

# THE LONGEST MATCH IN HISTORY

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## INTRODUCTION

This week the longest tennis match ever concluded, after 11 hours and 5 minutes... one report says: *LONDON Friday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010 — John Isner and Nicolas Mahut said they were absolutely exhausted by their epic duel but bound together for life after they played out the longest tennis match ever known. Both were utterly lost for words as to why their unprecedented encounter had gone on for so long, except to say the will to win was never extinguished. "I can't explain that," Isner, the American world number 19, said after the incredible record-shattering contest. "Nothing like this, it won't happen again. Not even come close," he said, after finally beating Mahut 6-4, 3-6, 6-7 (7/9), 7-6 (7/3), 70-68. "I guess it was just meant to be. In a way I'm kind of glad it happened, although I'm pretty tired. "I didn't know what I was thinking out there, especially once the match got past 25-all. I wasn't really thinking."....*

*Isner said he had no idea what was going on by the time the match was suspended due to bad light at 59-59 after seven hours on court Wednesday. "I was completely delirious. I wanted to keep on playing, which I don't know why, because he was the fresher one. Even though it was dark and no-one could see, I wanted a final verdict, win or lose."*

But there is another duel that is still going on. More enduring than Wimbledon, World Cup....We are part of the battle between the powers of darkness, Satan's hordes, and the people of God, the kingdom of light. This is certainly the longest match or battle in history – it began at the fall, and continues until the end of time, when 'the second death' sees the enemy of our soul cast into the lake of fire forever. This is a long-lasting battle – and we are in it – along with many who have preceded us in the grandstand of eternity. Yes, it requires endurance...it can be a long, long race, a long battle, and weariness and discouragement can easily beset us along the way. This is our chapter, our lap, our time, for this race, this battle for souls, our own soul – and the souls of those in our world.

**Heb 12:1-16** *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." .....v12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.*

Let's look again at v.12-13:

**12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,  
13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be  
dislocated, but rather be healed.**

In this long-lasting battle, there is need of great endurance. We can easily become weary and discouraged in our souls...**Heb.12:3**. Some of us may feel that today. When we see physically weak, feeble knees, and hands that hang down, weak, disabled in some way, we know there is a cause for the problem. Spiritually and emotionally, when we are limping, and our hands hang down – there is a reason.

## **1. THE CAUSE OF WEAKNESS**

There can be **damage to the tissue or bone** which if not healed and treated, can cause weakness – Our pastor Paul had an injury to his ankle several years ago when he fell off a ladder when it was wet. The injury 'sort of healed' but not really, and he was having pain and weakness when he walked on that ankle. Recent tests showed there had been an elusive, hidden break which was not repaired and needed surgery and a period of rest while it healed. Things happen in this longest battle in history – injuries happen to us...maybe accidentally, or for whatever reason. But an injury needs attention, healing, repair. You can't just leave it. Take it to the Master for His diagnosis and healing. Get someone to help repair it.

**Overwork**...can produce weakness, weariness, and along with that sometimes discouragement. When we were redeveloping this building, there was so much gyprocking to be done, and no one to do it...so I learned how and spent months on scaffolds and ladders, setting joints on tons of wall in this building. My hand developed pain at night and I had to bandage it up with linament before bedtime, so I could sleep comfortably...it hurt to play the piano. Prolonged, repetitive hard work and pressure can produce physical strain, pain and weakness.

Similarly in the spiritual battle we are in, the heat is sometimes turned up in our walk over a period, or we may be persevering at a task against opposition – it IS a battle, the longest battle in history. We become weary of the battle, a bit worn down by it. The Word to us is 'lift up the hands that hang down, strengthen the feeble knees'. There is a strengthening that comes to the children of God in these times. He has promised grace tailor-made to help in time of need. He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. So, we don't lose heart –

**Gal 6:7-10** *whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, **for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.***

Lack of exercise, wrong diet also causes weakness...in the natural and in the spiritual... Sickness causes weakness – actually prolonged physical sickness can also cause weakness and discouragement in our spirit. But it does not have to happen that way. We can't just let our hands hang down.

## **2. HOW TO STRENGTHEN WHAT IS WEAK... 'therefore strengthen the hands which hang down...'**

## What you think about is important: Consider Jesus –

**Heb 12:3-6** For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, **lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.** 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

We are told to think about Jesus, so that we don't become weary and discouraged in our souls. Precious fellow traveller, what are you thinking about? What are you filling your mind with? Consider Jesus. He was constantly opposed by his own people. He was opposed and baited by the Jewish religious leaders. He was betrayed by one of His own close followers. He endured the cross, despised the shame and is seated at the right hand of God. And you are His child, being transformed to be like Him. You can endure. It is worth it all. We will share in His victory.

**Opposing force** builds strength – just as Jesus endured hostility continually, so opposing force when we endure it, looking to Him, strengthens us. Our elite athletes train in the gym using weights – under the watchful eye of the trainer who is an expert in just how much pressure to apply. As we look to Jesus, He knows what we are going through, He gives us the grace, the strength to carry on, and will not allow us to be tested above what we can bear.

It is important **what we look at Heb.12:4** – 'looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith' – if we look at earth things, outward things, we lose heart. We need to see beyond what is seen. If we look back, we lose direction. Consider Jesus....for the joy that what set before Him, endured....

**2 Cor 4:16-18** Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our **outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed** day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not **look at** the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the **things which are not seen** are eternal.

'A hard time' - how **God trains us as His kids** - when we are having a hard time, we know that the Father uses this to train us as His sons and daughters, whom He loves. Of course this is not 'joyful', but 'afterwards' it brings the peaceable fruits of righteousness ('a peaceful harvest of right living' as one translation puts it). We will be partakers of His holiness, we are marked as His children by His Father hand shaping and training and correcting us. This is a mark of His love. Sure, it is easy to feel discouraged when we are having all sorts of trials, but that's why we are told to look to Jesus our example who endured all for the joy set before Him...and so may we. Like shepherd, like sheep. He is the author and finisher of our faith – let's not forget that God is speaking to us as sons whom He loves and trains. Perhaps the example of human parents training their child is good here – sometimes what we do to train them hurts them or is distasteful or painful in some way at the time – but it is so that they will yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness in time.

In October 1991 we had a serious car accident. I had a whiplash injury, but x-rays showed nothing that bone specialists could see. Weeks later, my neck was almost immobilised with pain, and I went to a physiotherapist who looked at the same x-rays and said: 'here is the problem' – the muscles are locked in spasm here, and you have pain all the way through these muscles to here...there was damage to the connecting tissue and muscles,

and it hurt and immobilised part of me, affected all of me in fact. Things happen in our spiritual walk that can damage connecting tissue and muscle, and cause pain, and slow us down or stop movement. The solution for me was to start **stretching exercise** – stretching the offending muscles...applying heat before this...stretching until it hurt a little, and repeating this gradually, consistently, consciously. Now, we can have body weakness and pain caused by immobilised, damaged connective tissue – we need to start stretching out the weak hands and the feeble knees, stretching out our ‘soul’ to others (Isaiah 58:10) – it might not be a comfortable feeling, but warm up first, and talk to that person you may not have noticed, because it’s uncomfortable. Identify the painful, awkward, damaged connection, and start exercising it. You will begin the strengthening process. Go to them. Do something with them. Start stretching and exercising...

**Who does the strengthening?** We need one another to help strengthen the hands which hang down. We need each other to help, encourage, exercise, gain strength in the feeble knees.

**Pray in tongues – Jude 20, 1 Cor. 14:4.** You can build yourself up when your hands are hanging down and your knees are feeble – pray with the Spirit, build yourself up, lift up the hands. And always remember the power of praise – in everything give thanks! Sing the Lord’s song always.

### 3. MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS

We need to tread a straight path – firm, unanimous in the right direction...if the whole body of God’s people by their united, consistent walk creates a ‘beaten path’ that is clear and straight – the lame, feeble, injured, young would be able to stay on the path, and not be ‘dislocated’ or ‘turned out of the way’. A friend was telling me about her safari in Africa – she said that through the jungle, the path to the water supply for the animals was well trodden down, clear and straight – safe for the young and weaker ones. We have a responsibility to those following after us not to walk a path that will trip up those who are following us, but to leave a clear, straight, well-trodden path...we need to look out for others.

*Isaiah 35:3 Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees.*

*4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear!"*

*Isa 35:8 A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray.*

**Heb.12:14-16** tell us how to make these straight paths for our feet, and stop making stumbling paths which will put the lame or feeble right out of the way...

**fix relationships** – pursue peace

pursue **holiness** – clean up

watch out for **others who might be struggling** in their walk

watch out for, and deal with **roots of bitterness**, in ourselves and others – they mess up lots of people

watch out for **sexual sin**

**don’t ‘sell your birthright’** when you feel tired and weary (like Esau) – he lost sight of what he was born to, and counted it as nothing, when he was tired and hungry. When your hands hang down and your knees are feeble – don’t give up the birthright. Don’t trade it for temporary, earthly filling of a fleeting hunger when you are weary from the journey – you are a child of the king, born again for eternal life – you have a future and a hope, an

inheritance undefiled reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God for salvation....His grace, His strength is enough...

**CONCLUSION:** *Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.* Let's pray.