

Text: II Corinthians 4:1

Theme: Carrying On in Tough Times

February 11, 2018

How many of you have ever faced tough times, times when you wondered what to do, what to think, how to change a situation, or how to deal with what you cannot change? Like it or not, they happen. We can do our best, yet tough times still arrive on our doorsteps uninvited. Our text speaks in particular about tough times in the church. Today, right here, right now, we, as God's church, are encountering those tough times and our challenge is to carry on.

I. God's Church is in the midst of a crisis. It's definitely facing tough times. A. But why are we, as God's church in this place, facing tough times? 1. We're facing tough times because our world is becoming increasingly corrupted. I'm amazed at those who believe in evolution, that our world is getting better because all the indicators blatantly disagree with that notion. Turn on CNN, FOX, or MSNBC or whatever news channel you like and you can't miss it. More corruption, more disasters, more chaos. Because our world is deteriorating at a rapid pace, we, as the church, face more challenges, and with each challenge, we find more tough times.

2. We're facing tough times in the church because we're living in a generation that has too much. If you look back in history, what has always happened to the church when people believed life was great? Was it growing or declining? During the Great Depression, did people gravitate toward the church or away from it? What about World War I and World War II? Increase or decrease? What about the initial reaction to 911? When life is great by our estimation, our need for God deteriorates. Who needs God when life is so good? Our society will continue its ranting about the need for more, but as they rant, the mission, the focus, the importance of the church suffers.

3. Let's add one more reason to our list. We're facing tough times because our priorities are out of order. Suppose we created a priority list of ten of the top priorities in our community. If sports were on the list, where would they be? If recreation was on the list, where would it be? If gathering with friends were on the list, where would it be? And, finally, if the church was on that list, where would it be? In our hearts, we know the answer. But how did it get there? Because we rearranged our priorities or allowed someone else to do it for us. Until we take control of our priority list, we, as the church, will continue to find ourselves losing heart.

B. Surrounded by tough times, how do we, as the church, carry on? 1. We carry on by recognizing that our ministry is from God. Paul writes, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God." God's church may be facing challenging times, but even so, we must remember that God is in charge, that God is still guiding, still blessing His Church. It may not always look that way. In fact, we may feel like we're in the two steps forward, three steps back mode. But regardless of how we feel or how things appear, we carry on by acknowledging, "This is God's house. What I'm involved in is God's work. I will press on because God's work must be done!"

2. We carry on by continuing to stand on God's Word. Paul's words are noteworthy, "We refuse to tamper with God's Word." What's the point of tamper-

proof labels? It's to keep those people out who are not supposed to be in, right? Today, we need a tamper-proof seal on God's Word because people everywhere are tampering, rewriting, or ignoring portions of God's Word. We can't allow that to continue! Martin Luther may have made the statement, but we need to adopt it regarding God's Word, "Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God!" As we stand on God's Word in love, God will bless His Church in the midst of our chaos.

3. We carry on by listening as God speaks. As the incredible Transfiguration event unfolded, God could have easily preached a two-hour sermon regarding His Son. But what did He do instead? What did He do for our benefit? He kept His message remarkably simple, so simple that even a child could get it as He said, "Listen to Him." Isn't that amazing? Isn't it incredible that God could preach one of His most power-filled sermons with only three words? Lest we lose heart within the church, lest we become weary while doing good, lest we allow ourselves to slide into the background, we take that three-word sermon to heart. We allow it to change our hearts.

4. We carry on by remembering God will never leave us. Did you notice that recurring statement made by Elisha in our Old Testament lesson? "I will not leave you." Today, those are God's words to us. As we face a generation who sees little need for worship, God says, "I will not leave you." As we face the reality of smaller families and fewer kids for our Sunday School, God says, "I will not leave you." As we face increased apathy, increased time demands, and decreased commitment, God still says, "I will not leave you. Carry on because I will continue to bless your efforts, even when you believe your efforts are no longer impacting My church."

5. We carry on in our tough times by rallying the troops. In World War I or World War II, why did commanders realize the need to rally the troops? Because they needed them on the same mission, committed to engaging in battle, mentally prepared for the next encounter. Isn't that precisely what we need in the church today? A rallying of the troops, a commitment to the same mission, a readiness to engage, to listen to our Commander in Chief, Christ Himself, as He says, "Go and make disciples?" As you rally and you rally, and I rally, and we all say, "God has prepared us. Let's go," the church will once again become that beacon of hope.

6. We carry on by reengaging in the battle. It's so easy to step out of rank in the church, to quietly disappear and let someone else fill in the gaps. But does God say, "You have My blessing to stay in the barracks while everyone else engages in battle?" Maybe you can find those words in His battlefield manual, but I can't. God is waiting for you and for you and for me to fall into rank, to reengage our heart, mind, and soul, to march into battle, to face the age old enemy, the devil, and all his cohorts. He's waiting for us to say, "Here I am, Lord. I have heard You calling. I will go, Lord, if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart."

7. I'd like to tell you that our ministry will soon become easier, but what value would there be in telling you what is not true? Instead, I will tell you what God is telling you, "Carry on. Carry on because there are more tough times ahead." Amen.