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At Wits' End

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

"For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end."—*Psalm* 107:25-27

Have you ever come to your wits' end? Have you ever come to a point in your life where you see no escape from your troubles? Have you ever been in a place where wave after wave of trouble has rolled over you, bringing you to total exhaustion physically, mentally and spiritually? Where trying to get yourself out of trouble was no avail? Are you perhaps even now drifting hopelessly and aimlessly in an unsettled sea of despondency?

My friend, take courage: millions have been in such a sea before you, saved and sinners alike, and millions have lived to say, "I cried unto the Lord in my trouble, and he brought me out of my distress" (v. 28). By the grace of God, we will survive. The history of Israel, the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, is a history of wits' ends. Go through both the Old and New Testaments. Can you number the many times when Israel and the apostles were at wits' end? So if this is the first time you are at wits' end, it is indeed high time for you to be there. If this is your second or third time, you have learned it becomes easier.

The "City of Wits' End" is a city of complete trust. It is a city of God's design. Therefore you must not fear. This city is indispensable for building character, for refining the soul, for shedding all unnecessary, ungodly attachments. It will boil out the debris that has settled in your soul, making you a non-witness for Christ and quenching the fire you once had. All your worldly attachments must be incinerated by the fire of the Holy Spirit. At your wit's end, you are forced to sit rest and adore at the nail-scarred feet of Jesus. There He will strip away from you all that is superfluous, all that burdens your soul and quenches your spirit. Yes, friend, He wants you undistracted from the chatter and clutter of the world. Jesus wants you there at His feet where it is just He and you and nothing else. He wants to teach you what to hold onto and what you need to let go of. He will get you back to the basics. Oh, how easily we unconsciously slip from business with the Lord to business about the Lord, from hot to lukewarm. It is at this City of Wits' End where we discover that all that matters is God and that which is attached to Him. It is here where we come from serving God *also* to serving God *only* and truly knowing the difference. Indeed, it is here at the City of Wits' End, where we begin our journey to God's kingdom.

My friend, do not despise the City of Wits' End for it is the way to the City of God. And there is no finer, no nobler, no grander place, no place more sublime, no place more sacred than that city. It is here where the angels ascend and descend, ministering to you in holy fellowship with God. Of course if you are new to the City of Wits' End, it may be scary. You may say with the psalmist: "my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth, my heart is smitten and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread... I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop (Ps. 102:3-7). Or you may feel totally disconnected from God, and say with Job: "oh that I knew where I might find him" (23:3).

This City of Wits' End is not an easy place to be. How much it shakes you depends on the depth of your root system. If our roots do not reach the deep divine springs, the agony can be overwhelming. So, here is where we reap what we have been sowing all along: neglect in prayer, meditation, the reading of the word; disobedience in witnessing, being too busy with all kinds of things, trying to get ahead to make our nest more comfortable and giving too little to the Lord. It is here where we finally must agree with Martin Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God": *Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also: The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.*

It is here at the City of Wits' End where Jesus meets us and bids us to trust Him entirely, to follow Him. It is here where we either go with Him on His terms or where we say, "we will not have this man rule over us" and start on the way to perdition. There is no playing around here. **There's no room for pretending here.** There's no place here for negotiations. There's only a place here for total surrender. Nothing less than that will get us out of the City of Wits' End.

Now, enough of theology. Let's get practical. Let us get down to the, "what must we do then?" When Peter preached his sermon at Pentecost, the people wanted to know, "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) So the first advice to God's people on the birthday of the church was: **REPENT!** It was not a suggestion, but a trumpet call from God. Friend, this is the first thing you must do: clean out, clean up and change course. You must add **prayer** to that, you may add **fasting** also. You have heard those things from me before, but today I want to propose an additional powerful tool: **START SINGING PRAISES**. This is indeed what they did after repenting and praying: they began to praise the Lord. So we need four legs to this stool, not three. **Do not stop short of SINGING A SONG. Keep singing and never quit. Sing your way all the way to heaven**.

But especially sing wholeheartedly in the dark. Truly, it is in the dark where your melody becomes the sweetest and your song the most inspiring. We have no better example of this than that of our Lord Jesus. At the end of the first Lord's Supper, Judas had gone out into the dark to betray his Master. Yet, in this darkest night in human history, Jesus called for a hymn to be sung (Mt. 26:30). He refused to get into a pity party. He refused to dwell on the negatives. Nothing good comes out of a negative spirit. Two of the finest discourses of the whole Bible came out of that spirit of praise in that dark night: the discourses on the vine and the branches (John 15) and on the Holy Spirit (John 16). Friend, what are you producing in your darkest hours? You MUST learn to sing in the dark, acting as *if* God is still alive, as *if* God still cares for you, acting as *if* God has a way of escape for you! Do you understand? If you don't sing in the City of Wits' End it is proof that your faith is dead and that your God has left the planet! Evangelist Loran Helm said that "praise is a very breath of trust; and where there is no praise, trust is choked to death." Praise and trust are in a symbiotic relationship. Neither can survive without the other. If one dies, the other dies also.

Therefore, praise spoken or sung is not a choice, something you do when you feel like it. It is a discipline to do and never to abandon. The book of Psalms can be expressed in one single word: SING. Heaven also is nothing but joyful adoration. And was not this the problem with the three friends that came to *comfort* Job? Yes, they came to comfort, but they only increased his misery because **they failed to bring a song**. Job needed a young man like David who sang his king out of depression (1 Sa. 16:23). In addition, we have the example of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25). They came to their wits' end and yet sang praises at the midnight hour.

Finally, let us not forget how God delivered entire nations through a song. In 2 Kings 3, Israel and Judah went to war against Moab. When Israel was at wits' end because they could not find water, Elisha called for a minstrel, a musician. And while a song was being sung the Holy Spirit gave the revelation for the way of escape: dig ditches. God filled the ditches with water and saved Israel's army.

When Israel was about to be attacked by a great multitude beyond number, King Jehoshaphat was afraid (2 Ch. 20). The nation gathered together for fasting and prayer. They said, "...neither know we what to do: but our eyes are on Thee" (vs. 12). God told them to face the enemy with singing, and they received a great victory. When you are at wits' end, **sing a song**. This has been the sign of victory in the church from time immemorial. When believers were saved, they sang a song. When they were forbidden to preach the gospel, they sang a song. When they were imprisoned, they sang a song. So my friend, if you're in the City of Wits' End, sing a song and it will not be long until you shall find a way of escape, a revelation or a word of comfort from Christ. Indeed, it will not be long, and you will be on your way to the City of Holy Contentment. "God inhabits the praises of his people" (Ps 22:3). Sing, show cold disregard for your feelings - just SING.

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