

6. Jesus Strengthened Those Who Were Sick (Weak)

In Ezekiel 34:16, Christ said that one of His ministries, to the nation of Israel, would be to strengthen those who were sick. That verse says, “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.” Christ demonstrated that ministry many times while He was here on this earth. He certainly strengthened many who were physically sick. However, He also strengthened many who were spiritually weak or sick. His ministry to those who are spiritually sick will be the focus of this topic today.

The word that is translated “sick” means *to be weak or to be sick*. In many of the passages, where the word is used, it could be translated either way. An illustration is Genesis 48:1, where we read: “Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Indeed your father is sick’; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.” Since this is the chapter where Jacob blesses the two sons of Joseph, we see that Jacob may have been weak because of his age, or he may have been sick. Either word would be appropriate.

In some contexts, the word must be translated weak such as in Judges 16:7, 17 where the passage talks about Samson. Judges 16:16-17 says, “And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her all his heart, and said to her, ‘No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.’” In this passage, we see that Samson would become both physically and spiritually weak. Of course, that is exactly what happened in his life.

Christ spoke to the disciples about spiritual weakness the night before He was crucified. Matthew 26:40-41 says, “Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, ‘What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’” These verses point out the condition of many Christians at various times in their lives. They want to do what is right, but spiritually, they are weak. In these verses, we also see one of the reasons for this spiritual weakness. Peter, and the others, failed to pray. So, they were depending on their own strength, instead of the strength the Lord provides as we ask Him for His strength.

Herod put John the Baptist in prison. There, John became discouraged. John sent two of his disciples with a question for Christ. Matthew 11:2-3 gives John's question, “And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” At this point in his life, John needed to be strengthened, because things were not going as he had expected, and he was now in prison.

Christ told the two disciples, in Matthew 11:4-6, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” In this case, Christ strengthened John by sending him a message of encouragement. He

told the two disciples to tell John what they had heard – the teachings of Christ. He also told them to tell John what they had seen – the works of Christ. Christ knew that, as John was reminded of both His words and His works, John would know that Christ was there to encourage him, even when John was going through a difficult time in his life.

Peter also had times in his life when he was weak and needed to be strengthened. One such time happened when Christ came walking on the water, to the disciples, after the feeding of the five thousand. When the disciples saw Christ coming, they were afraid. Peter said if it was really the Lord, Christ should ask him to come to meet Christ. Christ then invited Peter to come and join Him. Peter got out of the boat and started walking toward Christ. Everything was going fine until he took his eyes off Christ and started looking at the waves around him.

Matthew 14:30-33 says, “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” Many times, when we take our eyes off Christ and look at the problems around us, we also become spiritually weak. In this case, Christ strengthened Peter by catching him and holding his hand until they got into the boat. He just needed to know that Christ cared and held his hand as he walked through the waves.

One day, Christ took three of His disciples with Him to the mountain where He was transfigured. When they came back to the other disciples, a man came to Christ, and asked Christ to heal his son, because the disciples were not able to heal the son. Christ then healed the boy. Later, the disciples came with a question. Matthew 17:19-21 says, “Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’” Here, again, the disciples were depending on their own strength.

In this case, Christ shared with the disciples how to be strengthened in their spiritual weakness. First, Christ defined for them that the problem was their unbelief. They did not expect Christ to work through their lives. Christ did not tell them that they needed greater faith. Instead, all the faith that was needed was the faith of a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds. Instead of needing a great faith, they needed just the tiniest faith in a great God. If they had faith in Christ, He had the power to perform the miracle that was needed. In this case, He pointed out that they needed to fast so they could spend an extended time praying to Him.

This same event shows us how Christ strengthened the father. We read the words of the father, in Mark 9:22, “‘And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’” Mark 9:23-24 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” Here, we see that

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Christ immediately responded to the spiritual weakness demonstrated by the words of the father. Christ strengthened the father by telling the father that Christ could do all things. The only thing the father had to do was believe that Christ could work in the life of his son. He asked Christ to help him believe, and Christ met the need of both the father and the son.

One of the instructions that we are given, as Christians, is to hold up those who are weak. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” Those who are fainthearted need to be comforted. Those who are spiritually weak, and without strength, need someone to hold them up until they grow stronger. That is a ministry in which every Christian can get involved, especially those who are developing leaders. As we have seen, Christ held up those who were weak in many different ways.

After His resurrection, Christ showed another kind of strengthening ministry to two of His disciples. Christ joined them and began walking with them as they walked along the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:17 says, “And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’” Christ then asked them to tell Him why they were sad. After hearing why they were weak, Christ said, in Luke 24:25-27, “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” He strengthened them by helping them to understand the Old Testament.

The lives of those two disciples were changed. Luke 24:32-33 says, “And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’ So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together.” Christ strengthened those two, and it changed both their attitudes and their actions. They were so excited! They even had to tell others what had happened. That shows us the power of a strengthening ministry.

Developing leaders need to be shown how to have a strengthening ministry to other Christians. Such a ministry will change the thoughts, the attitudes, and the actions of Christians who are weak. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to strengthen other Christians.