

THE FAVORITE TEXT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE - Judge Harold R. Medina

“Courage In The Face Of Conflict”

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Rom. 12:2

I want to talk to you this morning about courage in the face of conflict. My text is the favorite scripture of Judge Harold R. Medina. A devoted Christian layman who suddenly found himself in the center of a struggle of historic proportion. The verse is - - - but let me read his letter.

“Dear Dr. Lavender,

I would have replied sooner to your very interesting letter of May 27 except for the fact that I scarcely know what to say. The fear complex referred to in “Guideposts” is something that I felt only as a result of the brainwashing by the Communists in 1949, and I do not think that any particular verse or passage in the Bible had any relation to that particular experience. What helped me most was the fact that I had already been pretty well accustomed to praying to God for strength and guidance, and especially little short prayers during the day. There is absolutely nothing so effective as prayer, which almost always brings a certain calm and peace of mind even in the midst of the most complex and difficult and trying circumstances. With reference to the Bible generally, I think the particular passage that has been most meaningful to me was the one selected by Woodrow Wilson as the text at his baccalaureate address at Princeton in 1908. It was the second verse of the twelfth chapter in the Epistle of Paul the apostle to the Romans, and reads:

‘And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.’

Very sincerely yours,
Harold R. Medina”

The incident to which Judge Medina refers in his letter took place in 1949 when eleven top U.S.

Communists were tried for conspiracy to overthrow the government by violence.

It quickly became clear to everyone close to the trial that the defendants were more interested in spreading Communist propaganda, or in breaking up the trial, than they were in working for an acquittal. What they really wanted was a mistrial which could be achieved in one of two ways, either by creating such disorder that the trial would become a farce, a travesty of justice, or by wrecking the Judge personally.

For the first five months the “commies” tried the former track. Witnesses were truculent. Attorneys were insolent. Everything possible was done to create chaos and disorder. When it became obvious the skill and massive patience of Judge Medina could not be circumvented in this way, they switched to the second alternative, and began an insidious psychological attack on the Judge himself.

Somehow they learned that as a child he had a fear of falling and they began to exploit it. One day a gang of pickets appeared on Foley Square outside the Judge’s office carrying signs which read: “Medina will fall like Forrestal.” It was just a few weeks after Defense Secretary James Forrestal plunged to his death from a hospital window, and the “commies” were using that sad experience as a weapon against Judge Medina.

Day after day and hour after hour, the pickets chanted,

“Medina will fall like Forrestal. Medina will fall like Forrestal. Medina will fall like Forrestal.”

And then to add to the pressure, the Judge began to receive phone calls and letters in which the words “jump” and “fall” were underscored. It was a clever and diabolical psychological campaign, and after a few weeks, it began to tell.

The goal of the “commies” was to get Judge Medina so emotionally upset he would either lose patience and blow up in court, thus disqualifying himself, or become so distressed he would have

to quit all together. Either alternative would result in a mistrial. And they almost succeeded.

But let Judge Medina tell the story. He says,

“One day my head suddenly started to spin. I recessed the court and walked quickly to the little room in the back of the court and laid down. I felt almost panicky. I sensed that this was the crisis, the turning point, one road led to defeat, the other to victory. If I could not force myself to go back there I would be conquered. Not only would the trial be a failure, but personally I would be unable to be in control of myself.

“I don’t mind telling you I did a lot of praying in that little room. I prayed for strength and I prayed for guidance. There was no visitation, no sudden apparition, but there was the slow renewal of strength. With it came the firm realization that I would be able to meet whatever trials lay ahead of me.

“I was in the little room for only fifteen minutes, but the crisis had passed. I opened the door, walked back to the bench, and to the successful completion of the trial.”

Most of us have never been subjected to so deliberate and insidious an assault on our person as that to which Judge Medina was subjected, but all of us face threats which, in their own way, are just as real and just as destructive. This morning I want to talk about courage in the face of crisis and how, by giving heed to Judge Medina’s favorite text, we can be sure of having the courage we need when we need it.

The first thing I want to say is –

For Christians Conflict Is An Inescapable Part of Life.

Samuel Rutherford, that saintly Scot whose writings have been a blessing to thousands, brings this

truth into focus when he says,

“God has called you to Christ’s side and the wind is now in Christ’s face.

And seeing you are with Him, you cannot expect the lee-side or the sunny side of the brae.”

With that beautiful feeling for words which characterizes everything Rutherford wrote, he here crystallizes the unpleasant but inescapable fact that in this world we shall have tribulation. That’s because,

“The wind is in Christ’s face and because we go with Him we shall have the wind in our faces, too.”

We shouldn’t be harsh on ourselves if we feel a yearning for the “sunny side of the brae,” for such yearnings are natural. No one enjoys walking with his face toward the wind, especially when it blows hard and cold, but that is precisely what Christians must do if we are to be true to our calling.

“The wind still blows toward hell and the man who is walking in the opposite direction will have the wind in his face.”

For Christians, conflict is an inescapable part of life.

We would be wise to take this into account as we ponder those things which are coming upon the earth. At the moment the prevailing winds are blowing in the direction of conformity. The massive pressure of our present age is toward that imaginary creature: the common man.

So great is this yen for uniformity, this struggle to standardize souls, we are in danger of creating what Herbert Hoover calls “the cult of mediocrity,” as the uncommon man is whittled down to size, and individual dignity and worth are eclipsed by the faceless image of the mass man.

There is no gainsaying that, within limits, conformity is good.

“The musician must conform to the laws of harmony, the engineers to the

laws of physics, and the farmer to the laws of growing things.”
If they would be truly productive.

If you would learn a new language you must conform to its grammar and vocabulary. If you would enjoy the benefitsof a civilized society you must bow to its rules and regulations.

Mankind, if it is to survive, must conform to the basic principles of right and wrong as revealed in the Holy Scripture, because experience and reason make it clear there is no other way to sustain life on this planet.

But, as A.W. Tozer points out, “When this has been said in praise of conformity, there is not much left to say about it that is not good. From there on it is almost completely evil and the child of God will be wise to acknowledge it as such.”

Legend tell of Procrustes, the Greek bandit, who forced his victims to lie on a certain bed. If they were shorter than the bed, they were stretched to bed length. If too long, their limbs were lopped off to fit. Old Procrustes was determined to have uniformity, regardless.

We have grown a bit more sophisticated. Our methods are not quite so crude. But this yen for uniformity still prevails, and in spirit at least, Procrustes works on, cutting and tugging until everyone looks, thinks, and acts like everyone else.

Our houses, our cars and our clothes are all trimmed to a pattern, arbitrarily fixed by persons who have no more right to decide such things than Procrustes had to decide how tall a man would be.

And so overwhelming is this struggle toward standardization, anyone who resists it is called a kill-joy. A spoil-sport. An odd-ball. Nobody wants to be called that, and since it is easier to imitate than initiate, to drift with the stream than swim against it, the great masses of mankind have cast their lost with the “cult of the common.”

In one of the many adventures the immortal Dickens character Mr. Pickwick had, we find him arriving in a town at election time. There was a great crowd surrounding them as they alighted from their coach and they were cheering for one of the candidates.

“Hurrah,” shouted the mob. “Hurrah for Slumkey! Slumkey forever!”

“Who is Slumkey?” whispered one of the Pickwick’s friends.

“I don’t know,” Mr. Pickwick replied, “It’s always best on these occasions to do what the mob does.”

“But suppose there are two mobs?” asked another friend.

“Then,” replied Mr. Pickwick, “shout with the largest.”

It’s human nature you see, to take the way of least resistance. It is easier to shout with the crowd than against it. That’s why Jesus said there will be many who walk through the wide gate and down the broad road that leads to destruction. He knew it is always easier to drift downward with the stream, than to struggle upward against it.

This is what you and I must do, if, as Christians, we are to be worth our salt. We must resist the yen for uniformity. We must stand with our faces to the wind, however cold and disagreeable it might be. We must not be conformed to the world, but by the power of Christ we must attempt to conform the world to us, or to put it more accurately, to Him.

The other day I came across an article in which reference is made to a comment by Daumier, a noted French painter. He had been asked to defend his style of far-out painting and said,

“One must be of one’s time.”

In answer to Daumier’s rather weak argument, Ingres, another painter and native of France, asked,

“What if one’s time is wrong?”

I say to you this morning, *that* is the question which needs to be asked regarding more things than painting.

As little children we learn by imitating others. We do as they do. We talk as they talk. That's how we learn. But when we “become men and women” we should put away “childish things” and learn to stand on our two feet.

No one ever reaches real maturity until he is able to draw some conclusions of his own and then courageously stand on them. Being gregarious animals, it is our natural inclination to run with the herd. To do as others do. There are a lot of young people today who are justifying their actions by exclaiming with Daumier!

“One must be of one's time,” or to put it as they would, “Everybody's doing it.”

I can't help but ask,

“What if everybody's wrong?”

The weakest possible excuse we can offer to justify our actions is that others are doing the same thing. Yet, according to a recent study of 150,000 teenagers, this tug toward togetherness is the major factor influencing their behavior.

Over 50% of them said they tried very hard to please their friends. Nearly half stated that the worst calamity that could befall them would be considered an “odd-ball.”

As a result, while nearly 100% disapproved of teenagers using alcoholic beverages, more than 25% admitted they drank. While 75% disapproved of smoking, nearly 40% of them indicated they smoked.

In other words, these youngsters were striving, and note the word *striving*, trying very hard not to be better, or different from the run-of-the-mill, but to be “average.” To be part of the cult of the common. And this pattern of behavior is not reserved for the younger set alone. Millions of adults have fallen prey to the same false philosophy. The curious fact, however, is, as President Herbert Hoover points out,

“When you get sick you want an uncommon doctor. If your car breaks down

you want an uncommonly good mechanic. When we get into war we want dreadfully an uncommon Admiral and an uncommon General.”

When the chips are down, average behavior simply will not suffice. Well, let's face it folks, the chips *are* down. If you don't believe so, pick up the morning paper and the story will be told in the blazing headlines there. The chips *are* down, and as Christians we cannot be content to drift along with the current, or public opinion and action.

We must struggle against the tide. We must strive to save the world. Not by being like it, but by being unlike it. Not by being “average” but by being “normal.” No one *drifts* into goodness. That state of blessedness is attained by struggling upward against the downward tug,

That takes courage. Not the superficial kind which expresses itself in outward bravado, but the significant kind which comes from inner belief. Which suggests this second thought –

Victory Belongs to Those Who Prepare For It.

Judge Medina found courage in the midst of conflict and thus won the struggle. He was able to draw upon a life of Christ-centered learning and living.

“There was no visitation, no sudden apparition,” he writes, “but there was the slow renewal of strength, (because) I had already been pretty well accustomed to praying to God for strength and guidance.”

The significant thing about his prayer, you see, was that it was not directed only toward his fear of falling. He didn't suddenly say,

“Now Lord, you've got to take away my acrophobia.”

The prayer Judge Medina writes about was,

“(A) whole prayer life that asked for strength and guidance in all that (he did).”

As a result, when the crisis came, he was able to draw upon those deposits which he had previously made in the ‘bank’ of the spirit.

Many of us go through life with little thought for tomorrow and its needs. We squander our spiritual resources laying nothing aside for that “rainy day” which inevitably comes.

As a result, when that day comes we find ourselves in the midst of a crisis without the resources we need to meet it. We become victims instead of victors. We lose when we ought to win. We falter when we ought to go on in strength to claim the victory.

Awhile back I stopped off at the office of one of our members who holds a very responsible job. Among other things, I was interested in finding out what role his faith played in the task which is his. In the course of our conversation I said,

“Tell me, do you ever stop to pray, and take into account the teachings of your faith, when you have to make some great decision involving thousands of people and millions of dollars?” He said, “No. I don’t have time.”

I confess I was a bit let down. I’d been hoping for a quote I could use with other Christian laymen. It looked like I wouldn’t get it. But a month or two later I had lunch with him and he said,

“You remember, John, you asked me sometime ago whether or not I stopped to pray, and weigh out the teachings of my faith, whenever I have a decision to make, and I said no, I don’t have time?”

“Yes.”

“I want to go on to say that though the demands of my job are such that I don’t have time to stop and pray about every decision I make, every decision I make is made on the basis of what I know to be true as a Christian. Having lived with Christ these many years, I hope I have grown to the point where I am able, by a kind of reflex action, to respond in a Christian way to life situations without having to take time to pray.”

Well, I had my quote, and it was far more believable than if he had merely said, “Sure, I always

stop and pray about every decision I make.” The simple fact is that most of us do not have time to do that, and if we are going to have the courage, insight and guidance we need in the midst of conflict and crisis, we had better see to it that, before the crisis, we build into our lives those basic beliefs and commitments to Jesus Christ which give us calm and control in the midst of the most complex and trying of circumstances.

A truly courageous and creative life is made up of a multitude of little things. Not the heroic efforts of martyrdom, but the little deeds done day by day. Not the eloquent sermons delivered from a pulpit, but the little words said in a quiet way. These are the things which make up the *positive* beauty of a courageous life.

Likewise, the *negative* beauty of a courageous life is not made up of the bold and bombastic denunciations of sin, but rather *the persistent avoidance* of little evils. Little inconsistencies. Little follies. Little indiscretions. Little indulgences of self. In other words, we are the sum total of all the “little things” we have learned to do, or not do, to be, or not be.

There was a song on the hit parade a few years back entitled, Little Things Mean a Lot. That’s true. Whether it be in love, or in life. That’s why Satan never tries to overcome us by one big frontal assault, but by the gradual process of slow erosion. Drop by drop, he pours the corrosive acid of conformity upon us, washing away our alertness to evil, leading us almost imperceptibly toward acquiescence to the world’s demands.

The only defense against such gradual decay is the equally gradual and laborious task of building up, deed by deed, thought by thought, commitment by commitment, a life centered in the truth of God, and therefore, a life which is strong enough, and big enough, and true enough, to stand against the pressures imposed upon it.

Which leads me to this final thought. *If*, for the Christian, conflict is an inescapable part of life,

and *if* victory belongs to those who prepare for it, then --

Preparation Begins When You Make A Commitment To Jesus.

A moment ago I quoted Paul who said,

“Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed.”

The only answer to the corrosive of conformity is the slow, laborious process of building a life centered in Jesus.

I was speaking of that process whereby we “become children of God.” This process of becoming, like any other process, is something which has to begin somewhere. It doesn’t just happen. It has to get started. For a Christian, that start is made when he is born again by an act of the will through faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the distressing things about the twentieth century resurgence of religious interest is that many people are sitting in church pews hoping to become Christians by osmosis. But, for them, there was never any time, or any place, which decisively began the process.

They are like a car which has been put on blocks. Not knowing this, the owner climbs into the car, pushes the starter button, races the engine, shifts the gears, spins wheels, but while there is a lot of noise and excitement, he doesn’t go anywhere. He hasn’t made contact where it really counts.

Life can be beautiful. It need not be the same old discouraging cycle of crisis and defeat. You can be changed. A new life can be yours. You must first make contact where it really counts. By an act of the will, through faith in Jesus Christ, you must determine to begin. If you haven’t done so, I urge you to do it right now. Here. Today.

It was Phillip Brooks who said,

“The way for you to find Christ is not be go groping through a thousand

books. (And I might add a thousand churches or creeds or ecclesiastical procedures.) But it is for you to undertake so great a life, so devoted a life, so pure a life, so serviceable a life, you cannot do so except by Christ.”

It's my earnest hope that this morning you will begin the process of “becoming.” That you will begin to prepare your heart for the conflict that must come. That by being transformed through Jesus Christ, you will overcome the temptation to be conformed to the ways of the world. When *that* happens, “those fears without” will lose their power to harass you. Victory will be yours, because you prepared for it. You will have an inner calm that gives one courage in the face of conflict.

“O Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end.
Be thou forever near me,
My master and my friend.
I shall not fear the battle
If thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me,
The world is ever near.
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within.
But Jesus, draw thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.”