?

Ascending Lion's Head Trail, Mt. Washington:

Hebrews 11:34 whose weakness was turned to strength

I. We Are Weak, He Is Strong

A. The Omnipotence of God

Isaiah 40:26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Jeremiah 10:6 No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power.

Jeremiah 32:17 “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.”

B. The Frailty of Man

Psalm 144:3-4 O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? ⁴ Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.

James 4:14 What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

C. The Strength of Our Opposition

2 Samuel 22:17-19 *"He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. ¹⁸ He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. ¹⁹ They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support.*

Psalm 142:5-6 *I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." ⁶ Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.*

Ephesians 6:12 *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

D. The Basic Prayer of Salvation: Weakness Crying for Power... to LIVE!

1. We are powerless to save ourselves

Romans 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

2. The Law of God is made powerless to save us by our flesh

Romans 8:3 *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.*

3. Only Christ can save us, as we call to Him for help

Romans 10:13 *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

E. God Strengthens His People

Psalm 68:34-35 *Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. ³⁵ You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!*

Isaiah 40:27-31 *Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint*

F. Paul's Thorn in the Flesh: The Lesson of Prayer

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 *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. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

G. Prayer: Weakness Begging for Strength

Psalm 22:19 *But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.*

II. Christ's Display of the Use of Power

A. Reliance on the Power of the Spirit

Luke 4:14 *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.*

Acts 10:37-38 *You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-- ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

B. Power for Signs and Wonders

Luke 5:17 *And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.*

Luke 8:44-46 *She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."*

C. Power in Speech

Mark 1:27 *The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching-- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."*

D. Power Given to Apostles

Luke 9:1-2 *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*

Luke 10:17-19 *The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." ¹⁸ He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from*

heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

E. Power for the Spread of the Kingdom

Luke 24:49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

III. Christ's Weakness Turned Into Strength: The Resurrection

A. Christ's First Prayer, Answered Differently

1. What Christ requested

Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

2. Christ's weakness pictured

Luke 22:44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

3. How God answered

Luke 22:43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

a. What did the angel do to Christ? What strength did he impart?

b. What was the result of this strengthening?

B. Christ's Second Prayer, Answered Powerfully

1. The greatest display of Jesus' weakness ever: death

2 Corinthians 13:4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power.

2. How Jesus prayed

Luke 23:46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

3. What God the Father did in answer

Romans 1:4 who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV. Case Studies: Weakness Turned into Strength

A. Physical Weakness Turned to Strength

1. Samson

- a. After killing a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, he became extremely thirsty

Judges 15:18-19 Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" 19 Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.

- b. Strengthened in death

Judges 16:28-30 Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." 29 Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, 30 Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

2. Daniel: Physical strength by the hand of an angel

Daniel 10:4-19 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, 5 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. 6 His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. 7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. 8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. 9 Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

10 A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. 12 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-

one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

¹⁵While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. ¹⁶ Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

¹⁸Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ¹⁹ "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

3. Nehemiah

Nehemiah 4:10 Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

Nehemiah 6:9 They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."

B. Emotional Weakness Turned to Strength

1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

C. Spiritual Weakness Turned to Strength

1. Weak faith made stronger

Mark 9:23-24 And Jesus said to him, "If you can"! All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

2. Weak apprehension of Christ's love made stronger

Ephesians 3:16-21 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in

your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ ¶ Now 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

D. Power for Military Victory

2 Chronicles 14:9-12 Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. ¹⁰ And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. ¹¹ And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you." ¹² So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.

Psalm 18:6 In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. ...

Psalm 18:32-37 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. ³³ He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. ³⁴ He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. ³⁵ You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. ³⁶ You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. ³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed.

E. Power for Perseverance in the Christian Life

Colossians 1:11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy

F. Power in Temptation

Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

John 17:11-12 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the

name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost...

G. Power for Evangelism

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 4:29-31 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

H. Power for Lasting Good Works

2 Thessalonians 1:11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

I. Power for Contentment

Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Note: it takes immense strength of character to be content "in any and every situation"... to stand firm in that resolve despite the onslaught of adverse circumstances can only be done through the ongoing, constant strength given by Christ.

J. Power for Hope

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

V. The Power of God Needed... or All Is Worthless

A. A Work that Will Stand for Eternity? How Can It Be??

B. "Unless the Lord Builds the House..."

C. The Basic Issue of Ministry: Overcoming Forces Too Powerful for Us

1. Overcoming the Devil
2. Overcoming our Flesh
3. Overcoming the World
4. Overcoming Trials
5. Overcoming Successes

VI. Unction in Preaching

A. Defining “Uction”

1. KJV verse

KJV 1 John 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

2. Concept of POWER through the presence of the Lord
3. To some degree undefinable

B. Paul’s Display of the Power of God

1. Power of signs, wonders, and preaching

Romans 15:18-19 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— ¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

2. Power in weakness: transforming lives for the glory of God

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

C. Power in the Gospel: “That Your Faith May Rest on God...”

1. God zealous that only by His power will the church be built
2. Paul utterly rejects human power

1 Corinthians 1:17-18 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its

power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:23-25 we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

3. Paul's display of the Spirit's power

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

D. Apostolic Power Different Than Human Power

1 Corinthians 4:19-20 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

E. Testimonies on "Unction" in Preaching

1. J.I. Packer and Don Carson on hearing Martyn Lloyd-Jones

a. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: served the Westminster Chapel in London, England, for thirty years

b. JI Packer's testimony

When J. I. Packer was a twenty-two-year-old student, he heard Lloyd-Jones preach every Sunday evening in London during the school year of 1948-1949. He said that he had "never heard such preaching." Packer said it came to him "with the force of electric shock, bringing . . . more of a sense of God than any other man" he had known

c. Don Carson's testimony

Three stages in hearing Lloyd-Jones preach

2. E.M. Bounds on “Unction Through Prayer”

a. Undefinable, indescribable, unmistakable

b. Old Scottish preacher

“There is sometimes something in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections and comes immediately from the Lord; but if there be any way to obtain such a thing, it is by the heavenly disposition of the speaker.”

c. It makes the word of God “quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword...”

d. It creates massive upheaval in the hearers, converting some, transforming others, leaving still others enraged

“Unction backs and impregnates revealed truth with all the energy of God. Unction is simply putting God in his own word and on his own preacher.”

3. How is unction attained?

“By mighty and great prayerfulness and by continual prayerfulness, it is all powerful and personal to the preacher; it inspires and clarifies his intellect, gives insight and grasp and projecting power; it gives to the preacher heart power, which is greater than head power; and tenderness, purity, force flow from the heart by it. Enlargement, freedom, fullness of thought, directness and simplicity of utterance are the fruits of this unction.” [EM Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*, p. 90]

“This unction comes to the preacher not in the study but in the closet. It is heaven’s distillation in answer to prayer. It is the sweetest exhalation of the Holy Spirit. It impregnates, suffuses, softens, percolates, cuts, and soothes. It carries the word like dynamite, like salt, like sugar; makes the Word a soother, an arraigner, a revealer, a searcher; makes the hearer a culprit or a saint, makes him weep like a child and live like a giant; opens his heart and purse as gently, yet as strongly as the spring opens the leaves. This unction is not the gift of genius. It is not found in the halls of learning. No eloquence can woo it, no industry can win it. It is the gift of God—the signet set to his own messengers. It is heaven’s knighthood given to the chosen, true and brave ones who have sought this anointed honor through many an hour of tearful, wrestling prayer.” [p. 93]

“Prayer, much prayer, is the price of preaching unction; prayer, much prayer, is the one, sole condition of keeping this unction. Without unceasing prayer the unction never comes to the preacher.” [p. 100]

4. Richard Cecil: Without unction, preaching is worthless

“All the minister’s efforts will be vanity or worse than vanity if he have not unction. Unction must come down from heaven and spread a savor and feeling and relish over his

ministry; and among the other means of qualifying himself for his office, the Bible must hold the first place, and the last must also be given to the Word of God and prayer.” [p. 95]

5. Charles Spurgeon

“One bright benison which private prayer brings down upon the ministry is an indescribable and inimitable something—an unction from the Holy One....If the anointing which we bear comes not from the Lord of hosts, we are deceivers, since only in prayer can we obtain it. Let us continue instant, constant, fervent in supplication. Let your fleece lie on the threshing floor of supplication till it is wet with the dew of heaven.” [p. 83]