

SRM14011

1/5/2014

“Don’t Quit”
Hebrews 12:12-17

As you look back on 2013, “How was your year?” For some of you, it was a tough year, for others it was a good one. I have had some very difficult challenges this year, but our family also happily celebrated the wedding of my oldest son.

However 2013 was for you, I'm sure there are some things you want to be better, some struggles you would like to avoid.

Last week Pastor Lindquist gave us a great reminder of guidance for the new year from Colossians 3 about Living in the Risen Christ, Getting Rid of the Old Life, and Affirming the New Life.

This morning, as we look ahead to 2014, I'd like to share some words from God that will be useful in those times when you feel like giving up on improving your spiritual walk, and falling in with the drift of the world that primarily seeks personal comfort, or “feeling as good as I can for today”.

This past summer at Peniel I was encouraged by some messages on Hebrews 12:1-3, and preached on it after I returned: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance

the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

This past week, on New Year’s Eve Day, Hebrews 12 came up in my QT Bible reading, and I believe God would have me share with you some of what the writer says later in that chapter.

1. Sometimes it’s hard to understand why the Christian life is difficult.

Apparently, the church Hebrews was addressed to had some who were becoming “weary and discouraged in [their] souls”. The reason was that they were experiencing persecution and suffering, and some of them were tempted to give up Christianity.

To them he says(v. 4), “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin”, reminding them of how Jesus Christ did do this.

In verses 5-11 we have an answer for those who wonder why God lets difficulties happen to His beloved children. Re Piper, the main point of v. 3-11 is:

- the pain and trouble you are experiencing is not a sign of the hatred of God, but the love of God.

Verse 6: "Those whom the Lord loves he disciplines."

- Your persecution is not a sign of God's treating you as enemies, but as sons. Verse 7: "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons."

- Your suffering is not meaningless, but designed for your good and your holiness. Verse 10: "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness."

In verses 12-17 there are a number of exhortations, encouragements to "keep the faith", which can be summed up as Personal Perseverance, Faithful Fellowship, and Sincere Spirituality.

Piper: "We are not being commanded here in this text to do things that will get God to adopt us as his children. We are being commanded to act like people who are utterly persuaded that we are already adopted through faith, and that our omnipotent Father loves us, and that the most painful adversities of our lives are expressions of his loving discipline and not his hateful vengeance."

2. When you are tempted to quit, follow Jesus in Personal Perseverance, Faithful Fellowship, and Sincere Spirituality. V. 12-14

A. Follow Jesus in Personal Perseverance.

V. 12-13 "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed."

Matthew Henry: "A burden of affliction is apt to make the Christian's hands hang down, and his knees grow feeble, to dispirit him and discourage him; but against this he must strive, that he may better run his spiritual race and course."

v. 12 picks up the metaphor of running the race in 12:1. Some of the believers were tempted to give up living the Christian life, esp. in the face of the difficulties God allowed as discipline, training (v. 4-11).

The exhortation is from Isaiah 35:3-4, and was originally addressed to exiled Jews that felt the promised deliverance and restoration would never come: (NKJV) Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come ... He will come and save you."

v. 13 has a quotation from Proverbs 4:26 (NKJV) "Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established."

The idea is to put the paths in better shape in order to facilitate travel, specifically for the lame(L. Morris).

ILL: Sounds like plowing snow or clearing a path through the woods, like our family's Cobble hike.

It also reminds us of v. 2, where the race is won by keeping our eyes on Jesus, who, for the joy, endured the cross.

First is Personal Perseverance, but MacArthur: It is not just "your" weak hands and feeble knees, but "the" hands and knees of others as well.

B. Follow Jesus in Faithful Fellowship.
v. 14a "Pursue peace with all people".

Jesus did not agree with all people around him, but He pursued peace with them. Romans 12:18 (NKJV) If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

This, of course, begins with those closest to you, your spiritual family, your natural family, the people you see every day, your neighbors.

Follow Jesus in Personal Perseverance, Faithful Fellowship, and ...

C. Follow Jesus in Sincere Spirituality.
v. 14b "and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord".

Even Jesus "learned obedience" through the discipline of suffering: Hebrews 5:8 (NKJV) though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

"holiness" -- a distinct Greek word from God's "holiness" (Heb 12:10). The meaning here, "sanctification." His is absolute holiness: our part is to put on His holiness, becoming "holy as He is holy," by sanctification.

JFB: While "following peace with all men," we are not so to seek to please them, as to make God's will and our sanctification a secondary object; this latter must be our first aim.

Trans: When you are tempted to quit, follow Jesus in Personal Perseverance, Faithful Fellowship, and Sincere Spirituality.

3. Now what does this call for practically? V. 15-17

A. Persevere Personally: v. 15a "looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God".

This is not a falling from a work of grace in the soul, but from salvation that is wholly by grace through faith.

The gospel of grace is always being challenged by the false gospel of salvation by morality (be faith-

ful to do the right thing), or salvation by self-actualization (be faithful to who you are).

What is the focus of your assurance? Your performance of your duties? Your personal experience? Or the grace and mercy of God in Christ?

B. Fellowship Faithfully: v. 15b “lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

The “root of bitterness” is language borrowed from Deuteronomy 29:18, referring to a person turning from the true God, disrupting the peace of the community of faith: “(ESV) Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit”.

What do you do when someone brings up an idea that sounds like it is not what you have understood the Bible to teach?

I fear that the knee-jerk response of many Christians is, “we agree to disagree”. While this is an appropriate conclusion to come to when believers have had a healthy, discussion based on the Word of God, I fear many Christians are unwilling to even have such a conversation. This “defiles” a church.

Brothers and sisters, fellowship is not just “being friendly with other Christians”, it involves exhorting one another, loving rebuke, correcting one another, and holding each other accountable.

ILL: I’ve been privileged to meet monthly with 3 other pastors for lunch. At first we just got to know each other, but as we grew to know each other, we have come to challenge each other, support each other, and pray for each other.

We also do this in small groups, and as prayer partners and as mentors to each other.

So Persevere Personally, Fellowship Faithfully...

C. Be Spiritually Sincere: v. 16-17

“lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

v. 16 warns against those who, like Esau, set aside the spiritual value of the birthright for the gratification of his physical cravings (Genesis 25:34 (ESV) Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright).

How sincere is our spirituality? Is it just a mask we wear on Sunday morning, or are we honest about our sins with each other?

v. 17 Esau later came to regret the loss of the blessing. When it was actually given to Jacob, Esau pled for his Father to reverse it, but there was no possibility at that point for second thoughts. It was not repentance that he sought with tears, for such is always available, if sincerely sought, but the blessing that he earlier was willing to trade for a momentary physical satisfaction.

Is living like a Christian tough for you? You don't have to quit !

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper today, consider taking action by writing down:

Action: What do you most easily turn to for comfort when living for Jesus alone gets difficult?

What issue or sin is hampering your love for some other believer?

What desire do see in yourself and in others that is more important than your daily fellowship with God?

I invite you to take these statements, and throw them away as you leave the Sanctuary this morning, while asking God to take them away spiritually.