

PLAYING HURT

“Be faithful, even to the point of death . . . ” (Rev 2:10)

In 1983 Wayne Smith started a tradition at the Southland Christian Church. On Super Bowl Sunday he spoke on the subject of “Playing Hurt”. Every year after that, he spoke on the same subject, using, of course, a wide variety of different Scriptures and illustrations.

Tommy Bell once came out of a football game telling the coach that he thought his leg was broken. The coach said: “Get back out there until your sure”. Joe Namath helped win the Super Bowl with both knees taped because they were in such bad shape. Lou Gehrig played 2,130 consecutive games. He was called the “Iron Man of Baseball”. When he retired, X-rays revealed that every finger had been broken at least once, and some as many as three times. Paul also knew what it was to play hurt. Five times he had been beaten with whips and three times with rods. He had a painful thorn in his flesh that God refused to take away. Paul concluded that the strength of God was made more powerful in his own personal weakness. Paul was hurt, but he did not quit!

Playing hurt, of course, applies to preachers. Wayne points out that 1,300 preachers are fired every month. In the last 25 years divorce increased in the parsonage 65 %. The average length of a ministry is less than 3 years. For every 10 who start out as ministers, only 2 retire as ministers. If preachers are going to stay in the game, they have to play when they are hurting. Paul also testified to this when he said that he had received a ministry from God and would not faint. Though he was troubled on every side, he was not distressed. Though perplexed, he was not in despair. Though persecuted, he was not forsaken. Though cast down, he was not destroyed.

Then there is also the destructive influence of emotional pain. Wayne told of a woman named Jackie from the S. E. Christian

Church in Louisville. A graduate of Cincinnati Bible College her husband left her for another woman. Then her minister father drowned at a Sunday School picnic. Next her 17 year old son was killed in a car wreck. At the very time Wayne was telling her story she was a missionary to Kosovo. Obviously, she didn't quit just because she got hurt. Then there is the story of Jerry Yorks who was a preacher at Hubbard, Ohio. On Aug. 24, 1974 his two little girls were killed by a run-a-way car at the county fair. Though he was hurt, he didn't quit. Thirty years later he was still faithfully preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Using humor and sarcasm to drive home the point, Wayne told of some boys who found a stray dog, and all wanted it. They agreed among themselves that whoever could tell the biggest lie could have the dog. When the local minister found out about their game he told the boys, "When I was your age, it never entered my mind to tell a lie". The boys got their heads together and said: "Okay preacher! It's your dog"!

The promise of God is for those who are perfect, but for those who do not quit. Even God does not promise the crown of life to quitters. We are to be faithful until we die, not until we get hurt. We are to be faithful until we die, not until we get offended. We are to be faithful until we die, not until someone tells a lie about us. Jesus didn't quit when people lied about him, and neither should we. Jesus didn't quit when people offended Him, and neither should we. Jesus didn't quit when a close friend betrayed him, and neither should we. Jesus was faithful until He died. Only after Jesus had done everything God commanded Him to do, did He cry out "It is finished" and yield His Spirit back to God.

The late Clarence Greenleaf once complained because he had torn his fingernail down into the quick. His wife gently rebuked him by saying: "You and Polycarp, both great martyrs for the cause of Christ". There is obviously a dramatic difference between a sore finger and being burned at the stake. Another complainer received this harsher rebuke: "When I hear of

suffering like you have gone through, Calvary pales into insignificance”. The books of Hebrews uses the same reasoning by reminded us: “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb 12:3)

Remember! Be faithful, even to the point of death, and God will give you the crown of life!