

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part forty-three

Sunday, February 11th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2029

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

DO NOT THROW AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE

Hebrews 10:32-39 - "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, [33] sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. [34] 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. [35] Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. [37] For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; [38] but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' [39] But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

A weighty part of developing confidence in Christ comes from not confining your thoughts exclusively to the present moment of your existence. This is not easy for any of us because the **present** moment of our existence is the one we see and feel. The present moment is the one that fills up our **senses**. You **experience** your present. You can only **think about** your past or your future.

The problem with this is the present moment - isolated from the past and future - has very limited spiritual nourishment in it. Living in the present moment to the exclusion of the past and future can **drain** trust in God rather than **feed** it. If the present moment is **prosperous and delightful** it draws all our attention to itself. It fosters false security. It distracts. It tends toward idolatrous infatuation. And if the present moment is **painful, lonely, and horrifying** it tends toward discouragement and fear and what our writer calls "**throwing away our confidence**" (35).

So the lesson here is lives tethered exclusively to the present moment aren't going to be lives with strong roots of enduring faith. And that this is our writer's primary concern for these Hebrew believers is obvious from the way he immediately encourages them **not to throw away their confidence** as he directs their thoughts into two directions **away** from their present circumstances:

First, he directs their consideration towards their **past** - **Hebrews 10:32** - "**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings....**" This is really interesting. Just because these days are "**former days**" doesn't mean these Christians were **done** with them. These **former** days need to be dragged into their **present** days. They aren't finished with these former days yet.

And **second**, he directs their consideration forward to their **future** - **Hebrews 10:36** - "**For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.**" This reward is still in the future. All they have is the **promise** of this future reward. These days haven't yet **arrived**. But just because these days haven't yet arrived doesn't mean they don't have present power. These still future days can help them **right now**. These Christians can draw present **endurance** out of a future that hasn't yet arrived.

The main point is there is a certain **mental energy** necessary for enduring faith. And how all of this works is the theme of today's text.

1) **A WISE MANAGEMENT OF PAST EXPERIENCES IS A GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO FUTURE ENDURANCE AND OBEDIENCE**

Hebrews 10:32-33 - "**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, [33] sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.**"

There had apparently been a fairly recent time - a time **after** their conversion to Christ - when these Hebrew Christians had experienced a particularly brutal time of persecution for their new-found faith. We're not told all the specific details of this persecution but we know some aspects from recorded events from the same time-frame in the history of the early church.

We know **Stephen** had been executed by stoning. We know the central church in Jerusalem had seen or was soon to see its pastor **James** executed. And we know all of the churches throughout **Judea** experienced a time of intense

persecution from the Jewish leaders.

Paul describes this in **1 Thessalonians 2:13-18, 3:1-5** - “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. [14] For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, [15] who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind [16] by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last! [17] But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, [18] because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us....[3:1]....Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, [2] and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, [3] that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. [4] For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. [5] For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.”

All of this was in the recent experience of these Hebrew believers. And our writer is telling them they need to actively **call** (“recall”- 32) these events back into active service in their thinking. And the question we need to ask is **why**. **Why did our writer demand these persecuted believers replay their past experience of persecution?** What good would this do?

And to answer that question we need to look at the **way** these Christians are called to remember these difficult past days. Look at it carefully - **Hebrews 10:32** - “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings....”

Do you see it? He doesn’t just call them to remember their **persecution**. He forces them to consider their past **persecution** as it related to their past **conversion**. Their persecution wasn’t just **bad luck**. It was **logically connected** to their dedication to Christ Jesus as Lord. It all came about immediately “**after they were enlightened**”(32). The way they were to remember their past persecution was to see it as the **result** of their profession of Christ. Cause and effect was happening.

This is our writer’s way of saying, “**You should have seen this coming. This is what always happens. This is the inevitable result of opposite kingdoms and colliding loyalties.**”

So this is a particular **kind** of remembering. It’s a way of accurately calculating and assessing their past persecution. We might put it this way. Another way - the **wrong** way - to remember this past persecution would be to feel sorry for themselves - “**Boy has this been rough! Nothing good ever happens to Christians. What did we ever do to deserve this nonsense? This is totally unfair! That’s the thanks we get for following Christ as Lord!**”

That’s a spiritually **defeating** way of remembering. And it’s **not** the kind of remembering our writer is calling these Christians to. The kind of “**recalling**” our writer demands is positive in nature. It’s a kind of mental **preparation**. It’s setting up proper **expectations**. It’s what the Apostle Paul described as a **readiness to “stand firm in the faith”**(Ephesians 6:13).

This is a constant theme in the New Testament. Remembering past trials and persecution keeps us from being **taken off-guard** as we prepare to face inevitable **counter-cultural ridicule and rejection** - **1 Peter 4:12-14** - “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. [14] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

Are you surprised at what Peter says will bring **glory** in your Christian life? - **verse 14** - “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

Please don’t miss Peter’s point. The main problem in this text **isn’t** unfair persecution of Christians. No. The main concern in this text is the **surprise** these Christians are experiencing **in** their persecution. They actually think

“*something strange*” was happening to them.

That was Peter’s main concern. They had actually come to Christ for forgiveness and pledged allegiance to Him **not** expecting it would cost them everything to do so. And Peter wants to know, “**Where did you ever get that idea?**”

And now we come to the practical application of this remembering. If we don’t consider the inevitability of persecution from the surrounding culture - and this in **increasing** measure - we will be **shocked and surprised** when it comes. And if we are shocked and surprised - if we aren’t mentally **ready** for this kind of cultural rejection - if we find such treatment **unnatural** - we will look for the quickest ways to **alleviate** it.

That’s the big danger. The quickest way to alleviate cultural rejection is to **adapt to the expectations and values of that culture**. This is the natural reflex reaction of weak-minded Christians who never think through what our writer describes as the **natural, expected reaction of the surrounding cultural to Christ’s kingdom**.

Remember - this is exactly the way Jesus described the kingdom/culture collision - **Matthew 5:11-12** - “**Blessed are you when others *revile you* and *persecute you* and *utter all kinds of evil against you falsely* on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**”

Please notice the similarity between Jesus’ words in **verse 11** - “**...others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account**” - and our writer’s words in **Hebrews 10:33a** - “**...sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction...**”

There is always a **public dimension** to our culture’s bitterness against the cause of Christ. Jesus isn’t physically present right now. But the church is. Christians must pay the visible cost of cultural embarrassment that Jesus faced when He was visibly here on earth. In other words the price isn’t just cultural rejection. The price we must pay is being **exposed** to cultural rejection. This will be **visible** and **public** in nature.

That’s why both Jesus and our writer in Hebrews very deliberately stress the kinds of things people will **say** about us - “**...utter all kinds of evil...**” (Matt. 5:11) - the things we will have to face “**publicly**” (Heb. 10:33a).

Private rejection is no rejection at all. It’s our **reputation** we treasure. It’s our **acceptance** we prize. And the **spirit of the age knows all of this**. Any follower of Christ will have to remember that the biggest part of daily taking up our cross in discipleship is the calculated daily decision to **not be thrown off stride by the very public rejection of the culture in which we are called to live**. The daily crucifixion of self is 90% the laying down of our love of cultural acceptance.

2) CHRISTIANS ENDURE PERSECUTION IN THEMSELVES BUT THEY RELIEVE IT IN BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Hebrews 10:33-34 - “**...sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and *sometimes being partners with those so treated*. [34] 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.**”

Not all Christians experience the same persecution in the same degree. But the point of these verses is no genuine follower of Christ is satisfied with his **own** freedom. When I see or hear of others persecuted for their love for Christ I am immediately aware of our **common roots**. I too love the same Christ. The same cause of my brother’s suffering beats in my own heart.

It’s no wonder our writer calls these Hebrew believers “**partners**” (33) with those under the most intense fire. And I **prove** - probably to myself as much as anyone else - I prove my love for Christ outstrips all other loves in my heart by the way I sacrifice the very things the world clings to for happiness in my outreach to others. I gladly use up “**property**” and “**possessions**” (34) in coming to the aid of my persecuted brother or sister.

3) JUST AS RECALLING PAST TIMES PREPARES THE CHRISTIAN FOR PERSECUTION, LOOKING FORWARD TO THE PROMISE OF REWARD GIVES CONFIDENCE AND ENDURANCE

Hebrews 10:34-39 - “**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*. [35]**

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God *you may receive what is promised.* [37] For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; [38] but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' [39] But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

I wish I had more time for these verses. Let me just wrap up with these closing ideas that I think form their heart:

- a) ***First, the essence of growing faith is the deeper cherishing of eternal goods over material goods - Hebrews 10:34 - "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."***

By the measuring-stick of all earthly values *our possessions are what make us happy.* That is why these enemies of Christ "*plundered*" the "*property*" of these early Christians (34). And had their possessions been the *root of their joy* this persecution would have been devastating. But they had something "*better*"(34) to place in the vacuum left by the removal of earthly possessions.

But here's the rub. We all *say* we treasure Christ above all else. We all *say* we renounce the idolatrous attachment to money and all it can bring. ***But only this kind of early church persecution reveals what we treasure most.***

Think about it. This is precisely why the Apostle Peter says this - **1 Peter 1:6-7 - "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] 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."**

Persecution *reveals*. It *tests*. It reveals the depth of my own faith both to *me* and to the *watching world*. Nothing shows the world the nature of my *truest* treasure than my reaction to the loss of all *false* treasure.

- b) ***Second, people who profess the gospel consistently and boldly will experience persecution in this world.*** There is nothing in the New Testament that would lead us to think it would be a "*strange*" thing to experience persecution just because we are part of the North American church. In one form or another we *will* face ridicule and loss for any *visible* devotion to Christ.

Have you ever explained this to your family? Have you somehow made it clear to your kids that - according to the New Testament - there will be times when they will feel like *aliens* when they go to school or college or work?

- c) ***Third, it takes constant, aggressive mental discipline to "give weight" to the still future promise of blessing.*** I find it so interesting that our writer actually describes the *future promise* as an actual *possession* - **Hebrews 10:34b - "....and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one."**

This is not accidental. It is the same mental processing the Apostle Paul practiced in his own times of struggle - **2 Corinthians 4:17-18 - "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."**

I love that word, "*weight*" - "*an eternal weight of glory....*"(17). Paul says he put eternal things on the *scale* constantly. It's like he was actually *weighing* them.

Look back to the past to *prepare* for cultural ridicule and persecution. Look to the future to *treasure* better possessions. This will help all Christians ***keep their confidence in Christ.***