

"We're not Quitters"

The 40 days of Lent are almost over. Hopefully for you, this has been a time of acknowledging the ways you have turned away from God and a time of focusing on turning your hearts and your minds back towards Him. I know it has been such a time for me. And our walk through Hebrews Chapter 10, which concludes tonight has certainly been a big part of that time. Through our faith in Christ, we have been made holy through the offering of His body on the cross, once and for all -**therefore**- we are to live like this actual event, that was part of God's plan the whole time, really matters in our lives. You know, I'm really thankful to be part of a church that actually acknowledges the season on Lent because I need it. So many Christian congregations skip this time of introspection, repentance, and prayer and go straight to the joy of Easter. But we slow down and take these 40 days seriously.

In the early days of the church, that's what converts seeking to become Christians did. Under the threat of Roman persecution, becoming a Christian was serious business, so their process of preparation was pretty intense! Usually they had spent several years in study and preparation. The final period of "purification and enlightenment" was the 40 days before their baptism at Easter. The rest of the church began to observe this 40 day period in solidarity with these newest Christians and this time became an opportunity for all Christians to recall and renew the commitment of their baptism.

Over the years , the period of Lent has become a time to acknowledge whatever it is that has distracted us from God. For many, it's also a time to give up something. We might deprive ourselves of some small pleasure or indulgence as

a way of remembering not only the abundance in all of our lives, but a way of remembering God's great sacrifice for us. ¹

And even though giving up french fries or beer for 40 days pales by comparison to what was done for us, taking a break from the normal, even in the smallest of ways can help us turn towards God. But even this takes perseverance, doesn't it? Going through the McDonald's drive through and ordering that Quarter Pounder with cheese and not ordering fries is hard. So is going to the White Street Brewery with your friends and ordering water while they are ordering beers! Even the small things— things that are so insignificant for many of us— that we commit to giving up for Lent can creep back in to our lives after a short time. Temptation gets the best of us and before we know it, we give up; we quit.

We quit and don't think anything of it. Now, of course, giving up something for Lent is not a mandatory part of the Christian faith and quitting it before Lent is over is not going to send you us to the depths of hell. But have you ever thought about how quick we are to quit things? Unhappy with our jobs? We quit. Not thrilled with the new diet or the results of the exercise plan? We quit. We quit trying in our marriages or in our relationships with our kids and settle for the status quo. In so many areas of life, we're a bunch of quitters! "Well maybe we are, but so what," you might be thinking. "What does any of this have to do with my faith?" The truth is **not quitting** has a lot to do with your faith and mine.

Listen again to how the author of Hebrews concludes chapter 10. "Yet a little while, and the coming one *will* come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." In other words, anyone who is right with God through their faith in Jesus Christ is OK and thrives. But anyone who cuts and runs, God won't be happy. But we're not quitters who lose out. No way! We'll stay through it all and survive, trusting all the way.

¹<http://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/why-do-we-give-up-something-for-lent>

Quitting is not an option here. It wasn't for the Jewish Christians of the 1st century, and it's not for us in the 21st century. We are those who have faith, which preserves our souls, and this faith is what keeps us trusting in God all the way. It's not to be treated like something we can pick up or quit at our leisure, based on whether we feel it's working for us or not. Our faith is who we are; it is our identity.

The old testament prophet Habakkuk reminds us of this. In our OT reading, he is having a conversation with God. Habakkuk wants an answer as to why things are so bad and God answers him. "The soul is puffed up," says God. In other words, the soul is full of pride and stubbornness. But then God says this: "The righteous shall live by his faith." These same words can be found in Romans 1:17. "The righteous shall live by faith." Faith is the power to believe that the greatest gift any of us could ever receive is the forgiveness of sins for the sake of what Christ did for us and believing this makes us right with God. And it's entirely His work.

With this in mind, the writer of Hebrews thoughtfully concludes Chapter 10. "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed. We are those who have faith and preserve our souls." Let me stop here and ask you something. Do you believe this? Do you believe that we are not those who shrink back that we are not quitters?

Then say it with me. We are not quitters. Say it again and say it like you mean it. **"We are not quitters."** One more time. **"We are not quitters."** Doesn't that sound good? Doesn't shouting this and hearing a congregation full of fellow believers doing the same sound like we actually believe that Jesus Christ died on a cross once and for all and by his sacrifice, we have an eternal relationship with God? Doesn't shouting this and hearing a congregation full of fellow believers doing the same give you a little more confidence that you are not alone and that whatever this life throws at you, you will be able to face it with peace and joy in your hearts because of the gift of faith God gave you and the community of people he surrounds you with?

We are not those who shrink back; we are not quitters. Yes, our faith may sometimes grow weak. Yes, we will still be tempted every day to go against the things of God. Yes, we will all have to face the death of our loved ones and even our own deaths one day. But, no matter what, we are not quitters.

Before I wrap this up tonight, I want to point you back to our Gospel reading from Luke tonight. It is the familiar story of this guy named Zacchaeus. That text tells us that he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Jesus comes to town and this rich man wanted to see him. But Zacchaeus had a little problem. He was short. The crowds were large and because of his shortness, he couldn't see Jesus. So he climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him. He didn't quit. He didn't leave defeated, complaining about how short he was. He solved a problem. Jesus ends up looking up and seeing Zacchaeus and tells him to hurry down because Jesus wants to stay at his house. People were ticked that once again Jesus picked a sinner to stay with. But again Zacchaeus didn't give up and quit. He tells Jesus that if he has done anything wrong, he will make it right. It was Zacchaeus' way of repenting.. And what does Jesus say? "Today, salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Jesus says the same to you and me tonight. "Today, salvation has come to this house. For the Son of man came to seek and save the lost." We are the lost but we are going to hold on to Jesus. Why? Because we're not quitters. Say it once more with me. "We are not quitters." **Amen.**