

+ Hebrews 12:1-3 + A Time for Giving Up Opposition +
+ 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday + 24 March 2013 +

Why does he keep going? How can he keep going? Doesn't Jesus realize what's waiting for him at the end of his journey? Hasn't he faced enough opposition since he came down from the mount of transfiguration glory and **"turned his face towards Jerusalem"** (Luke 9:51)? With each passing day, his enemies were increasing their attacks—one day trying to corner him into teaching God's word falsely, the next day trying to get him to say something that would either turn the people or the Roman government against him. Yet Jesus turned away their every attack. He pushed aside all opposition and frustrated his enemies to no end, but still they attacked and their opposition of words would soon turn into opposition with deadly force. Entering Jerusalem meant walking into the heart of enemy territory, but still he went.

Why does he keep going? It defies human reason. The opposition is only getting worse the closer he gets to Jerusalem, yet he keeps going. Wouldn't it make more sense to turn back and survive another day? Some would say he was a fool. Even his own disciples tried to turn him away from the violent end that surely awaited him in Jerusalem, yet Jesus still kept going.

If he wasn't going to turn back, we would at least expect him to enter enemy territory as the conquering hero, the mighty Lord, the tough general who's going to bring victory by sheer force of will, the king who will bring glory to his people, but that's not Jesus. Yes, he enters Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday to great praise and royal honor, but Jesus isn't coming for the glory and the power, and the opposition certainly isn't laying down their arms.

You have to admit that if it were anyone else, it would be heartbreaking to see Jesus keep going, because you know what's going to happen. It's like one of those movies where you know the hero or your favorite character is going to die, but this isn't anyone else and this isn't any ordinary, self-sacrificing movie hero. This is Jesus, **"the author and perfecter of our faith"**, and this morning the writer to the Hebrews explains why no amount of opposition will prevent Jesus from carrying out his holy mission—a mission that will result in suffering and death, but will end in ultimate victory.

As he crested the ridge of the Mount of Olives, Jesus could see everything. Herod's temple gleamed in the afternoon sun and the streets bustled with throngs of Passover pilgrims from all over the known world. Amidst those crowds were those who had opposed him throughout the last three years, and countless other souls that were by nature opposed to him.

None of that, however, distracted the focus of the humble King sitting atop borrowed cloaks on the back of a donkey. As the all-knowing God, he knew that Jerusalem was the heart of enemy territory. He knew entering that city meant suffering and death, but as he looked at the glorious city looming before him, it was not fear and trepidation that filled his heart. It was joy, not self-centered joy as the crowds praised him as **"the king who comes in the name of the Lord"** (Luke 19:38) and the promised Son of David, but the joy of knowing that he was finally going to complete the work he had been sent to do—the blessed rescue of those who so violently opposed him. For all the grand praises that the crowds directed towards him, what would happen later that week would be far more glorious, and that filled Jesus with joy.

So he kept going, even though he knew what was coming. Jesus knew what opposition awaited him. He knew how heated words would quickly turn into violent hatred. He knew the terrible suffering and injustice he would have to endure. He knew his blood would soon be shed. He knew that a criminal's execution awaited him. He knew what pangs of hell were coming. He knew that his heavenly Father would forsake him, and that the final enemy—death—awaited him at journey's end.

Still Jesus kept going, even as the forces of sin, Satan, and the sinful world opposed him with all their might to prevent him from completing his mission, to the point of even turning his own disciples against him. Yet no matter how violently his enemies opposed him or how difficult they made the task, nothing was going to stop Jesus from doing what he had come to do.

Jesus kept going so he could overthrow the dark forces of sin, Satan, and death to save you and me from the condemnation our sins deserve. He came to save even the lowliest and the littlest. He came to **"endure the cross, scorning its shame..."** for you in spite of **"the sin that so easily entangles"** and distracts and opposes you. Perhaps it's a lustful eye or a quick temper or a doubting attitude or a selfish heart. Sometimes what entangles comes not from within, but from pressures or embarrassment from without as you share the difficult truth of God's Word in a society that doesn't want truth or follow a sacrificial Savior, whom the world

around us still violently hates and opposes. At the same time, with every single sin, we have to admit that you and I join our voices with those who oppose Jesus as he keeps going to the cross. By nature, you and I are part of the opposition, but you and I are also the reason why he came and your salvation and mine is what brought him the joy to endure even the cross.

That's why the writer to the Hebrews tells us, ***"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*** As this Lenten season comes to a close, we watch the Savior enter the heart of enemy territory and overcome all opposition, even our own.

Realizing that our own opposition to Jesus is not only futile, but eternally harmful, we lay it aside in repentance. With God's help, we give up that opposition that comes so naturally to each and every one of us, and by faith joyfully welcome the King who was exalted because he completed his mission to save us from our sins. Rather than ***"grow weary and lose heart"*** when faced with the opposition of our own sinful natures and the hostile world around us, we find our joy in the Savior who didn't give up, who didn't surrender, who didn't turn around, who didn't turn his back on us although we surely deserved it. We find our joy in a Savior who ***"endured the cross, scorning its shame"*** purely because of his grace—that undeserved, indescribable love of God for sinners like you and me that brought him into our world and filled him with the joy to keep going in spite of all opposition.

You see, it was grace that moved God's Son to leave his heavenly throne and take our place humbly in the womb of a young virgin named Mary. It was grace that led to his birth as a tiny infant nine months later in the stench of a lowly stable in Bethlehem. It was grace that took Jesus through infancy and childhood and adolescence until he reached adulthood. It was grace that took Jesus to the banks of the Jordan River, where he was baptized, not for his own sins, but ***"to fulfill all righteousness"*** (Matthew 3:15) for us. It was grace that moved Jesus to fight Satan and his temptations. It was grace that brought Jesus into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday.

It was grace that moved Jesus to withstand every verbal attack as he taught his final lessons in the temple courts. It was grace that moved Jesus to become the servant and wash the feet of foolish, prideful disciples like us. It was grace that moved Jesus to institute his Holy Supper to keep giving himself, body and blood, with bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins.

It was grace that brought him out to the Garden of Gethsemane, to endure betrayal and arrest as his own disciples abandoned him. It was grace that moved Jesus to endure suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, the temple guards, the Roman soldiers, and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. It was grace that kept the struggling Savior going beneath the shameful cross as he carried it to his death. It was grace that allowed the soldiers to pound nails into his hands and feet, the crowds to ridicule him, and enabled forgiveness to flow from his lips. It was grace that moved Jesus to shout his final triumphant cry, ***"It is finished"*** (John 19:30), and give up his spirit in death. It was grace that put him in our tomb and brought him out alive three days later.

It is the grace of the gentle, humble, willing King that takes our breath away during Holy Week as we watch the Savior do what we would and could not do in the face of such unspeakable opposition, but what he had to do to save us according to his Father's holy will. So this Holy Week don't get caught up in the expectant praise of Palm Sunday that quickly passes away, but rather ***"fix your eyes on Jesus"***. Watch him endure your suffering, your hell, your death, even as he scorns their shame to the very end, but also watch as Jesus completes your salvation and wins for you eternal life. Watch him keep going to the bitter and glorious end, and ***"consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so you will not grow weary and lose heart."*** My friends, let's watch, because Jesus keeps going. Yes, the shameful cross draws near, but because Jesus keeps going, the best is yet to come! Amen.