

UNBROKEN AND RESTORED
February 8, 2015 –Romans 12: 14-21
The Church of the Covenant

“UNBROKEN” is a current movie about the life of Lewis Zemperini and his rise as an Olympic athlete, World War II hero and prison camp survivor. Hollywood has of course forgotten the rest of his inspiring story, how his faith in Jesus Christ was the very thing which made him UNBROKEN AND RESTORED.

The movie is quite compelling as it tells of how his love for running pulls him out of a troubled childhood and leads him to be an Olympic class runner. He is strong and he is driven and dedicated. He surmounts obstacles in his life alone. He finds the inner resources to tough it out and win Olympic medals. He is the master of his own fate, the captain of his own soul; he is UNBROKEN.

He enters World War II and is a bombardier for the Airforce. His plane is dramatically shot down and he, along with two other survivors, are afloat in a life raft in the Pacific Ocean. They subsist on rainwater and fish caught. One of the others dies. After more than 46 days adrift, as long as any person has ever lived, they are captured by the Japanese. He is still strong and driven and resourceful. He surmounts all obstacles in life with inner strength and fortitude. He toughs it out. The same drive that made him an Olympic athlete made him survive impossible odds. He is the master of his own fate, the captain of his own soul; he is UNBROKEN.

Then he is interred in a barbaric prison camp with a particularly cruel camp commander who targets him for particular abuse. He is subjected to unspeakable acts of human cruelty by his nemesis. The height of which is holding a large wooden beam up into the air with instructions that if he drops it he will be shot. But through his inner strength and fortitude, by the sheer willpower he brings to the moment, by summoning all of his resources he overcomes yet again. He tries harder. He toughs it out. By reason of strength he prevails. The drive that made him an Olympic athlete and a 46 plus day survivor now grants him the ability to prevail once again. He is the master of his own fate, the captain of his own soul; he is UNBROKEN. And here the Hollywood movie leaves us –to admire the strength and courage of this wonderful World War II war hero and vet. But alas, this is but half the story. Lewis Zemperini himself said that the biggest and most wonderful miracles of his life came after the war. These were not included in the movie for these are matters of faith. These are an inconvenient truth.

Because the truth of the matter is that when he came home from the war he was filled with bitterness toward the war and rage toward his captors. He experienced constant nightmares. He drank heavily to medicate his soul’s pain. He had a violent temper and nearly destroyed everything he valued in life. His wife began to prepare divorce papers; he was about to lose his precious little daughter. I think we would probably call this something like PTSD today –post traumatic stress disorder. And I want to stop for just a moment to say that many people suffer from post traumatic stress. Someone goes through a huge personal loss in their life, the death of a loved one, the disease of a child, a debilitating ongoing illness, chronic pain. Whatever it may be it is analogous to trying to tough it out in the Olympics, survive in the middle of the ocean and surmount victoriously the confines of a prison camp. There is trauma and injury to your soul. There is unfettered pain in your heart. You have risen only to be punched down again and again. You have stood, only to be flattened by life. You have been raised up by your strength only to be pulled down by your circumstance. It may not be as dramatic as a Hollywood movie but the pain is the same. As Christians we may draw upon our own resources not only of strength but of faith, but even with these the well can run dry, the trauma can be too great. I find it interesting as a pastor how often a person is able to get through the difficult time of stress and hurt only later, when we let our

defenses down a bit, does the true weight and cost of the trauma affect our heart, mind and soul. And we find ourselves where Lewis Zemperini did when he came home from World War II. He was no longer UNBROKEN. No, the trauma of his life experience had broken his heart and had broken his soul. But that doesn't make a good Hollywood movie. When we try to oppose strength with strength it works for a time. When we try to oppose the power of evil with our own power it works for a time. But finally, even the strongest person, even the strongest Christian, becomes overcome by the darkness and the human heart becomes the casualty of the bitter wars of the circumstances of life. *"Do not be overcome by evil"* says our scripture from Romans, *"but overcome evil with good."* (Romans 12: 21)

So Zemperini's wife begs him to attend a revival meeting in Los Angeles. It is 1949 and the evangelist is a young, little known evangelist. She has attended the meeting in a large open air tent but Zemperini wants nothing to do with it. He finally acquiesces, but in the middle of the meeting he walks out. He relents and returns to a later meeting and as the evangelist is preaching he knew the Holy Spirit was working on his heart and the moment the invitation was given he grabbed his wife's hand and headed for the door once again. But this time, overwhelmed by how BROKEN (not unbroken) his life had become, he turned around and gave his life to Jesus Christ. And from that day forward everything changed—he started reading his Bible, his nightmares disappeared, he gave up drinking, his hatred and violent anger melted away and he began to live for Christ. He stopped trying to do it on his own and allowed the love of God to enter into his heart and soul. He admitted he was not strong enough to face the hardships of life by himself. But he needed a Savior to walk with him. He needed to be healed of his brokenness by the brokenness Christ experienced on the cross.

Jesus for the joy that was set before him willingly went to the cross. There He suffered and died on a large wooden beam. He felt God forsaken and abandoned. All the pain of life was placed upon His great heart in those moments. The pain of Lewis Zemperini was placed on the heart of Jesus. Your pain and my pain was placed on the heart of Jesus. And it broke the heart of the Master. And love poured out from Calvary that day, enough love to heal every broken heart that ever was and ever will be. The love of Jesus overcame all the evil there is on this earth, everything that has hurt you, everything that has sapped your own strength, everything that has sought to break you and rob you of life. PTSD and every trauma in life healed at the foot of the cross. And three days later God raised Jesus from the dead; He made the broken whole; He gave power to put back together the pieces of the human heart and to make us whole again. Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection was ultimately UNBROKEN. Out of His life can come our unbroken and restored life once again. Unconditional surrender to the unconditional love of the Lord Jesus Christ --This is the story of Lewis Zemperini.

Postscript. Zemperini to his own amazement discovered he had a desire to have reconciliation with his Japanese tormentors. So he traveled to Japan after the war, visited the prisons which held war criminals, personally expressed his forgiveness to them, and shared the reason he could forgive, the Good News he had personally received in Jesus Christ. He went to meet with the Japanese commander who had been particularly cruel to him. But that man turned him away; he chose rather to try to be unbroken on his own, rather than forgiven by the blood of Jesus...That's always our choice, isn't it? Oh, and by the way, the young evangelist whose preaching poured out the love of God to Zemperini's broken heart was none other than Billy Graham...Zemperini's true story is better than the movie, UNBROKEN. The true story of his life rings truer and is a more authentic picture of the traumas of life being healed by the LOVE of JESUS. Hollywood wouldn't understand. That's why its the greatest story NEVER TOLD. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*