

GOOD FRI (2009)

When I was growing up in the early 50's, I loved Friday nights because that was the night I could stay up late with my Dad to watch the Friday night fights on TV...It was one of the few things he & I did together... My father was in his 40's when I was born; he worked long days & was dead tired when he got home... But just about every Fri. night, we watched the boxing matches together. ...Well, we'd start out watching together; about the 2nd round, he would be snoring away in his chair & I'd have to get up & take the lit cigar from his hand before he burned down the house. ...Even with all those Friday nights watching boxing, I never became a big boxing fan... Yet I've always admired the determination of some of the boxers - the ones who refused to quit even when the other guy was beating the you-know-what out of them...And when the referee would try to stop the fight, they would plead with him to let them keep going. They wanted to finish.

Wouldn't it be great if we were like those boxers?...I don't mean we should subject ourselves to unnecessary punishment....I mean hanging in there,... toughing it out 'til the end,... finishing. ...you unfortunately, we don't always do that...We often fail to finish what we start. We quit too soon. ..Sometimes our failing to finish involves little things like: a half-painted room;... the letter we started but never completed;... the miracle diet that we let slide;... the exercise bike gathering cobwebs in the corner....Things like that....But other times, our failing to stick it out shows up in more important - sometimes more painful - areas of life like: giving up on a marriage;.. jumping from one job to another;... letting a disagreement kill a close relationship;... terminating a pregnancy;.. taking that drink after weeks of being sober;...giving into temptation.

Have I struck any chords? Am I talking to anyone who is thinking about giving up on something or somebody?... If you are, I want to encourage you to hold on....I want you to look at Jesus - look at the fortitude and the nerve He showed on His journey to the cross & let that be your model. And let's not forget...Jesus was living a human life...He had no divine exemption from pain & suffering... Jesus didn't quit....But it wasn't like He was never tempted...It began with His 40 days in the desert when Satan tried to entice Jesus three different times to abandon God's plan and take the easy way to power and glory...And it wouldn't surprise me if Jesus thought about packing it in every time He heard his clueless disciples quarreling about which of them was the greatest,...or when they showed how little they understood about what He had been telling them....And don't think for a minute Jesus didn't consider throwing in the towel when His friends deserted Him in His time of need....And remember how he prayed on the ground of Gethsemane with such intensity that his sweat turned to blood,...asking His Father to spare Him from the horrible suffering & death that was coming?... Did Jesus ever think about quitting? You bet He did.

That's what makes His final words from the cross so magnificent, so powerful... With His last ounce of strength, Jesus pushed his feet down on that Roman spike, drew His final breath and cried out, "It is finished!" ...What was finished?... God's eternal plan for saving us from our sins was finished...Jesus' work as a man on earth was finished....His job of choosing and training ambassadors to carry His message to the ends of the earth had been completed...The task had been accomplished.... The blood had been poured...The sacrifice had been made. The power of sin & death had been conquered...Jesus stuck it out until the end. And thank God for us that He did.

How good are we at toughing it out until the end?... Any of us having a hard time doing that now? ...Any discouraged parents out there – throwing up your hands in surrender?... Any husbands or wives thinking, "I'm tired of trying to get this marriage to work...I'm not sure how much more I can do."?...Any of you grieving the loss of someone you love so deeply that you don't know how you can go on without them?... Anyone having trouble finding a job?...Bills are piling up...You're not sure how much longer you can hang on....Anyone out there wrestling with temptation?... You've fought it and fought it, but it's getting harder and harder to keep from giving in... Any of you have days when you feel only darkness around you, when you don't want to get out of bed,...you don't want to face the world?.....How many of us are struggling with something in our life & we're right on the edge of giving up the struggle?

What we need to remember is that a finisher doesn't finish without being wounded and weary. ...On the contrary, like the boxer, we may come out bruised and beaten; like our Savior, we may come out pierced and scarred.....That's the price for hanging in there, for persevering. ..But the reward is worth it....St. Paul encourages us in his letter to the Galatians: "Do not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up."...Apostle James tells us: "Blessed is the man who perseveres in his trials,.... because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life." ...And in his 2nd letter to Timothy, Paul offers himself as a model: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

My friends, there are some of us here who have something in our life that is beating us down & we don't know if we have what it takes to see it through,...to finish the fight,...go the full ten rounds,...So – in a few moments - as we are coming up to venerate the Cross,...let's pray to Jesus – the Great Finisher -...ask Him to give us what we need to stick it out until the end...And as we touch the wood of the cross with our hand or our lips,...feel His strength,..His courage ...His perseverance,...His trust in the Father's love ...flowing from that cross into us,...filling us,...equipping us to fight the good fight...finish the race...keep the faith...So that when we are at that final moment, as we are breathing our last,...like J.... we can say to the Father, "It is finished!"....And in that moment we will know – as Jesus did – that for us...it is not really the end...It is just the beginning!. AMEN.