



**Building Community  
Changing Lives  
Bringing Hope**

**SUMMIT**  
C H U R C H

*Being Jesus Christ to the World*

***Theme: Good, Good News!  
“Good News and Great Strength”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

February 6-7, 2021

**Weekly Memory Verse:**

***28 Have you never heard?  
Have you never understood?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of all the earth.  
He never grows weak or weary.  
No one can measure the depths of his understanding.***  
—Isaiah 40:28

**Scripture Readings:**

Isaiah 40:28-31 and 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

**VIDEO Sermon Bumper**

**SLIDE “Good News and Great Strength”**

My name is Jeff Huber and I’m Lead Pastor at Summit Church and we are so glad you have joined us for this time of worship. Today we continue in a series of sermons on the good, Good News. We believe as followers of Jesus that he came to offer Good News, but it can feel elusive in today’s

world as we watch world and life events unfold. This series is about looking at Jesus with some fresh eyes to discover the power of the Good News he proclaimed and lived so we, “might have life and have it to the full.”

One of the things we’ve talked about in this series is that many people are asking today not if the Gospel or the stories of Jesus are true, but if the Good News that he came to proclaim is really good. It can often feel like the Good News of Jesus Christ, that God came into the world to love us and be with us, is something we must earn instead of a free gift which we simply receive. What we want to do in this series of sermons is remind ourselves of the Good, Good News that God made us to love us and came as this infant, young man, Lord and Savior Jesus to show us that love in a very tangible way.

Today, we are going to focus on how the Good News brings us great strength. Most of us, when we hear the word strength, think of the ability to move things. We think about power and might. I was reminded of a construction foreman who started out every job by bringing in workers assigned to him and lining them up. He was a large man and he would tell them, “The first thing I want all of you to know is that I can take any one of you in this group, so I expect everyone to follow my orders.”

A very large young man stepped forward on the back of the group and says, “Sir, I don’t think you can take me.”

The foreman looked him up and down carefully and replied, “Yeah, you’re probably right. You’re fired!”

Wouldn’t it be nice if we could fire the pandemic? Wouldn’t it be nice if we could fire anything that seemed overwhelming to us or any problem which came our way, and we could see a way around or through it? The good news that Jesus came to share is that there is a strength we can tap into which will allow us to move through anything, and even the worst thing will not be the last thing.

The story of Jesus going to the cross, that we will remember today will be take communion, is the story of spiritual strength overcoming weakness, light overcoming the darkness, and love overcoming hate. It is meant to fill us with a sense of purpose and value, and it is something that we find as a theme throughout the Scriptures. In the Hebrew Bible, some of my favorite scriptures are found in the book of Isaiah. While the words are from more than 2500 years ago, they are appropriate today as we seek to find strength in tough times and discover good news in bad circumstances.

### **GRAPHIC            Ancient Near East in 605**

I find it helpful to understand the background of the text we are going to look at from Isaiah. This map shows you the ancient near East with the main area being Saudi Arabia and the Mediterranean Sea off the left. Turkey is on the upper left of the Mediterranean and Egypt is on the lower right. Modern-day Iran and Iraq are off to the right. Israel was this strip of land next to the Mediterranean Sea and really only the lower part in 605 BC. Egypt is this major empire in the purple which controls this land bridge connecting Africa, Asia and Europe.

Babylon is in the pink and it begins to expand with a new Emperor who has ambitions to conquer this entire region. The Egyptians and the Babylonians meets in this region above modern-day Israel at the **Battle of Carchemish**, depicted here in Hutchinson's *Story of the Nations* from 1900.

### **GRAPHIC            Battle of Carchemish**

These two empires, the most powerful of their time, are doing battle for this trade route and an epic clash of titans. Judah is a tiny kingdom caught in the middle. Just to give you an idea, you could fit 15 nations of Judah into the state of Colorado in square miles. Egypt is 50 times the size of Judah and Babylon eventually is more than 100 times the size of Judah, where the Jewish people lived in this time. Judah is aligned with Egypt in 605 BC and

they lose to the Babylonians, so the region now looks like this, with Babylon controlling this entire area in the pink.

### **GRAPHIC            Babylon Empire 598 BC**

The land of Judah is swallowed up by Babylon. One of the greatest kings in all of history is Nebuchadnezzar who led the nation of Babylon.

### **GRAPHIC            Nebuchadnezzar**

This image is a relief from his time, so this is what he looked like. Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned 65 times in the Bible in eight different books. He ruled for 40 years and as he drove the Egyptian South, he stops in Jerusalem to tell them, “There is a new sheriff in town. I am the ruler of this territory.”

In those times, conquerors would allow kings to continue to reign in their kingdoms as long as they bowed down to the new king, this case Nebuchadnezzar. King Joaquim in Jerusalem is allowed to stay on the throne but must pay tribute to guarantee protection from the Babylonians. Returning to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar would take groups of people with him from each nation to be his advisors. There are four of them we read about in Scripture that come from Judah to stay in Babylon. You might remember their names.

### **SLIDE                Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego**

The Jewish people and the Egyptians continue to push back against the Babylonians in 598 BC. Nebuchadnezzar comes back and warns them, taking some of their leaders like Daniel and Ezekiel back to Babylon. It is during this period which is where we get those two prophetic books are written.

Jeremiah stays in Jerusalem and write letters to the people in exile in Babylon, which is where we get his prophetic book from. The main message of Jeremiah is that the people need to settle in and realize they will be in

exile for 70 years or so and they should learn to bless the people with whom they live, regardless of their circumstances. The people in Jerusalem hated Jeremiah because he was telling them to get used to a new normal that none of them wanted and they all despised, living in Babylon with their captors.

Several years later, in 587 BC, the Jewish people rebelled again, and this time Nebuchadnezzar came back full force and destroys the nation of Judah by plundering the temple, killing the sons of the King in front of him, gouging out the king's eyes, and forcing him to lead what remains of his people back to Babylon to be slaves. There is a clear sense of hopelessness and having no power or strength to resist or find their way home.

You might wonder why it is important to know this history, and it's because this story shapes 28 of the 39 books in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. Every generation of Jewish people that comes after 587 BC would look back and see themselves in this story. Christians did the same thing as they were followers of Jesus, a Jewish Messiah.

Today, we are meant to look back on this story as well. We recognize that all of us have been in exile at some point in our lives. All of us have been in hopeless situations, and many of us have experienced that in the past few months. We all find ourselves wondering if it is worth going on or where God is in the midst of these difficult moments. Where is God and why isn't God saving us? We have all lived in exile and have wondered if we will ever find our way home, back to normal. The words from the prophets are meant to speak to us today because we can see ourselves in the exile in the words of the prophets are timeless.

When we read the words of the prophets in times of despair, we are meant to be encouraged and strengthened. Jesus comes from this tradition and longs to be a literal, flesh and blood reminder of the strength and hope that comes from God in tough times. The last 100 years alone, we have had

two world wars that went on for years, several regional wars, a Cold War which lasted decades, 9/11 and the war on terrorism. We have seen the great depression almost 100 years ago, with more than a dozen recessions and the great recession of 2008. We have experienced raging forest fires and hurricanes and floods and droughts. We are living in the great lockdown and hope we are coming out of it, but one day there will be something else that will come which will feel overwhelming.

This is a rhythm of life and has been since the beginning of time. There are cycles and seasons where life is hard. In many ways, we have been in exile for the past year, not being able to socialize or be with the ones that we love and the ways in which we are accustomed. Many of us will sit home and watch the Super Bowl or do something else today instead of gathering with people for party where no one watches the game, but we all wait for the commercials and vote on the best ones.

We are approaching half a million people who have died in the from COVID 19 or its complications, a number from this congregation, with the worldwide number being more than 2.3 million deaths and more than 150 million cases. We have seen record unemployment and people losing homes and businesses. We have experienced unprecedented of people in our political process here in this country and in many ways, we are in the midst of an exile. Compared with what the Babylonians experienced, ours is still just a fraction of that history, is even now we find ourselves moving towards a light at the end of the tunnel.

What I know is that the words of the prophets were relevant to the people in exile in Babylon, they can speak to us as well. Part of the challenge for us is that we want to be rescued from exile immediately. We want Prime delivery from exile which comes in a day, or at the most, 2-day Air! Even that 2 day promises now four or five days, and even then, we get frustrated

because of the delay. God's deliverance often comes through people and it is slower than we would like most of the time.

I often say to people about this pandemic that there are two realities we are experiencing. Most of us are experiencing it as an inconvenience, and some as an economic setback. Some don't seem to be affected at all other than having daily routines include a mask and distancing. But there is another layer of people who have lost loved ones to COVID, or those working in essential services who have been overwhelmed by the grief. I visited last month with a hospital worker who has seen so much grief, loss, and death it is been overwhelming. They have been helpless with many of the cases, including several young people have died under their care. They have done their best to facilitate family members being with loved ones, but many times it was medical professionals who held the hand of people as they died, wishing they could do something to help but feeling helpless.

There is fear about contracting the virus and then taking it home to children or loved ones or people at risk. As I have found myself in these conversations over the past 10 months, it is been difficult to find the words to say over the telephone because there is no way we can meet in person. The first thing I do is thank them for the work they are doing, and I acknowledge how exhausted they must be physically and emotionally. As I think about that experience, and many others who are feeling isolated and alone, I find myself drawn to the prophet Isaiah.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah were written hundred 20 years before the Babylonian exile, but the second half was clearly written towards the people in exile in Babylon. At the end of chapter 40, we find these words which I have read on multiple occasions over the past 10 months.

**BIBLE (Use VIDEO footage of Spotted Eagle in Israel as background and start at :06)**

**<sup>26</sup> Look up into the heavens.  
Who created all the stars?  
He brings them out like an army, one after another,  
calling each by its name.  
Because of his great power and incomparable strength,  
not a single one is missing.**

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>28</sup> Have you never heard?  
Have you never understood?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of all the earth.  
He never grows weak or weary.  
No one can measure the depths of his understanding.  
<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the weak  
and strength to the powerless.  
<sup>30</sup> Even youths will become weak and tired,  
and young men will fall in exhaustion.  
<sup>31</sup> But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.  
They will soar high on wings like eagles.  
They will run and not grow weary.  
They will walk and not faint.**

**(BLANK WHILE VIDEO CONTINUES TO PLAY)**

This is the spotted Eagle in Israel, soaring. We are meant to get this idea that God is bearing us up and lifting us up in our weakness. There is this powerful idea that in weakness, God will provide strength, and this is meant to be good, good news for us. This Scripture is a powerful reminder that God is walking with us. Each one of us can be instruments of God's grace. God's heart breaks with us and the one thing we can do is hold on to God. We



remember that God is walking with us, using us and ministering to us. God's promise is that when we don't have the strength to carry on, strength will come from God. We would be able to rise up on wings like eagles, we will walk and not be faint.

The apostle Paul was a faithful Jew and would have known the words of the Jewish prophets from the Hebrew Bible. He was not afraid to be weak, and he knew that his weakness could actually be a great strength when it is given into the hands of God. Here is what he writes in 1 Corinthians 9.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>22</sup> When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. <sup>23</sup> I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.**

Paul invites each one of us to share the good news and share in its blessings by entering into those weak and difficult places, entering into pandemic, entering into exile. It is here, in our weakness, that we can find strength and hope and courage to share with others in the world.

I remember hearing about a true story of a 10-year-old boy decided to study judo despite the fact that he had lost his left arm in a devastating car accident. The boy began lessons with an old Japanese judo master. He was doing so well, he couldn't understand why, after three months of training, the master had taught him only one move.

"Sensei," the boy finally at, "Shouldn't I be learning more moves?"

The sensei replied, "This is the only move you know, but this is the only move you will ever need to know."

Not quite understanding, but believing his teacher, the boy kept training. Several months later, the sensei took the boy to his first

tournament. Surprising himself, the boy easily won his first two matches. The third match proved to be more difficult, but after some time, his opponent became impatient and charged. The boy deft Lee used his one move to win the match. Still amazed by his success, the boy was now in the finals.

This time, his opponent was much bigger, stronger, and more experienced. For a while, the boy appeared to be overmatched. Concerns of the boy might get hurt, the referee called the timeout. He was about to stop the match when the sensei intervened and insisted, “No, let him continue.”

Soon after the match resumed, his opponent made a critical mistake. He dropped his guard. Instantly the boy uses move dependent. The boy had won the match and tournament. He was champion.

On the way home, the boy and sensei reviewed every move and each and every match. Finally, the boy summoned the courage to ask what was really on his mind.

“Sensei, how did I win the tournament was only one move?”

“You one for two reasons,” the sensei answered. “First, you’ve almost mastered one of the most difficult frozen all of judo. And second, the only known defense for that move is for your client to grab your left arm, which you don’t have. Your biggest weakness was really your biggest strength.”

As a powerful biblical principle. Sometimes, we feel that we have certain weaknesses, and we blame God, the circumstances, or even ourselves. We never fully realize that it is only in our weakness where God can really act or move, and it’s about God and not about us. The apostle Paul speaks about this when he is describing a thorn in his flesh, which many believe might be a problem with his eyesight like macular degeneration. He writes this in 2 Corinthians 12.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>8</sup> Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. <sup>9</sup> Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. <sup>10</sup> That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

The promise is that in our weakness is when God shows up the most to bring a strength.

I preached a sermon the first week we were able to worship outdoors and in person again earlier this summer where we talked about hope at the end of our rope. We learn that the Hebrew word “kavah” in a text from Isaiah about waiting on the Lord, also means rope. We talked and that sermon about finding hope at the end of our rope. I want to bring that image out again, but this way a bit differently.

## **GRAPHIC      Tow rope**

My wife texted me a couple weeks ago after that big snow and she had gotten stuck pulling off the side of the road where she was going to take the dogs for a walk. I arrived, and luckily, we had one of these in our car, a tow rope. As I was reflecting upon connecting this rope to the back of my truck and then to her car, I realize that the rope by itself is pretty useless. It needs to have something on the end with some power and strength. We were able to pull the car out of the snowbank because my truck was on nice pavement and the rope was long enough and strong enough to hold while I pulled the other car to safety.

The good news, the good, good news, is that God offers to be our strength, are very present help in times of troubles. God is that strength at the end of our rope, helping to pull us to safety when we can’t get there

ourselves. God promises to carry us on wings like eagles so we can walk and not grow weary or faint.

Paul talks about God's grace being all that we need, and today we and our time with Communion, something meant to be a physical, tangible reminder of God's grace. We are meant to taste the goodness of God in the bread and the cup. We are meant to be reminded that the cross is a gift meant to wash over us and give us strength when we feel weak.

### **SLIDE      Communion**

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread and broke it and said, "This is my body which is given for you. Whenever you eat this remember the life and the strength I am giving you is a gift."

Likewise, when Jesus took the cup, he said, "This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. Whenever you drink this, remember that I have now given you the strength to be forgiven and to offer forgiveness to others. Do this as often as you will remember of me."

*Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon these elements here, and in every place as people are gathering for worship with us today. May these be for us the bread of life and the cup of salvation, bringing us strength in our weakness. May we experience your good, good news as we taste the bread and the juice. God, we recognize that we often feel like we have to do everything ourselves and have the strength to get through life on our own, pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps as we are often told. This meal reminds us that we need you and we need to other. Most of all, we need your son Jesus and the gift of grace which strengthens us and brings us power in the midst of exile. We pray for that gift of strength today, in the name of your son Jesus. Amen.*