

PROMISES FOR THE WINDED (PART 1)

BY GUY HAMMOND

I've entitled the next two devotionals "Promises for the Winded," and by that I don't mean the "long winded." I mean those who have been running the Christian race for a long time now, and are "winded" because of it. I mean those who maybe have taken a punch or two from Satan in the "spiritual breadbasket", and are doubled over in pain from the hit. I mean those who have failed time and time again, and are wondering how much strength they have to keep getting up.

All of us get discouraged, overwhelmed and think of quitting. We all go through times of being winded. I certainly have. Not only in the area of fighting off my homosexual attractions, but just in life in general, I have felt drained, alone, afraid and wondering how much longer I could go on. It was General George Patton who said "fatigue makes cowards of us all."

Scripture is full of examples of men and women who had mountain top experiences (that we still teach our children about thousands of years later), but who also had their times in the valley, when they were fatigued and despaired even of life.

Elijah: He was the greatest prophet of Old Testament as he was willing to challenge the idolatry of his day, and even called fire down from heaven and won a face off with the prophets of Baal, but in I Kings 19:4 after it was all over, he requested for himself that he might die, and said "I have had enough now, O Lord, take away my life!"

Moses: Was a man whose resume we know so well. God once called him the most humble man alive. With God working through him, he freed an estimated 5 million slaves, split the Red Sea so that they could all cross, talked with God on Mt. Sinai, and was given the Ten Commandments. But in Numbers 11:15 he said to God, "If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death—if I have found favor in your eyes—do not let me face my own ruin."

And then there is **Paul**, whom we will look at today. In Acts 18 we find Paul in his 2nd missionary journey, arriving from Athens to Corinth as he was experiencing a low time in his life, when things weren't going too well. In 1 Corinthians 2:3 Paul says of that time in Acts: "*I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.*" We're about to read about a time in the life of the great apostle Paul when things weren't going well, when he was tired, dejected, alone, afraid, insecure, dejected by Christians and non Christians alike, when he felt like quitting.

Acts 18:1-11: "*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "*Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.*" So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God."

By the time we get to this point in the book of Acts, Paul was fatigued after his 53-mile hike from Athens to Corinth. He was alone and he was trying to stay alive by making a living with both preaching, and tent making, because the financial support from the Christians he was striving to serve wasn't there.

The scriptures say he was abused by people who rejected him and his message. It no doubt brought about fear and insecurity and stress. I'm sure he had a sense of failure as well, because he had not had much success in Athens. In Acts 17:18 philosophers had a fight with Paul and called him a "babbling." A more direct translation of the word "babbling" is "bird brain." He also felt incredibly unappreciated, and was hurt by the fact that Christians were spreading gossip and rumors about him that simply weren't true. In fact, he later wrote to the people of Corinth in 2 Corinthians 12:15-18:

"Everything is in readiness now for this, my third visit to you. But don't worry about it; you won't have to put yourselves out. I'll be no more of a bother to you this time than on the other visits. I have no interest in what you have—only in you. Children shouldn't have to look out for their parents; parents look out for the children. I'd be most happy to empty my pockets, even mortgage my life, for your good. So how does it happen that the more I love you, the less I'm loved? And why is it that I keep coming across these whiffs of gossip about how my self-support was a front behind which I worked an elaborate scam? Where's the evidence? Did I cheat or trick you through anyone I sent? I asked Titus to visit, and sent some brothers along. Did they swindle you out of anything? And haven't we always been just as aboveboard, just as honest?" (The Message.)

By this point on this trip alone, he's been beaten and jailed at Philippi, persecuted at Thessalonica and Berea, ridiculed in Athens, and now he has to face Corinth! He was at a low point, a crossroads in his ministry, and he was just about to quit! Paul was winded. He had had enough. Paul had served and loved and given until there was nothing left to give. Paul was exhausted physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It's not that he wanted to quit being a Christian, it's not that he wanted to quit on God, it's not that he was "bad hearted" or "evil" or "in sin", but the circumstances around him made it such that he was winded, tired, beaten up, he'd had enough. And, if it wasn't enough that the non-Christians and heathens were abusing him, mocking him, gossiping about him, the disciples were as well. Sometimes life and its circumstances get you to a point where you say "That's it, I'm done. I can't go on right now." But we see in this passage, and in the story we'll read through in tomorrow's study that God has Promises for the Winded. Today we'll look at our first promise.

The first promise we have is that of God's presence.

In Acts 18:10 God tells Paul, "*I am with you.*" In Hebrews 13:5 Jesus said, "*Never will I leave you, Never will I forsake you.*" In the Greek translation of Word "never" is actually stressed three times. It's like saying "*never, no never, no never, will I ever leave you.*" So it more accurately reads "*Never, no never, no never will I leave you, Never, no never, no never will I forsake you.*"

There's the story of the little boy went home after school very sad and told mom about Billy, his best friend, who had been absent for three days. He found out today why when he returned to class; his daddy had died, and when he told us, he cried and just laid his head flat on his desk. The mom asked, "What did you do?" The child replied "I didn't know what to do, so I just laid my head on my desk and cried, too!"

When our time of being winded comes, the Lord comes Himself with loving grace and takes away our fear. He doesn't send an Angel; He comes for us, like a loving and caring parent Himself! When one of my four children is crying or hurt, I don't get someone else to do the comforting. I have to do that myself, because there is no one else who can comfort *my child* in their time of pain like I can. God tells us in Isaiah 41:10: "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" And again, in Hebrews 13:6: "*So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'*" So in our time of being winded, we have the promise of His presence!

ⁱ Patton, George S. "The Quotations Page." 6 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.thequotationspage.com>>. Letter of Instruction Number 1, Third Army. War As I Knew It, 312

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