

Text: I Thessalonians 5:15-24

Theme: Carry On

January 20, 2019

Have you ever noticed how many words of encouragement are found in two-word statements? Don't quit. Keep going. Press on. Keep moving. Don't stop, and that's just the short list. As Paul nears the end of his letter to the church in Thessalonica, he provides them with words of encouragement. Maybe he doesn't use two-word statements, but, even so, his words are words of encouragement, words which are fitting today as God encourages you, as a congregation, to carry on.

I. Whatever the circumstances, our loving God always steps onto the scene and says to His faithful people, "Carry on." 1. As you carry on, Paul says, "Be joyful always." "Be joyful" isn't a suggestion like telling our kids, "Don't you think you should wear some mittens? It's cold outside." It also isn't optional, and, as far as Paul is concerned, it's not even a good idea. With the imperative, the command mode if you will, Paul says, "As you carry on, it's your Christian duty to be joyful." Whatever the circumstances, however things may be at the moment, his words to you are, "Be joyful." Not occasionally, but be joyful always. Carry a joyful spirit as you carry on.

2. Paul also says, "Pray continually." Suppose you went to Niagra Falls. As you arrived at that magnificent sight, how many of you would expect the water to stop during the night when the tourists were gone and to resume its course the next morning? As Paul says, "continually," he's telling us to pray daily, constantly, without giving up, to pray for each other, to pray for God's direction and blessing on every future event that occurs here in this place. But why so much prayer?

Because those prayers connect us to the will of God, the plan of God. They enable us to do His Will not our will, to do what we would do if He were standing beside us.

3. As you carry on, give thanks. Suppose we asked every person who entered Wal-mart during the next week, this question, "On a scale of 1- 10 with 10 being incredibly thankful, how thankful are you?" If we tallied the results, would they agree with the words of our text? We know the answer without even asking the question. But some would say, "What difference does it make?" It matters because thankful people are God-focused people, people who are constantly saying, "Lord, show me Your plan and guide me down Your path." When thankfulness is prominent, God is prominent and when God is prominent, we are ready to carry on.

4. As you carry on, keep the Spirit's fire alive. How many of you have ever stood around a camp fire or a bon fire? If you stand there long enough, what happens? Within us, the Holy Spirit has placed a fire, a faith fire, a Spirit-directed, Spirit-maintained fire. When that fire is actively burning, we're on fire. We're looking for opportunities to carry forward God's church in this place, opportunities to use our talents and gifts, opportunities to create a united fire that says, "This is our goal; this is our mission. What will I do to move our mission forward? What can and will we do together to keep the fire of the Spirit burning with great intensity among us?"

5. As you carry on, hold on to what is good. The English language sometimes doesn't do justice to the original Greek and Hebrew of the Bible and this is one of those occasions. When you hear the word, "good," what words come to mind? In Genesis one, we find the reoccurring statement, "And God saw that it was good." Is that the best we can do? As you carry on, hold on to everything that comes from God, to everything that is God-directed, God-blessed. Hold on to the spectacular,

the awesome, the amazing, the incredible, the unbelievable, the awe-inspiring. Hold on to everything that promotes harmony, that pulls everyone together as the body of Christ. As you carry on, remember to hold on to what is good in the mind of God.

6. As you carry on remember who you are. Paul writes in his letter to Corinth, "Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it." How well does the body function when one part decides it doesn't want to be part of the body? If you could detach and attach body parts, how well would you function without arms or without eyes? You, and you, and you are part of the body of Christ and you're not only a part, but you're a necessary part, an essential part, a part that eagerly says, "What can I contribute? How can I use my part to enhance the body, to build up the body, to enable the body to accomplish the plan and will of God?"

7. As you carry on, do so courageously. In Joshua 1:9, God says to Joshua as he prepares to lead God's people and to each one of us, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged for the Lord, your God will be with you wherever you go." Are you feeling a bit discouraged, a bit uncertain, unsettled, nervous, or unsure about the future? Whatever you may feel, God's incredible words to you right here, right now are, "Be strong and courageous." Why? God tells us why. "I, the God of unlimited power, the God who holds this congregation in the palm of My hand, I will be with you wherever you go."

8. As you carry on, remember that God will not forget your acts of love and kindness. How many acts of kindness occur within this congregation every week that simply go unnoticed? Those acts of Christian love that you have chosen to do in the past, those acts of kindness that you might think went unnoticed because you didn't receive recognition, they were actually never unnoticed at all because God notices and God never forgets. Whether others notice or not, remember this: God notices and as God quietly says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Well done!" you will know you have His approval and the energy needed to carry on.

9. As you carry on, continue. Change is inevitable and when it occurs, people do one of two things. They quit or they rally together and press on. In the next months and beyond, things will be different. Yet whether different becomes a good different or a not-so-good different will be determined by what you do in the midst of change. The words of Jeremiah can be applied to the church as a whole as he pens the words of God, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." With those words imprinted on your mind, continue to love, continue to demonstrate kindness, continue to use your talents, continue to gather in this place, continue to worship your great God. Continue to carry forward His plan, continue to be His Church in this place. Continue to do what He has called you to do for such a time as this. Continue to carry on. Amen.