

Finish Strong 5-13-01

Today is Mother's Day. I wouldn't mind preaching on Mothers – the wonderful and influential call on their lives. It is one of the greatest ministries given, for it is one of God's chief instruments to shape the future. Most of you mothers already know that and see how important your calling is, and know what it has meant to your children. I want to encourage you to pass on what you have learned to your daughters, both the failures and the victories. Pass on the things God has shown you. You already have in the clearest way possible, that was by your example, but reinforce it with words also.

One of the biggest problems in our nation today is the lack of esteem for the calling of Motherhood. That has caused women to look for esteem from the world in careers. I saw a news special on the trend of women now dropping their careers to have a family or take care of the one they already had. They were finding the work world unfulfilling and recognizing the great need in their children. That is a good trend! It is not that some women aren't called to the work place, they surely are, as we saw in the Prov 31 woman, but I believe many will affect the world more in the role as mother. It's a high calling! One that demands sacrifice, long hours, lots of tears, but has great rewards in this life - seeing the fruit of it in your children, and rewards in the life to come.

But today I want to speak on a theme Promise Keepers had a few years back, finishing strong. Last week I mentioned Hezekiah who had that fizzle of finish. The Bible gives us a number of bad examples amongst the kings of Israel, most notably, Solomon. I'm sure you know of people who began with such zeal they seemed unstoppable but they became the proverbial church mouse or not even in fellowship today. Some have fallen into worldliness with as much zeal as they once had for the Lord and holiness.

Let's read Hebrews 4 about a generation who were a bad example and see if we can learn from their mistakes so we don't end up like these. (Read Hebrews 4)

¹ Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

Here is a clear warning of Scripture for us all. The Children of Israel that left Egypt never made it to the Promised Land. They were found to have fallen short of it. God brought them right up to the border and they would not believe God. We are warned not to end up the same way. The promise of rest is found in Psalms 95:7,8 In chapter 3 the writer shares the reason they did not enter.

Heb 3:12-14 (NIV) ¹² See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

Do you see his message to hold on to the end? Sin had deceived them – presented itself as something that would satisfy them – be of value. That is always a lie. But they allowed it to captivate their heart and turned away from the living God. If you think that can't happen to you, remember that whoever thinks he stands needs to take heed lest he fall. (1Cor 10:12) The remedy he prescribes in that passage is to encourage each other. Not only does it help the one you are encouraging, but it helps you too. When we remind

each other of the wonder of who God is to us, of the heavenly calling we share, of eternity, that glitter of sin starts to look dull. The lie is exposed. God gives you opportunity to do this in many ways. Take those opportunities and use them to the maximum. It is one thing to feel and sympathize with our brothers and sisters, but don't leave them looking compromisingly at sin. See Hebrews 2:1 and 1 Cor 15:2. Make sure they know what it is they are forgetting of the Word of God! Encourage them to have a believing heart.

He also says we share in Christ IF (and the writer of Hebrews uses a lot of ifs) we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first. To hold firmly – the writer of Hebrews was fond of using nautical terms. This one means to check the ship's headway. Which way is our ship pointed? Is our course set for heaven? Are we aiming at eternity with our Creator who loves us and gave himself for us? Or are we aiming at the world and some satisfaction in it? Take a look at your compass, the Word, and you'll know the answer. He goes on to say they hardened their hearts and would not believe.

God speaks to us – and one of the main ways is through his word that is forever settled in the heavens. He spoke to the Children of Israel again and again but when it came time to believe what they heard versus what their eyes saw in front of them – those big mean warriors – they chose to trust their eyes and doubt God. Heb 4:2 (NIV)² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

They heard the Word – the life changing, eternal Word of Almighty God – but it didn't do them any good. Did you know you can hear God's word and it not help you? Why didn't it help them? They didn't mix it with faith. They refused to believe and act on it. I see that again and again in the lives of Christians. I'll share what God's word says about their situation and instead of listening and believing and acting on it, they give excuses why it does not apply in their totally unique situation. They have reasoned a justification why they do not have to believe and act on that belief. God told the Children of Israel He would go before them and drive out the inhabitants of Canaan. What difference did their size and walled cities make if God was going to drive them out? But instead of looking at the promises of God they looked at the physical conditions. Their faith was in their ability – not God's. They refused to mix the Word with faith.

Look how they started! Walking through the Red Sea – walls of water on each side. They saw miracle after miracle to help them believe God was faithful to his word. Still they kept hardening their heart and refusing to believe. And we can end up the same way and fall short of the rest of God. Heb 4:11 (NIV)¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

The Greek word for 'labor' (KJV) or 'make every effort' (NIV) means to exert one's self, to endeavor. We need to live in the rest of God that was made possible on Calvary. If we stay in that place of trusting Christ and all He did to make us right with God we walk in faith that He goes before us driving out the enemies that are too great for us. We obey his word – believing the unseen and not the seen. We mix his word with faith. Sounds like a contradiction to labor to enter rest – to make every effort to enter the rest of God. But it is a battle to mix faith with the word. The Children of Israel took the effortless way – lack of faith - and turned back to the wilderness. If they had made the effort to mix the

word they heard with faith and obeyed – they would have gone into the Promised Land. Instead they died in the desert. Heed the warning so that you do not fall by following their example of disobedience.

Heb 4:12-13 (NIV)¹² For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

I like to see these verses, we so often quote alone, in context. God is telling the Hebrew church they better mix the word with faith or it will be their judge. The Word comes to us and if we mix it with faith it will show we are living in what Christ did for us. It will show we are his and not living a lie. But if we are trusting in ourselves to get us through it exposes our self-reliance. 'uncovered' – is from the word *gymnos* – stark naked – that is the same as *gymnast* as the Greeks competed in the nude. That word 'laid bare' or 'opened' - *trachelizo trakh-ay-lid'-zo* – is the word we get *trachea* from. It was used when a combatant held back the head of his opponent exposing his neck for the sword. What is the sword? This word picture shows us that the word of God has us totally exposed and vulnerable.

And if this exposure of the word finds us falling short what should we do?

Heb 4:14-16 (NIV)¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Understand that Jesus – who was 100% man and 100% God - has experienced what you are tempted with – knows how tempting it is to rely on self, yet never did. He is there before God right now. He conquered every evil power and never gave in to sin. So "hold firmly" the faith you profess. Mix the word with faith in Him. Run to Him there in the heavenly Holy of Holies – confidently enter in, knowing that He can give you grace that will help you in your time of need. As long as you are seeking that help you are mixing faith with the word. You are holding on. It is when you stop running to Him that you will be found to have fallen short.

The author of Hebrews doesn't stop with the bad example of unbelieving Israel but goes on in chapter 11 to list the many good examples of those who mixed the Word with faith and even though they suffered for it, stood firm to the end. There you read of Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and many more. In the NT we have the examples of the Apostles, Paul, and our ultimate example Jesus! Those are the examples of obedience we can follow.

Strong warnings! Great comfort! Continue to mix the word with faith – so that you walk in obedience. Take every chance to encourage each other with the fact of who He is and what He is calling you to. Run to Him for the mercy and the grace to help you in your time of need. Let's close by reading Hebrews 6:10-12.