

## SERMON OUTLINE

# SESSION 1: Embracing Weakness

TEXTS: LUKE 4:1-19; JOHN 13:1-20

## INTRODUCTION

We come to two passages of Scripture that bookend Jesus' ministry on earth before he is crucified. The first story in Luke 4 marks the beginning of his ministry. After he is baptized, Jesus goes into the desert to be tempted. The Son of God not only chooses to become a human being but also to go without food for an extended period of time.

We also find in John 13 that Jesus gathers with his closest friends for a final meal and makes a point of washing their feet before the meal. Culturally, he is taking the place of the lowliest servant and performing what is considered a most undesirable task. This behavior is not what we would normally associate with a king or a god.

As we read these passages and enter into a season of fasting, let us consider three questions:

1. What does Jesus do with the power that has been given to him?
2. What does it mean for us to pursue weakness?
3. What does Jesus' intentional pursuit of weakness mean for us, some of the most privileged (powerful) people on the planet?

## 1. WHAT DOES JESUS DO WITH THE POWER THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO HIM? (LUKE 4:1-4; JOHN 13:1-5)

In Luke 4:1, the Greek word for Spirit is the word *pneuma*, which means *breath* but is often times translated as *spirit*, *soul*, or even *wind*. The saying, "He was full of the Holy Spirit" is to say that Jesus was full of God's life, power, and vigor and was being driven by the Spirit (wind) into the wilderness.

- Instead of attempting to establish his own rule/Kingdom/authority, Jesus chooses to withdraw and pursue anonymity.
- He purposely withholds from himself the food/sustenance that strengthens and energizes our bodies.
- He is showing that true power/life comes from a Source higher than the natural world.

In John 13:3, some translations read, "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power." It is hard to find a more eloquent demonstration of God's attitude toward power than in the verses that immediately follow.

- Jesus' first act is to get up and begin to serve.
- He assumes the most lowly role, one that would normally be given to a slave.

**KEY QUESTION:** What is our first response when we realize that we are the most powerful person in our relationships, home, workplace, school, church, and so forth? Do we wield our power to serve others or to serve ourselves?

## 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US TO PURSUE WEAKNESS INSTEAD OF POWER? (LUKE 4:2-3; JOHN 13:6-10)

- We typically think of weakness being the absence of strength; but what if weakness is better defined as vulnerability?
- We see Jesus voluntarily entering a place where he experiences need, hunger, and thirst. The Scripture says that after forty days, he was hungry.
- We also see Jesus taking on the role of a servant in order to establish a right relationship with his people/followers (John 13:8).
- Consider this quote from Chris' book:

*The primary reason Christianity seems less than Christian in these times, and the reason we struggle so deeply to be transformed into the character of Christ, is likely because we so often pursue something else. Instead of vulnerability, we are busy chasing power and prestige. But God's decision again and again to give up his power—from when he came to earth in the form of a crying baby to when he allowed people to torture and execute him—teaches us something very important: **the world will not be changed when we ascend to power.** God's Kingdom will not manifest because an evangelical Christian resides in the White House or the highest court in the land. God changes the world through weakness and service. It is a subversive tactic, yet highly effective. Just look back on the history of Christianity and you can see it clearly in the movements spawned by William Wilberforce, Martin Luther King Jr., or Dorothy Day. Lasting change cannot be legislated and enforced; it takes place in the hearts of people.*

Is it true of us that, when we say, "I want to be more like Jesus," what we really mean is that we want to be more like God (all-powerful, all-knowing, etc.)?

### 3. WHAT DOES JESUS' INTENTIONAL PURSUIT OF WEAKNESS MEAN FOR US, SOME OF THE MOST PRIVILEGED (POWERFUL) PEOPLE IN THE WORLD? (LUKE 4:17-19; JOHN 13:12-17)

We may not own the fanciest car or biggest house. Nevertheless, as Americans we enjoy the power to make choices that most of the world cannot.

- As Chris points out in the book, if we want a particular type of food, we can go get it. If we want a song on iTunes, pair of jeans, etc., we can purchase it.

But Jesus points out that the reason he has been empowered is to serve and empower others (Luke 4:17-19).

- “The Spirit of the Lord is on me . . . to bind up the brokenhearted . . .”

We often feel like we do not have the ability to mend the brokenhearted, but consider the following:

- Americans spend approximately \$450 billion a year on Christmas gifts
- In 2006, Americans spent approximately \$22 billion on ice cream
- Yet the estimated cost to end the global water crisis is \$20 billion
- The problem has never been a lack of resources; the problem is that those in power do not use their power to free others (because of greed, corruption, hate, vengeance, pride, fear, and so on).

Jesus does not call us into anything he is not willing to do himself. He leads the way (John 13:12-17). We need to allow God to transform our hearts. That's what this 40-day journey is all about.

*Will you join me on this journey? The daily readings in this book come out of thoughts, prayers, and experiences shared in my community, Ecclesia, in Houston. It is my greatest hope that through our willingness to be vulnerable, to be held, to be changed, to be active agents of hope in a world that so desperately needs it, we will encounter the Risen Christ together and be renewed and changed forever. —from *A Place at the Table**

The next five sermons will take us on a journey into the wilderness. We will be taking a look at the life of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus. Our prayer is that his life will help us to similarly prepare the way for Jesus to come into our lives in new and refreshing ways that help establish his Kingdom in our families, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, churches, cities, and the whole world.