

EMPOWERING FAITH

Ephesians 3:20-21

Last week I mentioned three young men of faith recorded in Daniel 3—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Empowered by their faith they refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gods, or bow down to the golden image.

Threatened with death in a fiery furnace, they still refused to bow to the image. Their reply is a classic statement of empowering faith.

Daniel 3:17-18 (NIV) "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. 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."

They were thrown into a blazing furnace. It was so hot the soldiers who threw them in were killed. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not even singed.

When the king looked into the fire he saw four men, not three. I believe the pre-incarnate Christ was in the fire protecting those three, faithful young men.

Here's the key—their victory was not because they survived the fiery furnace, but because of their faith in God. Their victory was won long before when they put their trust in God.

They were confident that God could save them if He chose to—and they were equally confident that it was okay if He didn't. Their faith was in God—not in a miracle. That's empowering!

1. Empowering faith comes from God.

We are amazed at that kind of faith! Where does it come from? How does it happen? The Lord's Supper reminds us of the one in whom we have put our faith.

We are humbled as we think what it cost God to give us the gift of salvation. We are reminded that our salvation was won on that cross—that victory over Satan and death was assured on that cross. And we are empowered by our faith in the resurrected Christ. Paul wrote...

Ephesians 3:20-21(NIV) 20Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

This magnificent doxology of praise reminds us that God is not idle; he's not inactive; and He certainly is not dead. He is able to do what we ask for He hears and answers our prayers.

More than that, He even is able to do what we imagine, for He reads our thoughts. And not only that, He is able to go beyond what we ask or imagine because His expectations are higher than ours.

He can do all this because His grace is not measured out in a dose here and a dose there. It is abundantly given to us because He is a God of super-abundance.

Underline "his power that is at work within us." The infinite ability of God to work beyond our prayers, thoughts and imaginations is by the "power that is at work within us."

Imagine that! This power comes from Jesus Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith; it is Christ dwelling among us through the Holy Spirit.

This power is the power of the resurrection, the very power that raised Christ from the dead, enthroned him at the right hand of God, and raises us with him.

Through the power of the resurrected Christ the New Testament people were a singing and victorious people who conquered the paganism of the Roman world.

They were empowered by a deep assurance of God's presence, His purpose, and His victory over evil. They were convinced that God was active in their lives.

They were empowered by the Holy Spirit to tell others about their exciting faith. Their empowering faith is an example to us today.

Have you noticed how preoccupied with problems and difficulties we are? All we want to talk about is what's wrong with the government, our schools, businesses, the youth, the church, etc.

And it seems that critical, judgmental, and complaining people find each other and feed off of each other. And it seems they are always resistant to change.

That's the world's way, the defeated way. The Lord's Supper reminds us that we march to a different drummer—Jesus Christ.

That's what the resurrection is all about—the crucified Christ, buried, raised by God to life again—is alive, He's here today. Understand this, know this, and grasp this great truth of victory.

Our God is able to do immeasurable more than we can ask or imagine. Our victory is in Jesus Christ. Our salvation in him is complete.

2. Empowering faith is my complete salvation.

When you were saved you were completely saved. Sometimes we think we are so sinful and that the secret areas of our lives keep us from complete salvation.

Before he met Jesus, Paul did everything he could to stamp out Christianity. He thought that persecuting Christians would make him right with God. Thank God, he was saved by God's grace, and he wrote an astounding thing:

Ephesians 2:8-9(NIV) 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that we couldn't do a thing to save ourselves—we had to simply believe in Jesus Christ.

A favorite hymn of Christians everywhere is Amazing Grace, written by John Newton. Newton was a teenage rebel. He was gang-pressed into the British navy; was flogged for desertion.

When he was 23-years old, he was fighting for his life in a terrible storm. Almost frozen he cried out for God's mercy, and was amazed that he was saved from almost certain death.

Yet, even then, he didn't turn to Christ. Later he became captain of an African slave ship. By his own admission, he lived a life of dissipation and wretchedness.

It was after reading a book called, *The Imitation of Christ* and remembering that he almost died at sea, that he became a Christian, and worked to end slavery. He wrote many songs and poems, including *Amazing Grace*.

God did immeasurably more in Newton's life than he ever imagined. When you accepted Jesus as your Savior, God forgave you completely and He saved you completely.

He gives you purpose and direction for living. You are worth everything to God. His grace and mercy give you peace and contentment through complete salvation.

3. Empowering faith knows Jesus is always with me.

In the tiny book of Jude, v. 24, are these words, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy."

Have you ever just fallen down? It happens to all of us at the most unexpected time. It may be a misstep, an icy spot, a crack in the sidewalk, a wrinkled throw rug, or something else.

Likewise, spiritually we can fall at any time. The person who says, "I will never . . ." as he or she condemns sin in someone else's life is often the one who falls the hardest.

The Apostle Peter seemed to be constantly in trouble—he had foot in the mouth disease, he was overly impetuous, he was impatient. Yet Jesus told him to feed His lambs.

We know Thomas as "Doubting Thomas." Why, because he found the resurrection hard to believe. Not until he saw the resurrected Christ for himself did he believe.

James and John desired power—they wanted to rule over the others in Christ's kingdom. They all faced the same temptations that we do every single day.

We think of big sins, but all of us are sinners—we're filled with pride, greed, hatefulness, gossip—which of us is exempt from such temptations

The answer of course is, none of us. But thank God, our Savior is there to keep us from falling. With every temptation God provides a way out. Christ is able. We are victorious

The Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way. He understands our temptations, and comes to our aid when we are tempted (Heb. 2:18).

4. Empowering faith gives me victory.

Come to the Lord's Supper with full assurance of your salvation, your forever family, and your empowering faith.

As Jesus hung on the cross he cried out, "It is finished!" He didn't mean that his life was over. It was a shout of triumph that he had done everything necessary for you and me to have complete salvation, victory, and empowering faith.

Application:

The Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's suffering and death. It also reminds us that he didn't stay dead—he arose on the third day, he completed his mission, and his victory is our salvation. Empowering faith is all ours when Christ is our Savior.