**ENDURANCE (#4)**

***Hang In There***

I couldn’t believe the story of Henry Dempsey was real until I researched it and found it actually happened. In 1987 Mr. Dempsey was the pilot of a 15 seat commuter plane run by Eastern Express Airlines. He and his co-pilot Paul Boucher were flying empty from Lewiston, Maine to Boston to pick up passengers. The light came on that the exit door was not fully sealed shut. Henry went back to check on it when suddenly there was a jolt of turbulence that slammed him into the door. The door flew open and sucked him out of the plane at 5,000 feet. Co-pilot Boucher felt the rush of wind and turned to see his partner gone. He radioed for immediate landing and for the Coast Guard to begin a search-and-rescue mission to find his partner. Ten minutes later he was landing the plane at Portland Jetport, touching down at over 100 mph. He immediately ran to the back to see how badly the door was damaged, only to see a leg still in the plane, and his partner holding a death-grip to the steps railing.

“Hang on Hank” Dempsey, as he would later be called, had frantically grabbed for anything he could find as he was being sucked out of the plane. Upside down, with his head at the bottom of the steps staring up at the sky, he hung on for dear life as the plane flew at nearly 200 miles per hour for the next 10 minutes. Since his head was below the bottom step he could see that the landing would hit the stairs and so at the last moment found enough energy (adrenaline) to do a sit-up as they touched down. The emergency crew took several minutes to pry Dempsey’s fingers off the railing. Other than cut fingers from that death-grip he was “miraculously” unharmed.

That is a great picture of endurance. The ability to hang on against all odds during great tribulation (or turbulation in this case) is the essence of Biblical endurance. The will to hang in there when it would be so easy to let go and give up is what God is telling us to do in our struggles of life.

James, the Lord’s blood brother, and spiritual brother, watched Jesus grow up in Nazareth. Oh the stories he could have told if the Spirit had permitted him to do so. He had a front-row seat for almost three decades watching his older brother live a sinless life as a carpenter’s son. He then watched Jesus endure the infamous witch-hunt and death-threats in His final three years. He likely saw the crucifixion of his brother at Golgotha. He would know exactly the meaning of this statement:

*“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him* ***endured*** *the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who* ***endured*** *such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls”* (Heb. 12:2-3).

The non-stop savagery his brother took at the hands of government leaders and angry mobs is beyond anything we will ever face. Lest we “*become weary and discouraged in your souls*” Jesus was set as an example for us to “*look unto*” and “*consider*” for the endurance of our faith.

James must have thought about his brother daily for the rest of his life. I’m almost certain his thoughts were about Him as he sat down to write his epistle. Right off the bat his very first words were:

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces* ***patience****. But let* ***patience*** *have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”* (Jam. 1:2-4 NKJV)

We look at “trials” as stumbling-blocks to our faith, but James tells us they are stepping-stones to the perfection and completion of our faith. What seems like a negative is in reality a faith-building positive. Trials test our faith to see what it is made of. They are a refiner’s fire that burns out the dross to produce pure gold. Trials produce “*patience*” (“*endurance*” – CSB, NASB; “*perseverance*” – NIV; “*steadfastness*” – ESV, RSV).

Knowing this fact should cause us to “*count it all joy*” when they come, for it leads to a Report Card that must be presented to God to sign. As a child I hated the end of every six weeks, for that was when Report Cards must be taken home for parents to sign. Many times I was tempted to first let Rudy see it and ask him what he thought. Who is Rudy? My pet dachshund. The old excuse, “The dog ate my homework,” was a powerful temptation at Report Card time. But with God “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*” (Heb. 4:13). Just as we had to take tests in school to discover our success (A) or failure (F), so God gives us tests called “*various* *trials*” to determine the strength (A) or weakness (F) of our faith.

While I might have dreaded Report Card time in my school days, as a Christian I should “*count it all joy*” to come before my Father to receive my grade. By developing a strong faith through Bible study (2 Tim. 2:15), prayer (Jam. 5:13-18), and service (Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10), I can be joyful handing Him my Report Card.

I love William Barclay’s definition of Endurance: “the courageous acceptance of everything life can do to us and the transmitting of even the worst event into another step on the upward way.” Just as an oyster takes a grain of sand, which is an irritant and a source of pain, and rushes healing fluids to it to cover it, thus making a beautiful pearl, so Christians can take life’s irritants and rush God’s healing palm of grace to it to create a pearl of great price. Pearls, conceived through irritation and born of adversity, create a precious gem. So our faith, conceived through confession and repentance and born in baptism, create through trials a priceless gem to present to God at Judgment.

Let us not fear the trials that are coming, but instead embrace them with joy for what they can yet do for us. Like Mr. “Hang-On-Hank” Dempsey, let us grab the saving hand of Jesus and hang on for dear life as we face each day’s test of faith. May the angels have to pry our fingers off the Lord’s hand as we land safely at Heaven’s Home.

Hang in there. – Rick