

Have You Fallen for This Unbiblical Motivational Quip?

The other day a preacher was sharing with a group of people who, for various reasons, were broken. Some were hurting from the effects of divorce or broken homes. Others were damaged due to years of battling sickness and various addictions. Still others had recently lost loved ones and were broken-hearted and searching for a reason. Right in the middle of the speaker sharing some very inspiring words of encouragement, he inserted a well-known phrase which most of us have heard many times throughout our lives, one that seems to become more popular as time goes by. The problem with the statement is that while it is intended to bring a positive note to a negative event or situation, it is a notion that is not only anti-biblical but downright dangerous and almost guarantees continued failure.

The statement spoken in the middle of a faith-filled motivational message intended to inspire a large group of people with wounded souls was, "Anything that doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The original quote attributed to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was actually, "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger." For those unfamiliar with Nietzsche, he was a philosopher who was very critical toward people of faith who proclaimed in 1882 that God was dead.

Yet, his quote, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," has many times been quoted by the very people who profess the absolute opposite of what Nietzsche promoted. Although, on the surface, the statement about survival making us stronger sounds good and even encouraging to those who travelled the path of struggle and personal warfare, the Bible teaches us a very different understanding. If we truly desire to overcome and be stronger as a result of surviving our circumstances,

the only way we will be able to do so is by looking not to an anti-faith atheist, but by looking to the words of life provided by our G-D.

Let's look at the biblical perspective of strength, true strength. When preparing to face the Philistine Goliath, David, who had survived attacks by a lion and a bear, proclaimed to King Saul in 1 Samuel 17:37,

David said, "The Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

Notice that although the lion and bear didn't kill David, David understood he didn't get stronger, but rather that G-D provided the strength. This is further established when David enters the field of battle with Goliath. David doesn't speak of his own strength. He proclaims in 1 Samuel 17:45,

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have reviled."

In the book of Zechariah, we read about the calling of Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem from Babylon. The captivity in Babylon was horrendous, yet Zerubbabel survived. When the Angel of the L-RD spoke to Zerubbabel, he didn't say. "I know things were tough in Babylon, but remember what didn't kill you made you stronger." No, not at all. In Zechariah 4:6, we read,

And he said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

The angel made it perfectly clear to Zerubbabel that he was not made stronger while in Babylon and that it wasn't by this newly establish survival strength that Zerubbabel would reestablish Jerusalem's glory. No, not at all. It was only through understanding that it was by G-D's might and power that Jerusalem would be renewed.

In the midst of the "heroes of faith" chapter, Hebrews 11, we read:

who through faith subdued kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in fighting, and turned the armies of foreign enemies to flight.

It wasn't by their strength that these heroes prevailed through their hardships and tests of faith. It was through their faith and weakness that they were able to defeat their enemies.

Paul, the most effective and powerful apostle in the New Testament, describes the difficulties he lived through in 2 Corinthians 11:25-30,

Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brothers; in weariness and painfulness, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, and in cold and nakedness. Beside the external things, the care of all the churches pressures me daily. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led into sin, and I am not distressed?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things which concern my

weakness.

Notice after all of these things that didn't kill him, Paul says he doesn't want to boast in his strength; he wants to boast in his weakness:

Remember in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul spoke these words,

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in hardships, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So, contrary to pop culture's repetition of Nietzsche's false pronouncement about our becoming stronger because we survived those things that did not kill us, the truth is that it isn't that we get stronger. Rather, it is that our faith gets stronger because we learn from our experiences that our G-D is stronger than anything that would come against us. {eo}