

# *Bleats and* **ROARS**

It was the most pitiful, tragic face I'd ever seen (no, I wasn't looking in the mirror!). Somehow, a news photographer had captured the portrait of a terrorized man in India. The caption read that he was a Muslim surrounded by an angry mob of Hindus who clearly were about to kill him.

His expression said it all – he'd begged for mercy and there was none. Now, he faced death with what appeared to be an awareness of eternal, unchangeable disaster.

Today, we see that religiously motivated terrorists can be, and are, successfully brainwashed to the point of committing suicide in the name of Allah. Among other things, they are convinced of receiving in their afterlife a blissful satiation of their fleshly lusts – especially if they destroy in the process lots of Allah's enemies. And thus they voice with measured bravado, "We're not afraid to die!"

However, if they knew the truth, they would all appear as the man in the photo, and the sickening certainty is that they do – afterwards, when it's too late. But instead of an angry mob of men, they face a much worse company.

Now, in considering strength and weakness, I was amazed at how these concepts weave almost without notice throughout the entirety of the scripture. You know, there are about 50 different words in the original Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic that we simply translate as strong, strength, power or might.

You'll find "vigor", "permanence", "speed", "quiet", "a twist", "a vision", "an open hand", "a belt", "a bone", "a separation", "a cliff or rock" and many other expressions for strength in the scriptures. But something seemed to stand out as an important strength, if you would – the strength associated with courage and faith. It is especially significant as it applies to facing the fear of death or disaster. Here are some examples for us:

Abraham feared for his life in Egypt but later became the 'father of faith'.

Moses first ran for his life from Pharaoh's wrath but later faced it fearlessly.

Joshua had to be told multiple times by the Lord not to fear and he proved to be faithful.

Gideon was found by God's messenger hiding as he threshed wheat and likewise was admonished by the Lord several times not to fear. You know the story of his ultimate courage against incredible odds.

On and on it goes, into the New Testament where we find Stephen at the point of death praying for his executioners, Peter sleeping so soundly before his apparent death sentence that the rescuing angel had to strike him to wake him up.

And there's Paul, getting up after being stoned and left for dead, walking back into Lystra to preach again.

What courage, what overcoming faith! Where can I get me some of that?!

Strength is not a scriptural option. The Word never suggests, proposes or asks us to be strong. In fact, the Lord commands it over and over (see Deut 31:6,7; Josh 1:6,7; 2Tim 2:1, etc.). Yet, if that stirs up an

image of some Basic Training Drill Instructor chewing out his bumbling green enlistee – hold on.

You see, according to scripture, the actual well springs of strength are not the 'Christian Superheroes' or "Spiritual Drill Sergeants" so to speak, not the naturally bold and confident, not the ones to whom we are most inclined to look to as examples to emulate. Rather, it is from:

- babes and sucklings -- Psalm 8:2
- those who have no might -- Isaiah 40:29 and
- the weak -- Romans 5:6, 1Cor 1:27, 2Cor 12:9, 10

For counter to our natural expectation, it is weakness which is an essential preliminary ingredient for strength – Hebrews 11:34.

Once again, God shows us that we're upside down. For:

- Who among us wants weakness?
- Who desires the sincere personal awareness of it? (not just intellectually but from experience!)
- Who remembers the names of last season's losers?
- Who finds failure a friend?
- Who considers crushing a kindness?
- Who willingly sheds fame and power for society's bargain basement of notoriety?

Our nature is to flee from the cross when it is ours to carry, to rationalize our rejection, to convince ourselves that morality is an adequate substitute. We want nothing to do with real weakness unless we can toy with it to obtain attention.

One reason for this is that sin misleads us with a false ID for strength and a false compass

concerning its source. Yet Christ said that His followers would follow Him. (Mark 8:34) And that inevitably means first, like Jesus, you are like a lamb – the epitome of weakness. At some point in your life as a believer, or at many points, the Lord will allow you to realize some portion of your weakness in order to find real strength.

You may think, 'Yes, but you know, I'm saved by grace and that's all I need. Jesus just wants to give me an abundant life – health, wealth and celebration here and now! After all, don't the saved go from "strength to strength"? It's just those unspiritual folks who have marital, financial, emotional or physical problems.'

Hmmm, your salvation is indeed secured by faith in God's gracious gift – Jesus' atoning death and resurrection. But let me suggest that you will enjoy your gift and your heavenly eternal home to degree you enjoy Christ – all of Him! Lamb and Lion, weakness and strength. 'Enjoy weakness??'

No, rather enjoy what you discover of Christ in weakness. In Daniel chapter three, you know the story, 'Shad, Shack and Benny' were thrown into the raging furnace for their refusal to worship the pagan king's idol. They were bound before being cast in and yet freed by the flames. The ropes were the only things to burn, and in the furnace with them was a fourth Man, the Son of Man – Jesus, in His pre-incarnate appearance.

Now, they did not rush to leave the fire – in fact, the king had to command them to exit. When you realize the presence of Christ in the flames, in the furnace of trial, hardship, brokenness – weakness, you're just not in any hurry to leave.

This is NOT to say that you should look for hardship or the breaking of heart, mind or body – not at all. But, if you would identify with Jesus, you will understand that when these come, and they do come to everyone, that in them you will discover a strength the world does not know or value or comprehend. Yes, it is the Lord Himself (see Ex 15:2; Psa 18:32; 19:4; 27:1; 28:7; 29:11; 37:39; 73:26; Isa 41:10).

You see, it is God's plan both to save you from sin and death AND to conform you unto the image of His dear Son. Did you suppose that to be a painless intellectual process? Did you want to roar with the Lion and not first bleat with the Lamb? Armchair Christianity is of no more value than armchair quarterbacking. Everyone likes the idea of 'roaring' but who truly wants to 'bleat'?

But the strength of overcoming faith is born from the womb of personal weakness. (2Cor 4:7) It is reared by the recognition of Christ's footprints in the blood and tear-stained soil before us. It is courageous and confident (Isa 30:7, 15) without worldly cause.

The strength that knows the truth and fears not brokenness or death (or even life) is not lunacy but loving trust in a faithful Father. It is God's desire to make us 'Lion-like' in courage and faith. In fact, the very first attribute of those condemned to "their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone..." (Rev 21:8) is cowardice.

Here's some good news -- for those of us who believe, who truly trust in Christ, in the end, salvation and never-ending strength will come (see Rev 12:9-11 and Isa 40:28-31).

For now, remember:

- His strength in you is made complete in your weakness.

2 Cor 12:9. If you're lacking spiritual strength, it could be that as yet you're not realizing your weakness. You may still be wrestling with God, like the patriarch Jacob, and it might take the Lord putting something 'out of joint' to get the message through – "You are weak. Admit it, and cry out to Me." Hosea 12:3,4 James 4:8-10

- If you've been dashed about by a death, be encouraged -- you will one day 'roar' about life. "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." 2Cor 13:4
- If you're ill, be confident -- your illness is not an end -- only a means and God will heal you, perhaps temporarily in this life but for sure eternally in the real life of heaven. "The body...is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." 1Cor 15:42,43; Psalm 103:3
- If you're alone, be expectant -  
- your loneliness or forsakenness prepares your heart for an eternal spring of incredible relationships which will come. Psalm 68:6 and Genesis 2:18
- You have a choice, you can 'strut around' in rebellious 'strength' now and find weakness throughout eternity (like Satan – see Isaiah 14:10-12) or you can walk like a lamb, with the Lord and inherit real strength forever. See Revelation 12:10 again!

*In the deep wells of weakness you'll find the waters of God's strength.*