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# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

## Continuing in the Faith Hebrews 10:32-39

Let us begin by reading the text of Hebrews 10:32-39 -

**32** *But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, **33** partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. **34** For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting 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 was promised. **37** FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING 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 to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

At some time or another, there is a question that inevitably gets asked of most people, particularly Christians. It is a question that we might like to suppose is easy to answer and yet requires great reflection. It is a question that after thinking on it, may have a relatively short list of answers. Would you like to know what that question is? “What is it that you would die for?” For what would you be willing to lay down your very life? Now don’t let the simple Sunday School answer keep you from thinking about this. For what people or principles would you be ready to die for? I well imagine that some of us would say, “the gospel – I am willing to die for the message and hope of Jesus Christ.” Perhaps included in your list would be some people – that you would be willing to die for your spouse, your children, or some close friends. I would also suppose that most of you here would say that you would be willing to die for Jesus Christ – at least that is the hope – right? We try to imagine what it would be like if called before a hostile crowd to renounce Jesus or die. Would we there, in that setting, die for Christ?

Would it be hard to die for Christ? That is an interesting question. But may I say to you that dying for Christ may not be the hardest thing that faces you this morning. It has been said that dying for something or someone is easy because such a death is associated with glory, honor and recognition. It is noble to die for someone or something. It would be glorious to die for Christ. I say to you that even harder than the question of “what am I willing to die for” is this, “what I am willing to live for?” To connect this with the previous thought, “Am I willing to live for Christ, just as much, and with as much intensity, as I am willing to die for Him.” I do believe that dying for Christ would be relatively easy – but living for Christ, day by day – moment by moment - isn’t that a bit tougher?

We speak often of what we believe – we believe in Jesus; we believe He died for our sins; we believe that He sent His Spirit to empower us for His service; we believe we are His witnesses, His ambassadors; we believe we are crucified with Christ and it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us; we believe we have been bought with a price and are to

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therefore glorify God in our bodies. This is what we say we believe. But may I warn you that what you say you believe is not the same as what you do believe. Rather, what you do, how you live your life - be it in public or private, at church or at home, in front of others or in front of a computer – that truly reveals what you believe. So, if you believe it is important to tell others about the saving grace found only in Jesus, then what will you do? You will be telling others of Jesus. Sadly, many of our lives testify that the most important person in our lives is ourselves; our own happiness, our own well-being, even our own spirituality.

Living for Jesus – that is what is hard. Truly dying to self and being alive in Christ. So, what are you willing to live for? If indeed your answer is “Jesus Christ” then our text in Hebrews 10:32-39 will help us answer this question, “How can I live for Jesus?” The text here teaches us how to continue in the faith, showing us four key ingredients or means by which we can rightly live for Jesus. We live for Jesus when we -

- I. Remember the Grace of the Lord (10:32-34)
- II. Retain Our Confidence in the Lord (10:35)
- III. Resolve to Endure for the Lord (10:36)
- IV. Refuse to Shrink Back from the Lord (10:37-39)

Let us take these one by one and unpack them to learn how we might better live for Jesus; to truly continue in the faith, even in life. Before we begin, let me remind you that these thoughts come on the heels of the warning against apostasy in 10:26-31, that call to notice in ourselves or in our brothers and sisters anything that might indicate a falling away from Jesus. Here in our text this morning, the call is to persevere in Christ, to continue in Christ, to live for Christ.

## **I. We Remember the Grace of the Lord (10:32-34)**

**32** *But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, **33** partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. **34** For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.*

If we are going to continue in the faith and not fall away, but to truly live for Jesus in this life, we are called first in this text to remember the gracious work of the Lord. It is interesting and important to note that this is an exhortation, a command – we are “to remember.” This shows us that our natural tendency is to forget what God has done for us in the past and this will invariably lead us to sin. The Scripture itself is replete with command after command to remember the works of the Lord. By way of example, Psalm 105:5 tells us –

***Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth...***

And even Paul exhorted young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:8-9 saying,

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**Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel...**

Hebrews 10:32 is a present tense command, “*keep remembering*” – that is continually keep it in your mind what the Lord has accomplished in the past as this provides ample evidence of how He will work in the present. The readers are called to remember, to carefully think back and reconstruct in their minds, the former, or first days of their walk with Jesus. They are called to remember back to the working of God in their lives when they first came to believe, or as our text says, “**enlightened**” – shown the greatness of the person of Jesus Christ. While those who fall away, as we saw back in verses 26-31, also clearly saw the greatness of Christ, they did not continue. Their “**enlightenment**” did not result in that which lasted. In fact, in the rest of verse 32-34, we see three indications of what true enlightenment in Christ translated into for these first believers who were living for Christ. This then is what it means to *live* for Christ.

1. *Those who live for Christ endure suffering (10:32).*

These believers had “endured” – a word that indicates a joyous patience through a **great conflict of sufferings**. The word for “conflict” here is the root word from where we get the word “athlete”. Upon coming to Christ, these were engaged in a great athletic event, a struggle of sufferings, difficulties and trials. Some of these sufferings are described for us in verse 33 – **partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations...** One way in which these believers suffered was that their lives were made “live as in a theater” (which is the meaning of the phrase “public spectacle”). Their lives were constantly exposed to the reproaches and ridicule of others. And yet, they joyously endured it.

We have an example of this in Acts 5, when Peter and some of the Apostles were held by the Sanhedrin, eventually to be flogged and released, that is suffering reproaches and tribulations. And what was their response to this “great conflict of sufferings” – Acts 5:41 says,

**So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.**

Beloved, they had *lived* for Jesus. But not everyone may suffer as directly as this and so our Hebrews 10:33 text tells us that this great conflict of sufferings also took the form of **partly by becoming sharers (fellowshippers) with those who were so treated**. Rather than being ashamed of those who suffered directly for Christ, these rejoiced and shared in their sufferings. They saw their brother’s suffering as their own. They lived for Jesus. The grace that brought them to Jesus, allowed them to suffer for Jesus. The grace that promised the hope of eternal life had enabled them not to be overcome by such sufferings, even as those who had fallen away had been overcome.

2. *Those who live for Christ have sympathy (10:34a)*

Our text goes on to describe how those who continue in the faith, who live for Christ, have a continual “**sympathy**” – that is, full and complete compassion for those who were in prison for Christ. In the culture of those first receiving this letter and even true today, there is a

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stigma connected to those associated with prisoners. These early believers were willing to stand with those who were in prison for Christ and sought to encourage and comfort them. Interestingly enough, this is also one of the very characteristic the Lord Jesus gave of those who truly lived for Him in Matthew 25:35-36, 40 saying,

**35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'...40 The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'**

This is living for Jesus. How is your compassion, your sympathy, and your encouragement of those for whom Jesus died? The word “sympathy” is used only one other place in the NT, over in Hebrews 4:15 -

***For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize (or – “cannot be touched with the feeling” – KJV) with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.***

Those who live for Christ are touched with the feelings of others. They mourn when others mourn, they weep when others weep. By God’s grace, may we learn to so bear one another’s burdens.

3. *Those who live for Christ joyously give up the things of this world (34b)*

The third way we see believer’s live for Jesus is that they joyfully give up the things of this world. These first readers **accepted joyously the seizure of your property...** Beloved, in comparison to knowing the greatness and wonder of Jesus, in light of the promise of eternal life, eternal hope and the blessing of being in God’s eternal presence, all other things grew pale, dim and looked like refuse. Let me ask you something, and I really want you to take this to heart. What is one of your favorite possessions? Think about it. Now then, how would you respond if it were taken away from you, particularly and simply because you are a Christian? “Oh, you’re a Christian – you don’t get to own your own home, or have a car, or have certainly belongings. The idea of our text is not simply that these things were taken, but the term “seizure” may well imply destruction; all your possession destroyed right before your eyes simply because you want to follow Christ. Would you consider the loss of such things as truly living for Christ?

Is there any benefit to living this way? Our text tells us that we can joyously live for Christ in this way because we know of **a better possession and a lasting one.** As believers, we are to know that this world is passing away. There is a sense in which everything we see is dead and meaningless (if is apart from Christ) and will therefore be destroyed. The believer agrees with 1 John 2:17 –

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**17** *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

Beloved, these are just a few of the things we are to remember. I know it is the testimony of many who have come to Christ that their zeal, their passion and their intensity for Christ was greater when in the first days than it is now. May we remember the gracious working of God in the past as well as His promise for the future.

## II. We Retain Our Confidence in the Lord (10:35)

*Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.*

The second way in which we are told we can truly live for Christ is to retain our confidence in the Lord. Again, this is an exhortation, a command. I have stated it in the positive, but our text says, **do not throw away your confidence...** The verb “throw away” literally means, “to throw off or cast away.” It has the idea of getting something as far away from you as possible. This call is couple with something we should esteem of great value, **confidence**. This is not the first time we have seen this word “confidence”. Let me remind you that the word means, “out-spokenness, bluntness or boldness. The author of Hebrews uses this word in speaking of the believer’s ability to come to God because of the work and person of Jesus.

### **Hebrews 3:6**

**but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.**

### **Hebrews 4:16**

**Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

### **Hebrews 10:19**

**Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...**

### **Hebrews 10:35**

**Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.**

We are not to recklessly reject the value of speaking out and speaking up Jesus. If we live for Jesus, we will speak of and for Jesus. We will retain our confidence – it will be our desire and joy to speak of Him through who we draw near to God.

And then notice that this exhortation, like the first one “to remember”, also has a benefit – to retain our confidence in the Lord is to possess a great reward. And what is that reward? It is salvation. It is the better possession, the last one – of eternal life. We live for Christ by anticipating being with Christ in glory.

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### III. We Resolve to Endure for the Lord (10:36-38)

*For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.*

The third trait of those who live for Jesus is that they resolve to endure for the Lord. They had begun with walk with Christ with endurance, but along the way, this had waned. So, the author reminds his readers **you have need of endurance...** This endurance is the same thing that was spoken of back in verse 32. In other words, believer's need to remember the joy of their salvation at the first and, by God's grace continue in such endurance. This "endurance" speaks of a cheerful or hopeful constancy. It's not that we are grudgingly enduring the hardships and difficulties of this life, but that we are joyously doing so. One commentator called this "a blazing hope." We have a need of a sober calmness that allows us to joyfully follow the Lord.

Beloved, such a resolve is truly a trusting in the sovereignty of God – that nothing comes to pass by accident but all things are appointed by God to bring Him glory – and all things that come into our lives, even the seemingly bad, are brought to bring us close to God. And notice here as well, that like the first two exhortations to remember and retain, this call to resolve to endure has a benefit – that those who endure **receive what was promised**. What was promised? If we were to go back into the book of Hebrews we find in 4:1 and 6:12 that the promise is of rest, of eternal life. So we see this great progression of hope – of this "better possession" in 10:34, of this "great reward" in 10:35 and this "promise" of 10:36).

And then, to confirm the surety of these things, our author quotes from Habakkuk 2:3-4

**37** FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING 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.

The reminder here is that any trials in living for Christ are relatively short in comparison to His coming to finally deliver us. In the meantime, those who are truly righteous, live by faith, in assurance of what Jesus did and what He has promised. Those who live for Christ do so by faith, faith that will be defined and exemplified in Hebrews 11. But for now, suffice it to say that only those who resolve by the grace of God to joyously endure living for Christ in the present have the assurance of joyously living with Christ in the future as God takes no pleasure, has no delight in those who shrink back. And this then leads us to our final point.

### IV. We Refuse to Shrink Back from the Lord (10:39)

*But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

The final point is that those how truly live for Christ refuse to shrink back from the Lord. Isn't this strange terminology? It is even stranger when we learn that a literal reading of this verse says, "But we are not the shrinking back kind who are ruined, but are the believing kind who believe to the very end which means salvation of the soul."

Those who live for Christ refuse to be like those who, because of fear or persecution, or hardship, reject the Lord, whose very souls are eternally lost because they have not fully

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embraced the greatness of Christ. This is not exactly an exhortation here is it? Rather it is a statement of fact – those who shrink back do so to eternal damnation. Those who continue in the faith, who continue to live for Christ, who suffer for Christ, who have confidence in Christ, who endure all things for Christ and therefore refuse to fall away, be turned away or otherwise be pushed away from the Lord will be preserved, kept – experience full and final salvation.

The contrast here is not unlike what we see in the parable of the soils as recounted in the Gospel of Luke. You might remember that some of the seed was thrown into good soil, but soil that was surrounded thorns. It sprang up looking good and healthy and yet we read this in Luke 8:14:

***The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.***

Those who shrink back do so because of the either the worries, the riches or the pleasures of this life. But those who live for Christ, how are their lives characterized. We read Luke 8:15:

***But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.***

Beloved, those who live for Christ ***bear fruit with perseverance.*** This word “perseverance” is the same word we read in Hebrews 10:36, “you have need of endurance, of joyous perseverance. Why do we need this, because such a perseverance, such a continuing, such a striving in living for Christ is your assurance of eternal life with Christ. We cannot do this of our own accord, “for in Him,” so says Acts 17:28, “we live and move and have our being...”

Do you want to simply live or do you want to live for Christ? While living for Christ has great joy; while living for Christ is promised by Christ to be abundant and full, let us remember that living for Christ in a world that by and large rejects Him and His principles will be hard. Let us remember that living for Christ in this *body of flesh, or the body of this death, as the Apostle Paul says, is a constant battle. We must strive daily to deny self and follow in and after Christ. To live for Christ is to understand the words of Titus 2:11-14:*

***11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.***

This is living for Christ – is this the desire of your heart? Do you long to remember the joy of salvation, to retain the confidence of your salvation, to resolve to endure to the end of

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salvation, refusing to shrink back from salvation to destruction? May this be the heart and intent of each one to the glory of God.

O Savior of sinners,

Your name is excellent, Your glory high, Your compassions unending, Your condescension wonderful, Your mercy tender.

We bless You for the discoveries, invitations and promises of the gospel. For in them is pardon for rebels, liberty for captives, health for the sick, salvation for the lost.

We come to You in the beloved name of Jesus; re-impress His image upon our souls; raise us above the smiles and frowns of the world, regarding it as a light thing to be judged by men.

May Your approval be our only aim, Your Word our one rule. Make us to abhor that which grieves Your Holy Spirit, to suspect comforts of a worldly nature, to shun a careless way of life, to reprove evil, to instruct with meekness those who oppose us, to be gentle and patient towards all men, to be not only a professor but an example of the gospel, displaying in every relationship, office and condition its excellency, loveliness and advantages.

How little have we illustrated our principles and improved our privileges. How seldom we serve our generation. How often have we injured and not recommended our Redeemer. How few are those blessed through us. In many things we have offended, in all come short of Your glory. Pardon our iniquity, for it is great – and grant us grace to live for and live out Jesus in our lives for Your glory, for the building up of our brothers and sisters in Christ and for the salvation of the lost. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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