



GOD'S CALL TO PERSEVERE

15 November 2009
Pastor Mark Nieting

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Last Sunday evening my son Adam and I went to Scope for *Star Wars in Concert*. It was fabulous, of course, but what made it better was afterwards a few of us got to go backstage for a meet and greet with the show's narrator, Anthony Daniels. He is a small, thin, extremely dynamic and energetic man who played C3PO in all the movies, and quite often he jumped back into character. Since the event was a *concert* played by a *symphony*, Daniels asked each of the kids in the group if they played an instrument.

And their answers? Each one of them said, "*I used to. I used to but....*"

A lot of good it does them now, right? Daniels, putting on his best C3PO, urged each of them to get back to it, practice long and hard and complete what they had started. In other words: persevere. Keep on going. Don't stop. Work at it!

Think back over the past few years of your own life. Do you see places where you wish you wouldn't have quit....but would have persevered?

- the piano lessons I started but gave up because it took too much time
- the new sport or craft that you fizzled out on....why?
- the job you quit the job because it was too hard
- the time you gave up on school and dropped out...because you didn't NEED education!
- the relationship that might have made it if only you hadn't given up....
- And the times you even gave up on God?

We don't like to think about our failures. I don't like to be reminded of times when a little perseverance would have made a huge difference! We don't enjoy looking back and wondering why we gave up so easily.

But let's face it: when it comes to our human nature, it is INFINITELY easier to quit than it is to persevere. It's easier to give up than it is to endure. Stopping is easier than going.....at least when the going gets tough. And the cost? Each time we quit, each time we give up, it costs us....and sometimes, costs us dearly.

Open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 18, a part of our epistle text for this morning, and we'll take a brief walk through the section that is subtitled *A Call to Persevere*. As you're turning pages, let me paint a mental picture for you.

You're looking out over a beautiful, green pasture. There's a shallow pool over on one side and a flock of sheep that is starting to awaken, steam rising from their bodies as they get up and begin to eat. An old priest looks over the fence, deciding this day, as he does every day, which sheep he will select, take to the temple and sacrifice for the sins of God's people. This goes on day after day, year after year, for hundreds of years, priest after priest, sheep after sheep, rivers of blood for the sins of the people of God.

Finally a NEW priest assumes the office, but this time things are different. Instead of sacrificing sheep, this New Priest allows HIMSELF to be sacrificed, rather brutally and horribly on a cross, and then His body is buried in a grave. This is the sacrifice described by the author of Hebrews, the sacrifice that forgives sins and forever ENDS all other sacrifices.

Read verse 18 out loud with me: *and where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins.*

It is the SACRIFICE of Jesus Christ on the cross that has won for us, earned for us, bought for us, paid in full for us the forgiveness of all of our sins. The reminder of this is right in front of us all.....the opening in the communion rail. This opening reminds us that Jesus'

sacrifice allows us access to God the Father who has created us and who, now, has prepared a place for us in His presence.

Because of Christ's sacrifice and what it means to each of us eternally, the unknown author of Hebrews gives us 5 *pieces of let-us*, 5 different "exhortations."

Please look to verse 22 and read with me to the end of verse 25: *22 Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the DAY approaching.*

Five different exhortations, each of them different but each of them related.

First, 'let us draw near to God.' Verse 22 is loaded with wonderful baptismal language that should be especially meaningful today for Kristen and Nathaniel Johnson, as they have been baptized just this morning! It is through the washing God has given us in our baptisms that we can stand before God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ Himself. Even our consciences....that remind us of our sins....even those ARE wiped clean as we draw closer to God; closer through worship, closer through reading His Word, through prayer and through praise.

Verse 23 continues: *let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who has promised is faithful!* Let me "drive home" this exhortation with an illustration that all of us understand.....driving our cars. We are taught from the beginning that SWERVING is by-in-large not a good thing. If we swerve back and forth we stand a far better chance of running off the road, of having a head-on with another car or spinning out of control. We are also taught to hold the wheel TIGHTLY....driving without cell phones, applying make-up or trying to watch the movie the kids have on in the back seat.

There are plenty of distractions that the devil uses to try to get us to take our spiritual hands off the wheel of faith, to take our eyes off of Christ and to loosen our grip on the cross. In fact, I am quite sure we could all make LISTS of the distractions that the devil uses against us. “Hold on tight and keep going straight” are wonderful words of encouragement for our daily walk of faith. God is faithful to His promises, far more faithful than ANYTHING else in life. NO one can promise more than God does and NO one can ever be more faithful to His Word.

Third, we are encouraged to “*SPUR one another on to good deeds.*” I’m not an equestrian by any means, but I know what spurs are and how they are used, and I’m not sure I’d like to take this literally. But as we begin the construction of ENVISION HOPE this very week, this verse is a wonderful reminder of the commitment we as a congregation made that we will build this part of God’s kingdom together using our hands, our backs, our sweat, our labor, and our money. I will “spur you on” and you can spur ME on until the job is done!

Fourth, “*let’s not give up the habit of meeting together.*” The Christian faith is both a relationship with Jesus Christ into which we have been called by the Holy Spirit and a commitment we make in response to our salvation. When we joined this congregation we literally signed our names on the dotted line to these seven commitments:

- attend worship regularly, something I would define as weekly.
- lead a Christian life that is an example to others.
- develop a pattern of sacrificial tithing ... last week’s message of 10% as the floor of our giving still rings in my ears.
- regularly participate in Bible classes.
- discover and use our spiritual gifts.
- allow ourselves to be admonished when and if the need should arise.
- accord honor, love, prayer and support to this ministry.

These are the duties and the privileges of each member of this congregation, and we are to encourage each to carry them out to the glory and honor of our Savior.

Finally we come to the end of the list, exhortation number 5, "*let us encourage one another all the more as you see the DAY approaching.*" What DAY is that, the DAY that is the ultimate motivation for our mutual encouragement? It is the DAY when Jesus Christ returns.....it is the DAY when for many of our friends, neighbors, and even family members it will be TOO late to reach them with the Good News of Jesus Christ, it will be the DAY that they will be lost, so before that DAY comes, and it comes closer with every breath we take, it is URGENT that we do all we can to spread the good news of Jesus Christ so that they will not be caught without faith.

As we join our hands, hearts and backs with the Laborers for Christ to make ENVISION HOPE a reality, it is important that we remember that we are not simply adding square footage to our building or renovating bathrooms or taking on youth spaces, we are BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD. We are BUILDING THE FAMILY of Christ, one person, one soul, one eternal life at a time. We will press on, committing our time, our talent and our treasure to do whatever it takes so that when "*the Day*" comes, there will be more people joining us in heaven through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

You, my friends, have never looked eyes with someone who doesn't matter to God. You have never spoken with anyone for whom Jesus Christ did not die. Let us...there's that phrase again....commit ourselves unswervingly to the task that is before us, following the Master Builder Himself, Christ Jesus our Lord.

AMEN.

