

I Am Weak, But I Am Hopeful

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[0 : 00] Hi, Table Church family. This is Pastor Ray, or some of you might call me Pastor Ramon. I am looking forward to bringing a word today to you.

I will admit that this has been a tough season for me, and that's just being very transparent. But I hope that today I will cover just my thoughts that I have been led to share with you, and that you will find something out of this or that it will resonate with your soul or with your spirit.

So, let's pray. Gracious God, I am so grateful that you've given me this chance to speak to your people, to know that you've called me as a servant to lead your people, to respond to your people, to be amongst your people, and that you are speaking through me.

So, God, I humble myself in your presence that what is said is said straight from you, the Holy Spirit, and that it is received and interpreted in the way that brings you glory and the way that brings you power.

In the Master's name of Jesus, Amen. If I had a title, which I don't know that I've titled many of my sermons at the Table Church, I would title this sermon, I Am Weak, But I Am Hopeful.

[1 : 40] We'll dive right in. We are going to come from the scripture, Ephesians 6. And this is Paul in his letter to Ephesus, where he is talking about who we might wrestle against.

And, yeah, just going to share it. And mind you, this is the time when Paul is also locked up. So, Ephesians 6, we're going to do verse 10, and then we'll jump down a little bit.

And throughout this, I'm going to read some scriptures that hopefully will guide you through where I've been and where I'm going, and hopefully help you as well. Ephesians 6, 10 says this.

Paul says, He then later comes back a few stanzas down in verse number 18, and he says, He then says, He then says,

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, and I need y'all to know, this is the part that talks to me. Whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I, I am ambassador in chains, pray that I may declare it fearlessly, fearlessly, as I should.

[4 : 05] And so, Paul, a servant and an advocate of the Lord, he wrote this letter as he was shackled in cuffs as a prisoner, a prisoner who protested for Jesus and Jesus' people, knowing, and watching not only Jesus, but also Jesus' followers who chose to rebel against the established order, were being persecuted by the Pharisees throughout the land.

Paul is led to call out the spiritual forces of evil that we fight against, acknowledging that we needed Christ to fight off the enemy that we cannot see.

trusting that in our blind weakness, through prayer, God's strength would fight for us.

In all truthfulness, family, these last few weeks have been pretty intense, hard, and just plain overwhelming.

I, an ambassador in chains, I've mourned over death. I have grieved over the bloodshed and senseless murders.

[5 : 33] I have cried and hurt in undurable pain for myself and for the millions of people who are tired. I, an ambassador in chains, I've wailed, especially for young people who are acting out, but not without cause.

They are the children who have been ignored and bullied, abused, and molested by their own parents. Our country, America, who instead of accepting them and loving them, have responded to the outcries that originate from the abusive shores of America, by scolding them and yelling at them and amplifying their degradation.

Selfishly, forcing them to remain silent, because to admit that America's quietness has only contributed to the hurt will cause America more shame.

So America, our parent, much like the Pharisees, has selfishly proclaimed that the unwanted, adopted kids, who are now speaking up, should be marked and labeled as the disorderly and the malfunctioning, the hypocrisy of our parent, who has miscondacted themselves, who illegally adopted us, who stole us, and then murdered our siblings, murdered our aunts, murdered our uncles, America, who aborted us, and threw away our fetuses in the middle of oceans, to sharks with no proper last rites because her pregnancy was too rough, our adopted parent, America, who reached deep into another woman's womb during the gestation of migration and immigration, only to snatch out the embryos of my ancestors and to place her premature babies right into the chains of slavery and into his chopping boards.

[8 : 07] It's that America in its hypocrisy that stands in total disregard of his sins as it now fails to call out the atrocities of its past.

instead, he alludes that its abused children have no right to scream and yell or to break down the very streets that were built on our scared, beaten, and bloody backs.

I, an ambassador in chains and one of those children appointed to call out the wrongs of the world, to identify the powers and rulers of darkness, the evil mentality and presence of spiritual forces that enable oppression and yet simultaneously proclaim the good news of Christ, the redemption of his blood and his merciful forgiveness.

But God, I am weak. My adoptive parent has chased me as Saul chased David and launched spears of bullets at my head.

God, I am weak. The chains of injustice are too tight and they are depriving me of a pulse. I suffocate in the silence of willing negligence.

[9 : 40] I am smothered by America's denial of racism and I stifle in the screams of decades of systematic oppression. I, an ambassador of Christ, am drowning in the policies of tyranny that refrain me from the very same scriptures, from the opportunities of equality and deny my basic unalienable rights.

I, an ambassador of Christ, like Paul, I'm asked to share the good news of freedom from the very same scriptures that have been used to justify enslaving me and my people.

The scriptures misused by America, our Pharaoh, while he transported our piled high bodies through the exodus of enslavement.

scriptures used to support his law when they were read out loud as he nailed me to the same cross that I was told released me from bondage.

I, an ambassador for Christ, am suffering just as Christ suffered. I, an ambassador for Christ, consistently strangled from the degrading of my tight curly hair, my long flowing locks and the melanin of my skin.

[11 : 12] I suffocate in the smog of resentment for my existence. I am dying of asphyxiation. I, an ambassador of Christ, was taught to stand in the churches and the temples with people who willfully deny my humanization and categorize me as a mere animal and still expect me to fearlessly declare the good news of Jesus all while there's a rope and a knee on my neck.

To declare he is good even though I cannot breathe. Y'all, I am weak.

Chained and suppressed by questions that white privilege, white guilt, and black identity supply as burdens. Asking myself, Ramon, how do I prepare a message in this season for a multi-ethnic church?

How do I not appear too political? How do I appeal to all sides? How do I not be overdramatic? How do I explain all lives matter only if black lives matter?

How do I not alienate our allies? How do I use inclusive terminology? How do I not sell out from my own people?

[12 : 47] How do I not negate other people of color? How do I speak the truth of Jesus? How do I represent God? How do I practice holy boldness?

Am I willing to offend for Christ's sake? How do I defend the peaceful protest of Kaepernick while, though not in agreeance with looting, share that I understand the emotion behind those who riot? How do I get them to understand that practicing Christianity out loud is that a privilege that was fought for and died for just as we fight and die now?

We have all tried our hardest to endure through COVID-19 and I add for some of us the pain of the fact that it disproportionately affects the black communities.

Then, the news of the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery. Directly behind that came the killing of Breonna Teller, followed by the murder of George Floyd, which resulted in protests both peaceful and non-peaceful.

[13 : 58] For most of us, the pressure is insurmountable. Most of us are too weighed down and many of us are too confused and overwhelmed to know what to even pray for, how to even pray for it.

And so, in a moment of true honesty and transparency, I want to admit to you, Table Church, that in this season, I too have no idea how to pray or what exactly I am praying for.

And as I sat with my thoughts and I cried and I was angry and I have talked to white friends and black friends and Asian friends and Spanish friends and in this moment that I have been conflicted, in this moment where I don't understand our political system, the Spirit led me to Paul.

Paul. And I read for you Ephesians, but I was led to Paul's letter to Rome. In the biblical times when there was racial, economic, and cultural tensions, they were on the rise.

Specifically, between the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul takes the time to address the very cultures that he stands between. See, Paul, born of one culture, raised in privilege, and at one point in his life, Paul was definitely the one who screamed, all lives matter.

[15 : 44] Blinded by that same privilege and ready to execute those, anybody who protested, those who dared to challenge the established religious system and doctrine of the day, it wasn't until God completely blinded Paul that he was able to hear and eventually see the truth of God past himself.

Thus, Paul, now converted from an ignorant prisoner of pride to a fully aware and willing prisoner of the Lord, has humbly accepted the strength of weakness.

weakness. It is at this crossroads of awareness that Paul is awakened. It is here where Paul and Ramon share the burden of responsibility to a vast diversity of people.

It is here where Pastor Angela, Pastor Jessica, Pastor Anthony, and Pastor Richard, and dare I say, all of you are called. It is the intersection of humbled weakness and heightened awareness that we have inherited a responsibility to look far beyond the status quo and the norms.

It's that place where we are challenged to admit that privilege, privilege over other humans cannot exist or survive in Christ.

[17 : 11] Only those who willingly choose to be weak for the sake of God's strength will last. will last. Only those who are willing to shackle themselves by the chains of equity and nail themselves together to the cross for the sake of righteous freedom will last.

But y'all, I am weak. And it is here at this very place of willful torment that I find myself, unsure of what to say and how to lead, ambiguously ripped between righteous indignation for the minority and just outright being pissed off for those in the majority.

I am weak, crying, desolate, weak. It is at this place that I am lost for words, bereaved of peace and lost for empathy.

I am weak. Paul, Paul who is vexed in some of the same conflict, in some of the same tensions between Jews and Gentiles, Jesus followers and non-Jesus followers.

He addresses this in Romans, Romans 8. At verse 26 he says, in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness, we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us, the worldless groans, and he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

[18 : 59] Ultimately, Paul is saying it is in these moments when we're not sure what to pray for or how to pray that God prays for us through us, that the Holy Spirit prays through our moans and our groans and our cries and our wails.

Earlier in Romans 5, we're told that all of creation and the universe is unsettled and longs for restoration to our Creator. Although we were separated from God and then redeemed through the death of Jesus, we have not been fully restored to our original state.

And because of that separation, all of creation, all of creation fills its effects. The universe and all it encompasses longs for restoration like a baby boy cries for his mother.

And so though you might be redeemed, though I might be redeemed, we are still longing to be restored to the perfection of God. I am reminded that we are all torn.

I'm reminded that we are all lost. I'm reminded that there is sin in this world. I am reminded that though we are saved, we are not free from suffering. Paul reminds us that in tough times we are speechless.

[20 : 21] We have no words. We cry. We mourn. We grieve. We yell. We don't understand. God. The Holy Spirit, Paul says literally, it literally speaks for us, through us, to God's self.

Paul is saying here that he, the God of the universe, speaks when we don't have the words to say. And sometimes that voice, the best power it has is through our moans and through our groans. It's why I wrote the song Breathe and Rock. And if you haven't had the time, I implore you to go and stream that song. You'll hear it with new ears because what I'm really saying is that sometimes God just requires us to breathe and rock.

And it's in that breathing, it's in that rocking that the spirit is moved and that God hears. it's in the sense that we don't all have the answers, that we are not God, and that is exactly what should humble us.

And so Paul, after his encounter with Christ, chooses to leave his privilege of being with the majority behind, and he attaches himself to the fight of the minority. He leaves the comfort of the law and uses his education to support the cry of Jesus.

[21 : 49] He leaves the very same privilege that allowed him to blindly write-off and martyr and murder a people who did not look like him. He has now chosen to abandon that same privilege.

He has turned from upholding the laws to rebelling and protesting against them. He has willingly gone from hunter to hunted.

Oh, Paul, what have you done? Why have you joined the side of thugs? Can't you hear it? The leaders of the time? Why have you attached yourself with those looters and those rioters?

Why are you being seen with those animals? Why are you being seen with those hoodlums? Paul, why are you hanging out in the ghetto? But perhaps Paul, now a great student of Jesus related to the humility of God, who could have just wiped out the human race altogether, but chose instead to experience it firsthand.

a creator who didn't have to come to earth, but when he did, chose to be born and birthed in a lonely manger in some hay. Perhaps Paul recognized a Messiah who was not bound by gravitational rules, that still chose not to fly, chose not to drive, chose not to ride an elephant, chose not to hop on a camel, chose not to appear on a horse, but instead a king chose a funny-looking donkey.

[23 : 25] Perhaps Paul recalled that his majesty did not network with the Pharisees, he did not network with the Sadducees, and he did not network with those in established power, but rather Jesus aligned himself with the lower class, the impoverished, the disenfranchised, the handicapped, and the ghetto.

And so Paul, Paul chooses to take the risk of a former oppressor and bravely walks into the streets with the oppressed in hopes of his own redemption.

He understood that in order for all lives to matter, not only must the Jews matter, but now the Gentiles must matter. He understood that in order for all lives to matter, that the poor must matter. He so, and so he commits to the side of the oppressed. And as Paul joins the marches and the protests, as he faces the same mentality that led him down the road of Damascus in hopes to slaughter the voices screaming for equality, as he confronts the bigotry and the discrimination he once was a part of, he understands that this fight is not just about the flesh.

Paul uses his prophetic voice and makes a spiritual voice. He says, do a declaration, that he calls out the mentality, the evil, the spiritual forces that we don't see that are at work.

[25 : 06] for our struggle, he says, is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

If you were to ask me why is it more difficult now to create a specific demand for justice, if you were asked to say, Ramon, what's so different about this fight compared to maybe that of the 1960s or the 1970s, I would simply say mentality.

You see, when we were fighting back then, we were fighting for equality in the form of tangible things like the right to vote or the right to attend the same schools as white folks did.

We fought for things like being able to sit in the same place in theaters. We fought that we could ride the bus and sit wherever we wanted to sit.

We fought so that we could go and appear in the same places that our white counterparts appeared. But now, in this day and time, it's been harder to put a tangible request on what we're fighting for because people and it's harder to see a mentality, a racist mentality change.

[26 : 39] Anybody can act like they're not racist. Doesn't mean that they aren't. So then what, Paul? What do we do? Who then, Paul? Who do we rely on?

How then, Paul, do we confront this evil? Because, Paul, I'm tired. Paul, I am weary. Paul, I am worn. But Paul, who in his letter to Ephesians calls out spiritual oppression, has prophetically answered his own question back in his letter to the Romans.

In Paul's conversion, his dedication to follow the leadership and servanthood of Christ, in his inclination to submit to Christ, he finds the keys to fighting the mentality of racism and oppression. You ready? the spiritual and demonic influences and the strongholds, Paul prophetically speaks on to how we can attack. We don't really talk about this place of spiritual strongholds, of demonic influences anymore.

We don't really get deep into the Bible. And it's most likely because people always are like, well, that's too spooky. But Table Church, family, we have got to start talking about the mentality, the strongholds, the spiritual strongholds, the weakness of evil.

[27 : 59] Paul, who is now hunted, he's gone from hunter to hunted, now is the persecuted, says this in his commitment to spiritual reform.

Verse 35, he says, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, for your sake, he's saying, for Christ's sake, we face death all day long. We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered.

No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Paul says, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor demons, nor neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor death, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Family, I am weak. I am weak from the decades, centuries of blood that runs from sea to shining sea.

[29 : 17] Family, I am weak from the endless names that have been omitted from our history books who were tossed like unwanted trash over the wooded boats into the abyss of the raging seas, the raging oceans.

I am weak from the countless young people who are incarcerated for drugs that were used as weapons as the majority infiltrated our communities with illegal substances in order to wipe out our existence.

I am weak from the label of deadbeat father when it was the white masters who raped our women and then left us or sold us into the fields of slavery.

I am weak. But table, I am also hopeful. I am hopeful that in my weakness, God's strength is made strong.

I am hopeful that the majority will encounter the real and true Jesus and convert as Paul did to the side of the minority in the fight for justice.

[30 : 30] I am hopeful that in our redemption, we are being reconnected to a God that is on the side of the oppressed. I am hopeful that we are arming ourselves for a battle, a battle against the wickedness of injustice by wearing the shackles of faith.

I am hopeful that an encounter with God is turning a road to murder into a journey of freedom. I am hopeful that you are listening.

I am hopeful that you are posting. I am hopeful that you are acting. I am hopeful that you are sponsoring. I am hopeful that you are protesting. I am hopeful that you are going above and beyond to ensure that America does not go back to a place that was never great for some people, but that a new America is being built that will be great for all people.

I am hopeful that I no longer have to cry for injustice, but that I can cry for the sake of justice being served.

I am hopeful that you will finally accept me, that you will finally see me, that you will finally allow me to be authentically me.

[32 : 06] Let's pray. Gracious God, we are weak.

We are torn. We are worn. We really don't know how to pray. We really don't know what to say. And yet, God, we are trusting you. We are trusting at this moment that your Holy Spirit is speaking out for us.

And in the midst of chaos, we are not quick to judge, but we are patient. We are patient with each other.

We are patient with ourselves. We are patient with our brothers and sisters. God, we seek you for true truth.

[33 : 09] We seek you for honesty. We seek you for guidance. God, we pray for those who protest.

We pray for those who riot and loot. pray for our officers. We pray for our leaders. We pray for this country.

And we pray for the world. God, in our weakness, we pray that you are strong. We pray that you support our hope.

God, we pray for our people. In Jesus' name, amen. Table church, remember, it is the calling out of racism that will move us forward.

It is the education. It is creating systematic change. It is providing a voice for the oppressed that will move us forward.

[34 : 14] my last note is this. Imagine that you lock a group of newborns in a basement. That the person who locks them in that basement beats them and barely feeds them.

Imagine that their only free time is looking out of a window at other children who are playing and growing. Then when they arrive to their early 30s, a few of them break free.

They escape from bondage to freedom and they share their story. However, the owners of the house will not release the ones who remain.

In the same way, our communities have suffered from years of unfair treatment and have still not been released from their captivity. they are only now being seen and discovered.

What actions would you perform for those children? What would heartbreak enable you to do? How would you seek Jesus in that moment?

[35 : 35] How would you protest for the release of the children that remained in bondage? I hope that you will consider that same type of immediate action that you would for those children, for those who are screaming Black Lives Matter.

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