The Power Outside of You

Ephesians 3:14-21

A couple of weeks ago, when we were last at the Novotel, Martin preached a sermon on Acts 27 about facing storms. In that passage, Paul's out on a boat in the Mediterranean Sea with a load of other prisoners, heading for Rome. But the weather has turned and it's getting really dangerous, to the point that they all think they're going to die! Everyone gets sick and everyone is terrified. Martin explained to us how Paul reacts to the situation. And his sermon was called 'calm in the storm'. In short, Paul has an incredible inner-strength through it all, because he's relying on a power outside of himself. Martin said this:

"Let me ask you, who or what upholds your life? What keeps you strong in the storms of life, when everything is being stripped away? Do you rely on yourself, on your own strength, saying 'I can do this!' Or on the support of others? The problem is that our strength is not limitless, is it? Whilst we all might have different capacities, we do all have a capacity, and if we are stretched too far, the strongest of us will snap. And friends can fail. So we need a strength outside of ourselves, one that undergirds us, and sustains us, and lifts us up when we are weak".

So today I want to talk about this inner strength that Martin was referring to. I sung a lot of songs about God's strength, and growing up, I often heard people talking about relying on God's strength. But I never really knew what people meant. And to be honest, I just thought 'what are you talking about? I've got loads of energy! I'm young, I'm fit and I can face anything'! But in the last few years, as I faced life and some difficult situation, I realized I'm really not that strong at all! Martin's right, we all have a breaking point! I found mine in 2012! Sure, when I'm sitting in the saddle of a bike or running, I can go pretty hard for a while! My outer strengths ok for the moment! But that's subject to change! And anyway, that's not the kind of strength that Paul's talking about. Going to the gym, or staying in good physical shape is great. But we're going to need more than that to live for Christ: to resist temptation, to overcome sin, the strength to love my wife and my Christian brothers and sisters, the strength to keep preaching, keep leading, keep fighting, keep praying, keep growing - everyday. This is an altogether different kind of strength! And we all need

this strength because we all get tired don't we? We all feel like giving in sometimes - the trials of life are just too much for us to handle and we all break eventually. But as we read in Isaiah 40:30-31: Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Walking and not fainting, running and not getting tired, soaring high above the trials of this life – sounds amazing doesn't it? Who doesn't want to walk, run, soar like this? But we never will in our own strength – no matter how strong we think we are. Because, as Martin put it: this strength is beyond me, and it's beyond you.

So I want to look at a passage in Ephesians today that has become of enormous value to me, especially in last few years. I call it the powerhouse! And it talks about this strength outside of us – a strength that's found in God, which is available to all of us. It's a wonderful passage of Scripture. I love this passage and I just keep going back to it over and over, because like many in this room, I find the things of this life pulling me down and sapping my strength, and I know how much I need a strength beyond my own! So here it is, lets read it together. Ephesians 3:14-21:

[14] For this reason *(the reason being God's sovereignty: that God knows exactly what he is doing and is completely in control of every situation)*, Paul says, I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

So as we go through this passage today, I want us to think about how we tap into this strength that's beyond us. And the first thing we do if we want to have this kind of strength is:

Go to the Source

Notice that this passage is actually a prayer. Paul says 'I bow my knees before the Father, and pray that God might grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being'. Prayer is a massive part of the Apostle Paul's life. And that's what prayer is – it's going to the source. Because God is the Source. Source of what? He's the source of everything we need. He's the source of all strength and power. His resources are unlimited! I love how the New Living Translation puts it: 'I pray that from his **glorious, unlimited resources** he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. That's what I say to Nix when I go out to pray in the morning as I leave the house, because I pray best when I'm walking, I say, 'Ok, Nix I'm going to the source. Back in 20 minutes'! Because that's how I see prayer – a trip to the powerhouse. My resources are so limited so I need to take a trip to the Source where they can be found. Just like a coffee might give you a kick, going to the source, to God in prayer, gives you strength in your inner being. By the way, that's a terrible analogy, because the power you receive for your inner being in prayer can hardly be compared to the buzz you get from a coffee! But anyway, I think you know what I mean! **Guys, you've got to go to the Source.** When you're weak and tired, when you feel like giving up, when the kids are exhausting you, when your job is draining your energy, when you don't seem to be experiencing victory over sin, **go to the Source.** Go to God. Other sources are guaranteed to let you down. I know, because I've tried to get strength elsewhere: in sport, in rest, in TV programs, in socializing, in various other things. And there's nothing wrong with any of those things, but they're no substitute for God. And neither are online sermons, or conferences or speaking to others or reading a good Christian book. Again, these things are great. I would sincerely recommend you do all of them, but they mustn't replace you going to the source of life.

Jesus said it like this: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing'. Do you want to bear much fruit? Do you want to prosper and grow and flourish? Of course you do. Then go to the Vine! Psalm 1:3 talks

about the person who goes to the source. It says 'That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers. Don't you want to be like that? Bearing fruit – the fruit of the Spirit: growing in love, joy, patience…? Prospering doesn't necessarily mean you'll be rich, healthy, and everything will always go well, but it does mean you will grow in strength to live victoriously as a Christian and what could be better than that?

So I want to encourage you this morning to spend a bit of time on your inner being! Most of us spend quite a bit of time on our outer being! Going to the gym, putting on makeup, going running, brushing hair, taking showers – all good things! Please don't stop doing that! But that's not where your strength comes from. Inner strength to fight the daily battle comes as it's renewed by God. Look how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. I love this verse: so much so, that I actually wrote it on the back of bedroom door as a teenager! Young people don't get any ideas! Christian graffiti is unacceptable! Paul says: 'we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day (in other words our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are passing away, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

So that's what we do if we want genuine strength. We go to the source of it, which is God. But notice Paul says that we're strengthened with power, how? **Through the Holy Spirit.** And so his strength becomes our strength as we learn to submit to the Holy Spirit. That's my second point today: that we have to

Learn to Submit to the Holy Spirit

If you're a Christian this morning did you know you are in a fierce battle? It might not always seem it…but you can read all about that battle in Ephesians 6. John tells us that our enemy – the things we're fighting are the world, the flesh and the devil. We're fighting sin, addictions, doubt, depression, anxiety, and all kinds of evil on a daily basis. **The inner part of you is going to have to be strong or you just wont win. You'll live in defeat.** The apostle Paul talks about this in Romans 7 & 8. He experienced

this battle himself and he says 'The things I want to do, I don't do and the things I don't want to do, I do'. In other words, 'I don't want to lose my temper, but I do, I don't want to lie, but I do, I don't want to look at that, but I end up looking at it, and I didn't want to say that to them, but I did'. Paul's saying, I know what I want to do, but I'm just not strong enough to do it. Meaning his outer being - his own strength is not enough and keeps failing him. Can anyone relate to Paul? Can you sense his frustration? He ends up saying in verse 24: 'Oh, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death'? What's he going to do? He's in a mess? He hasn't got the strength. But wait, the very next chapter: Romans chapter 8 (the greatest chapter in the Bible)…in my opinion, Paul discovers a new strength! The Holy Spirit. And he says in verse 2 that 'the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death'. He's discovered a power outside of himself that means he can live in freedom. Paul now walks in freedom and **there is no condemnation** at all. Why? Because God did what we could not do. He sent his own Son, Jesus in a body like ours. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. And now we no longer have to follow our sinful nature but instead we follow the Spirit.

What does that mean? - to follow the Spirit? It means that you wake up in the morning and surrender your day to God. It means you talk to the Holy Spirit in everything you do! You give your decisions to him – big or small. Little things throughout the day, you talk to God about them. You know you don't have to be on your knees or in church to pray? You can actually talk to God and talk to others at the same time? I'm a man, so I'm no multi-tasker, but I've learned to do this a bit, and it's amazing how conscious of the Holy Spirit you become. That's one way you learn to submit to the Spirit. And another, and these two work together, is that you **fill your mind with the Word of God.**

Like Colossians 3:16 says, you 'Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly'. How do you do that? You read the Bible, you memorize bits of it, you sing it, even listen to Christian music - that really helps me! There's loads of ways we can let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. This is where the strength lies: in God's Word. I don't know about you, but I can tell when I am not spending time with God in his Word. This sounds really cheesy, but I once heard someone say '7 days without reading your bible makes one weak'!

Cheesy, but true! If I miss a couple of days I can really feel it, if I miss 4 or more days, Nix starts to notice it, and if I go over a week –everyone starts to notice it! The strength has gone! That's why Jesus taught us to pray 'give us this day our daily bread'. We need the sustenance for the day. He didn't say give us this week our weekly bread or this month our monthly bread. We need it daily. You have to fight for this, guys. **You need daily strength for the daily battle.** The more the Word of Christ dwells in you, the more the Holy Spirit fills you, the more strength you have to walk in the Spirit and fight those battles.

And so we've seen what happens when we go to the Source: we receive inner strength and we learn to submit to the Holy Spirit. And then guess what happens: verse 17, you learn to love like Jesus loves!

Learn to love like Jesus

Verse 17 tells us that as Jesus dwells in you, you begin to love like him! No way! I could never love like Jesus. I know you couldn't. Neither could I – not in my own strength. But you've got his strength now! Hang on a second! What's being strengthened in the inner man got to do with love? Absolutely everything! Guys, you have to agree, **nowhere do we need Christ's strength more than in loving other people!** Let's face it – naturally us humans are not that good at loving others are we? And by love, I don't mean feelings, I mean putting others first, preferring others before us, looking out for others' needs before our own. That doesn't come so naturally does it? Sure we can all love people who love us back and treat us nicely and say nice things to us! But what about the person who's really hurt us? We don't even have the strength within ourselves to forgive them for what they did, let alone love them. But Jesus does, and he's dwelling in you, and giving you the strength to comprehend the 'breadth, and length, and height, and depth, of his love'. Jesus loves those who hate him back. So much so that he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. You can't get more depth than that. Lower than the death of the cross. That how deep the love of Jesus is for you and for me. It passes knowledge. It's overwhelming! How much we need this love in our homes? In our families? **Even amongst each other here at Westlake.** That genuine Christlike love for one another, putting each other first, preferring one another's needs above our own. We're not capable of loving like this. But Jesus is and we have him dwelling in us.

And so as we come towards the end of this passage do you see the progression? One commentator I read describes this passage as like a staircase that keeps ascending. You go to the source, where you receive strength for the inner man. Then you become empowered with the Holy Spirit, which means you become rooted and grounded in love, and consequently, you learn to love like Jesus did. So you've got strength beyond your own! And with that kind of strength what can you expect? Here's mine and Nicola's favourite Bible verse: You can:

Expect God to do the Unthinkable

Reading from verse 20: **20** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Wow! Far more abundantly above all that you could ask or even think'! Now I'm a bit of dreamer and I think pretty big most of the time! That might be why I'm not so good on finer details as my wife will happily tell you! So I can conceive of what I think is some 'big stuff', but God says, "Mark, you have no idea. You cant even imagine what I'm capable of'! So many times have Nicola and I seen God do far more than we have asked, or even thought possible. He has blown our minds time and again.

Glorious unlimited resources are his! He's God! There's no limit to what he can do in your life, in anyone else's life, in this city, in the universities… There is a limit to what you can do, but remember, we're talking about the **power outside of you**! And that makes life exciting, because God's power is limitless! He can accomplish things through us that we never dreamed possible – he already has in me! When we go to him, when we surrender to his Spirit, when we get strength for the day. We get filled with all the fullness of God. And then God's at work doing exceedingly abundantly above all we could ask or even think! But look who get the glory - us? No way! What did we do? It's all God. He gets the glory. He deserves all the praise, because he's responsible for anything good in us! And so Paul concludes, and I think this ends it perfectly: 'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen'.