

Do you ever feel like you're fighting against life? Do you ever feel like no matter what you do there is some obstacle that is making everything you do difficult? From the time we are children, we are constantly fighting, aren't we? Why can't I make friends? Why can't I get good grades? Why don't my parents love each other? Then as we become teenagers it becomes more obvious. Why do I feel so awkward? Why won't he like me? Who even am I? By the time we become adults we are fully convinced that life is a battle. What if I don't make enough money? What if I never really feel like I matter? Why is my family such a mess? Why aren't I the person I wish I was? It's almost as we are in a boxing match and continually getting punched in the face with struggle after trial after disaster.

I was reminded how universal of an idea this this week when I was on Twitter. I noticed a "Motivational Quotes" handle and when I clicked on it, I realized how many of these Twitter handles there are and how many people follow them. Turns out there are a lot of people out there who are feeling at least a little downtrodden in life. I'm one of them...so I started reading some of the motivational quotes to get a little encouragement, but one stood out to me as I was thinking about this account of Jesus from Luke for today. The quote was from Vince Lombardi. He said, *"It doesn't matter how many times you get knocked down, but how many times you get up."* You know, that is really the anthem of worldly encouragement, isn't it? Just pick yourself up and try again. I think Chumbawumba expressed the sentiment best when they wrote, "I get knocked down, but I get up again. You ain't never gonna keep me down."

That's all well and good, and sometimes we really need to tell ourselves to just get up and get back at it, but it got me wondering... What happens when you don't get up? What happens your life falls apart? What happens when you hit rock bottom? What happens when everyone has abandoned you? And finally, what happens when you realize that the guy that's punching you in the boxing ring is death, and he has never lost. Every punch he throws is just one step closer to the end of this life of struggle, and friends, eventually, no matter how many Chumbawumba lyrics you know or Twitter handles you follow, you're not going to get up.

Well, if you have ever felt like you're fighting against life, I want to introduce you to two people who understand what you're going through. The first is a woman. She was in her late forties, a widow. Her husband died a couple years ago. As hard as it was to lose him, she still had her son who was a good kid and wanted to stay home with her to take care of her as long as he could. Unfortunately, he also died and now she's left with nothing. In her culture, it was almost impossible for women to hold a high paying job or hold property. And so here she is, walking in front of the casket of her dead son as the whole town watches all thinking the same thing she is thinking, "What is she going to do next?" There was really very little she could do for herself and the people around her didn't seem to be offering much help either. She was knocked down, and she wasn't sure she could get up.

The second is a man, about 20 years old, thrust into the role of man of the house earlier than he wanted to be when his dad died. And if that wasn't bad enough, he had to lie in bed sick and unable to help his mother whom he knew needed his help. He couldn't even live up to the expectations his culture placed on him. Maybe some of you ladies here understand what that feels like, but for men, when you're unable to provide for the people in your life who need you, it can feel like you're an absolute failure. But no matter what the doctors did, he was not going to get up again, and eventually he died. He was knocked down, and he wasn't getting up.

You ever feel like either of these people? Like you have no purpose in life or your purpose was taken away from you? Do you feel like you just can't control the things you wish could control? Do you ever fear the unescapable reality of death?

See, the world works one way without Jesus. People suffer in every stage of life and then they die and if that's not bad enough, after they die, they go to hell because they are sinful. As much as we would like to blame all our problems on our "lot in life," the real problem is right here, inside me, inside you. No matter how hard I try, I can't be perfect, I can't live forever, and I mess stuff up daily. It leaves me lying on my back, knocked down, unable to get up again.

But Jesus steps in. He steps in to the lives of these people and he has stepped into your life as well.

Jesus changes the world for the two people in our gospel for today, and he has changed your world as well. Luke writes for us, **When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said, "Don't cry."** Jesus feels her pain, his heart hurts for her, and before he does anything, he just commiserates with her. That's a great truth for us to remember because God isn't just a sugar-daddy who is going to make all our problems go away. He wants to feel our pain with us. Hebrews 4:15 says, **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.** He can empathize with every pain and weakness you know all too well, in fact, he loved you so much that he not became like you, he stayed like you.

Friends, Christmas was permanent. Jesus didn't just come to earth, become a human, die for us, rise again and then go back to be a spirit in heaven. Jesus is so in love with human beings that he is still a human being! He still knows what it's like to have your heart broken, to be frustrated, and so if you come here today knocked down by your sin or the sin of someone else, Jesus cares!

But he doesn't just stop there. He makes it better. Luke continues, ¹⁴**Then He came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And He said, "Young man, I tell you, get up!"** ¹⁵**The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.**

For the young man who had literally been knocked down by death, Jesus makes everything right. As death was carrying away its helpless prey, the people there knew no one could stop death. But Jesus, the Prince of Life, steps in and takes back what is his and steals this young man from death.

And did you catch that last little part Luke includes, "Jesus gave him to his mother." It's interesting to think that at face value, we would probably just think that Jesus had his hand on the boy's shoulder and walked him over to his mother, but what if Luke is just summarizing the whole event. It's as if he says, "And in doing all this, he gave him back to his mother." In the end, it doesn't change how we understand what happened, but it does show exactly what Jesus is about. He's about making things right.

Now, here's the best part of this. Jesus promises that he is going to do the same for you. Death cannot take you as its helpless prey because as soon as you close your eyes on this earth, you wake up in heaven, and at the end of the world, Jesus is going to raise our bodies from the dead, perfect them and give them back to us.

Jesus message to you is no matter how many times you get knocked down, he will always be there to pick you up until eventually in heaven, you will never fall again. Because he promises you that, all things are new. You no longer need to look at everything through the eyes of sin that say you have to make something of yourself. You know that Jesus has you and isn't letting go.

That allows us to look at our lives through eyes of faith. This week, I read an article about Kobe Bryant's training when he was on the Olympic basketball team. If you haven't read the article, basically, he worked out doing cardio and weights for two hours, and made sure he made 800 shots before he even started practices. It's a process that takes almost 6 hours! When I read that, I thought, man there are like 200 things I would rather do with those six hours, but then I realized, that's the kinda stuff we all do when we aren't looking at our lives through eyes of faith. Now, I'm not necessarily saying that about Kobe, but the principle is true. If the only reason you matter is because you're good at basketball, then you do everything you can to keep that reason, and when you lose it, it's painful.

The eyes of faith let us do the opposite. No matter what is going on in your life, no matter what you've lost or feel guilty about, not only does Jesus care, he's going to make it better. It might not be until the end of the world, but the promise is there for you. You don't have to live in this world of sin forever. All things are being made new! Amen.