

“You can’t show weakness.” I imagine something like that ran through the head of a young boy a couple weeks ago as he stuck his tongue to a metal pole on a freezing cold day. Firefighters were dispatched, warm water was poured, and he lost a couple layers of skin on his tongue. Why? Apparently some friends dared him. At least he didn’t look weak as his tongue was being peeled off the pole.

Foolish things like that happened to each of us. Maybe not sticking our tongues to a frozen pole, but we probably said yes to our share of foolishness just so we wouldn’t appear weak. As adults it really doesn’t change. Show strength or falter and fall back and everyone thinks you’re weak. Now add faith as a need in your life and some will see that as a definite sign of weakness. “Who would believe in something they’ve never seen or count on someone up there to bless them and help them through life? That’s just a crutch for the weak.”

In a portion of the Bible that is a favorite of Sunday school children we talk about three men in the book of Daniel. Their names may sound familiar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their story may sound really familiar. But it’s not just about marveling how God protected them in the fiery furnace. This morning the first lesson helps us see that...

God strengthens you to face the fire
Working through your confession
Working to save you

The moment happens sometimes when you least expect it. You’re asked to go along with the crowd, fit in, just do it. It’s something you shouldn’t be doing. Then it hits. “Why not,” someone asks. Everyone on the plain that day bowed down to King Nebuchadnezzar’s 90 foot tall idol statue. Doing so wasn’t that burdensome and also ensured you didn’t end up scorched in the fiery furnace. Every one of the king’s officials did it that day, except three. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained standing while everyone else knelt in worship. They said no when everyone else said yes. At that moment these three men didn’t just look weak, they looked dead. The pressure to give in was probably brutal. Not just the hot flames, the thousands of eyes looking at them, but also the wrath of the king. The king probably wasn’t the only one asking them why not.

Their refusal to bow down was their doom. But they knew why. **“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol...you shall not bow down to them or worship them.”** It was simple in their minds. That idol wasn’t the true God and bowing down to it would be idol worship. If they did their fate would be much worse than just a really hot furnace. But they wouldn’t go weakly to the flames. This was their opportunity to confess what they believed about God. **“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.”** These men knew their God. They knew his strength, abilities, and his desire to save people. No earthly king could stop the Almighty King from saving who he wanted when he wanted. They would look weak but God would look strong.

Looking weak is a fact of life. We all have to answer that question, why not. Everyone else at the party is drinking to get drunk. Why not you? All the other moms and dads are bringing their sons and daughters to every tournament every Sunday morning. Why not you? We face the fire and think we’re weak. Easiest option is to give in, get drunk like everyone else, and come to every tournament on Sunday mornings like everyone else. Or we could hide our weakness behind a show of strength. We could talk tough, tell everyone how we really want to get drunk or come on Sunday. We don’t mention that God is the one governing our decisions. If we said that we’d look really weak. So in essence when things get hot we hide our faith and cover up our confession. We’ll face the flames and confess Christ when it’s easy. So there have been failures and sins. We’ve failed to face the flames and confess Christ.

Turn around your idea of weakness. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego certainly did. In your weakness is the opportunity to be more in tune with God’s strength. During our weakness we can be reminded that Christ Jesus faced difficult decisions just like you and even harder. He didn’t back down from making any of those choices. He took the cross, the painful cross where he would die. It was the ultimate show of weakness, but also love. That show of weakness, allowing himself to be crucified, was his confession to the world that he was the Savior. That show of love gave strength to our weaknesses and words to our confession. **“I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord...”** aren’t just words we say. They’re the backbone of our faith in Christ Jesus.

We love people who give us good things. We’ll treat them nice, give them good things back, and let other people know how much we like them. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not getting a good thing; at least it didn’t look that way. They were getting death while boldly confessing God. But they had not one promise that God would keep them alive. That didn’t matter. **“But even if he does not, we want you to know, o king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”** Your confession shouldn’t change either. You confess Christ as Savior, but it’s not based on God giving you good things all the time or always giving you happiness. Even in the hospital bed dying you can speak confidently about the God who saves you. Even while you search for a job, deal with bullies at school, or put up with people making fun of you your confession and praise can still be for your God and Savior. Though God might be allowing the flames, he’s strengthening you to face them through your confession.

Three men went into the furnace destined to die. But God was strengthening them to face the fire by saving them. When people looked into the furnace they were stunned. The king called out, **“Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”** Walking around safe, unbound, with a protecting angel sent from God were the three men. It was a miracle meant just as much for the people who witnessed it as it was for the three men who experienced it. God used this moment to showcase his saving power and shake the crowds awake to their spiritual need of a Savior.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn’t brag about what God could do. They didn’t say that God was going to definitely save them. They also didn’t say that God wanted them to be rich, healthy, or successful. They simply took God at his word that he would save them in one way or another. Are you worried if you tell people you pray to God for help and God doesn’t come through it will make God or you look foolish? You prayed for healing and God didn’t respond. That must mean God isn’t good. You prayed for a strong school, but enrollment still went down and money still became tight. That must mean God doesn’t care. It hurts when people don’t take God seriously but it seems like God is doing it to himself a bit. When he allows bad things to happen to good people he shows that maybe he isn’t a loving God after all.

You and I were staring hell in the face as a consequence for our sins. That was a promise God made to all sinners. But Jesus came and stared hell’s flames right in the face too. He was victorious. He took the horror of hell and death away for us. No longer must we fear dying in the flames forever and being separated from God for eternity. Our promises from God now are that Christ transformed death into the beginning of eternal life. No matter what happens in the world around us we have the promise from God that he is working to save us from it all. Jesus has already forgiven our sins and life in heaven is waiting because God saves us.

Believe these promises because they can’t fail. Live believing these promises. We live taking God at his word about him saving us. We live even in the face of circumstances that make us look weak. We live confidently marching forward in the knowledge that God takes even the bad things and makes them work out for our eternal good. God is saving us from the eternity that awaits each one of us as sinners. He is bringing us safely to victory in Christ Jesus in heaven. This is our God strengthening us to face the fire.