

## DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." I Corinthians 16:13.

Some years ago a friend asked the great actor, Walter Hampden, what in his opinion was the greatest sentence in the English language. That is a very interesting question. One would suppose that Mr. Hampden, being a very learned and educated man, would have quoted some wonderful saying or profound observation of William Shakespeare or perhaps of Ruskin or Emerson or Lincoln -- all of whom were geniuses with the English language. But to the surprise of everyone, Hampden said that in his opinion the greatest English sentence he had ever seen or heard was this one from an old Negro spiritual: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen; glory, hallelujah!"

It is a splendid declaration, isn't it? It catches up and expresses an essential meaning of life. It recognizes that life is full of pain, trouble, and suffering; but it doesn't stop with that recognition; it goes on to say that through faith in God and the greatness of your soul you have what it takes. The appropriate words are "glory, hallelujah!"

The essence of life is not defeat, but it is victory. Now, of course, this statement is not accepted by the softies of this generation. We have built up a philosophy over many years that people should be protected, that they should be coddled and pampered, that every conceivable kind of protection should be thrown about them, that there is something essentially bad about hardship, pain, and suffering. The purpose of much of this is to advance social awareness, and make the lot of human beings easier. But social progress does not mean that human beings should become weak. On the contrary, they must become strong.

Congressman Martin Barnaby Madden of Illinois served in the House of Representatives for many years. He took notice of a young Congressman who had come to Washington, a bright young man full of idealism and high hopes for the future.

Madden began to notice that when bills came up before the House which involved conflicts between principle and the selfish interests of powerful groups, this young man tended to vote in favor of the special interests. The older man had been around a long time and knew the meaning of it: the pressure groups were getting to and controlling this young fellow. He realized the young man was ambitious, wanted to please everybody and be one of the boys. It was an old story. So the older Congressman called his young colleague in and asked, "Son, how come you are voting that way on those bills?" The other replied, "But, Mr. Madden, don't you realize the pressures?"

Congressman Madden replied: "I have been around a long time and I know all about the pressures. But son, where are your inner braces? You are always going to have pressures from the outside. You have to counteract them by building up inner braces." Truly, life will cave in unless you brace yourself on the inside. Pressures come and sometimes they come against you with tremendous force; but they can't break you if you have been built up on the inside, because then you have what it takes to stand up against them.

We sometimes wonder what God is trying to do with us anyway. We are born, and we live on this earth, and after a while we die. What is it all about? Why do we live here? Why do we struggle all these years? God is trying to make real men and women out of us. He wants us to become strong in character, victorious and spiritually powerful within ourselves, having what it takes to take what life brings.

Not long ago a psychiatrist made the statement that the chief duty of a human being is to endure life. What a washed-out philosophy! A true Christian would not go for that at all. The duty of a human being toward life does not consist in just saying, "I'll endure it." The chief duty of a human being is to overcome the difficulties in life,

rejoice in the blessings of God, praise Him, and do His will. It is the duty of a human being to stand as a child of God, take any difficulty, any trouble, any pain, and handle it creatively and make something good out of it.

If you have a problem don't whine about it; don't run away from it; don't be afraid of it; and don't let it get you down. Go at it in God's name, trusting in Him that you have what it takes.

A genuine Christian is the highest type of man. To be a real Christian means to be measurably Christ-like. The true Christian is a pupil in Christ's school trying faithfully to improve day by day. He studies in order to know God's will and to do it. He endeavors to have the mind and the spirit of his adorable Master. He tries to be earnest, faithful, gentle, and firm, as Christ was in His service for God and men.

A man and his view of life agree. Life is to him as he is to it. Bad thinking comes out of bad being. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The relationship between character and conception of life was portrayed clearly in the life of Paul. Paul had known hardness, and he had endured it. His life had been one of trouble and change, yet he lived bravely. Think of him as a young man full of faith and hope. He had strong convictions. Paul did not so much hold these convictions as they held him.

As Paul was bringing his first epistle to the Corinthians to a close, he wrote these stirring words: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." After the lapse of these nineteen centuries, these words still have power to quicken the heart's throb, and they appeal strongly to all that is noblest and best in the soul of any true Christian.

These words, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong," contain the counsel of a brave and experienced warrior to a little company of comparatively untried Christian recruits in the city of Corinth. Their little church was besieged by the continual assaults of their Jewish foes; it was torn with internal divisions; it was honeycombed with deadly heresies; and it was defiled by sensuality. Nearly all the members of the church were of obscure origin, and a goodly number of them were slaves. It was to this little company of Christian recruits that the Apostle wrote this challenging bugle-call: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." This challenging word deserves the attention and application of all who are striving to live at their best. It is a maxim which is as relevant today as it was pertinent to those who first heard or read it.

If you, as a Christian, are to have what it takes to live victoriously and usefully, it will be necessary for you to do the four things which the text admonishes you to do.

#### I. Be Vigilant.

"Watch ye!" This is the first note in Paul's bugle-call to Christians. This is a military metaphor, derived from the duty of those who were stationed to guard a camp, to observe the movements of an enemy, and to warn the army of the approach thereof. It was necessary for those on guard to be alert and watchful, lest the whole camp be exposed to the danger of an unexpected attack. They must never sleep when on guard or picket duty, but always be alertly watchful to discover and avoid danger and to provide for safety. Likewise, Christians must be vigilant and act cautiously at all times. We must be vigilant and watchful about our thoughts, our affections, our words, and our actions.

#### II. Be Steadfast.

"Stand fast in the faith." The roots of our faith must sink down into the soil of God's

revealed and eternal truth, if we are to stand firm and steadfast. What does this stand-fast in the faith involve?

1. Standing by your Captain.

Be true and loyal to the Christ Who has saved you. Having come into right relationship with Christ, we must strive to know Him better, love Him more, and follow Him more closely.

2. Standing at your post.

Stand fast wherever God has placed you. The tendency is to lose heart after doing the same monotonous work without any visible progress. Sometimes one is tempted to say, "How much better work I might be doing somewhere else!" Beware of that spirit. When God decides that you will do a better job somewhere else, He will call you there. In the meantime, "stand fast," and carry on perseveringly.

3. Standing by the Word of God.

God has placed His Word into your hands, so stand fast in the truths which it reveals. "Stand fast in the faith." Do not let anyone move you from it, or laugh you out of it.

III. Be Manly.

"Quit you like men." This really means "Play the man!" Acquit yourselves in a manner that is manly. This is one of the supreme needs today. The Lord certainly requires manliness in all that we do in everyday life. There is no justification for ungentlemanly conduct anywhere or anytime. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). God wants us to achieve our full capacity. He has committed to us a tremendous trust, and given to us a magnificent opportunity. He is looking to us for manliness in spirit and in action. God wants us to play the man under all circumstances and on all occasions.

IV. Be Strong.

The man who wrote the injunction, "Be strong," was one of the greatest personalities in the annals of mankind. The strength which he enjoined is the same as the strength which he exhibited. This strength does not consist of the might which controls others against their wills, but in the might which controls self, bringing all of one's energies into play, and wins the victory over Satan.

This command implies that it is possible for every Christian to be strong morally and spiritually, for God never requires the impossible of any of us.

A number of us can remember when many in this country were taught a doctrine called will power. Perhaps most of you young people have never heard it, unless your parents told you about it. Even now as I mention this doctrine some may say this is really corny: this idea of the will power to accomplish something. This is no longer an educational principle in the schools — and more is the pity. I thank God that He let me be born in a day when I could grow up under the influence of parents and teachers who believed in, practiced, and taught self-discipline.

Will power! The average human being does not have any consciousness of the potential of vitality and strength God has built into him. He seeks to get through life in a soft and easy way, afraid of difficulties, afraid to stand up and face things, afraid to stand up and do the right thing. Will power is a gift of God. It is a great thing to have inner strength. There is joy and satisfaction in it that cannot be known without

it. Our world needs strong people today. So in humility and faith in God let us look to Him for His help and be strong.

Are you an unsaved person, living without Christ, without God, and without hope? If so, trust Christ now as your Saviour. If you will repent of your sin and believe on Christ as your Saviour, He will forgive you, save you, love you, bless you, and use you. Then, mastered by Christ, make His will your criterion, His command your joy, and His marching orders the music of your life, until the pierced hands that opened to you the gates of grace shall open to you the gates of glory.