



Remember the Past, Persevere in the Present, Look to the Future

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 10:32-39

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Three Reasons This passage that we are looking at this morning, beloved, I'm convinced, does not often resonate with us and does not often impact us, as it should. It's not so much that we don't believe that the words we are reading are true; it's just that we are not sure how applicable they are to us. I'm sure there a multiplicity of reasons as to why this is true, but I think that there are three that sort of stand out.

One, is that we have never experienced severe persecution for our faith in Christ. Sure, we may have had people slander us, may have experienced rejection, been criticized or laughed at, but none of us, that I know of, have ever been beaten, tortured, thrown in prison, or had our family or earthly goods taken from us because we have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. We just haven't had this experience.

A second reason that this text seems distant is that mainstream Christianity isn't really worth the effort that persecution requires. The gospel that is most often preached in America is a Jesus who makes much of you and whose job is to maximize your life and success, here on earth. Jesus is offered as a way to overcome failure, the solution to your failing marriage, the solution to your addiction problems, the guru of weight loss, the key to success in business, the one who helps you win sporting events, the secret to a happy home or the one who can maximize your personality and performance for personal success. Jesus, then, becomes nothing more than a commodity like anything else that improves your life. Jesus is just there to make life simpler, easier, and more comfortable and who could be against that? The persecution of which this text speaks only comes when you hold fast to the biblical Jesus, to the true gospel, when you insist that man's greatest problem is his sinfulness before a holy God, when you have a firm and unbending biblical morality, and you seek to follow Jesus' commands faithfully and seriously and by and large that's not a "big problem" in this country.

The third reason why this is so flows from the second. Generally, we have lost the biblical picture of what it really means to follow Christ. In the Bible, living the Christian life is often presented in military terms – as a fight or a battle. Paul uses this imagery in Ephesians 6, when he describes the way that we are to be clothed for battle, saying: **“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”** (Ephesians 6:10–20, ESV) Those are not words of ease.

To Timothy, he wrote: **“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”** (2 Timothy 2:3, ESV) And, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** (2 Timothy 4:7, ESV) Jesus told His disciples: **““If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”** (John 15:18–20, ESV) And, **“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33, ESV) Peter wrote, **“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”** (1 Peter 4:13–16, ESV) Paul sums it up perfectly when he says, **“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”** (2 Timothy 3:12–14a, ESV)

This is how the apostles and the Lord Jesus describes the fight of the faithful Christian life and, beloved, what may seem foreign to us now, I promise you, was not foreign to the Hebrew Christians to whom this pastor is writing. They were experiencing the cost of following Jesus Christ, the persecution that comes from faithfulness to Him. The gospel that they lived had nothing to do with temporal success, and only indirectly dealt with addictions and improving your marriage or any of a number of other things. They understood that this gospel had to do with the radical and powerful work of Christ to redeem them -- sinners who rightly deserved the wrath of God for their sin against His Holy Majesty, a gospel that boldly called every other way of approach and peace with God a lie, a gospel that was no respecter of persons, a gospel that called sin, sin and called righteousness, righteousness, a gospel that called for ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ and surrender to Him as Savior and Lord and that did not shy away from proclaiming the coming judgment of the wicked and unrepentant. And they were in the fight of their spiritual lives -- a fight to remain faithful in the midst of mounting opposition, a fight to hold fast to Jesus Christ and His gospel and not to fall away, a fight to persevere in the faith and not give up their hope in Christ.

We may not want to think about it but, the kind of pressure they faced will not remain foreign to true and faithful Christians in this country forever. The relative comfort we have enjoyed and the easygoing tolerance of Christianity in our godless society is beginning to evaporate. Already we see the precursors of this kind of persecution in our own nation. The spiritual capital of our forefathers has long been spent. The message and the moral influence of the gospel, even among unbelievers, is being increasingly lost in our culture. And here is the truth -- more and more, as mainstream Christianity capitulates and compromises with a godless social worldview, with godless morality and with a government that is characterized by unbelief, if we would remain determined to be faithful to God and to His Christ, we will experience, to a greater and increasingly painful degree, the reality of persecution. These words are powerfully important to us whether we may have initially realized it or not. There is a storm coming.

The writer of Hebrews knew that in his own day, just as in our own, there are multitudes of great starters, but few finishers, but Jesus said: ***“The one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 24:13, ESV)*** So the goal of this text this morning is to encourage the Hebrew Christians and us to endure to the end, to persevere to the end and so be saved.

The writer has just spent the last several verses warning the Hebrews of the danger and the judgment of falling away from their profession of faith in Christ, of turning away from Jesus to go back to Judaism in order to avoid persecution and trial... warning us not to trade our confession of Christ and to turn aside to a less costly version of Christianity, to a Jesus of your own making rather than the Jesus of the Word of God, to a less-demanding Jesus, to a self-esteem producing Jesus, to a Jesus like all the other gods, or, even more, to some other religion or combination of religions, or embracing some form of private spirituality or even atheism. All that is left for those who fall away, whom Scripture describes as trampling the Son of God, treating His blood as worthless, and outraging the Spirit of grace, is judgment without mercy, a fury of fire that will consume God's adversaries. He gives them a stern and uncompromising warning, but then like a good and wise pastor, he encourages the faithful. He give encouragement to the ones who earnestly desire to remain faithful to Christ even in the midst of unrelenting pressure and that's what we are looking at this morning and it is a timely word, indeed.

The pastor's encouragement in this text can be summed up in this way. To have an enduring, lasting, and durable faith -- one that will take you to the finish line -- you must do three things -- remember God's work in you in the past, persevere in the present by doing His will, and look to the promises of His future grace. Let me say that again: To have an enduring, lasting, and durable faith, you must remember God's work in you in the past, persevere in the present by doing His will, and look to the promises of His future grace. That is the gist of this message, ok? So let's start by looking at the pastor's call to

Remember God's Work in You in the Past (32-34) He writes: ***“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”*** (Hebrews 10:32-34, ESV) The writer points them to the past, to remember the first days when they had come to faith in Christ -- the passion, the faith, and the certainty of the gospel that fueled their faithfulness to Jesus. We are apt to forget the gracious working of God in the past, aren't we? We can easily forget what we once were before Christ and what God has done in and for us, the mire from which we have been lifted, how He brought us to Christ, and what we have known of God through personal experience with Him and His gospel truth.

The writer recalls how the Hebrew Christians had been enlightened. But unlike the apostates that we looked at last week, their enlightenment was not in mind only, but in heart. They were a people who had been truly transformed by the grace of God in Christ. Before God **“shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,”** (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV), we were spiritually blind, with no idea of the holiness of God or of the depth of our sinfulness and the great gulf that it had created between us and God. We had no regard for the commands of the Holy God, no regard for our desperate situation and the wrath and judgment that we deserved, nor any care that the Son of God gave Himself on the cross to pay the debt of our sins. We walked in the dark and thought we knew the way. But praise God, He did not leave us in our sin and darkness but regenerated our dead and darkened hearts to see the worth of Jesus Christ and His saving death personally. He gave us faith to believe and rescued us from hell and spiritual death.

The writer wants these Hebrew Christians, wants us, to remember what it was like to first be redeemed by Christ. “Remember,” he says, “what it was like when you had been delivered from the law and ritual of Judaism, when some of you were freshly delivered from idolatry or human philosophy, and you were brought to new life in Christ!” Remember!

Remember how your faith in Christ filled you with courage and steadfastness. He says, ***you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.*** It was this new-found love for and gratitude toward Christ that made them able to endure the conflict and the struggles that came with faith in Christ. He referring back to the persecution under Claudius, some 15 years earlier, when they had come under fire for their faith in Christ. Then they had been cast out of the Jewish synagogues, expelled from polite society, lost their businesses, and been made second-class citizens -- some had even been kicked out of Rome -- though by this time many had returned. Still, nothing they faced could make them turn away from Jesus, no matter how hard it became. In fact, the phrase that is translated here as “publically exposed to reproach” comes from the Greek word “theatrizo” from which we get our word theater, that means to make a public spectacle of someone. They were ridiculed and rejected by everyone not of the faith. They were falsely accused, some of them, of being part of strange cult, of crimes against the state, crimes against the ungodly laws and constructs of society. Physical, emotional and psychological abuse were hurled at

them and yet they stood strong, unwilling to reject or compromise on the gospel of their Savior Jesus Christ, unwilling to be a traitor to their Lord.

Their courage reminds me of the story of one of the English Reformers, Hugh Latimer. On one occasion, Latimer preached before King Henry VIII and offended him with his boldness in his proclamation of sin and the gospel of Christ. So Latimer was threatened and commanded to preach the following Sunday and to make a public apology to the king. On that following Sunday, after reading the text, he addressed himself as he began to preach, spoke to himself in the pulpit, saying, “Hugh Latimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king’s most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest; therefore take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease; but then consider well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest; upon whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God! Who is all present and who beholdeth all thy ways, and who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully!” He then preached to Henry and everyone else the same message that he had preached the week before, only with greater passion!

The Hebrew Christians had shown courage and strength just like that, born of faith in Christ and rather than becoming divided and self-protective – everybody for themselves – they became **partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property.** They stood together in solidarity with one another. They had each other’s back and they chose to face persecution together. Do you see that? Back in the day, to be placed in prison meant that you likely did not eat, did not have water, and did not have clothing unless someone brought it to you. But to do that was put a big bull’s eye squarely on your back. You couldn’t fly under the radar and care for your brothers and sisters in prison, but once you were identified, it meant trouble for you. At the very least, it meant the plundering of your property – either by corrupt officials extorting them or by mobs stealing everything of value. But they did it anyway. They refused to live only for themselves but to live for Christ and for the good of their brothers and sisters in need, even if it cost them dearly.

But, here’s the thing, and what was so unnerving and astonishing to those who persecuted them, they didn’t just grit their teeth and get through it. They didn’t just grimly endure the loss of their property because they were identified as Christ-followers. They did all of this

joyfully. Joyfully! How can that be? Here's how -- ***you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*** When you know you have a better and lasting possession, you are not broken by loss of temporal things. What was that better, lasting possession? It wasn't a thing; it was a person -- Jesus Christ! Isn't that what the writer of Hebrews has been telling us all along? In Christ we have victory over death, the way opened to the throne of grace, the full and final forgiveness of sins through His death and resurrection. In Christ we have an eternal redemption, His blood that cleanses our consciences, a sacrifice that perfects us for all time, His powerful intercession as our High Priest in heaven to sanctify and make us holy in practice as we are in position before God. In Christ we have new and better covenant in which the word of God is written by His Spirit upon our hearts, the promise that our sins and iniquity God remembers no more, the promise that God's presence abides with us forever -- we His children and God our Father. In Christ, we have the promise that He will make His enemies and ours His footstool, and that He will come a second time to bring to completion the salvation of all who eagerly await His coming.

We have all of this in Christ and when we know this, it puts everything else -- our rights, our temporal comfort, our longing for ease, our houses, cars, vacations, bank accounts, recreation, even our very lives -- everything else -- into proper perspective. It is all temporal and we can't take any of it beyond the grave. Christ lasts forever. What He has given to us in Himself cannot fade away. He is better than anything we may lose in this life to hold fast to Him. Do you believe this, beloved? Are you absolutely convinced that this is true? The Hebrew Christians were once convinced of this and they lived like it. So, having reminded them of God's work in their souls in the past, their absolute confidence in Jesus Christ, their unrelenting faithfulness to Christ, the work of God in them, he calls them to

Persevere in the Present (35-36) He says to them, "***Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.***" (Hebrews 10:35-36, ESV) Do you see what he is doing? The writer of Hebrews is reminding them of their past faithfulness and allegiance and love to Christ and he is saying, "Now look, don't throw away your confidence in Christ." Don't bail on Christ. Don't recklessly reject what is ultimately valuable. People don't throw away what they know is valuable, what they believe is precious. They just don't do it. It is why people are hoarders. It's why our storage rooms are filled to the rafters.

But, how do you keep from throwing away your confidence in Christ? By reminding yourself, over and over, of His ultimate worth. It's by having a clear perception of all that Christ is for you in the gospel. Puritans often spoke of Christ in terms of His offices, His roles, His ministry as our Lord in a threefold way – Prophet, Priest and King, all in one. Jesus is your Prophet who has revealed God to you, who has made Him and His will known, who has spoken God's saving Word to you, and whose words are life itself. He is your Priest who has satisfied God's wrath against your sin for you by His death on the cross and who lives even now, in heaven, interceding for you. He is your King, who is seated at the Father's right hand, who reigns over your life, who providentially directs even the smallest details of your life for your eternal good and His everlasting glory, and who will return for you in triumph. This is Christ to you – not your Judge, but your faithful Brother, your eternal Savior and your only Lord. This is the Christ we need to continually parade before our thoughts. That's where we find spiritual strength and joyful endurance to do God's will, to remain faithful and to live and walk and speak like Jesus and for Jesus.

And so he says, in essence, “You need endurance, aggressive endurance. You do not need me to commiserate with you, or rehearse with you how hard it is to be faithful in such difficult times. You do not need to feel sorry for yourselves. You do not need a strategy for political reformation of the Roman Empire. You don't need to win the culture wars. This godless culture is damned. You need endurance.”

Why suffer ridicule, why endure persecution, why spend this short life serving Christ? Why continue to preach the gospel and call unbelievers to repentance in this godless culture when so few, it seems, believe? Why stand unashamedly on the righteous commands of God? Why live lives devoted to Christ? Why keep seeking to live according to God's will? Why not compromise? Why not be slack? Why bother living for anything or anyone other than yourself? Here's why, because the promised reward is so much greater – heaven, eternal fellowship with God, beholding and delighting in the glory of Christ. What is better than that? Therefore, endure as a good soldier of Christ! “Endure,” he says and

Look to the Promises of God's Future Grace (37-39) He writes, **“For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” (Hebrews 10:37–39, ESV)** Christ is coming! Christ is coming! And when he comes, He will set all things right. But

in the meantime, as the writer's quote from the prophet Habakkuk so clearly proclaims, **my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.** We must not shrink back. We must not fall away. That is the way of the apostate and it ends in eternal destruction.

No, we must live by faith and the writer of Hebrews is confident that those who, in this moment, were struggling and weak would hear his words and respond in faith. He says, "We are not those, you are not of those who shrink back, but who have faith, who trust in Christ, and who, through continuing faith in Christ, will preserve our souls."

Listen, endurance is all about faith. **Faith**, that he will say in the next chapter, **"is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** (Hebrews 11:1, ESV) Faith is everything. The whole enchilada. The whole Christian life is to be lived by faith – not sight, not feelings – but faith. It is faith, faith for salvation and faith for Christian living. Saving faith is not a one-time action, but an ongoing, daily matter of trusting in God's promise of salvation in Christ, believing the worth of Jesus, and living like you believe it. **"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."** (Hebrews 11:6, ESV)

This storm-tossed church, that had earlier triumphed in the persecution under Claudius and was presently on the even of the horrific persecution under the Roman emperor Nero, was to triumphantly endure by faith, and so must we.

We Must Endure

Despite Persecution, We Must Endure Persecution is the reality for all who truly follow Christ. We have to have the mindset – living for Christ is going to be hard, but the reward is infinitely worth all that we have to suffer and more. Persecution is a reality. It may not always be obvious and fully blown, but more and more open displays of faith in Christ are being stamped out by more and more nations. There can be no question that there is a growing hatred and opposition to Christ by our society and by our government and if it continues unabated, believers in this country will one day face the same fate as the first disciples did. The days of easy going tolerance of Christianity is over. Despite persecution, we must endure.

Despite False Teachers and Religions, We Must Endure There be the false prophets of patently false religions and there will be false teachers within the church. Men who in the name of ecumenism or of plurality or of some humanistic “greater good” deny the absolute and binding truth of the Scriptures, who deny the necessity for the substitutionary blood atonement of Christ, who deny His uniqueness as the Son of God and only way to the Father, men who deny the depravity of men, who make a mockery of God’s holiness, who deny the reality of eternal hell, and deny that those who die without Jesus Christ are lost forever. They turn after fads and popular social causes and sell their souls to political correctness. They think the gospel to be something that can be twisted and molded and shaped to suit the depraved desires of men. They do not preach the gospel because they do not even believe the gospel. But we must stand fast in the power and the name of Christ and fearlessly speak the Word of God because souls hang in the balance and we must faithfully speak for God.

Despite Growing Apostasy, We Must Endure Even though it seems like everyone is willing to compromise and settle for a pop culture, acceptable “Jesus,” we must endure. I love what Charles Spurgeon has to say to this. He said: “Inside the nominal Church, the many may grow cold, but there ought to be a remnant who abide in life and love. God grant that we may belong to it! We must at once grow warmer. We must live nearer to Christ. We must be more enthusiastic. Oh for a band of choice spirits—men fit to walk with Christ in white, for they are worthy—men who will be prepared to follow the Lamb wherever He goes! The Spirit said, “You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.” And so in every Church there are some that have not grown idle or heretical! Let them get together and help each other! I thank God for those whom the Lord keeps very near to Him—may their number be daily increased! May each one of us be filled with the Spirit!” And last,

We Must Endure Because We Proclaim the Only Hope For All People The true gospel of grace, the gospel of salvation by the shed blood and perfect obedience of Christ, the redemption that is in Christ alone which must be received by faith alone, must be preached and it’s truth must be lived out. Just as Christ entrusted this responsibility to His disciples and the churches before us, so He has entrusted that responsibility to us. Yes we will face difficulties like those before us, but we must be faithful and not fall away from our calling. We are not to withdraw ourselves from society, not to retreat to some safe Christian cocoon, not to become inwardly and selfishly focused, only concerned for what is easiest or most beneficial for us.

No, we have been called to something bigger than ourselves, something more lasting than life on this earth, something more important than our ease or our safety, something of greater significance and worth than even our own families. We have been called to proclaim the good news, to magnify Christ and His gospel. That is our calling as we wait for the end, when Christ in all of His glory will be revealed and we will be with Him forever. Comfort, ease, risk minimizing, self-security and self-preservation are not our rights as Christians. We have a Christian life to live for the glory of Christ and gospel to proclaim and we must be found faithful to do it, no matter the cost.

We must endure – Remember the past work of God in you, persevere in the present by doing God’s will, and look to the promises of God’s future grace.

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