

Isaiah 40:27-31 (WCF 14:3) “Weak and Strong”

For the Children: A lot of people today like to make themselves strong. They buy weights to strengthen their muscles, or go to the gym. Some like to be mentally strong. They read a lot, or do cross-word puzzles regularly. Not so many people try to strengthen their faith. Actually, we can't strengthen our own faith, at least not by ourselves. Only God can strengthen our faith. So we have to seek His help and wait for Him to build us up. This is not a lazy waiting, doing nothing. We study His Word, pray and go to church. But we have to wait for Him to use these things to make us stronger. Even then we remain weak in ourselves – we are only strong “in the Lord.” **Questions:** What is it that makes us so weak? In what way is the Lord “strong”? Why is it important to know that we are weak in ourselves?

Introduction:

First Point: Israel's Weakness

- 1) Israel's Complaint: Israel was oppressed by the Assyrians (Is.36-39). The people felt that God was not observing their distress or giving them the justice they thought they deserved. The prophet asks a rhetorical question, “Why do you say these things?” For the Lord had already explained to them that this was due to Israel's rebellion against the Lord. He had also assured them that He would eventually destroy the wicked and restore His people.
- 2) A Complaint That Shows Weakness: This attitude shows up Israel's sin and weakness. Not only was there injustice and idolatry in Israel, there was also a failure to detect their sin and repent. This combination of sin and weakness undermined their faith and made them more susceptible to doubt and complaint.
- 3) A Weakness in All of Us: We all struggle with weakness and sin. See 1 Cor.1:27, Rom.8:26 and LD 44, Q/A 114, citing Rom.7:14-15. It is true that the Lord gives the good gift of faith, which is so strong that even faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains! That gift also includes assurance of sonship (LD 7, Q/A 14. But WCF 14:3 is focused not so much on the essence of faith as God's gift, but in how we appropriate, use and experience this gift. See likewise WCF 18:3. The way we experience faith varies, from weak to strong – because of remaining sin and weakness.

Second Point: The Lord's Strength

- 1) Strength to the Weary: Isaiah reminds God's people that though they are weak, the Lord is strong. He gives strength to the weary (v.29). See also 2 Cor.12:9-10, Mt.11:28.
- 2) The Lord's Ability to Give Strength: The Lord is infinitely able to lend strength to the weak. Isaiah points out that He is eternal, unchangingly independent of His creation; He is the Creator of all, who never becomes weary. His knowledge is also such that He is beyond our understanding.
- 3) For Those Who Wait: However, His strengthening grace is only for those who “wait for the Lord” (v.31). This implies trusting prayer for help and patience as we wait for that help. It also implies that we do not try to overcome our weakness in our own strength – if that were even possible. Looking for help elsewhere only adds to our weakness and sin!

Third Point: The Believer's Strength

- 1) Simultaneously Weak and Strong: Because the Lord does give strength to the weak, we can speak of the believer being “strong” in the Lord. V. 31 therefore describes a situation where even a strong young man would faint with weakness – such as when surrounded by enemies like the Assyrians – but where the strength of the Lord would enable His people to fly like the eagle and run without becoming weary. See 1 John 2:14, 2 Cor.12:10, Eph.6:10. The weak believer is even *commanded* to be strong. In one respect then, we are weak; but in another respect, we are strong.
- 2) Final Victory: Though our faith is often attacked and weakened in its expression, the final victory comes from Christ. He is not only the Author (Initiator) of that faith but also its Finisher. All believers will finish the race and receive the victor's wreath.
- 3) Use of Means: Just as our faith can be weakened in this life, so it can also be strengthened. We are called upon to use the means of grace – Word, sacrament and prayer – to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in strengthening our faith. That, too, is part of waiting for the Lord to send us aid.

Conclusion: