

IT'S NOT OVER, 'TIL IT'S OVER

2 Timothy 4:1-5

INTRODUCTION

- A. There is a popular poster available in most bookstores which shows a wide-eyed cat holding on for dear life to a clothesline. The caption underneath reads, "Hang in there, Baby." It communicates a message that all of us need to hear from time to time in our lives - that often it is not brilliance or brawn or bravado which is needed in day to day living so much as the simple capacity to stick things out.
- B. We use a number of folksy sayings which make the same point:
 - 1. Keep on keeping on.
 - 2. Never say die.
 - 3. When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hold on.
 - 4. It's not over till it's over. (*Yogi Berra*)
- C. The ability to hang on, to persist, to persevere is one of the most praiseworthy characteristics we humans possess. We don't like quitters, we hate ourselves for giving up, and the very word "surrender" leaves a bad taste in our mouths. Even when things seem bleakest, there is something about the human spirit that refuses to say "uncle."
- D. Until it comes to matters of faith, that is. *Satan is constantly tempting us to give up and let go.*
- E. Christians need few things as much as the ability to hang on. We've all known people who, in the excitement of conversion, make some initial changes and commitments only to lose in time both their excitement and their faith. Very few of us start out luke-warm, but the New Testament constantly warns that many will end up that way.
- F. When it comes to faith, what begins with a bang often ends in a whimper. We get tired. We grow apathetic. We lose interest. We become comfortable. And all of that persuades us to slow down, back off, drop out, and give up. We try to tie a knot, but we can't seem to hold on. It's sad but true that it's over for many of us long before it's really over.
- G. *The Pastoral Epistles are an encouragement to keep on keeping on.*

I. WHEN DID PAUL DIE?

A. The witness of the Bible:

- 1. Silence of Acts.
 - a. Acts ends in this inconclusive manner.
 - i. No word on the conclusion of Paul's ordeal in Rome.
 - ii. No hint of the outcome of his trial before Caesar.
 - iii. No indication as to whether he lived to continue his work or was martyred in Rome around A.D. 62.
 - b. Most of us assume he died at the close of Acts, martyred under Nero after coming to trial in A.D. 62.
 - c. There are several problems with this assumption.
- 2. Testimony of the Pastorals.
 - a. The events spoken of in the Pastoral epistles (1Ti, 2Ti, and Titus) do not fit within the time frame covered by *Acts*.
 - i. When did Paul leave Timothy in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) or Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5)?
 - ii. When did Paul ever winter in Nicopolis (Titus 3:13)?
 - iii. When did Paul ever suffer in prison like he describes in 2 Timothy (2:9)?
 - b. Either Luke left out a great deal of material when he wrote Acts, or the events of the Pastoral letters took place after the close of Acts.

B. The Witness of Early Church Traditions:

1. Clement - 1st Letter to the Corinthians (circa A.D. 100). After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, *and come to the extreme limit of the west*, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.
2. Eusebius - The History of the Church (circa A.D. 325). *There is evidence that, having then been brought to trial, the apostle again set out on the ministry of preaching*, and having appeared a second time in the same city found fulfilment in his martyrdom. *I have said this to show that it was not during the stay in Rome described by Luke that Paul's martyrdom was accomplished."*

C. Another Possibility.

1. A Fourth Missionary Journey?
 - a. Imprisoned and sent to Rome following his third missionary journey.
 - b. During this time he wrote the "prison epistles" (Eph., Phil., Col., Philemon).
 - c. Those letters indicate he expected to be released.
 - d. Evidently he was released and then traveled widely until once again imprisoned.
 - i. Travelled to Crete, where Titus was left (Tit 1:5) to finish the work and appoint elders.
 - ii. Travelled to Ephesus, where Timothy was left (1 Tim. 1:3) to teach the gospel and deal with false teachers.
 - iii. Travelled to Greece (wintering in Nicopolis), where he wrote back to Timothy and Titus, sending 1 Timothy and Titus.
 - e. From there he travelled back to Rome.
2. A Second Roman Imprisonment?
 - a. In Rome, persecutions by Nero were in full swing.
 - i. The Christians had been blamed for the Great Fire.
 - ii. Nero was busy making an example of the Christians.
 - b. Paul may well have been arrested during this time for being a leader of the Christians. During this imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy.
3. Death under Nero in A.D. 67/68.

II. A LESSON IN PERSEVERANCE.

1. Paul has had a long ministry full of suffering.
 - a. Approx. 32 years of service, every bit of it full of persecution.
 - b. Described in 2 Cor. 11:23-28.
 - c. Now he is in prison about to die.
2. Yet Paul has never given up or quit!
 - a. He has "stuck it out" through the worst of times.
 - b. He writes to encourage Timothy to do the same.
 - c. He shames us by his example of perseverance.

A. Paul's Suffering in 2 Timothy

1. Paul's language:
 - a. "Suffering" - uses the word 7 times.
 - b. "Persecutions" - 3 references
 - c. "Chains" - 3 references
2. Paul is lonely.
 - a. It was difficult for people to find him.
 - i. **2 Tim. 1:16-18**
 - ii. Onesiphorus seemed to be unique in this.
 - b. Many had "deserted" Paul: Note: **2 Tim. 1:15, 4:9-10a, 16.**
 - c. Only Luke remains – **2 Tim. 4:10b-11a.**
 - d. He wants Timothy to join him quickly. Note: **2 Tim. 1:4, 4:9.**

3. Paul is in a "state of want," **2 Tim. 4:13, 21**—without his books or warm clothing.
4. He knows that the end is near (**2 Tim. 4:6**).

B. Paul's Perseverance in 2 Timothy

1. Endurance in suffering:
 - a. **2 Tim. 1:11-12**
 - b. **2 Tim. 2:8-10**
 - c. **2 Tim 4:16-18**
2. *"I have fought the good fight ..."*
 - a. **2 Tim. 4:6-8**
 - b. Paul's example of perseverance:
 - i. The time has come
 - ii. I have finished the race
 - iii. Now . . .
3. Paul is not just writing to tell about his own suffering and perseverance. He wants to encourage Timothy (and us)
 - a. To follow his example.
 - b. To persevere even in great suffering.

C. Paul's Encouragement in 2 Timothy

1. Paul's charges to Timothy:
 - a. **2 Tim. 2:1-3**
 - b. **2 Tim. 3:14-15**
 - c. **2 Tim. 4:1-2, 5**
2. *"Here is a trustworthy saying" – 2 Tim. 2:11-13*

CLOSING

- A. During the darkest days of WWII, Winston Churchill became famous for his speeches on perseverance. On one rainy day early in the war, people waited for hours to listen to a speech by the famous statesman. When at last Churchill rose to speak, he looked out over the audience and said just seven words - "Never, never, never, never, never give up!" And sat down! It wasn't a long speech, but it is considered by many to be his most powerful.
- B. In the life of the Apostle Paul, we have something better than the speeches of Churchill. We have the example of one who kept the faith, who hung on, who never gave up.
- C. Can we do any less?