

Don't Quit

From the deep recesses of my mind, as I began working on this message, a poem once read and commented on during my childhood education surfaced. Some of you may remember this poem as well. It was written by Joseph Rudyard Kipling. The poem is *If*.

The poem speaks of several dilemmas wherein the reader is encouraged to bear up against each situation. The encouragement is for the reader to continue to do the right thing even when facing resistance. We are encouraged not to quit. When we look at Jesus as our example, we see that He did not quit. From the beginning of John's gospel, we are told: **He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (John 1:11 NASB)** The ultimate rejection is seen on a Friday morning when an angry mob shouted to Pilate **crucify Him**.

There are times when each of us are tempted to quit. We are ready to throw in the towel and walk away. We're tired, we feel abused, we feel unappreciated, or there may be a host of other reasons why we are ready to quit. This morning we will look at a passage found in 2nd Corinthians and see that Paul put those feeling into perspective. Hopefully, we will be able to find the strength we need so that we don't quit.

I am reading 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 from the New King James Version.

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NKJV)

In this chapter, Paul is sharing his drive to continue to preach the good news of Christ Jesus. He feels driven to proclaim Jesus even when it would have been easier for him to quit.

First, Paul tells us that he is hard-pressed, but not crushed. There may be times when we feel that we are bearing a burden that presses down on us. The temptation to quit is strong. It is times like this we need to remember these two passages.

The first is from Paul in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 NASB)

Regardless of the pressures we feel, God has provided a way out. God will help us overcome those pressures.

The second scripture is found in James the first chapter.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 NASB)

Each time of we encounter those pressures, we should face them with joy and not sorrow. They will help us to grow stronger in our faith.

Second, Paul says he is perplexed, but not in despair. We may be brought to the point of despair by the evils that come our way. We may feel like the group from the television show "Hee-Haw" that sang about gloom, despair, and agony. There are at least two examples of people we meet in the Bible who certainly had every reason to be in despair yet, they weren't. They had every reason to quit, but they didn't.

One of those was Job. As we read just the first chapter of the book of Job, we find a wealthy man with a large family. In one day, he received news that all of his livestock had been killed and his

children had died when the house they were in collapsed. We might understate his situation by saying Job was having a bad day. Here is Job's reaction:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said,

“Naked I came from my mother's womb,

And naked I shall return there.

The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. (Job 1:20-22 NASB)

How many times have we heard others blame God for their misfortunes? Job faced those calamities and loss and, rather than sinking into despair, Job praised God.

Another person whom we meet in the Bible that certainly was mistreated is Joseph. We may recall, Joseph was hated by his brothers. They threw him in a pit, sold him into slavery, and told their father that a wild animal had eaten him. We know that after several misfortunes, Joseph was raised to a prominent position in Egypt. He once more faced his brothers and could have exacted revenge for their mistreatment of him. Most of us would agree that retribution would have been justified. Here are his words to them:

But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19-21 NASB)

Through the time of slavery and imprisonment, Joseph did not despair. He looked to God to make things turn out to fit God's plan. He did not despair but a surrendered to the will of God. In both cases that we considered; we see that neither Job nor Joseph reaches a point where they quit believing in God.

Third, Paul tells us that he was persecuted but did not feel forsaken. Persecution is mentioned several times in the Bible. Persecution, by its nature, punishes people because of their beliefs and behaviors. It is an attempt to make us feel isolated from the “main-stream” since our ideas and actions do not blend in with others. Those who follow Christ will not blend in with the world. If we do, then we may need to determine if we are truly followers of Christ.

Paul tells the young preacher Timothy that persecution will be suffered by all who follow Jesus.

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12 NASB)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus prepared His disciples for the coming persecution for following God's path. We are familiar with the beatitudes so let's review those that mention persecution.

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12 NASB)

Persecution may take the form of physical abuse like imprisonment or even death. It may also be in the form of isolation. Friends and family may stop associating with us due to our following Jesus. We do have certain assurances from God. In the book of Hebrews, we are told: **“I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”** so that we confidently say,

“THE LORD IS MY HELPER; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.

WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?” (Hebrews 13:5-6 NASB)

The psalmist, David also noted: **I have been young and now I am old,**

Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread. (Psalm 37:25 NASB)

Paul suffered much persecution during his ministry. Paul gives us these assurances in the 8th chapter of Romans.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:38-39 NASB)

The assurance that God will never leave or forsake us should give us the strength and courage to continue in our service to Him. We should not quit.

Fourth, as a result of the persecutions or the forces of evil in this world, we may be struck down. In Acts the 7th and 8th chapters, we find that Stephen was preaching about Christ. He outlined the history of the Jewish people rejecting God and God's prophets up to and including their rejection of Jesus. Stephen was stoned for his message. We then see in the first few verses of the 8th chapter this persecution was taken to all of those who were Christians.

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:1-4 NASB)

While Stephen was stoned, we see that the church continued to grow and expand. Those who were scattered went away and preached as they went. The idea that death would silence the message of the cross is contrary to the will of God. Paul tells us that we are to imitate Jesus even to the point of death.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NASB)

The message of God to His people has always been to remain strong in Him. Stay the course and don't quit. When we read through the 11th chapter of Hebrews, we find many people who demonstrated their faith in God. Their faith, at times, took them to the point of death. The summation of this chapter is found in the first two verses of the 12th chapter.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2 NASB)

We are to remember that we serve an awesome God and we must never quit. Even when we find that:

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NKJV)

God is there with us and will see us through each and every circumstance.