

The Need of Endurance

Hebrews 10:19-39

April 3, 2016

As I have mentioned several times now, the more I work through this *Letter to the Hebrews* the more I am inclined to think that the author is the apostle Paul, or at least someone who was very familiar with the apostle Paul's letters. There are just so many similarities between this letter and Paul's. It is noticeable in our passage this morning in two ways: 1) First is at the very beginning, the transition phrase or word, *Therefore* – or some other versions use, “since.” The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* spends the first 2/3 of the letter laying out everything that God has done for humanity through Jesus Christ. The replacement of the imperfect Old Covenant in which sin needed to be atoned for by animal sacrifices with the New Covenant in which sin was atoned for once for all by the perfect human being Jesus Christ. God's entire plan of redemption is set forth in the first 9 ½ chapters of the *Letter to the Hebrews*, where it reaches its climax, that which we looked at last Sunday, Easter Sunday. Last Sunday, Easter Sunday was the perfect Sunday to look at that passage, not my planning but the Holy Spirit's planning.

Then this morning we get to chapter 10, verse 19, and we get the word *therefore*. Just like in Paul's letter to the Romans where he sets out in the first eleven chapters to tell the early Christians in Rome all that God has done for them in Jesus Christ, how the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New and then Paul begins chapter 12 with the word, *therefore*.

The other similarity between Paul's writing and our passage this morning is not quite as noticeable. You have to dig just a little bit. But in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's great chapter on love, which was not supposed to be just reserved for married couples, but how God intends for all Christians to live among one another, at the end of chapter 13, Paul tells us the three greatest virtues of the Christian life: 1) faith; 2) hope; and 3) love. Okay, now look back at our passage this morning:

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,* ²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of **faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.* ²³ *Let us hold fast the confession of our **hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.* ²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to **love** and good works, . . .*
Hebrews 10:19-24 (ESV)

Faith, hope and love! Do you think that is just a coincidence? Maybe, maybe not.

There are two primary themes in our passage this morning. One, endurance or perseverance which we are going to look at this morning, and two; “better together,” which we are going to look at next week.

That first Easter 2,000 years ago must have been a very special day in the life of Jesus' disciples. First, the women who went to the tomb, then Peter and John, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus later in the day, and then the disciples gathered in the upper room. The tomb was empty and the risen Savior Jesus had appeared to many of them. But what did it all mean for them?

That new life, the resurrected life found only in Jesus was about to be passed on to them, but it wouldn't come instantaneously. First they had to wait fifty days until the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Then they had to go out and live out their new resurrected life. It was not going to be as easy as they might have imagined. By the time we get to the time period in which the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* is writing, probably less than one generation after Jesus' death and resurrection, that new life in Christ has shown itself not to be so easy.

By the time this *Letter to the Hebrews* is written, the early Christians are already facing severe persecution and many are defecting. Many of the defections were from the Jewish Christians who were returning to their old faith, that which is really going to be tested as the temple in Jerusalem is about to be destroyed.

The author of this *Letter to the Hebrews* now offers the early Christians in and around Jerusalem some practical advice for continuing on in their Christian faith. He offers three essentials if they are going to complete the race or finish the fight:

1. **Draw Near** – One of the most important things that Jesus did for us through His death on the cross and His resurrection, symbolic of the tearing down of the veil or the curtain, is that He provided us access to the presence of God. That which was available to only a few specific people throughout Old Testament times was now available to all.

How do we draw near? *With a true heart in full assurance of faith.* Hebrews 10:22

What is a true heart? One which is honest, vulnerable, and humble. A true heart is one which readily acknowledges and confesses its own sinfulness. The apostle James writes in his letter, “confess our sins to one another and we will be healed.” God doesn't expect perfection from us, what He expects from us is for us to acknowledge our imperfection.

In John, chapter 15, Jesus tells his disciples to “abide in Him.” *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.* Jesus said that without Him they can do nothing. Jesus was telling his closest disciples that even after he left them, they would be able to draw near to him, to abide in him.

How much time do you really spend “drawing near to God,” abiding in Jesus?”

The second essential needed to completing the race or finishing the fight is to:

2. **Turn from Our Sins** - Not only do we need to confess our sins to one another, we need to turn from our sins.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 10:26 (ESV)

If you have been counting we now have the fifth warning by the author of this *Letter to the Hebrew* and this one is by far the strongest, considered to be one of the harshest warnings in the New Testament.

God has always taken our sin very seriously. Maybe even more so today in light of the tremendous sacrifice He has paid to offer forgiveness for those sins. The breaking of His own son's body and the shedding of His blood:

²⁸ *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.* ²⁹ *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?* Hebrews 10:28-29 (ESV)

While the author to this letter does not specifically say it here, what he is talking about is known as apostasy: the renunciation of a religious faith; the abandonment of a previous loyalty; a defection. Apostasy is an intentional falling away or withdrawal. Judas Iscariot was an apostate. He drew near to Jesus, walked with Jesus, sat under Jesus' teaching, ate with Jesus. //And then he defected, he walked away. Apostasy is an intentional walking away. Apostasy was a characteristic of many followers while Jesus was here on earth, for the gospels tell us that when Jesus' teaching really heated up, many walked away. When he started talking to them about having to undergo persecution and the need to take up their own cross, maybe even having to abandon their own family, many turned away. It is no different today, in this day. In fact it might even be more common. Jesus said it would happen. It is a characteristic of the last days and the last days represent the time period between Jesus first coming and his second coming. This is what Jesus said of many during those last days:

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.* ¹² *And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.* ¹³ *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

Matthew 24:10-13 (ESV)

The apostle Paul said it too: *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith.* 1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

Apostasy is worse than ignorance. That is the idea that the writer of the *Letter to the Hebrews* is trying to get across. A Christian apostate is one who has been presented with the truth, the gospel message, has identified himself or herself as being a Christian and then intentionally walks away, completely rejects the saving grace of Jesus Christ and/or willfully and deliberately goes on sinning. That is different than the one who continues to trust in Jesus for salvation and stumbles and sins occasionally, because the truth is that we all continue to sin at some level. Even as Christians, we only stop sinning when our life here on earth ends.

The sin that is talked about here in the *Letter to the Hebrews* is willful, deliberate and habitual. It is often very hard for us to distinguish between a true believer who is stumbling in his or her faith versus someone who is an apostate, lost. That is the main point of Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds). Only God knows.

Again, is it easy to fall away? No. But as Christians in these times we need to be aware of the dangers and what happens when people do fall away. Whereas we in the New Covenant times, especially today, have become more and more tolerant of sin, God is less tolerant:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.
Acts 17:30-31 (ESV)

The third essential to completing the race and fighting the fight is:

3. “**Patient Endurance**” –

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.
Hebrews 10:28

If we are putting our hope in our faithfulness, we are in trouble. It’s not our faithfulness that gets us to the end, it is God’s faithfulness. *For he who promised is faithful.*

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.”
Hebrews 10:36

God never promised his followers, whether in Old Testament times or today in New Testament times that they would be free from struggles, sufferings, and pain. Christians seem to experience the same struggles and pain that non-Christians face during our time here on earth, many of which there appears to be no good reason or explanation. And then on top of that Christians will face persecution and conflict. Just the fact that the kingdom of God is opposed to the kingdom of this world guarantees that there will be conflict.

There has been a lot of talk in the bigger denomination, Mennonite Church USA recently regarding “forbearance.” They even passed a resolution on “Forbearance” at the MCUSA Convention last July in Kansas City. I think we need to be careful that the words that we use, especially in the church, with such things as resolutions and/or to articulate doctrine, are how they were used in the Bible. The word “forbearance” is found only once, or three times in the Bible, depending on the version you use. In the NIV only once:

*God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his **forbearance** he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -*
Romans 3:25 (NIV)

In the ESV forbearance is found three times: one being Romans 3:25 and then,

*Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and **forbearance** and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* Romans 2:4

The other time is in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 15:15. “Forbearance” when used in the Bible is about God’s “tolerance” for us sinners. God is never tolerant of sin but He is tolerant of sinners. God has chosen to forbear with us for a certain period of time, but His forbearance doesn’t last forever, captured best by the disciple Peter:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

If forbearance, or tolerance of sinners, and patience are two of God's characteristics as found in the Scriptures, then it seems like they should be characteristics found in His people. But we need to be careful that our tolerance of sinners doesn't cause us to become tolerant of sin, because then there is no longer any need for repentance and we have *trampled underfoot the Son of God, and have profaned the blood of the new covenant and have outraged the Spirit of grace*. For it is both a joyful and a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Forbearance (tolerance) of sinful people, patience and great humility are all needed as we journey as God's people, as we endure whatever God has in store for us – both as individuals and collectively as a church. And we do that only when we constantly and consistently repent – turning from our sin and drawing near to God through Jesus Christ.

Let us Pray:

Father God,

We thank you for all the promises of Your word as we draw near to you through your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that You come near to each of us. We come to you confessing our need for you and confessing our sins. We confess of all the times we have trampled underfoot the salvation you have offered each of us through Jesus' death on the cross.

Give us strength and endurance to finish the race, to fight the good fight, to be as tolerant of sinners as you have been tolerant of us. Yet, not to be tolerant of sin – that which you take so seriously that you gave the life of your own Son.

Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to earnestly draw near in full assurance of faith, hope and love, that when we have completed the course you have set before us, when we have done Your will, we will receive Your promised reward.

In Jesus' Name we Pray, Amen