

The Wednesday Word, March 23, 2011: Without Strength!

‘Without strength’, is a literal description of our state apart from Christ (Romans 3:12; Romans 5:6). We have no ability to save ourselves. We are helpless! You may argue the point, but God won’t. In His mind it is perfectly clear. He says that we are so weak and destitute in our natural state that we cannot hear His words (John 8:43) or even see His Kingdom (John 3:30). It is when we get a sight of our utter spiritual impotence that we realize that Christ alone must be our salvation: if He doesn’t save us then we will not be saved. It is those who are without strength whom the Lord saves. In fact, so long as we think we have some strength to perform ‘the great act of faith’ we cannot be saved. Bonar remarks that it is when we find out that we have no strength we will cease to work, and believe!

Jesus commanded the man with the withered arm to stretch out his hand (Mark 3:4). That man was thoroughly helpless, yet he was commanded to do the very thing which he couldn’t do--- the thing which Jesus only could enable him to do. Notice how the Lord did not tell him to do anything which might prepare him to have faith. The religious unbeliever, on the other hand, always tries to avoid the truth of his inability and attempts to get to God by his own efforts. He is a past master at devising plans to help God to save him. The religious man always invents some kind of a horrible little ladder on which he thinks he can climb from his wretched pit. He hopes that God will take note of his efforts and when God sees his sincerity He will step in and help him. But this is sheer nonsense. He is like a child standing there pulling up hard on his shoe laces in the hope that he can somehow take off and propel himself through the air. We laugh at the child for we know that in spite of his sincerity and efforts he cannot defy the laws of gravity. Yet the child has more chance of “taking off” than the man, assured of his own strength, has of getting to heaven.

Christ didn’t save us because we were strong; He saved us in our utter weakness. Christ alone has provided for our inability and it is only as we realize our continued lack of strength that we are in a position to receive the all-powerful help of the Holy Spirit. It is only as we know that we continue without strength that we can now attempt great things for God for our strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Here’s the truth of the matter: until we come to terms with the extent of our weakness, we are in no condition to receive help from heaven. If we hold on to some concept of self-ability we actually reject the help of the Spirit. Just as the person who is holding on to some supposed remaining goodness to save him dismisses Christ’s work at Calvary so our notions of self- sufficiency and strength dismiss the willing help of the Spirit of God! If we do not see that we have no strength we will not believe correctly and our service will be very limited. He is the Creator; we are the creature and not vice-versa. He says we have no ability or strength. Believe Him on this one.

As believers, however, we are experts at expending our tiny stock of imagined strength in holding fast the ropes of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. We need gospel strength which comes from resting in the strength of Jesus. We are not called to be strong in ourselves but are called to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might (Eph 6:10). This we will never do, so long as we imagine that we have strength to believe and to finish our salvation (Rom 8:7-8). Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9; Ps 27:1).

Sometimes as believers we get so low because of our lack of strength. We don't even seem to have strength to meditate on the Word or to think about the Lord. We don't seem to have strength to stand against sin. We despair at times that we will ever see His face. However, our salvation does not depend upon our strength, but upon His. Even without strength we can keep looking at Calvary and see the conquering Christ's rescuing us (see Ps 121). It's at the cross that we get our daily supply of gospel strength. As Spurgeon said, "There's no place like Calvary for creating confidence."

And that's the Gospel Truth