

8<sup>th</sup> January, 2017

Text: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench." Is 42:3

Theme: "Something to hold on to"

When times are tough, you need to have something to hold on to.

As many of you are aware, times are tough for Rod Bryson. Some 2 months ago – and I have Rod's permission to share this with you – some 2 months ago, Rod was diagnosed with multiple internal melanomas, one of which had eaten away into his spine leaving him with virtually no movement in his right leg. He was in a bad way. The doctors overseeing his case said they were unable to help him, and had basically given him 3 months to live.

Not long after that diagnosis, I saw Rod in his hospital bed in the PA. Melissa – Rod's wife - was there too. We talked pretty honestly and frankly about what he was facing, and the journey that lay ahead of them. And I was blown away by Rod's positive attitude to the whole deal. And it wasn't because he wasn't aware of the challenges. Nor was he trying to do the ostrich trick by putting his head in the sand and pretending that that sickness wasn't real. Oh no. He was fully aware of the mountain that lay before him. But he had this sense of peace and positive determination.

In the course of our conversation, Rod showed me a cross that he was given. It's not this one, but it's like this one. It fitted in the palm of his hand, and he was able to close his fingers around it. And he told me about the difference it made to him. Not as some magical talisman. But it reminded him that – in the midst of the turbulence and uncertainty – he had something to hold on to. Someone to hold on to. And knowing that – that he could hold on to Jesus, and that Jesus was holding on to him – that made all the difference for him.

When times are tough, you need to have something to hold on to. How true. Certainly true for those Israelites in our text for today. Some 600 years before the birth of Christ, they were also facing tough times. Crisis times. They had been uprooted from their beloved homeland and were carted off as captives to the land of Babylon. For 75 years they had languished there. How often hadn't they cried out to God for deliverance. Yet God seemed silent. Inactive. How often had they prayed for a sign from God – any sign – something just to reassure them that he hadn't forgotten about them, something that would keep their fragile faith alive. And yet – they received nothing.

Yes, those Israelites were indeed in a time of great crisis. They were down-hearted, dispirited, almost crushed. But God had not abandoned them. He wasn't insensitive to their plight. He wasn't deaf to their pleas for help. God knew exactly what they were going through. And he comes to those Israelites through the prophet Isaiah. He comes to them with a timely message. A message of comfort. A message of hope. A message of promise. Something to hold on to. This is what Isaiah says to the people about their God; "*A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.*"

"*A bruised reed he will not break.*" Yes, they were bruised. They were bent. How easily they could have been broken. Yet God assures them – he promises them – that he would not break them. He lets them know that he is a gentle God. A tender God. A God who would come to them and gently restore them.

What a tremendous boost those words must have given to those Israelites! Sure, they were still captives in Babylon. Sure, things were anything but rosy. Yet in the midst of that, they had

this precious promise from God to hold on to: they would not be broken! They would not be crushed! They would not pass the point of no return! God himself would make sure of that.

*“A dimly burning wick he will not quench.”*

Yes, their faith in God was like a dimly burning wick. A flame that was flickering. A flame that could so easily have been extinguished. How faith-strengthening it must have been, then, to have God speak to them after all those years of silence. How reassuring it must have been for them to know that God still existed. But more, to know that he was still on their side, that he loved them, that he cared for them, and that he would once again cause their faith to shine brightly and strongly.

*“A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.”* What a wonderful promise from a wonderful God. A promise which God kept! He did restore Israel! He led them triumphantly out of Babylon and back to the promised land. He blessed them greatly. He nurtured their faith until once more they were a light – a strong light – to the nations around them; a light which gave glory to their God.

The good news – the great news – is that these words of comfort and promise spoken 26 centuries ago – they are still being spoken today. Isaiah comes to you and me today and he says about our God; *“A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.”* And there are a number of you sitting here today who can bear witness to this fact. Because you’ve been there too. In the depths of despair. In times of crisis. A loved one who has suffered . . . and lingered . . . and died.; or who was snatched away from you so quickly that you never had a chance to say goodbye. An ailment of body or mind that almost dragged you under. Relationships that spoiled and shattered. And through it all there were times you felt sure your bruised and battered life would break, times when your faith in a loving and good God was tested to the limit, when you cried out to God again and again from the depths of despair but felt no answer, no help, no comfort, no support. Yet . . . yet you sit here today as people who have endured. And overcome. And been strengthened. Like those Israelites so long ago, God remained faithful to you and brought you through to greener pastures.

Perhaps . . . perhaps some of you here today haven’t yet overcome your crisis. Perhaps you’re right in the middle of one. Grappling with a serious illness that affects you or someone close to you. You may be grieving over the death of someone precious to you. You may be experiencing turmoil in the family home, or at work, or here in your church family. You may be experiencing a crisis in your faith. But whatever your particular circumstance, you need to hear God’s word of promise; *“I will not break you!”* And you need to hold on to, to cling to that promise. You mightn’t always be able to see his love and care, but you need to take him at his word and trust him. And as you do, you will feel his gentle, loving arms around you. It may take time, but you will be brought through your crisis by your tender God. You can be sure of that because God’s promised you that. And God never, ever breaks a promise.

When times are tough, you need to have something to hold on to. And you do! You do have something to hold on to! You have this promise from your God; *“A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.”*

And you have someone to hold on to. And someone to hold on to you!

And that will make all the difference to your tough times! Amen.