

6TH WEDNESDAY OF LENT

MARCH 20, 2013

CHRIST IN A SOLEMN OATH

Pastor Jim Dunn

(Based on the sermon, *Finish*, by Reed Lessing in the sermon series, *Christ in the Strangest Places*)

1 Kings 11:1-6

Solomon Turns from the Lord

11 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, **2** from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. **3** He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. **4** For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. **5** For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. **6** So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.

It's easy as pie to begin and just as much fun, but it's tougher than nails to finish.

I'm talking about a formation run. When I was in the Army, I often had to run in formation with soldiers from my unit. When a formation run began, it was easy as pie. The soldiers were lined up straight and even. Four soldiers in a row, an equal distance from each other. Each row behind them the same distance from each other. The sergeant singing the Jody calls so that everyone stays in step. Left, right, a left, right, a left. It's the cool of the early morning. 6:00am.

Everyone feels fresh, ready to run, singing the Jody calls back to the sergeant. But the commander, leading the formation by running out in front of it by himself, is in the mood for a long run. And as the soldiers begin to catch on that it's not going to be a quick run and then off to the showers, they start to tire and drop out. Holes appear in the formation. Those farther back in the formation have to run harder to close the gaps. Even the stronger runners grow tired, and finishing the run in formation, not dropping out, becomes tough as nails.

When Solomon began his reign as king of Israel, it was as easy as pie. His competitors for the throne, older brothers Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, were out of the way. Solomon's enemies, Joab, Abiathar, and Shimei, were soon cast aside. He called himself a kid, but wisely asked God for the gift of wisdom instead of wealth or honor. He came out of the starting blocks like a greyhound chasing a rabbit.

As time went on, Solomon built the Temple, the royal palace, and fortress cities. Under his leadership Israel gained control of the two international trade routes that passed through Israel. And Solomon wrote proverbs and songs of praise. For the first ten chapters of 1Kings, Solomon is awesome!

But then along comes chapter eleven. Solomon hits a bump. And it's as if he's become tired, fatigued, having trouble keeping up. It says, "Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines..." Among them were Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites, Sidonians, and Hittites. "...and his wives led him astray." They wore down his defenses. They wore down his faith. Because as awesome as a start as he got, Solomon broke the solemn oath between the Lord and Israel: "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after other gods." It's as easy as pie to begin, but it's tougher than nails to finish.

We're great at beginning things. Like a hungry soldier with a plate of hot food in front of him, we tear into new projects, new Bible classes, new relationships. But as time goes on, we can get weary, bored, or impatient. Our passion for seeking the lost can be zapped. Our enthusiasm for searching the Scriptures can become zapped. The joy of our salvation can get zapped. It's as easy as pie to begin, but it's tougher than nails to finish.

But “one greater than Solomon is here.” as Jesus puts it in Matthew 12:42. This King also began strong, and He finished strong. And for Him also it was tougher than nails. Because in addition to the nails there was scourging with the Roman cat o’ nine tails and mocking and spitting and beating and slapping and sweating and bleeding and crowning with thorns.

Still, He finished. In spite of His disciple’s kiss of betrayal, in spite of His friends running away and leaving Him, in spite of His fellow Jews calling for His death, in spite of His Father’s abandonment, He finished.

Look! Listen! The sky is dark... the two thieves are moaning.

There He is, pushing Himself up, taking a deep breath, speaking His own solemn oath and promise. “It is finished!”

The veil in the Temple is torn! The blood is poured! The curse removed! The sacrifice is complete! Death defeated! Paradise restored!

It is finished!

Is this a cry of defeat? By no means! Had it not been for the nails, Jesus would have lifted a triumphant fist to the sky! This was a cry of fulfillment, the task completed, the victory in hand!!

So that today finishing the race in faith is not something you and I need worry about. So says the One who finished salvation for you. So says the Author and Finisher of your faith. Who gave you faith and who will see your faith through to the end.

So, then, surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the formation run that is marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on the One who does not run out ahead of us but who is with us and leads us, the Beginner and Finisher of our faith. Let us be encouraged by those in the cloud of witnesses who finished strong by the grace of God.

Moses who had to work for his father-in-law for forty years, but in the end brought Israel to the Jordan and when he died yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. Joshua whose first job was a forty-year stint in the desert, but at the end of his life stated: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And then there was the one who spent his last days in a prison in Rome. Who at the end of life wrote: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

Finishing in faith is tougher than nails. But the Beginner and Finisher of your faith promises that He who began a good work in you will finish it on the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

AMEN!!