

Fighting To Keep The Faith

1 Timothy 6:12 KJV Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 KJV I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

I. INTRODUCTION—BEARING THE CROSS

Thomas a' Kempis—If thou bear the cross, it will soon bear thee.

The story is told of a great businessman who lived in the 1970's who managed to learn this very principle that added to his life. He told of how that when he was 14 years old that an older brother of his became very sick. The time frame would have been sometime in the 1930's. He said that his family was so poor that they could not afford the kind of medical care necessary to take care of his brother and so his care was left up to

him and his mother. His father toiled away working on the farm and took on as many odd jobs as a handyman to try to help pay for a cure for his sick son.

Finally it reached the point where the country doctor told the family that there was nothing else to be done but just give him supportive care and provide as many comfort measures as possible. The businessman said that during this time that were some very unpleasant tasks that he had to perform. But because he loved his brother, he was willing to do what he could to help him. He said that always when he got the task completed that he felt good about what he had done. Day after day, this fourteen-year old young man and his mother did their best to take care of his brother without complaint.

When his brother died, the businessman said that he forgot about the unpleasant parts of the care and thought about how much his brother appreciated what he had done for him. He said that he was glad to have done what he could.

Being dirt-poor, there wasn't much of an opportunity for advancement except through the elbow grease of plain, hard work. He took on a lot of hard jobs and a lot of times there was the

temptation to give up and quit. Every day he did his best at the job and when he would get home that night he would feel good about what he had pressed on through. He knew that he had done what he should have done. He learned and practiced one of life's greatest truths: *The cross bears those who bear the cross.*

-There are some distasteful things about life that have the ability to shape us into what God wants us to be but only if we are willing to bear the cross and to stick with what we have to do!

William Mathews—The difficulties, hardships, and the trials of life, the obstacles that one encounters on the road to fortune, are positive blessings. They knit the muscles more firmly, and teach self-reliance. Peril is the element in which power is developed.

Carlyle—He who has battled with poverty and hard toil will be found stronger and more expert than he who could stay at home from the battle, concealed among the provision wagons, or abiding by the stuff.

Anonymous—It is not the helps but obstacles, not faculties but difficulties, that make men.

II. TWO CONNECTED PASSAGES

-This is what the great Apostle Paul was getting at when he was writing to Timothy about fighting the good fight of faith. At the end of his life, Paul was clearly telling Timothy that the connection between a “kept” faith is going to be a “fought for” faith.

-There is a discovery that all men have to make at some point in their lives, they have to fight for their faith at every turn.

- In private and in public.
- In the home and at the workplace.
- In his own life and in the life of those to whom he is responsible.

-The discovery is that if a man can learn to fight for righteousness in his own personal life then the world around him will begin to change by degrees. Far too many times we have the tendency to think that we will win the fight for our faith in one single battle.

-The reality is that we fight for our faith every single day. When we have an understanding of the faith, it is clear that Paul was having reference more than just a set of doctrinal views and beliefs.

- He was having reference to a fellowship of faith that involved interaction with God.
- He was having reference to a household of faith that put him in a church with fellow believers.
- He was having reference to a surrender of self to a greater, holy calling from above.
- He was having reference to a mindset that refused to be defeated despite huge setbacks and obstacles.

-This is the faith that he fought for and that all of the church today will have to fight for. Until truth really takes hold of our mind and heart, it will never become real or fruitful. Far too many of us are guilty of living on the perimeters of the faith and never allowing it to capture us in such a way as to totally transform us.

-Over the course of time, the steady fight of faith causes men to begin to mature, almost as a piece of fruit that will ripen. The fight will have to progress in the darkest and most dangerous hours of your life.

-Paul's advice for us in our day is that we should stand firm, hold true to the course that has been plotted out for us, and to endure the afflictions that come with the course. You find all of those

things when you begin to read through 2 Timothy 4.

-His afflictions had involved Demos who had forsaken him and an Alexander who had did much evil to him. But God had also placed some along the way who helped him. We can find Aquila and Priscilla, Luke, Crescens, and Erastus who had strengthened him along the way.

-You won't be too far into the journey before there is a clear understanding that we are not always our best and we will be ashamed of those times. There will also be times when we can look at say, "I did my best! I carried my cross!" These are the victories that often become the things giving us strength for the journey.

There is an old story told by Max Beerbohm called "The Happy Hypocrite." It came from a collection of short stories that had moral tones to be read to kids written in the late 1800's. It is about a fierce and terrible man who one day saw a young girl who he thought would be the love of his life. She was beautiful and innocent and did not even begin to fit into the same category of moral character as the villain.

Despite that wide gulf of difference between the two, he proposed to her one day.

She exclaimed back to him that she would only marry a man who had the face of a saint. Because he wanted her so much, he had the finest mask maker make him a mask that was saintly. With the mask of a saint, he pursued this young woman and they married.

Every day, he lived his life in such a way to keep up his hypocrisy. He shook off all his vices of gambling, drinking, and immoral carousing because he had found the love of his life. He was careful to be unselfish, attentive, and patient with her and he constantly held in check his evil tendencies in order to be a saint.

But one day, an old enemy found him and in the presence of his lovely wife, ripped off the mask so he would be forever exposed. When the mask was ripped away, the face of a saint was revealed. He actually had become what he had been practicing day-in and day-out. The faith that he had kept, at last came to the place of being able to keep him.

-Paul knew about that. If you will just fight for the faith every day, there will come a time that the faith you have fought for will be the faith that will keep you!

-You may say, how are we going to let this happen in our lives? How do we gain this faith?

III. SPIRITUAL PROGRESSION

-There are some things that we can do that will help us to fight for and keep the faith so that it will keep us.

A. Remember the Past

-When you are tempted to throw in the towel and to give up, look back and remember the past. There are some victories in the past that God has brought to you. Not a single person in the church who has been serving the Lord for any length of time can say that there are not some victories in the past.

-We sometimes can be defined by the troubles that settle in on us. But God in His great grace has set out the path in front of every one of us to travel. In that path are some victories that took place and we must remind ourselves of them on a regular basis so we won't lose heart.

- Doors that God opened that only He could have opened.

- Healing of our bodies and times when he healed our children.
- Financial pressures that God stepped in and relieved.
- Moments when we thought all hope was gone and He worked.
- Pressures that had consumed our minds and wearied our bodies.
- Worries and anxieties that had us spending sleepless nights and weary days.
- We did not see a chance of survival but we kept holding on to our faith.

-Now here you are, whole, sound, and with a sense of faith that would not be as healthy as it is had you not gone through the challenge of life.

-Remembering past victories helps us to keep from giving up in present moments of crisis!

Exodus 13:3 KJV And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this *place*. . .

Deuteronomy 7:18 KJV Thou shalt not be afraid of them: *but* shalt well remember what the LORD thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt;

-Remember the Lord will ultimately bring you through if you will be faithful to Him!

B. Fight for the Future

-The second way that we can do to let our faith keep us is to fight for the future. You know that life has a way of pulling you down but there are stronger forces at work in life that will hold us up. Life can hurt you but it aids us more than it wounds us!

-Years ago I preached a sermon about how the Temple of Solomon was built. The Temple was built in near silence because all of the stone, metals, and woods used for the construction had been cut to precision away from the site. (The Work of the Riddler was the sermon.)

-One of the things that we know was that the cedars of Lebanon had been retrieved from the forest and placed in the Temple. These huge majestic beams were placed in the Temple in such a way that when it was completed they were completely hidden because of all the gold, bronze, silver, tapestries, and so forth. But the Temple never would have been able to stand except for the supporting structure of these beams.

-The vast contrast of Lebanon and Jerusalem can help us to see how we fight for the future:

-In Lebanon:

- Noise
- Dust
- Confusion
- A roaring din
- The cry of worker's voices
- The rattle of tools
- The striking hammer
- The straining saw
- The distraction and the hurry
- The complexity of the blueprints
- Varying degrees of unfinished work. . . all in Lebanon.

-But it was a preparation for Jerusalem:

- Quiet
- Calm
- Refreshing Harmony
- A deep and solemn stillness
- A hint of worship
- A hush of purity
- A settling of the sacred. . . all in Jerusalem

-An understanding of this solves the whole mystery. The quarry and the workmen are at Lebanon. The Temple is ordained for Jerusalem. The work had occurred before it ever arrived in Jerusalem.

-If you can withstand the noise, the shouts, the pain of the cutting, and the devastation of construction, there will be some cedars placed in your heart of worship that will help you. The cedars of Lebanon in the Temple proved to be inward bracing for outward beauty!

-Life has the power to hurt us very deeply but life also has the power to heal us and do it completely. Giving up on the faith causes us to forget that life's helping power is greater than its hurting power!

-Don't let the noise, the pain, the trials, the defeats, and the calamities of life down here get you off track of keeping your faith. If you will carry your cross, it will soon carry you!

C. Others Have Made It

-The last thing to consider when we are tempted to give up is that this faith has brought some great victories to those before us. There have been

some men and women before us who have had to endure much to overcome the challenges to their faith.

-They did not sacrifice their standards of excellence when the pressure was on them. They prevailed in a great way.

Several years ago, I read a biography about the great composer Amadeus Mozart by Maynard Solomon. I got involved with it when I signed on with an online reading group sponsored by Barnes and Noble. It was quite an amazing story to read about a very gifted and yet complicated man.

There was a part of the story that stands out even now. When he was twenty-five years old he went to Vienna, Austria and would live there for the next ten years until his death. Those ten years were very productive as far as the writing of his music. The great scores, symphonies, and arias were written during that time. They still live on to this day.

But there were some challenges and setbacks that he had to endure in that great city. He was caught up in the madness of having to compete with another gifted composer named Antonio Salieri who did his best to destroy

Mozart. He had the ability to poison the musical community against him and he did. It wasn't too long before the publishers of music fell under the sway of Salieri.

One day, one of the publishers said to him very harshly, "Write, sir, in a more easy and popular style; or I will neither print your music nor pay you a penny for it." It just so happened that this came during the height of a terrible winter. In fact Mozart and his young wife were so poor that often they did not have food or fuel in their tiny rented house. One cold morning that winter, a friend came to visit him. He was shocked to find that the house was freezing and there was nothing to eat. Not only that but he caught Mozart and his wife waltzing about the little room just to generate body heat to keep them warm. In fact some believe it was these conditions that sent him to an early grave at 35 years of age.

The temptation to sacrifice his standards was something that he might have very easily done. He could have said, "I have to eat." He could have said, "I cannot see my wife suffer." Instead he said to the publisher, "My good sir, if those are the conditions that I have to meet, then I will die of starvation. I cannot write as you demand." Through the help of some of his closest

friends he managed not to starve. Because of that, his music lives on today.

-There has to be that amount of courage in every one of the children of God. If we can look just at the pages of history and say “Others have made it and I will too!” Furthermore, Scripture is loaded with men and women who chose to do just that.

-Sometimes you have to tell yourself, “I am better than this! I am going to plow on and make it through whatever setbacks, challenges, and devils that I have to fight against!” “God is building something on the inside of me and this is the process that I must go through to make it!”

IV. CONCLUSION—DO THE WILL OF GOD!!!

-We are challenged to do the will of God in every turn in our lives!

- It will be through tears and blood that we make it.
- It will be through the many tribulations of the way that we make it.
- It will be through the dilemmas of life that we find a shape for our soul to be put into.

-There is a great message in that song "Through the Fire."

(Verse 1) So many times I question the certain circumstances and things I could not understand. Many times in trials my weakness blurs my vision and that's when my frustration gets so out of hand. It's then I am reminded, I've never been forsaken. I've never had to stand one test alone. As I look at all the victories, the Spirit rises up in me. And It's through the fire my weakness is made strong.

(Chorus) He never promised that the cross would not get heavy and the hill would not be hard to climb. He never offered a victory without fighting. He said help would always come in time. Just remember when you're standing in the valley of decision and the adversary says give in, Just hold on. Our Lord will show up and He will take you through the fire again

(Bridge) I know within myself that I would surly perish If I trust the hand of God, He'll shield the flame again.

(Chorus) He never promised that the cross would not get heavy and the hill would not be hard to climb. He never offered a victory without fighting.

He said help would always come in time. Just remember when you're standing in the valley of decision and the adversary says give in, Just hold on. Our Lord will show up and He will take you through the fire again. . .