

Don't Drop Your Sword

On June 20, 1980, Roberto Durán of Panama defeated the American, Sugar Ray Leonard, capturing the welterweight boxing title in Montreal. The fight was an embarrassment for Leonard, who had abandoned his usual fleet-footed style and went toe to toe with Durán.

The rematch took place five months later at the Superdome in New Orleans. It became one of the most famous and controversial bouts in boxing history. Sugar Ray Leonard used his superior speed and movement to keep the befuddled Roberto Durán off kilter. Repeated jabs to his face wore him down. Finally, in the 8th round, Durán waved his hand, turned to the referee and famously said, "No mas." Spanish for "no more." The fight is now known as the "No mas" fight.

Afterward, Durán insisted he did not say "No mas," but instead was saying, "No sigo, no sigo, no sigo" which means "I can't carry on." He said he quit because of stomach cramps. However, his manager said that he quit because he was embarrassed.

Sugar Ray Leonard happily took credit for forcing Durán to give up, and took great satisfaction in it. "I made him quit", Leonard said. "To make a man quit, to make Roberto Durán quit, was better than knocking him out."

Think of life as a heavyweight fight. Our 70, 80, or 90 years here are like 7, 8, or 9 rounds in the ring with our adversary, Satan. That's what Satan means- adversary or enemy. Your enemy has one goal and that is to take you out. In John 10:10 Jesus calls him a thief who has come *only to steal, and kill and destroy*. Satan has a plan for your life. He has come to steal your faith. He has come to kill your hope. He has come to destroy your integrity. And he will use every strategy and every trick in the book to do it. He doesn't want you to know grace. He doesn't want you to experience any sort of blessing. He is here to make sure that he sucks every ounce of lasting joy from your life.

Here's what I want to talk about this morning. Satan doesn't need to take you out with one knockout punch. Most of us are too guarded for the straightforward attack. He just needs to keep you off kilter. He just needs to keep you spinning in circles. He just needs to wear you down and wear you out. And like Roberto Duran in the 8th round we are saying "No mas. No mas." No more.

Every one of us knows guys that have given up the fight. They've waved their hand and said, "No more."

We all know guys who used to be serious about their faith, guys who were spiritual leaders in their home, with their wives and their children, they were leaders in their church, but something happened and they gave up the fight. A jab in the face at work, an uppercut from a friend at church, a low blow from their wife, then another right hook at work, and soon the enemy had them spinning in circles, and they gave up the fight.

Here's the problem in the heavyweight bout of life. There are no rules. There is no ring with safe corners, and there is no referee to call time. There is only one bell, and when it rings you've either won or you've lost. Satan always fights dirty. When you give up the fight, he's got you right where he wants you. When you give up the fight, you are no threat to him, and you are of no help to the other side.

If you've ever thought about giving up the fight, if you've ever thought about quitting... Maybe you are here this morning and you gave up the fight, and now you're trying to climb back in to the ring and claw your way back into the fight, and you're not sure if you can do it. You're not sure if it's worth it. Here's what I want you to know this morning.

You are not alone. We all get weary and worn. We wonder if we can go on. We wonder if we can take one more punch. We wonder if things would simply be easier if we just gave up.

Let me tell you real quick about a couple of guys from the O.T.— real heroes of the faith. The first is Elijah. Elijah was a prophet and he was one of the great ones. Here's how close to God Elijah was, he didn't die. When his ministry was over, God took him straight to heaven. That's the way to go. Elijah was no wimp.

But listen to what happened to Elijah. In 1 Kings 18 Elijah takes on 850 false prophets who were all in service of Israel's evil queen Jezebel. Elijah felt like he was the only one in the whole country who wasn't worshipping idols. Queen Jezebel was out to get him. Imagine there are Elijah wanted posters all over the place. Death squads are roaming the countryside just looking for Elijah.

1 Kings 19:3-4 says this:

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

Do you hear Elijah here? "No mas. No more." Elijah was ready to give up. He was ready to quit. You are not alone.

In Numbers 11:11-14 Moses cries out to God, "No mas. No more." He had led the people out of captivity. He had seen God miraculously deliver them again and again. God had provided food for them throughout their wilderness wandering, but verse 4 tells us that there were some rabble among them that stirred up trouble, and they began demanding something else to eat.

It only takes a few people to stir everyone up. It only takes a few to stir up a whole family, a whole church, or a whole nation.

Here's what Numbers 11 says,

Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. 11 He asked the Lord, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? 13 Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."

Now, neither of these guys ultimately gave up and quit. God was able to meet them in their

time of need. He reminded Elijah that he was not alone. There were seven thousand people in Israel who had not worshipped false Gods. He gave Moses some management advice and helped him delegate some of his responsibility to others to help shoulder the load. And both of these guys stayed in the fight. They did not give up. They did not quit.

You are not alone. If it can happen to these two heroes of the faith, it can happen to me. And it has. It can happen to you. I want you to know this morning that even when it is hard, even when you are worn out, and even when the enemy has you up against the ropes, you don't have to give up. You don't have to quit.

I want to take you to a third O.T. story. We find this one in 2 Samuel 23. This story is about David's mighty men. Before David became king, he gathered around him a cast of characters. Some of them were cast-offs or running from trouble, and others were simply drawn in by David's deep faith in God. Among them were an elite group of warriors who were fiercely loyal to David. They fought by David's side as he defeated Israel's enemies time and time again. They stuck with him while he was on the run from King Saul and they served him when he became king. They were known as David's mighty men. David was a great warrior and a great king and a great man of God, not just because of his profound faith in God, but because he surrounded himself with good men. Good men make a good man better. Many hands make a burden light. Who do you surround yourself with? Do your friends make you better or do they drag you down.

The second half of 2 Samuel 23 tells of some of brave feats of David's mighty men. For example, one of these guys killed 800 men in one brave stand. Another killed a lion in a pit so he could shelter from a snowstorm. These are some tough dudes. If you are going to walk into a dark alley in a crooked city on a bad night, these are the guys you want by your side.

This is one of those passages you never want to volunteer to read in Sunday School, because it is filled with names that are impossible to pronounce. You have Josheb-Basshebeth the Tahkemonite. There is Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite, and there is Shammah, son of Agee the Hararite.

The Israelites are fighting the Philistines, who at first appear to overpower the Israelite army. The Israelites retreat and their soldiers begin to flee the battlefield, but there is one guy who stands his ground. Here's the part I want to point out to you. This is what we read in 2 Samuel 23:9-10,

"Then the Israelites retreated, but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead."

Think about that! This guy fought so long and so hard and so valiantly did he clasp his sword, that when the battle was over he couldn't drop the sword. So determined was he not to let go that he couldn't let go. Medically, we understand how muscles can be so overused and exhausted that they simply cramp in place, but I don't want you to think about muscles and tendons.

I want you to think about the heart and mind of such a man. Just what kind of man is this? What a great story of heroism and the difference one determined individual can make. Except

this isn't a story about the power of one man with his iron jaw set against everything that opposes him. It's a story about what the power of God can do through one man determined to stand his ground. You didn't miss that part did you? "The LORD brought about a great victory that day."

This isn't just about Eleazar, the Israelite Rambo who took on a whole army by himself. It's not the man who makes the hero, it's the power of God in the man.

There is great power when one person chooses to take a stand. We are stronger than we think we are. You capable of doing much more than you ever thought. You have great power because your power does not come from yourselves. You have the power of God who is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine.

It not only matters that you stand strong. It matters more in whose strength you stand.

Imagine what could happen if we joined our human spirit with the Holy Spirit! The enemies of God will be defeated in great fashion.

I want to add more names to this list of names that we can't pronounce— names that we know very well. You have Josheb-Basshebeth, and Shammah, and Eleazar, and David and Ben, and Darrin, and Kenny, and Terry, and Roy, and Josh and Jason, and Morris and Gene and Wyatt and Zach and Tony.

All of you. Everyone here- mighty warriors of God. When we choose to stand. When we stay in the fight rather than run, the enemies of God will be defeated.

We will stand our ground. We will not lay down our sword. We will not quit the fight.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. I'm no great man of God. I'm not some valiant warrior. I don't have faith like a prophet. I can't take on 800 warriors at once. I have a hard enough time paying my bills, helping my kids with homework, and getting to work on time."

You might think of 20 other guys better suited to this than you. Guys who grew up in a better home. Guys who had better opportunities. Guys with more potential. Guys with more supportive wives and more obedient children and dogs that don't shed or stink.

But let me tell you about some of those other guys, those guys that had so much going for them. What happened to them? They laid down their sword and quit. Every week I hear about another man who ran off with another woman and left his kids twisting in the wind. I hear another story about a man consumed by addiction and his whole life crumbles around him. I hear about another man who doesn't show up for battle, he just stays home and watches porn and plays video games and they let their mom, or their girlfriend or their wife carry the sword and fight the enemy. We live in a culture of men who run. Men who quit.

But not you. It doesn't matter how strong or weak you are, because the power comes from the LORD. It doesn't matter how many battles you've lost in the past, or how many times you've dropped the sword, because the LORD gives the victory.

You will fight. You will hold the sword with valor. You will stand your ground. You will not give up. You will not give in, because YOU ARE A MIGHTY MAN OF GOD!!!