



Building God's People

Commitment

Sunday 21st May – Saturday 27th May

Daily Devotions



New Strength

Read Isaiah 40

"...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isa 40:31

I bet you're tired.

Everyone I speak to is tired. I am tired - I always seem to be tired. We have more leisure time than most people in history, yet we seem to be busier than ever. We are busier than ever, and it affects every part of our lives. Work suffers, home suffers, health suffers.

Relationships suffer. That's a big one, isn't it? We don't spend time with the people we should be spending time with. We don't spend time with God.

"Read my bible more? I'd love to, but I don't have time. Join a home group? The thing is, when I get home from work I'm exhausted. Go to church regularly? I'm so tired on Sundays I sleep in half the time."

Our lives are tiring and, let's be clear, the Christian walk is tiring. The Christian "race" is a marathon rather than a sprint. And the Adversary takes down many believers, not through some spectacular sin, but through tedium, weariness, tiredness.

There is a promise in Isaiah - if our hope is in the Lord He will renew our strength. He is the one who offers us revival, new life, new vitality. But we must turn to Him constantly. Every day, every hour, every moment we must look to Him and Him alone for the strength to persevere.



Joy in Pain

Read Romans 5:1-11

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; (Romans 5:3)

I hate suffering.

I bet you do to. If we enjoyed it, it wouldn't be suffering. If someone tells you they enjoy suffering, there is something wrong with them.

But here we have the apostle Paul saying he **rejoices** in his suffering! What's that all about? Is he a masochist? Is he sick? Does pain somehow feel good to him?

Not at all. Paul isn't saying that suffering is pleasant. Far from it. In another letter he lists all of the many things he has suffered for serving Christ. He knew more about suffering than most of us. He knew what it meant to experience pain. He knew what it meant to be lonely. He knew what it meant to lose everything. He knew what it meant to be hungry, to be homeless, to be hated. Paul knew suffering.

Yet he also rejoiced in it. Not because it was pleasant. No - he felt the pain as much as we do. But he rejoiced because, as a Christian, he could see that suffering is not meaningless. We believe in a sovereign God, and He brings good out of every situation, pleasant or unpleasant.

The Christian journey is difficult at times. It takes strength and commitment to complete. Through our suffering, God "toughens" us, builds our perseverance so we can face the hurdles ahead. In this way, we can rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that God is using them to bring us safely home.



Watching Your Belief

Read I Timothy 4

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16)

Do words matter?

Are they worth arguing about? Are they worth getting passionate about? I'm tempted to say "no". It seems ridiculous to get worked up about words, to make a fuss. What does it matter what people say? Far better not to worry too much about it and just "get along" with everyone.

This is a tempting attitude. But I think the "peace" it brings is an illusion. Because words do matter. Words are the medium by which we communicate ideas. And ideas are the most powerful forces in the world. Every significant thing that has ever happened in the world, for either good or bad, is the result of an idea.

What about God's words? If the words of humans matter, how much more the words of God! In the verse, Paul tells Timothy to watch his doctrine. Doctrine just means "teaching" - ideas and words! If he is careful, if he is faithful, then he will "save both himself and his hearers."

That is the special power of God's words - they save us from the penalty and power of sin, which destroys true life. If we get it wrong, we are left trapped in our sin, cut off from real life, hopelessly lost.

Words do matter - and God's words most of all.



Perseverance

Read Hebrews 10

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Hebrews 10:36)

Will you hang in there?

A famous sporting coach once said "It's not so important who starts the game but who finishes it." This is certainly true of the Christian walk. Many start out following Christ but, sadly, fall away before reaching the end.

The mark of the true Christian is that they persevere to the end. They are committed to Christ come what may. The false Christian is one who fails to persevere, who falls short of the goal.

The Christian life is a journey, and the destination lies beyond death. You accomplish nothing if you start a journey without reaching your destination. And you will accomplish less than nothing if you spend many years faithfully following Christ, then stumble at the final turn.

Do not be discouraged. Do not waver in your commitment. Hang in there.



Your Fight

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7)

Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races, one after another.

The same is true of the Christian walk. Sometimes the adversary uses great and spectacular sins to destroy a faith. But more often he uses tedium and repetition.

The daily grind. The horror of the "same old thing". The gradual loss of commitment. The slow ebb of passion. Turning away, degree by degree, bit by bit until one day you wake up and you are far away from God and your faith.

Paul often faced violent opposition to his faith. He actually spent the last few years of his life imprisoned, and was finally executed for his beliefs. He was both more and less fortunate than ourselves. Less fortunate in his great sufferings, clearly.

But more fortunate, perhaps in the opposition he faced. Because opposition sharpens our beliefs, it gives a keen edge to our faith. The strongest, most vibrant Christianity is always that which is oppressed.

Some of us will face great opposition to our faith. For some there will be ongoing conflict. Others will have a gentler ride, which has its own great temptations. Paul's call to both is to keep fighting the good fight, keep running the race, keep the faith. Do not waver in your commitment.



Dirty Secrets

Read Hebrews 12:1-13

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)

I bet you've got a dirty little secret.

You know, it's that sin you've been holding onto for a long time. No-one really knows about it. You know you should get rid of it, you know you should change - but it's just so hard. Easier to just ignore it.

I don't know what your sin is, though I can probably make a guess. Perhaps you have not been entirely honest in your tax affairs. Perhaps you are the office gossip. Perhaps you've been flirting with someone you shouldn't be. Perhaps you are watching tv shows and movies that shouldn't be watching. Perhaps you are looking at stuff on the net that you shouldn't be looking at.

In your heart, you know it's wrong. If everyone at church knew your little secret, you would be so ashamed. But it's worse than that. When we play with sin, when we keep it around, it slowly strangles our spiritual life. Prayer becomes less and less potent, the Bible becomes more and more difficult, church becomes less and less enjoyable. Sin entangles. Sin corrupts our commitment. Sin hinders us in our journey with God.

What is the answer? Throw it off! Kill it! Don't play with it - take drastic action! If TV is a problem, turn it off. If you lack the will-power to do that, take a cricket bat and smash the TV. Honestly!

That is the sort of drastic, aggressive action we must take. Do whatever you have to do, but throw off sin. Then, with commitment and perseverance, you will be able to run the race marked out for you by God.



Storms

Read Matthew 7:15-29

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (Matthew 7:25)

What do you do when the storms hit?

The storms of life, I mean. Who do you turn to? Where do you take shelter? You might say that you've never encountered a really big storm. It's coming. I'm not being pessimistic - that is just the way life is in this fallen world. Trouble comes.

We look to insulate ourselves from trouble using all sorts of means. We try to protect ourselves from suffering. We must use money, or sex, or drugs - anything to protect us from the realities of life. But we know that all of these things fail.

Christ says that the wise man builds His life upon the rock of His commands. That is the way to survive the storm. That is the way to persevere. That is the way to stay true to your commitment - obey Christ, and look to Him alone in all your trouble.

If you do that, if you truly do that, then nothing in this world will make you stumble. Troubles that knock down other people, you will be able to shrug off. You will know a peace from day to day that is unknown to those around you. And you will have the foundation for a deep and pure joy that no circumstances can shake.

Are you ready for the storm?