

## Draw strength – 21/08/2016

***You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2.Tim.2:1)***

Beloved in the Lord,

There is a message written on a mirror in our gym which reads: *“Don’t stop when you are tired, stop when you have finished.”* As I work out and am tempted to quit, I remind myself of these words. If I have set the elliptical or treadmill for a 30 minute workout, I try not to quit before the set time. Sometimes at around the 20 minute mark I feel tired and want to stop. That is when I remind myself: *“Don’t stop when you are tired, stop when you have finished.”* This helps me to keep going.

As I was preparing this message, I read about a marathon runner from Tanzania who competed in the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico. His name was John Stephen Akhwari. During the race he injured his leg, but he didn’t quit. About an hour after the last runner had entered the stadium at the end of the race, Akhwari hobbled in. There was only a handful of spectators left in the stadium as he limped over the finish line. Later when asked why he just didn’t quit, he replied: *“My country sent me to Mexico not to start the race, but to finish it.”* It was this conviction that helped him not to give up, even with a wounded leg.

At the close of his life, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his son in the faith: ***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;<sup>8</sup> in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2.Tim.4:7-8)***

Paul never gave up, although I can imagine there were times along the way that he was ready to. Everywhere he went he encountered numerous problems. He was persecuted, rejected, ridiculed. His heart ached for the unbelievers. He was saddened by the hardness of people’s hearts. He never gave up. He drew strength from God’s grace, that is in Christ Jesus. He kept his eyes fairly and squarely on Jesus.

We read in Hebrews: ***“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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)***

Very clearly we see that Jesus Christ is the key. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. We will finish the race only if we keep Him before our eyes at all times. The marathon runner Akhwari kept the fact that he represented his country in his sights as he struggled along the course. He would not, could not quit.

Like Akhwari, we are representatives, not of an earthly country, but of Heaven itself – God’s Kingdom. We are ambassadors of The Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot and must not quit. We must complete the task that God has set before us. We must finish the race.

At times it is difficult. We get weary. At times we carry extra weight, we bear burdens that slow us down and tire us even more. Extra weight slows our progress. On Monday I had to take the Bulletins to the post office. I decided to walk. I picked up the box and thought to myself “That’s ok. It is not really heavy.” I headed out at a good pace. About half way there I started to notice that the box was actually not that light after all. By the time I got to the counter I was very relieved to set it down and leave it there. The walk home was so much easier.

That is why in the passage in Hebrews we are told to lay aside every encumbrance and sin which so easily entangles us. Unconfessed sin is a burden that weighs us down and hinders our progress. When we become aware of any sin we should immediately go to Jesus, confess it, repent of it, and be set free from it.

However, sin is not the only thing that weighs us down. Extra weight can be stress, concerns and worries, heartaches, hopelessness, disappointments, discouragements and many other things. We need to lay them all down at Jesus feet. He says to us:

***“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Mt.11:28-30)***

Jesus wants to lighten our load. He cares, but He cannot help us if we do not let Him. He does not take our weight by force. We need to hand it over to Him. This is something that needs to be done regularly. We so easily pick up extra burdens as we travel along. We get ensnared by things, oh so easily.

I know that from my own experience. To be honest, lately, I have had to battle a sense of discouragement. It would be so easy at times to simply give up and say “It’s not worth it”. There seem to be so few who seek God. So few who seem to want Church. When these thoughts weigh me down I remind myself that I must remain faithful to my Lord. I am His ambassador. I serve Him. I represent His Kingdom. It is my duty at all times to serve faithfully, and to do my best no matter what. I don’t need to worry about the outcome or results, for that is God’s doing.

It is so much easier to say this, than to do it. But when I surrender all to Him, I draw a new strength from Him. He renews my oomph to serve Him joyfully. This is what Paul is referring to in our passage today: ***“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2.Tim.2:1).*** Another rendering of this passage says: “Draw strength from the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” A couple of verses later we read:

***“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. “ (2.Tim.2:3-4)***

Herein lies the key. If you are in the army, then the army takes care of your needs. You are clothed, feed, accommodated, armed and so forth. Your responsibility is to obey and execute the orders given to you. When we are children of God, we are also soldiers in His army. He supplies all of our needs. Paul writes: ***“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Phil.4:19)***

This is a promise from God Himself. What we need is the faith to fully trust this promise. I am slowly learning to trust God in all things, and am coming to understand that He does all things well, and in His time, and in His way. My obligation is to faithfully, obediently serve Him. I must never give up. I must not try to serve in my own strength, but rely upon Him. I need to draw my strength from Him.

Why am I sharing my personal struggles with you in this way? To encourage you, and so that you would also encourage me. We serve in the same army. We are not running a solo race, but we are in a team event. If one of us starts to waver, it is up to the rest to support and encourage. Maybe we even need to carry a fellow soldier for a while.

We read: ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:23-25)***

We are to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works. We are to support and encourage one another.

If we are in Christ, if we have accepted Him as our personal Lord and Saviour, then we are part of His family. We are all members of the same family and so we are bound by love. We are to support each other. Do you see how beautifully God has designed it? Love is the tie that binds us to God, and to each other. I will close my message today with Pauls encouragement to us:

***“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. <sup>10</sup> So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” (Gal.6:9-10). Amen.***

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.***