

## Walk by Faith – Faith Perseveres

7/8/18 – Pastor Randy

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### Hebrews 10:32-39

Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.

"For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away." But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.

How many of you have ever quit something that you shouldn't have? Have you ever thought about quitting? A job? School? Relationship? Church?

Sometimes we are tempted to give up on people and pursuits when we assess that the cost outweighs the reward. Other times we are tempted to give up because we lose patience waiting for the reward. And still other times we are tempted to quit because the difficulties and stress we are under affects our emotions, eroding our faith that our labor is not in vain.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who had suffered persecution for their faith in Christ. As a result of the difficulties they were facing due to their decision to trust in Jesus as their Messiah, some had been tempted to abandon the faith and return to Judaism. The pressures and persecutions associated with believing and following Christ had apparently caused some to neglect their worship gatherings. The author repeatedly reminds these

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faltering Christians that everything they have in Christ surpasses all that they had before and without Christ. The Holy Spirit speaking through the author of Hebrews uses a variety of means to persuade them to remain faithful to Christ and His gospel. The answer that the author gives to the problem is “Faith”.

The contemporary church in America faces a different, yet similar challenge. Consider the following from an article in Influence Magazine:

*“There is a new epidemic in our society called “churchlessness.” People are leaving the church in increasing numbers. The April 2017 issue of The Atlantic features an article by Peter Beinart, titled “Breaking Faith,” that describes the growing number of people who are rejecting any religious affiliation, also known as religious “nones.” In 1992, only 6 percent of the U.S. population self-identified as “none”; by 2014, the number rose to 22 percent. Among Millennials, 35 percent are religiously unaffiliated. Another group is leaving as well. A 2014 Barna Study reported on the growing phenomenon of churchlessness in America, which rose from 30 percent in the 1990s to 43 percent by 2014. The study found that 33 percent of once-active churchgoers are no longer choosing to be part of a local church.*

There are two issues communicated here. First, there is a decline in the number of Americans who profess belief in Christianity. Second, is a decline in the degree to which professing Christians practice their faith. Another article I read recently presented the following research:

*“Only 39 percent of active believers consider the Bible as the literal word of God. Less than 20 percent of professing believers follow the biblical principle of giving. Only 5 percent have shared their faith with a non-believer. More than half of all church members attend church once a month or less.”*

The reasons for this this decline in profession and practice are varied and complex but let me offer two. Christianity has been increasingly disparaged in

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popular culture and many believers have been shamed into disassociating with it. The second is that the affluence of our culture has led to a lessening of our sense of need for God.

The author begins his sermon of encouragement by focusing on the greatness and the glory of Christ. The first few chapters explore the supremacy of Christ.

Jesus is greater than all the previous prophetic revelation about God the Father because Jesus alone is the radiance of the Father's glory, the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by His powerful word.

Jesus is greater than the angels because they are Father's messengers but Jesus is His Son, and the angels worship Him. Why did he make this point?

If rejecting God's message as communicated by angels warranted punishment, how much greater will the punishment be to those who reject the message of salvation that Jesus has come to deliver; the salvation He gave His life to make possible. If disobeying angels, who have no authority in and of themselves, brought punishment, what do you think will happen to those who turn away from Jesus, the one who has authority over all creation.

Then he goes on to show that Jesus is superior to Moses, their great deliverer. Jesus possesses a greater glory than Moses because He is the builder of the house (i.e. God's People) whereas Moses is only the manager of the house.

The the author reminds them that in spite of the miraculous deliverance that the Israelites had experienced under the leadership of Moses they still lost faith and rebelled against God's word through Moses. As a result, they were destroyed because of it. The author applies this to his audience. How much more do you need to be careful that you don't lose faith and abandon your faithfulness to the gospel given that you have experienced and even more miraculous redemption brought about through Jesus death and resurrection.

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If the Israelites can be deceived and rebel even in the face of amazing miracles, don't be so arrogant as to think the same can't happen to you!

***“Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God.” – Heb. 3:12***

Next the author begins to draw an analogy between the Israelites trials in the wilderness as they were journeying towards the promised land and the trials his audience was experiencing as they were journeying towards their eternal homeland which he describes in chapter 11 looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God (11:10) and as a better place, a heavenly homeland (11:16).

In chapter 4 he describes our heavenly homeland as our place of rest. The idea of rest is used, not to describe sleep, but the end of trials and temptation, pressures and persecutions that arise from sin and evil. He has already warned them of the punishment that awaits those who abandon the faith. Now he motivates his audience by directing their attention to the reward that awaits them if they keep the faith and stay faithful.

***And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest. – Heb. 3:18,19***

***For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God. – Hebrews 4:2***

In Chapters 5, the supremacy of Christ continues to be extolled as the author demonstrates that Jesus is qualified to be our “perfect High Priest, and the “source of eternal salvation” for us.

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In Chapter 6 he briefly departs from his emphasis on the Supremacy of Christ as greater than the High Priest in Judaism by encouraging his audience with an assurance that although he has been warning against the danger of falling away from the faith he is completely confident that they will not abandon Christ but will follow the example of Abraham, and never let go of the promise. Abraham's assurance of God's faithfulness to keep His promise kept Abraham waiting patiently. Knowing God as the great Promise Keeper served as your anchor to keep you steady and strong through every trial and storm.

In Chapters 7-the first half of chapter 10, our author hammers home the reality of the supremacy of Christ because Jesus has accomplished what no other High Priest ever could.

Jesus is a better High Priest because he offered a superior ministry through a superior sacrifice, establishing a superior covenant with superior promises. Jesus is better because He was the only priest promised by God (7:20-22); the only priest who stays in office perpetually; the only priest who offered a perfect sacrifice that could actually atone for sins permanently rather than just provisionally because only His sacrifice was a true substitute for us. In order for our actual atonement to take place, the life being sacrificed in our place, must be one of us, yet without our sin. ONLY JESUS was qualified.

After 10 ½ chapters of persuading these Christians that what they have presently in Jesus is superior and what is promised to them in the future through Jesus is superior, the author spent the rest of chapter 10 encouraging them to persevere in faith and faithfulness. We read the final 8 verses of chapter 10 at the beginning of this message. Look again at the final 5:

*So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. "For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay.*

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*And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away.” But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. **We are the faithful ones**, whose souls will be saved.*

This is the introduction to a series I have titled, “Walk by Faith”. In chapter 11 the author of Hebrews presented a host of examples of Old Covenant believers whose faith translated into faithfulness. Then he brought all these examples to a climax by turning their attention to Jesus – the supreme example! Over the next few weeks we are going to look at some of these examples in order to gain encouragement and insight from their example.

Today I want to close by encouraging you and challenging you with the call to action found in chapter 10: 19-25. The Spirit said to them and He says to us today: *And so, dear brothers and sisters...By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way...*

1. Let us **go right into the presence of God** with sincere hearts fully trusting him...
2. Let us **hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm**, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.
3. Let us think of ways to **motivate one another to acts of love and good works**
4. And let us **not neglect our meeting together**, as some people do, **but encourage one another**, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

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Jesus is greater. Jesus is better. Jesus is Who I need. Jesus is all I need, Jesus is Who I want and Jesus is all I want. I won't go back to Egypt. I won't give up on Jesus. I will do the work he has for me until he is done with His work in me.

I don't care what the statistics say about how many people are abandoning their faith, giving up on God, forsaking their fellowship and worship with fellow believers, compromise in place of commitment,

We are not captive to contemporary trends. We have the power of the Holy Spirit, the grace of God the Father, and the love of Jesus to motivate us. With God we will grow stronger, not weaker, we will see our young people that are in Christ remain in Christ. We will see our children that have drifted the faith return to follow Jesus. We are going to see atheists and agnostics come to faith in Christ. And when we are done - whether we are done because God has called us home through death like did Thomas Stevenson or whether we are done because we have been caught up with him at His return – when we are done, all that he has promised will be our possession.

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of giving. Only 5 percent have shared their faith with a non-believer. More than half of all church members attend church once a month or less.

Now *faith is...* The nature and character of faith.

1. Assurance of things hoped for, and
2. The evidence of things not seen

Faith according to scripture is not about trying to be positive; it is about trusting in God's promises.

We often equate having our faith strengthened with "feeling more confident". In other words, faith - or a lack of faith - is often associated with how we feel. But in the scripture, faith is evidenced more by action than feeling. Faith often produces action in rebellion against our feeling.

Faith as commended to us in the scripture always has God as the object. Our faith is not in the power of positive thinking. When that is the nature of our faith it is faith in ourselves, not in God. Our faith is in the power of our supremely loving, graciously good, always faithful and almighty God!

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We walk by faith and not by sight does not mean that our trust in God is akin to taking a leap in the dark. It requires a step into the darkness because our faith in God's word provides us with a light at the end of the tunnel.

It is *by faith that...* The product of faith

Vs. 6 – Faith is necessary to please God. Faith believes God is real and that he rewards. The emphasis is not on what these individuals received from God for themselves, but on what their faith motivated them to do in obedience to God.

Faith brings us to God.

Faith acts and faith waits for the reward. God will always reward faithfulness to his word, but not always immediately and not always in the form that we anticipate.

Vs. 13 & – Faith's rewards do not always come in this life. Better yet, faith's rewards are never full and complete in this life. The rewards of faith are experienced ultimately and supremely in eternity; in the life to come.

Vs 35 – "But others".

The author of Hebrews writes that he doesn't have time to give the names and go into the details of all the OT persons who demonstrated great faith in God's promises.

We need to speak faith into the lives of our brothers and sisters to help them persevere. Speaking faith does not mean promising them all their troubles will disappear. It does mean reminding them about who God is and what he has done and what he has promised to do God.

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No temptation is unique. God will not let you endure what He won't give you the strength to bear. He provides a way of escape from every temptation.

Hebrews is different than any other book or letter in the NT. Even though it is typically classified as a NT Epistle, it is more of a written sermon. In recent years NT scholarship has paid more attention to the fact that the NT documents were written to be read publicly which means they were written to function more as speeches that employ rhetorical devices that make the message more pronounced and powerful when the words were heard not just read. In fact, even private reading in ancient Greek culture was not done in silence but out loud. Think about the difference between reading and hearing Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. Hebrews, and especially Hebrews 11 employs rhetoric that makes it more powerful when heard than just read.

OK, I have been pondering this question for a long time but have been wary as I think it may be emotionally controversial for many.

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First context: I live in a country where family rejection, abuse, jail and death is a known reality and possibility for believers. They, generally, consider these things part and parcel of the Christian journey.

However, I also minister and lead in a western context as well on a regular basis where the common idea (nearly obsessive) has been a lot of talk about 'burnout', self preservation, self care etc.

Please hear my heart in this. I fully know the reality of hitting my limits and dipping over the edge, I have sat in a car crying before going into Church before preaching because 'I was done' but...

I just can't seem to make sense of the disparity between the two world views and experiences. God does not have one plan/ expectation for westerners and a different one for those from the east / closed countries.

1. One expects that they could die, giving everything is standard. I know believers who have family that have literally been burnt alive and they seem to understand God is fine with martyrdom (despite the reality being horrific)
2. The other is often frantic over being rostered more than twice per month and somehow 'burns out' over very little. In this case, God does not want that to happen.

How should we approach this? What theological framework do we need to approach the disparity here?

I want to care for both consistently without patronizing one or the other.

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Abraham was chosen to be the father of a great nation and a blessing to all nations. God did not choose Israel simply for Israel's sake but for the sake of the world.

Genesis 3:15 – The fall of Adam and Eve have brought the whole creation under a curse, but God made a promise to crush the evil one who is responsible for the curse through another man (i.e. The seed of a woman)

Genesis 12:1-3 – God's promise is revealed from the positive side. Abraham is the first in a succession of chosen persons through whom God will fulfill His promise. Through Abraham and his seed the whole world that is under the curse of sin will experience God's blessing.

Abraham's leaving was a turning away from the idolatry of his family. Sin = Idolatry.