

“Stay With It”

Matthew 24:9-14

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All Scripture quoted from NIV unless otherwise noted

Have you ever given up on something you shouldn't have? A troublesome car that just needed a minor repair? A healthy fruit tree because it hadn't produced in the first two years? A dream that got too hard to chase? A relationship that was just blooming? Some people even give up on their Christian faith because it got too hard, because of the disapproval of other people, or because they were fooled by smooth talking con artists who claimed to have or know something that they actually didn't. God makes it clear that in the end days, many would abandon their faith. Regardless of whether or not you believe we are in the last days, there are some things that will happen then that we can guard against now.

I encourage you to deepen and strengthen your Christian faith; to stay with it when opposition and hardship comes. To stay with it when doubts and fears come crashing in; to stay with it when competing voices call you to abandon your faith and go chasing something else. Today, we'll examine that topic in a little more depth.

First of all, stay with it when opposition comes. From 1861-1865, America waged a Civil War that pitted North vs. South, and several states in the middle were torn between the two. One such state was Kentucky, home to U.S. Senator John J. Crittenden, who had one son fighting for the Confederacy and one son fighting for the Union side. They didn't hate each other; they just hated the uniform the other one was wearing, and what it stood for.

Christian brother or sister, this world will mistreat you – even hate you – just because of your faith. But know that *religious persecution is never personal*. Jesus says [Matt. 24:9] – that His followers would be hated *because of Him* (emphasis mine). It's not you; it's the “uniform” that you wear – the Jesus that you show to the world around you. When you face that hatred, you've got a choice to make – turn your back on your beliefs, run away, or try to teach them why you hold those beliefs. If you cannot defend your own faith, that is a much bigger problem than when someone attacks it. If someone asked you, right now, to explain why you are a Christian, could you do it? What would you say?

Don't back down from those who would challenge and attack your faith. Remember that those people are attacking the Jesus in you, not you. It's not personal – it is the outworking – the evidence – of their misunderstanding of your faith. Stay with it.

Stay with it when friends betray. When faced with opposition, many may turn away from their faith and in doing so, may even turn against those who remain true to their

faith. This is not them leaving one church to attend another; this is one person 'sicking the dogs' on their former friends. It's been said that, "*The saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from enemies.*" Isn't that the truth? Roman General Julius Caesar was murdered by a group of Roman senators, including his own nephew, Marcus Junius Brutus. Historians say that Caesar's last words were, "Et tu, Brutus?" This translates to, "Even you, Brutus?"

Jesus was also betrayed by a friend. Matthew, in 26:50 records Jesus referring to Judas as a friend, even as Judas was betraying Him. By the end of that chapter, Jesus has been betrayed by Judas, arrested by a mob, interrogated by the religious ruling authority, and denied by Peter. Betrayal hurts because it comes from someone you trust – someone you care about. When that happens – and it will – hold firm to your faith, knowing that your trust is in Jesus, and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Betrayal always hurts, but Jesus will never betray you. Betrayal is a breach of trust; a breaking of faith; it's a stab in the back from someone that you never thought would have a knife. In that moment, with the blade still stuck in your back, where do you look for healing? For peace? For hope? Faith in Jesus Christ will sustain you even if all others abandon you. When friends betray, and your confidence and faith are shaken, stay with it.

Stay with it when false prophets arise. In the movie *The Day After Tomorrow*, there is a scene in which a police officer leads people out into sub-freezing temperatures. [NOTE: we are commanded to honor and respect authority, such as police officers.] Sadly, this officer was operating under false information and soon after they left, everyone who followed him had frozen to death. *Be sure you're following the right guide.*

There are guides out there who invite you to follow them, but they don't know the way. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, they were told not to go out, but they didn't listen. Instead, they were convinced by the voice that said to follow him, and they didn't stop to examine whether or not they should actually follow him. Not everything you hear that is presented as truth is really true. Don't believe something because it sounds good or even because it comes from someone that seems trustworthy. Test every spirit to see if it lines up with God's revealed truth.

Matthew 24:11 – "**And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.**" They may seem harmless enough on the surface, but beware! They are savage wolves underneath (Matthew 7:15). A partial list [and that is all that this is] of things that you need to be on guard against would include someone who:

- ... claims to have a new revelation or secret information about God
- ... claims that they (or a select group that they are part of) are the only ones qualified to interpret and explain Scripture
- ... gets angry or defensive when you don't agree or when you challenge their claims

- ... is arguing, rather than exchanging ideas
- ... insists that you follow them instead of following Jesus with them
- ... stands to gain from your loyalty to them or to their faith
- ... claims exclusive access to God

Satan often masquerades as an angel of light [2 Corinthians 11:14] so you need to be on your guard against these wolves; against the prince of darkness disguising himself as a bringer of light. When false prophets or false teachers arise, hold firm to your faith. Stay with it.

Stay with it when you are the only one. I love the paraphrase of this passage as it appears in The Message. You should check it out. It sometimes seems that you are the only one who is standing firm in your faith. Rest assured, you're not. Several years ago, there was a movie scene in which one character says to the other, *"If I were [your enemy], I would want you to feel cut off from everyone else. Because if it's just you alone, you're not as much of a threat."*

Be a threat to the prince of this world. The prince of darkness, who disguises himself as an angel of light. Be a threat to invade his because you are on a mission. A mission to take back ground that has been given up; a mission to reclaim faith that has been fractured; a mission to boldly go where God's Word tells you to go; a mission to follow truth, even if it seems you are the only one, in the face of persecution, mockery, doubts, fears, insults, and whatever other manner of resistance the powers of this world have to offer.

Stay with it. Hold fast to your convictions. Study truth, so you will recognize lies. Stand firm in your faith. Stay with it when things get hard. That's what it's going to take, at the most fundamental level, to reach this world with the good news of Jesus Christ. Matthew 24:14 declares, **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."**

Friends, let's not bicker and argue over what the end times will look like, or fight over whether or not we are in the end times. Let's hold firm to our faith, so we will be ready for whatever is ahead. Stay with it! Let's bring our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King to those around us!

Takeaways from this message.

Stay with it when OPPOSITION comes.

- ***Religious persecution is never PERSONAL.***

Stay with it when friends BETRAY.

- ***The saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from ENEMIES.***

Stay with it when **FALSE PROPHETS** arise

- *Be sure you're following the right **GUIDE**.*

Stay with it when you are the **ONLY ONE**.

- *Be a **THREAT** to the prince of this world.*

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. *What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?*
2. *Why do you suppose the disciples were pointing out the buildings of the temple in Jerusalem? What might they have been attempting to do?*
3. *What prophecy did Jesus give His disciples in v.1-2? When was this fulfilled?*
4. *Why is it impossible to adhere time to water?*
5. *Have you written out your testimony? If not, try to write out your personal spiritual journey so that you can share your faith in under 90 seconds.*
6. *Why do you suppose the disciples were so interested in the signs of the end times? Are people more interested or less interested in these matters? How do you know?*
7. *What is the great promise we see in Matt. 24:14? What makes this such a great promise?*
8. *What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?*