

Sermon Title: Strength is Meekness, The Final Week, Week Six

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Sermon Questions:

- What does strength look like to you?
- Jesus was mocked as he was arrested and then faced five trials (Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again). What parts of these strike you the most?
- When Jesus was arrested the disciples asked if they should draw their swords (Luke 22:49), and Jesus tells them to put them away. What does it mean that Jesus did not endorse retaliation?
- Read Luke 22:63-65 and Matthew 26:67-68 about the Sanhedrin lining up to hit Jesus in the face, while he was blindfolded, and ask him to prophecy and tell them who hit him. If you were in this situation, and you had the power to call down an army of angels to defend you, how would you keep that power in and not defend yourself?
- In 1 Peter 2:21-23 we are called to walk in Jesus steps, that he is an example for us, specifically in not retaliating. What does that look like in your life?
- How can you live without defending yourself in marriage, with your children, your parents, friends, and others?

Transcript

So my 15th birthday was memorable for lots of reasons. But on my 15th birthday, three friends and I, who our self title of ourselves was the awesome Foursome, we went out to a movie and it was a little bit special because one of my friends was a year older. He had been held back in school, he already had his driver's license. So it was the four of us in like our own car heading out to see a movie and we went and saw First Blood. It was the beginning Rambo movie.

If that means nothing to you, you're okay. It is the typical machismo Americana. Think like John Wayne and Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger and Charlotte Johansson and Angelina Jolie, like all wrapped up together, about to catch the bad guys. That's the scene. And we came out of that movie.

I've never been in a fight in my life. We came out of that movie begging for a fight. We were so filled with, like, we were just so filled with adrenaline. We can. We were begging for a car to drive by us and cuss at us through the windows so we could rip the doors off, pull the people

out and just conquer in dominion.

And I share that because it's just a sliver of what America portrays as strength. If you say strength and power in a Western mind, we think of that as. As dominance, as control. We think of that as providing and protecting and stewarding. We think of that as.

As overseeing the whole thing as a. As an aspect of authority. It's tough, it's aggressive and it's in control. It's. It's the stoic ability to suppress emotions and control emotions and to lead.

We're walking through a series looking at the last week of Jesus life As we near Easter today, we're going to consider the very end of Thursday night and just half of Friday. And as we do, we're going to see that strength by Jesus definition is meekness. That strength is not aggression. That true power is restrained in humility and meekness and love. Not what we typically think of.

We think of strength like a mighty oak. It's a powerful tree that's unbending and it's beautiful to look at. No one's going to push that thing over.

But Jesus doesn't come as a mighty oak. He comes as a tender shoot out of dry ground. In fact, listen to just two prophecies about him from the Old Testament. Isaiah's Servant Songs. This is out of Isaiah, chapter 42.

Behold my servant whom I uphold, my Chosen One, in whom my soul delights. I have put My spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break.

Later in a another servant song. In Isaiah, chapter 53, we read these words. For he grew up before him. This is the Messiah, this is Christ. For he grew up before him like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground.

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. It's very clear in Christ strength is meekness, not the strongman.

So we're going to enter into the story. Enter into the story late on Thursday night. So Christ has gathered his disciples together on Thursday for a Passover meal where he washes their feet. And he tells them that he is the body that's broken for them, the bread. He is the cup that's poured out for them in his blood.

And then Judas leaves to betray Jesus. And he takes Jesus, takes his disciples to the garden of

Gethsemane, just to the east of the gates of Jerusalem. And last week you heard Andrew do a fantastic job taking us into the heart of Jesus, crying out, wrestling with God over this calling over the cross that lies before Jesus. And as Jesus cries out his disciples, his disciples sleep. It's about maybe 11 o' clock at night.

Jesus has finished praying. And now, and now he turns and he gathers his disciples because Judas, with an armed band of soldiers behind him, approach the garden. Let's pick up in Luke 22, starting in verse 47, while he, Jesus, was still speaking, there came a crowd. And the man called Judas, one of the 12, was leading them. He drew near to Judas to kiss him.

But Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? Jesus meekness on this night begins. Even here. Jesus could have exposed Judas. He could have powerfully repelled Judas and the soldiers.

Instead, he receives the kiss of betrayal. Continues in verse 49. And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword?

Disciples are ready to go now. They were asleep during the prayer, but now they're ready. Here's the fight. And they're ready to pull those doors off. Just like Greg and his friends, armed.

Here it comes. Here comes the soldiers. This is what we've been waiting for. But has it? Has it?

Have you forgotten everything of his teachings. Just go back to the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous sermon of Jesus where he says these words. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

But those words are fated. Now for the disciples, or if not fated, maybe they think this constitutes an exception to the rule. I mean, if I was there, I'd probably be in the same place. Like yes, we get it. Normally you turn the other cheek.

But this time it's you, Jesus, it's the soldiers. It's. Everything's going to fall apart if we let this happen. And so Peter the fisherman pulls out his sword and ever so bravely approaches this group. Now he approaches the high priest servant named Malchus.

It's a group of armed soldiers. But he comes after Malchus because well, he picks on someone that he can actually fight. He whips out his sword and he. He tries to take Malchus head off. But he is after all, a fisherman.

And he takes his ear off.

Jesus is like whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, what are you. What are we doing? It's no.

Jesus stoops down in the dirt and he picks up Malchus ear. And in his last miracle here on earth, he heals the high priest servant who came to arrest him.

He is the one who not only meets sword with sword, but he meets sword with healing. He heals those who come after him.

Jesus. Jesus, from the very start of his final day, shows us that strength is found in meekness. From that point on, all through the night, Jesus faces five trials. From midnight until nine in the morning, he's led first to Annas house, then to Caiaphas house with the Sanhedrin. From there he's led to Pilate, then to Herod, and then finally back to Pilate.

Before the path is set for the crucifixion. We're going to walk through each of those trials as they unfold. The first is Annas. So the timeframe is between midnight and 2:30 in the morning. Annas is the former high priest.

He's not the high priest now. In fact, his son in law, Caiaphas is the functioning high priest. But everybody knows Caiaphas is weak. And Annas, Annas is the real power holder. Even though he's been retired about 15 years, in a sense he holds all the power strings.

But behind the scenes. And so Jesus bound in the garden is Led to Annas house. And there Annas questions him. He wants to know about his teaching.

And Jesus hears the question. And he says, my teaching, it's all been public.

I taught in your temple, in the courts. Lots of people heard my teaching. I've taught on the hillsides. My teaching isn't a secret. If you want to know about my teaching, ask the people.

You don't need to ask me. And when he said that there was a guard standing next to Jesus that turned and struck him. You know who you're talking to?

Is that how you talk to the high priest?

And it's a little ironic because if you kind of go back in time and oversee the situation, you'd whisper in his ear, do you have any idea who you just slapped?

The king of glory, the creator of the universe. That's God.

We hear this unfold in John chapter 18. I'm going to read starting in verse 22. When he had said these things, one of the officers standing struck Jesus with his hand, saying, is that how

you answer the high priest? Jesus answered him, if what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me?

Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest. So the first trial comes and goes and we see Jesus holding back in restraint his power.

In humility and in meekness. He doesn't defend himself. He surrenders to Annas. So now they take Jesus to Caiaphas, the son in law of Annas, the acting high priest and the Sanhedrin 70 of the ruling elders of Jerusalem of Judaism. And as they take Jesus to the house, let's not Forget it's about 2:30 in the morning.

2:30 in the morning is when this trial's taking place. These are going to happen all throughout the night. Now I don't know if this is my own parents warning to me as a young man who just got his driver's license, John, nothing good happens after midnight. Same advice we gave our own kids. Nothing good happens after midnight.

It's true. And so this is not just some like Jewish custom that you're not used to, of a trial taking place in the middle of the night. No, it's exactly as your intuition would tell you. Something is fishy. This is a sham of a trial, a mockery of justice.

And they're doing so because they want to cherry pick the people. They want to pull in those who are under their power and control and they want to force the execution of this Jesus of Nazareth, this one who Claims to be God, and they want to force it before sundown of that day when Passover begins. And so the trial begins. They bring forward witnesses who bring forward false testimony of Jesus. And like so much false testimony, there's a kernel of truth in much of what they say, and yet there's twisting and distortion.

So, for instance, they say this man claims that he's going to tear down the temple and then rebuild it in three days. He's a threat to us because he's a threat to our centralized place of worship, the holy place.

They demand that Jesus responds, and he doesn't speak a word. They continue to bring up false witness after false witness, and Jesus doesn't respond. Finally, finally, Jesus says this one thing in that trial. This. This is not the final judgment.

You know, Jesus says, for one day, I will come on the clouds and I will be the final judge.

Authority is not with you. Jesus says, the final authority is with me. I am submitting. I am in meekness, walking through this from for the sake of my people. And so the leaders of the Sanhedrin come forward and they spit on him and they mock him and they slap him across the face.

Luke records it this way in Luke 22. He says this. Now, the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, prophesy, who is it that struck you? And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

Oh, so you, you're this great, high, powerful one. So show us your power demonstrated. They're mocking him. Matthew records the same event this way over in Matthew 26. Then they spit on his face and struck him, and some slapped him, saying prophesy to us.

You, Christ, who is it that struck you? Vileness. They treat him like a circus animal. Now, I don't know if you can imagine yourself in the sandals of Jesus in that moment, but I'm going to tell you, if I was there in all of my flesh and all of my sin, oh, I would have prophesied. I would have told them exactly what was going to happen to them.

I would have called down the host of angels at my command to bring the power and authority from on high to show who was in charge. But not Christ. Not Christ. He withholds. He cares so much about his mission, about those who.

Whom he loves, who he's come to die for, that he restrains his authority out of love. Because strength is found in meekness in the kingdom of God. Strength isn't Domineering.

Strength isn't controlling. Strength is meek.

One of the places you can go in Jerusalem is Caiaphas house.

We don't know with 100% certainty that it was his house. But it is a priest's house from the time of Jesus, and it's a very wealthy priest's house. So it's fitting that it's the high priest Caiaphas. And in the bedrock under that home there is a cistern, would have originally been dug to hold water. But there are markings in the cistern that would indicate that it had been used as a prison at times.

And just feet away from the cistern, a low ceiling with a rip of rock that hangs down. There are carvings of two holes through the rock where it's very obvious that a human being would have been tied up by their hands to be beaten in that place and in that space. One of the things that I love to do is to sing. There's something about the echo of the sound off the hard walls of the cistern. And it's sorrowful, and it brings you into that time.

There's an ancient hymn. We don't sing it very often because the hymn from beginning to end is about sorrow. Called O Sacred Head. It's written in the 1100s.

O Sacred Head, now wounded with grief and shame, Weighed down, now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown, how pale thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn. How does that visage languish which once was bright as mo.

Abused, mocked, spit upon, defiled, shamed. Jesus is now dragged to Pilate's place of residence. Pilate was the Roman prefect of Judea, I think, Governor. And the reason that the Jews now take Jesus to Pilate is not because they need someone to discern what's right and wrong, but because they need the arm of power to execute this man. You see, they had no ability, as those who were vassals to the state of Rome, to execute anyone.

And so they drag him to the house of Pilate at 6:30 in the morning or thereabouts. And there we see this exchange take place as Pilate is placed in this position, and they're coercing him to use his power to destroy this man, this threat against their kingdom, against their power over in Luke 23:1, the story picks up. Then the whole company of them arose and brought him Jesus before Pilate. And there they began to accuse him of. What's the accusation?

Well, that he claims to be the king of the Jews. Why that accusation? Because to be the king of the Jews is to claim and be a threat to the Roman might of the region. Pilate pulls Jesus aside and says, tell me about this accusation.

Jesus essentially says, well, do you really want to know? Or are you just. Are you just arbitrating this? Are you a seeker of the truth about who I am?

Pilate discerns this is not a man, he's a threat. He's a man who's in the crosshairs of his subjects who have used him. And so he brings Jesus back out. And he says this in verse four. Then Pilate said to the chief priests in the crowds, I find no guilt in this man.

But they were urgent saying, he stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee, even to this place. And so Pilate then pushes Jesus, okay, you say he's in Galilee. He pushes him to the one underneath him. In charge of Galilee, we might call him like a mayor. This is now Herod.

Called himself the King of the Jews. He was neither a king nor actually even a Jew. So ironic little title there shows the puffery of power. And the King of the Jews is taken to the King of the Jews. And Herod, we see, is more than happy to side with the accusers, more than happy to play this little political game and to mock the one who potentially as a threat to him.

This is in Luke 23. The chief priests and scribes stood by vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. In other words, got my thumbs up to take him down.

Mocks him. He joins with him, and the powers are set against the all powerful one, mocking him, despising him. And now he heads back to Pilate.

From eternity past, Jesus had the most beautiful angelic beings bowing down before him, continually singing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. He trades all that to be born a man and now tossed back and forth through the night, is mocked and ridiculed. They take him back to Pilate. It's eight or so in the morning now.

They stand out front. They urge Pilate to take him. They want him to be killed. We can't kill him. So you take him and do it.

And Pilate brings Jesus into his house for a private conversation. The Jews won't go into Pilate's house for its defilement to go into a Roman's home. So he brings him in his palace, Are you king?

Are you king? And Jesus. Jesus responds to him. Back in the Gospel of John, in chapter 18, Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews.

But my kingdom is is not from the world. Do you hear the tone of strength again in that response? See, my kingdom's not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then we'd draw swords, then we'd fight, then we'd match blow for blow, because that's what the world does. But my kingdom is not of this world.

My kingdom. We don't display strength in the same way.

Herod or Pilate is baffled. He's baffled at this Jesus. And again he declares him innocent. He finds nothing in him.

Later talks about the truth with him. And it says this in verse 38. After he said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in him.

He sees a way out. He feels the trap. He doesn't want to kill Jesus. He says, you have a custom that I'm allowed to release a prisoner to you. What would you say to release this Jesus, king of the Jews, to you?

And they shout out, we want Barabbas. We want Barabbas. Now, Barabbas is known as a notorious murderer. Everyone knows he is a vile, rude human being.

They say, we want him. As for Jesus, crucify him. Crucify him. Crucify him. All the while, Jesus,

like a lamb to the slaughter, doesn't utter a word in his defense.

And not once does he think of flexing his muscles, so to speak, as the way the world does. But he shows strength through meekness.

So Pilate, bending to the will of the crowd, has Jesus flogged, whipped, A severe beating, beating known to take the lives of many. It was so cruel. He flogs Jesus and hopes that the crowd will be appeased with that continuing in John, we read in verse 19. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.

They came up to him saying, hail, King of the Jews, and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, see, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in him. So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, behold the man I've beaten This innocent man, are you not happy? Is your blood thirst not sated?

It's not. When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, crucify him. Crucify him. Pilate said to them, take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.

The Jews answered him, we have a law, and according to that law, he ought to die because he made himself the Son of God. They finally come out with it. This is the real reason we're here. He's not just claimed to be king of the Jews, he's claimed to be a son of God. The Son of God.

And it's because of that blasphemy, because of that claim to be God himself. That's why he's here. And Pilate now gets the whole truth. He responds in shock and fear. When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.

He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer.

He's trying to sort this out. His wife has had a dream about this man, this warning. His gut tells him that this isn't right. And yet the reality is he is a political animal, and he wants to solve this while giving himself an option out on the other side. And Pilate's begging for Jesus just would you just deny this?

Would you just say no, and I have a reasonable excuse to let you go? Verse 10. So Pilate said to him, you will not speak to me. Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Work with me here.

He's saying, Jesus answered him, you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been

given you from above.

Observe what's just happened over the course of this night. The power of the Jewish leaders of Annas and Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, all brought to bear against Jesus. The power of the Roman state, Pilate and Herod, brought to bear against Jesus. And if you were there and you were watching and you saw this man in the crosshairs of this, you would say, they have all the power. He has none.

And Jesus says, don't confuse meekness for weakness. Don't confuse my submission. For who actually has authority here?

I am the Son of God, the high King of heaven, and all things are in my sovereign reign. And still I submit for the sake of those I love, for the sake of the care and the salvation of my sheep, I submit myself unto death. Jesus, the embodiment. The embodiment of everything, power of everything. Strong demonstrates that in his submission and in his meekness.

I cannot read these passages without weeping, without imagining the idea of the Sanhedrin lining up with Jesus in a blindfold, striking him. Oh, if you're so great, tell me who just hit you. Tell me who just hit you, knowing he's the King of glory.

It's a lot.

But the most shocking thing about this narrative, about this passage, this story, is not that the King of Glory goes like a lamb to the slaughter. It's not that the King of glory restrains his power and strength to display it in humility and meekness. The most shocking thing is, is that there is an invitation for you and for me to follow in his steps.

In First Peter, chapter two, we read these for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued in trusting him self to him who judges justly.

Now, the shocking thing here is there is an invitation in Good Friday for you and I to carry our cross and die to ourselves too. I mean, how are we to apply this in our lives? First, if you have any measure of authority, whatever that looks like, be the authority over your little brother. Consider, consider humbly what authority looks like in the kingdom of God and what authority looks like in this world, because they are radically two very different things.

I think there's an invitation here for marriages. In marriage this week, would we choose to lose every disagreement or argument?

Would we set aside the feeling to defend ourselves, the desire to win, the desire to leverage our preferences and just die to ourselves to love another?

Perhaps it's in parenting. Parenting authority has unfortunately, at times been used just to control. Control is an awfully good thing.

So we raise our voice, we shout, we try to control and put someone into a restraint and use authority. And there's an invitation here to not raise our voice and not control and not domineer, but with meekness, humility, and grace, love another person. Maybe the tables are turned. Maybe there's a child looking up at parents. They don't understand me.

They don't listen to me. They don't care. You can get frustrated, you can get angry. And if there's any. Any narrative in all of Scripture that would tell us if we get frustrated or angry, it is a great time to die to oneself, because that frustration and that anger does not accomplish righteousness.

And there's an invitation to die to ourselves, to love another person. There's an invitation here with friends, with co workers, with neighbors, an invitation here to serve, to die to ourselves, to love, to set aside our own preferences, our own desires, our own thoughts and love others.

This is the path Jesus took. And it's a path that not only washed away our sins, it's a path that gave us an example of how we are to live. It's radically different than the message we get bombarded with every day as some kind of machismo strength.

We get to die to ourselves and gaze at Jesus and walk in his steps together. Would you pray with me, Lord? This is humbling.

Everything in this world tells us to flex might, to control things.

But like a lamb to the slaughter, you paved a way that's scary and you invite us into it.

And I ask that you would help us decrease, help us serve, help us walk in humility and meekness and kindness and love, to put others in front of ourselves. This day, this week, with our lives, in the precious and beautiful and saving name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. Amen. Let's go ahead and stand as we close.