

A Persevering Faith

Hebrews 10:23-36

²³ Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

²⁶ For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” ²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know the one who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³² But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion for those who were in prison,

and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. ³⁵ Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. ³⁶ For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Theme Statement

As we explore the stories of early believers who suffered for the sake of their faith, we find through community in Christ the courage to endure hardship as faithful witnesses and are equipped to share in the struggles of Christians around the world.

Exploring the Word

Surrounded by threatening conditions, the congregation didn't know if it would be safe to continue meeting in person. Yet they needed the encouragement from each other to keep going in daily life. Should they meet with greater restrictions or should they not meet at all? How would they reach out to those who couldn't come to worship? And how would they help the younger members learn about Jesus? It was overwhelming. Things were so bad that they even began wondering if this Christian faith was worth all the trouble. Then someone spoke up and reminded them of God's faithfulness in the past.

No, this isn't about a congregation in the pandemic of 2020. It was a congregation of Jewish-Christian believers in the mid-first century CE. The writer of the letter faced challenges that we do today: how to keep a body of believers connected when separation was both easier and safer.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Encouraging words

The writer of Hebrews urges a congregation under stress to *congregate* and to “hold fast” to hope. Gathering regularly will stave off discouragement. The confession of their hope

is based not on their feelings but on the promise of the one in whom they have placed their faith. That person, Jesus Christ, can be trusted.

Provoking one another to love and to do good deeds almost sounds like a challenge: “I can do more loving deeds than you!” For these first-century Christians, one was called to use one’s talents and treasure to care for the community. Like the little boy whose lunch fed thousands, the church was to bring together the resources entrusted to individuals to bless those beyond the congregation (John 6:1-14; Acts 2:44-47). This is part of the promise made to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12.

Hebrews 10:26-31 Words of warning

The writer focuses on willfully persisting in sin. This is not like taking an extra cookie from the cookie jar, but rather is the intentional rejection of Jesus Christ and his work on our behalf on the cross. These former Jews, now Christian believers, were discouraged and contemplating a departure from the new, Christian teachings and a return to Judaism with its sacrificial system. They were considering turning their backs on Jesus.

The writer says, “It’s a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (v. 31). Once they had experienced the grace of God, if they walked away from it by returning to their former beliefs and practices, they would know it was futile to try to earn God’s grace.

Hebrews 10:32-34 A backward glance

These Christians are encouraged to recall the former days. They had been ejected from their Jewish synagogue and had suffered socially for Jesus. James 1:2-4 says that endurance is built through trials and the testing of our faith. They had been reproached, had their goods plundered,

and endured the persecution. Their endurance in the past could help them hold fast to their faith into the future.

Hebrews 10:35-36 Looking forward

The fulfillment of the promise of God seemed especially far away for this community. The scriptures connect hope, waiting, and faith as central to the Christian life. Obedience and spiritual maturity were evidence of believers’ faithfulness and confidence in what God has promised.

The Word Today

Buddy was a typical five-year-old boy—his body always seemed to outrun his feet in his “I’ve got to get this done” approach to life. His smile was irresistible. Everyone loved Buddy.

When Buddy was six, the doctor had some concerns and asked his parents to get his eyes checked. Buddy’s sight was not as sharp as it should be. This, coupled with his physical gait, prompted the doctor to suggest additional testing. Wanting the best for their son, his parents took him to the recommended specialist, where they learned that Buddy had Batten Disease. Loss of coordination, blindness, seizures, and many other symptoms are usually followed by a shortened lifespan. Often the individual’s life is limited after diagnosis.

Dreams for the future and excuses from the past fell victim to the reality of the present. Buddy’s parents thought they had done everything they could do to ensure that his life would be healthy and centered in community. The disease threatened to steal everything. How could God let this happen?

One day as Buddy’s mom was flying home from a business appointment, the person seated next to her on the airplane

said she had news about Buddy. This unknown woman assured Buddy's mom that his family would grow in faith through him, that his father would find peace with God, and that Buddy would be OK in God's hands. In fact, Buddy would be known by people far and wide because of his condition. This was the first encouragement, but not the last.

Buddy's family was also surrounded by a larger faith family—both relatives and congregation members. This larger family listened to their heartbreak, gently reminded them of their persevering faith in the past, and pointed to the never-ending promise of God's love in the future.

Buddy is now in his early teens, with limited eyesight but enough curiosity and energy to power a lighthouse. Buddy and his family have moved forward in faith and engaged the community to reach out and help people in all kinds of limiting circumstances. His family knows they won't have Buddy forever. But they also know that God will. This hope is fueled by persevering faith and keeps them focused on life.

When life is difficult, we have the choice to be angry at God and reject God's involvement in our lives or to have faith that God is a God of love and will not abandon us. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the support of a loving community is essential in order for us to persevere.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. Do you think regular attendance at worship and involvement in a congregation are essential today? Why or why not?

2. Mark your place on the following scale in response to this question: When I disagree with something another person believes, I usually

keep quiet.

express my own
own beliefs.

try to change
their mind.

Exploring the Word

1. Why was it important that the believers encouraged each other?
2. What reasons do you think people were suggesting for leaving the Christian faith and returning to the Jewish faith?
3. According to the writer, this was a disastrous idea. Why?
4. The writer lists many bad things that happened to the believers already. Why was this approach taken?
5. Review other scriptures that lift up endurance. Your leader will provide a list. How might the Christians in this congregation respond if they heard these passages?

The Word Today

1. How would your congregation have interacted with Buddy's family?
2. When have you experienced support in a difficult situation? What did that do to your faith?

Closing Prayer

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1*

Further Study

Psalm 91

Daily Readings

M. Mark 8:31-37

F. Hebrews 10:11-18

T. 1 Peter 3:9-19

S. Hebrews 10:19-22

W. Revelation 2:8-11

S. Hebrews 10:23-36

T. Hebrews 10:1-10

Memorization

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.