

Three Ways to Stay Encouraged

Matt. 11: 2 “When John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

- Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptizer, is now in prison because he stood against the religious system and declared that Herod was living in sin because he had taken his brother’s wife as his own.
- John’s circumstances had now changed, he once proclaimed and declared about Jesus - “Behold, the Lamb of God that comes to take away the sins of the world.”
- But now that he’s in prison, he’s not so sure Jesus is really the One He claimed to be.

The two disciples went to the city where Jesus was ministering to ask the question: “

Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?

vv. 4-6 Jesus response was to “go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

The key to this story is v. 7,

“As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John; “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”

- John’s disciples nor John himself would ever hear Jesus paying him this compliment.
- Jesus told how great John was.

It was the greatest encouragement that they would never hear.

- The crowd and multitude heard it.
- V. 11- “Of all men born among women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;”
- Perhaps that would have encouraged John in his situation to have known Jesus was aware of his condition and thought so much of him.
- “John, he talked about you and declared there is no one greater born of women than you.”
- That might have helped John deal with the prison, the sword to his neck, the false accusations against him.

- But John never heard those words!

Today, I want you to hear words of encouragement that you need to hear whatever your situation may be:

1. You're doing better than you think you are:

- satan is called the “accuser of the brethren.” Rev. 12:10.
- So if hell is the accuser of the brethren, we need to be “an encourager of the brethren.”
- Jesus loves you even if you have issues and challenges that make you feel you are not making any progress in your spiritual journey.
- You are doing better than you think you are –
- You need to know today – You’re going to make it!

ILL: Steve Land saying to me at the Bible study when I was a new Christian –
“He looked at me and said – Russell – You’re going to make it.”

Another time when I went to see a brother in the Lord I worked at the same store with. He was actually a college friend of my brother. When I went to where he lived, a lady answered the door and let me in and my work friend – Andy met me and we begin to talk. I was a young struggling Christian with no Christian friends my age and caught in the middle of young people and young adults.

Didn’t know if I would make it as a Christian.

The women that let me in the door, came back in the room where Andy and I were and handed him a small piece of paper. I opened it and it said this:

“As I let this young man in the door, I saw an I.D. bracelet on his arm that was badly scratched. It had several names on it, as if a name were engraved but then scratched through and another name written over it. BUT, then she saw the Name of Jesus on the bracelet signifying that Jesus was the One I ended up with.”

Some of you are here today, are struggling with your identity as a believer, wondering if you will make it, if you have what it takes to persevere and overcome.

I want to tell you that if you will pull close to Jesus, He will strengthen you and will make you His child – son or daughter.

- You may not be what you ought to be yet, but you’re not what you used to be!
- You will get there by God’s grace – “The empowering presence of God empowering you to be who He has called you to be and to do what He has called you to do for His glory.”
- Stop putting yourself down – Jesus is pulling you up to be closer to Him.
- Stop speaking negatively – you’re speaking the opposite of who and what He says you are.

The old preacher says the way to get to heaven is to not quit, keep moving and walking toward the goal.

Ecc. 3 list 28 seasons or times we can go through:

- A time to be born, a time to die;
- A time to plant, a time to pluck up;
- A time to kill, a time to heal;
- A time to tear down, a time to build up;
- A time to weep, a time to laugh;

But one thing it doesn't say there is a time for and that is a time to **QUIT!**

If John could've heard those words while in prison, he would have been encouraged.

Today, hear those words: **YOU'RE DOING BETTER THAN YOU THINK YOU ARE!"**

- I've got cancer, I've got an addiction in my life, I'm trying to get better.

When you fall, get up and run to the Throne of Grace and beat the accuser to the throne.

He wants to be there to throw mud on you and point you out to God,

GET UP AND BEAT HIM TO THE THRONE AND FALL BEFORE GOD AND RECEIVE MERCY AND GRACE TO HELP IN YOUR TIME OF NEED!

DON'T QUIT OR GIVE UP!

2. You matter more than you think you do:

Isa. 41:6 "Everyone helped his neighbor, and said to his brother, **BE OF GOOD COURAGE.**"

v.7 "So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith; He who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes with the anvil, saying, it is ready for the soldering; then he fastened it with pegs, that it might not totter."

- The carpenter encouraged the goldsmith
- The goldsmith encouraged the guy who had the hammer
- The guy who had the hammer encouraged the guy who held the nail
- They are encouraging one another saying: "You matter, No – you matter, No – you matter.
- The reason they were encouraging each other is because they didn't want anyone to totter.

Totter – “to wobble, stagger, fall down.”

God doesn't want anyone falling down, wobbling or staggering. He wants us to help encourage each other to stand and finish this race with victory TOGETHER.

We have to have a little encouragement from somebody, a kind word, a sincere pat on the back, a joining together and not working independently.

Every one of us matter more than we think we do!

When we go through prison experiences [like John], we start thinking we don't matter, our life is useless and ineffective.

- Some of you have a little age and miles on your life – you still matter.
- Some of you are young and think you're too young – you matter.
- Some of you think you are small and unseen – you matter.

You matter and you're more valuable than you think you are!

Who in your family or circle of acquaintances is feeling like they don't matter and life is meaningless and empty?

Be watchful – this is the time of year and season more people commit suicide than any other; they are overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness and feeling they don't matter.

Give them the message that John never heard:

- You do matter and your life is valuable and God does have good plans for you.
- Give somebody the compliments they need while they are alive to appreciate it.
- Don't wait till they've died and wish you would have told them what you wanted to say. SAY IT NOW!

3. It's less about you than you think:

- John's in this prison thinking it's all about him.
- But Jesus is thinking: It's about the Kingdom and the Father's will.

When Adam and Eve sinned; why didn't God just wipe them out and start over?

- It was just two people; they are messed up; it's not a populated world of millions.
- Just wipe them out and try again.

- God is not interested in replacing damaged products
- God is into fixing damaged products.

God is not into replacing damaged marriages – He is into fixing damaged marriages.

- There is a God that doesn't want to replace you – He wants to repair you.

It's less about you than you think – it's about His cross and the sacrifice HE made for you.

Ill: One day a man's car broke down on the road. As he was sitting there wondering what to do – a man pulled up driving a limousine and got out. He was dressed from head to toe looking like a million bucks. He walked over in his suit and asked the broken down motorist if he needed some help – to which the man replied YES. He looked under the hood. He told the owner of the car “when I tell you, sit in the car and turn the ignition.” The helping motorist fiddled around with the motor, and told the man sitting in the car to try it. He turned the ignition and the car started right up. The stranded motorist was amazed, asked how much did he owe him for the help. The man said – “You don't owe me a thing.” The motorist asked: “Why would you, driving that fine car stop and help me, you look like you're very well off – why would you stop and help me? The man replied – “My name is Henry Ford - and I'm the creator of this car you're driving; and it really bothers me to see what I've created broken down on the side of the road not doing what I've created it to do.”

God is saying to you today: “I'm not going to replace you, I'm going to fix you if you will come to Me and allow ME to work in your life.”

It bothers Him to see you not living the life He created you to live. It's less about you than you think it is – Your Heavenly Father gets great joy when HE sees you overcoming and moving forward.

Consider Job: He got in tough situations and thought God didn't love him and was ignoring him and forgot him.

- He didn't understand it was less about him and more about God's Kingdom.
- There was a conversation going on in heaven between God and satan and God was bragging on Job.
- God said: “have you considered MY servant Job?”
- God was bragging on Job.
- Sometimes we think when we get in prisons and chains, tough circumstances and adversity that God doesn't love us.

- Maybe it's that God has been bragging on you.

The devil accuses God of protecting Job – you've got a hedge around him, who couldn't live in a perfect environment?

God says to satan – “You couldn't.” “you had it perfect and you rebelled.”

- **That's why we shouldn't let the devil condemn us – “Remind him that he couldn't live for God in heaven – you are living for God on earth.”**
- satan, you couldn't live for God when there was no sin, and I'm living for God with sin all around me.

When I stumble, I get back up and beat the devil to the throne!

God said about Job: “He doesn't serve Me **because of** – he serves ME & worships ME **in spite of!**”

It's one thing to worship God when it's all going good and you've got your money, cars, house and stuff and it's another thing to worship God when you're in prison, chains, and tribulation and problems and physical attacks and bad reports.

When you can praise in pain and praise God and lift your voice and declare:
The Lord gives and the Lord takes away!

I don't praise You because of – I praise You in spite of my hardships.

It's not about you – it's about Him.