

#20 “Is the Christian Life Supposed to Be Easy?”

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If you tune into enough Christian television nowadays, you might be prone to think that we can buy our way to health, wealth, happiness, and success. Listening to the many TV preachers, it would appear that Jesus is the key to being set free from all that is difficult and hard about life. Jesus did say in Matthew 11:30, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” But did He mean that life itself would be easy, or was He referring to something else?

We as humans have a knack for making things harder than they have to be. The Pharisees of Jesus’ time had rule after legalistic rule which served to wear people out, to burden their souls, and to make their lives miserable. Jesus came onto the scene and said that the only work that we need to do in terms of making our souls righteous and giving ourselves inner peace and rest is to believe upon Him (John 6:29). To trust in Jesus is to say that all of our own self-effort and religious works amount to nothing unless we by faith repent of our sins and trust in the blood of Christ to cleanse us from all sin. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). That includes being saved and being sanctified as we grow more and more into the image of Christ. God began a good work in us, and He will be faithful to complete it. In these truths of our salvation and the completion of it there is great rest for our souls. The burden of Christ is indeed light, for He has carried the weight of our sins, nailing them to the cross. Simple faith and repentance is all that is required. It is that easy.

Yet we know from experience that life, despite our confidence in our salvation, is not easy. Jesus knew that life is hard (they tried to throw Him off a cliff, they mocked Him, and they eventually brutally executed Him), and He told us just that, saying that in this world, we will have trouble and tribulation (John 16:33). Have we ever gotten upset with God because things are tough, and they don’t seem to be getting any easier? Yet Christ has told us it would be this way. Why do we go on expecting things to be easy?

Paul, too, understood suffering, having been beaten, bitten by a snake, shipwrecked, homeless, and the list goes on and on. Life is tough, even as Christians. We are not supposed to set our lives on cruise control and coast into heaven. We are called to suffer, to labor, and to strive for the prize which is yet to be ours in heaven. Paul spoke of disciplining his body so that he would not be disqualified from the race of life, which he viewed as preaching the gospel to as many souls as he could (1 Corinthians 9:27). In Colossians 1:28-29, he says, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” Paul labors toward the end goal of preaching the gospel to all men and teaching them the full counsel of God. The word for “labor” implies a fatigue, tiredness, toiling, and weariness. Even implied in this word is the notion that the labor causes us to

sweat. Paul's labor was preaching the gospel, and such is what made him toil and sweat. The chief commission and call of the believer is to preach the gospel and make disciples. Therefore, by definition, the Christian life involves labor that makes a person sweat. Sin has blinded many, and it is tough work to see a captive of the devil released. It will not happen without a fight. The devil fights against our purity as believers as well, and as such we must stand firm. This is battle imagery. The word for "striving" means to contest as in a sporting event or to struggle as against an adversary. The Christian life is far more a battle than it is a joyride, despite the fact that we can have joy unspeakable at all times in the Lord. The promise of unconditional peace and joy for the believer is so remarkable because it transcends circumstances and is often in spite of circumstances. Plain and simply put, the Christian life is a struggle. It is nothing short of hard work.

The reality of life as a believer is that we have an enemy, and we must stand firm against Him, putting on the full armor of God. We must remember the promises of God and believe them, we must use the Word of God as a weapon to set captives free (2 Timothy 2:26), we must take thoughts captive and bring down spiritual strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:5), and we are to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). We are to do good as we have opportunity (Galatians 6:10). Like a soldier, we are to labor, strive, suffer, fight, and contest the enemy. This is hard work, and it requires great faith. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3-4, "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." A soldier on active duty has a mission. His eyes are fixed upon his task, and he is not consumed with all the busyness and activities of life. He doesn't get entangled and sidetracked by anything that would keep him from accomplishing his mission, which in the case of the Christian is making disciples. His purpose is to please the one who called him into service, which is the Lord. Compared to knowing Christ and experiencing the fellowship of His suffering, all else is secondary. Nothing is to impede our walk with Christ and service for Him.

The curious thing is that when we make Christ the centerpiece of our ambitions and commitments, all else falls into place. When we trust Him by faith and make Him our all in all, life carries a certain joy and richness that is lost when we make life all about us and the passing things of this world. God has not promised to take away suffering and to give us lots of money. He has promised to go through the tough spots with us, and He has given us the honor of serving in His spiritual army. May we not lose sight of the fact that each day we battle the devil and temptation, and God has vested His power in us to release captives of the devil and to advance His kingdom on the earth, which is a kingdom of His reign in the hearts of mankind. Let us like good soldiers, fight the good fight of faith as we preach and live out the gospel, setting our hope completely on Christ.

Life is tough, no doubt about it. Jesus never meant it to be easy. He said in this world we will have trouble. The promise, however, is that He has overcome this world. When we remember our calling and our inheritance in heaven, we will more adequately keep our eyes fixed upon Him Who will keep us in perfect peace no matter what difficulties come

our way. As Isaiah 26:3 says, “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.” It is a challenge to stay the course and be steadfast, but if we can keep our minds fixed upon Christ and rest upon Him by faith, He will keep us in perfect peace. The Christian life is not easy, but it can be one of great joy, incomprehensible peace, intimacy with our Lord, and rest for our souls.