



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Endure in Faith Until the End

Hebrews 10:32-39

January 17, 2010

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. 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. 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.

- ❑ One of the most profound results of postmodernism on our culture today is not Darwinian macro-evolution (although that certainly is a significant result); but, rather, our **view of history**.
- ❑ That is, the postmodernist answer to the question, “Why should one study history?” is simply, “Because history repeats itself.” In other words, the postmodern worldview declares that history is cyclical, repeating itself over and over again.
- ❑ Yet, this stands in direct opposition to the biblical view of history. **To the Christian, history is not cyclical, but is rather linear, with all events being**

uniquely and providentially orchestrated by Almighty God who is personally moving all things toward a single crescendo, that is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (of course, all events prior to the first Advent of Christ moved toward that singular event). Yet, the point is that every event is unique, and all of history tells the story of God's providential plan of redemption for His people. Indeed, history is *His*-story.

- However, this view of history has implications on how we are to view the past.
- We do not look to the past for fear of repeating it. Conversely, we do not look to the past in a desire to recreate or relive it either. It is not as though we ever should want to recapture our “glory days.”
- Rather, biblically, we look to the past because we see God's faithfulness. And it is the faithfulness of God in the past that gives us strength to live today and courage to look to the future.
- The Bible continually encourages believers to “look back” and “remember.” However, **we look back only to gain strength for the present and the future.**

<p>Biblical faith is always forward-looking, knowing that the greatest days are never in the past, but in the future.</p>
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- This view of the past is presented throughout the pages of Scripture.
- **Exodus 12:26-27**: [Speaking of the Passover Feast] “And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’ And the people bowed their heads and worshipped.”
- **Deuteronomy 1:29-31**: “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them. The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.’”
- Also, **Deuteronomy 6:20-25**
- In **1 Corinthians 11:24-26** when the Lord Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, he states, “‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

- In our passage this morning, the author of Hebrews looks back on the endurance of the Jewish Christians, as a means of encouraging them to look forward to the Coming One of God.

I. Recall Your Endurance II. Maintain Your Confidence III. Endure in Faith to the End
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I. Recall Your Endurance

- Our author begins this section by encouraging his readers to recall the “former days”:

“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.”

- The author of Hebrews speaks of the time “after you were enlightened...” This brings to mind **Hebrews 6:4-6** and draws a contrast between these *true* believers and the apostates of the previous verses. In direct contrast to the apostates, these true believers did not turn back on Christ, but **endured**.
- Yet, what is interesting here is that our author does not recall the “**glory days**”, but days of **affliction and tribulation**.
 - The word translated “struggle” is a word found nowhere else in the New Testament. It is the Greek word *athlesin*, meaning an athletic event or contest. Donald Guthrie writes, “In this case the imagery seems to be an obstacle race with *sufferings* as the obstacles to be overcome.”
 - The word in **Verse 33** translated “being publicly exposed” is the Greek *theatrizomai*, referring to a theatrical spectacle. The idea is that Christians were persecuted as a public spectacle.

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- Some have suggested that the suffering spoken of here is a reference to the persecution under Nero following the great fire in Rome in **64 A.D.** The ancient Roman historian Tacitus wrote, “Their [the Christians’] death was made a matter of sport: they were covered in wild beasts’ skins and torn to pieces by dogs; or were fastened to crosses and set on fire in order to serve as torches by night when

daylight failed.” Clement also wrote that Christian women were forced to “enact the parts of Dirce and the daughters of Danaus.”

- However, given the most probable dating of the Book of Hebrews, this is not likely. It is more likely that the persecution here is a reference to the years after Claudius became the Roman emperor, in 41 A.D. In this period Emperor Claudius enacted multiple restrictions on the Jewish population of the city of Rome. As one ancient historian (Dio Cassius) wrote, “He did not directly banish them, but forbade them to gather in accordance with their ancestral way of life.”
- However, because the restrictions did not achieve the desired ends of the Emperor, eight years later, in 49 A.D., he issued the Edict of Claudius, formally expelling all Jewish settlers from the city of Rome.
 - According to Suetonius, Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews because “they were constantly indulging in riots at the instigation of Chrestus.” Certainly, the name *Chrestus* is most certainly a reference to Christos, or Christ. Suetonius’ account seems to indicate that riots began in the Jewish community in Rome due to the spread of Christianity among the Jews living there.
 - F.F. Bruce writes, “A large-scale eviction of this nature would inevitably have been attended by widespread looting by the city proletariat, together with many other kinds of insults and indignities.”
 - NOTE: *This sort of eviction also occurred in the city of Alexandria (modern-day Egypt) in A.D. 38. The Jewish historian Philo writes, “Their enemies overran the houses now left empty and began to loot them, dividing up the contents like spoils of war.”* The description spoken of here in Hebrews 10 is quite similar to the sufferings of the Alexandrian Jews in A.D. 38.
- Yet, regardless of what particular persecution our author is referring to, it is important to not that the persecution of the first century Jewish Christians was unique in that in the cities where they suffered, they were attacked by **both the synagogue/Jewish authorities and the pagans as well.**

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- Yet, rather than having pity on the Jewish Christians for their previous sufferings, our author encourages them while looking to their past endurance.
- The idea that suffering and tribulation is a reality for Christians is seen throughout the New Testament.
 - **Acts 14:21-22:** “When they [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra

and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

- A.W. Pink, **commenting on Hebrews 10:32-33** writes, “The word ‘tribulation’ is derived from the Latin ‘tribulum,’ which was a flail used by the Romans to separate the wheat from the chaff. How much ‘chaff’ remains even in the one who has been genuinely converted! How much of the ‘flesh’ mingles with and mars his spiritual exercise! How much which is merely ‘natural’ is mixed with his youthful zeal and energetic activities! How much of carnal wisdom and leaning unto our own understanding there is, till God is pleased to deepen His work of grace in the soul! And one of the principal instruments which He employs in the that blessed work is the ‘tribulum’ or flail.” When the author states, “you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,” he is utilizing an athletic metaphor.
- As F.F. Bruce writes, “[The contemporary readers] had met the challenge of those sufferings as good athletes of Christ, and stood firm.”
- John Calvin writes, “The remembrance then of past warfare, if it had been carried on faithfully and diligently under the banner of Christ, is at length useful to us, not as a pretext for sloth, as though we had already served our time, but to render us more active in finishing the remaining part of our course. For Christ has not enlisted us on this condition, that we should after a few years ask for a discharge, like soldiers who have served their time, but that we should pursue our warfare even unto the end.”
- It is useful then, when the emphasis on the sufferings of the Jewish Christians, and encouragement of the author, to examine the results of suffering, from a biblical perspective.

1. Sufferings remind us that this is not our permanent home. They remind us not to be satisfied with our present home. In other words, sufferings point us heavenward to our true home.

Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

2. Sufferings uproots us from the trappings of this world and free us to be used by God.

- Consider that, in the Book of Acts, this was one of the primary reasons why the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth.

3. Sufferings make us to cling to Christ.

- A.W. Pink comments, “It is by drying up creature-streams of satisfaction that He makes His children thirst for the Fountain of living water.”

4. Suffering leads one to understand the source of true joy

“This, indeed, was the hallmark of the early church: not merely that they endured affliction, but they exhibited joy throughout it all” Richard Phillips

5. Sufferings conform us to be like Christ, to reflect His character.

6. Sufferings confirm the testimony of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:12: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

7. Sufferings separate true believers from false.

8. Sufferings deepen our faith, contrary to the wisdom of the world.

- Consider that throughout the centuries, men have attempted to destroy the church through persecution; yet, it has only served to strengthen and grow the witness of Christ.

9. Sufferings unite believers.

- This is precisely what we see in this passage: “...and sometimes being partners with those so treated.” **Hebrews 10:33**

10. Sufferings produce within us hope.

- This is, to some degree, counter-intuitive, for the world will never understand it.

“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:3-5

11. Suffering provides an opportunity to bear witness to the Gospel

Jeremiah Burroughs, one who knew first-hand, the reality of persecution, wrote, “When a Christian can walk in the midst of fiery trials, without his garments being singed, and has comfort and joy in the midst of everything...it will convince men, when they see the power of grace in the midst of afflictions.”

- ❑ The author also writes, in **Verse 34**, “For you had compassion on those in prison...” In the first century, prisoners who did not have loved ones to bring them food and clothing, would often starve.

II. Maintain Your Confidence

- ❑ The author encourages his readers in **Verse 36**, “Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.”
 - The Greek word translated “do not throw away” is the Greek *apobalete* which refers to casting or flinging away trash that is no longer useful.
- ❑ The author’s focus here is the present **confidence** of his readers.
 - He uses the Greek word *parrhesia*, which he has already used three times in this letter. In 4:16 and 10:19, it is used to describe the confidence with which a believer in the Lord Jesus may approach the throne of God through the finished work of Christ.
 - This **present** “confidence” is similar to the “boldness” with which Peter and John addressed the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:13.
- ❑ W.C. van Unnik states that here “it is, so to say, the content of the Christian attitude in the world, the security of God’s salvation and the open confession amidst...opposition.”
- ❑ **And so, the author looks back to their endurance under persecution in order to encourage them in the present to maintain their confidence in Christ, always looking forward to the coming great reward.**

III. Endure in Faith to the End

- ❑ Finally, our author writes, in **Verse 36**, “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”
- ❑ Further, in **Verse 34**, our author has already spoken of “**a better possession and an abiding one.**”
- ❑ In order to encourage his readers to press on in faith into the future, our author writes, “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God **you may receive what is promised.**” +

- The author’s point is not encourage his readers not to look back or stay in the present, but press on into the future.
 - The Jewish Christians had faced persecution, and were likely experiencing present difficulty. However, there would be a reward in the end.
 - The world encourages us to “Buy now and pay for things later.” However, Scripturally, we are taught to “Sow now, and reap later.” And sowing is often synonymous with sacrificing.

Donald Grey Barnhouse writes, “There is no thought of, ‘I can stand it.’ The pagan, in dull hopelessness, bows to the inevitable. The Christian accepts the suffering, knowing that God is bringing him through to glory; and from the hope of the past to the hope of the future, he sees the connection running through his suffering like a thread that binds all together. His life is like the turbulent rapids of a river, but he knows that the river comes from a still spring and is flowing to a calm ocean. In this knowledge, the Christian has settled peace.”

- In order to “bring home his point” the author quotes from Isaiah and Habakkuk out of the Septuagint (LXX):

‘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.’

- The opening phrase “Yet a little while” is likely taken from the Septuagint version of **Isaiah 26:20**.
- In the late seventh century through the early sixth century, B.C., the prophet Habakkuk cried out to the LORD because of His apparent indifference toward the truth that the people of God had departed so radically from covenant life. Furthermore, Habakkuk laments that the LORD remains silent as Judah is oppressed by foreign enemies, particularly the Chaldeans, i.e, the Babylonians. In short, life in Habakkuk’s day was wrought with great suffering and oppression. **Read Habakkuk 1:12-2:4**.
- Yet, [in the Septuagint translation] Habakkuk looks not simply for the fulfillment of his vision, but for the coming of a Person (i.e., the Messiah or the Christ). It is this Person who will vindicate the righteous, who live by faith.

- The Apostle Paul quotes this phrase (“the righteous shall live by [his] faith”) two times (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:17) emphasizing the Reformation doctrine of Justification by Faith alone.
- Yet, the reason our author quotes from Habakkuk is to emphasize the **forward-looking nature of genuine, saving faith.**
- In the context of the Coming One...the Messiah...Habakkuk’s vision points to the commitment of Christ to the will of the Father.
- This is also seen in Isaiah 50:

Isaiah 50:7-9: “But the Lord GOD helps me;
 Therefore I have not been disgraced;
 Therefore I have set my face like a flint,
 And I know that I shall not be put to shame.
 He who vindicates me is near.
 Who will contend with me?
 Let us stand up together.
 Who is my adversary?
 Let him come near to me.
 Behold, the Lord GOD helps me;
 Who will declare me guilty?
 Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
 The moth will eat them up.”

- Our author concludes by assuring his readers that they are not the apostates spoken of in the previous passage: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”
- **Since we are united by Christ through the Holy Spirit, we do not shrink back because He did not shrink back.**
- In the context of Habakkuk’s vision, the Second Coming of Christ will come soon and we who persevere in faith will receive our reward.

John Calvin writes, “There is indeed nothing that avails more to sustain our minds, should they at any time become faint, than the hope of a speedy and near termination. As a general holds forth to his soldiers the prospect that the war will soon end, provided they hold out a little longer; so the apostle reminds us that the Lord will shortly come to deliver us from all evils, provided our minds faint not through want of firmness. And in order that this consolation might have more assurance and authority, he adduces the testimony of Habakkuk.”

- A mature perspective recognizes that the trials of this world are fleeting and but a moment in the perspective of eternity.

- **2 Peter 3:9**: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you...”
 - **Psalms 30:5**: “Weeping may tarry for the night,
But joy comes with the morning.”
 - **2 Corinthians 4:17**: “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”
- ❖ For we are to persevere in the faith as we look forward to what God has in store for us (strengthen by what He has done in the past).

1 Timothy 6:19: “thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

- ❖ Puritan Thomas Watson writes, “Christians do not arrive at perseverance when they sit still and do nothing. It is not with us as with passengers in a ship, who are carried to the end of their voyage while they sit still in the ship; or, as it is with noblemen, who have their rents brought in without their toil or labour; but we arrive at salvation in the use of means; as a man comes to the end of a race by running, to a victory by fighting.”
- ❖ In his book *Future Grace*, John Piper quotes Allister McGrath, the Oxford theologian who describes a “Crisis of Spirituality in American Evangelicalism”:

Evangelicals have done a superb job of evangelizing people, bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, but they are failing to provide believers with approaches to living that keep them going and growing in spiritual relationship with him...Many start the life of faith with great enthusiasm, only to discover themselves in difficulty shortly afterward. Their high hopes and good intentions seem to fade away. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh proves weak...People need support to keep them going when enthusiasm fades.”

1 Peter 1:1-7: “[Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 3:13: “...one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”