

STAND FAST, LOOKING UP

Hebrews 11:1–8 • Pastor Luke Herche

Please turn with me, if you would, in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews chapter 10 verses 32 - 39 will be our sermon text for this morning. We have slowed down a little bit in chapter 10 of Hebrews. There's a lot going on here. But we come to the end of that chapter now, before we jump into next week - what is known as the great chapter of faith, or the Hall of Faith, in Hebrews chapter 11. This week, we look at verses 32 - 39. And before we read that, let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this book of Hebrews. We thank you for how clearly it paints a portrait of our Savior Jesus. We thank you for all that he has done for us. Father, we pray that you would pour out your spirit on us now that we would see Jesus even more clearly, that we would see him in all of his glory and grace as we've just sung about, that we would delight in him our bridegroom and in his love for us demonstrated in the cross. And so, again, pour out your spirit on us, give us eyes to see and ears to hear that we would see Jesus more clearly this morning. We pray in Jesus name, amen.

Again, the book of Hebrews chapter 10, beginning with verse 32.

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

I recently had to move a fence, about 20 foot of fence that was on my neighbor's property, and I had to move it to about 16 inches. And when I talked about it with my other neighbors, who I had to talk with because it affected their fences, they were kind of appalled that I was forced to move this fence, and I had to resist the urge to complain. I wanted to be a good witness (and good Christians don't grumble and complain) and so I acted as if it was no big deal. But, you know, it was a big deal to me. And I was actually pretty grumpy about it. And grumpy is really just a nice word for angry. I was angry about it because my heart was in the wrong place.

You see, I expect that life in my cozy neighborhood is going to be easy. And I am focused on that easy life, and when something goes wrong, my immediate question is, what can I do to make this work? How can I fix this? Who do I need to talk to to make everything right again? You see, I have a pretty unrealistic expectation for this present life. My heart is focused here, which means my mood rises and falls based on whether those expectations are met. And ultimately, the person I rely on to make things go my way is me. And anyone I can co-opt into making my world a better place. Which of course, relying on me leads to all kinds of frustrations and being overwhelmed.

Well, God wants to overhaul my expectations. He wants to adjust my focus and reorient my confidence. And that is exactly what our text does for us this morning. And we're going to look at three things. You can see the outline in your bulletin. We're going to look at:

- A hard struggle: what did you expect?
- A better possession: where are you focused?
- An enduring faith: in whom is your confidence?

So first: ***A hard struggle: what did you expect?***

Paul Tripp is a biblical counselor who understands how to get to the heart - and not just the heart of an *issue* but the heart of a *person*. And his book on marriage is called, *What did you expect?* And the point is, people go into marriage moony-eyed and twitter-pated. And they expect a perpetual honeymoon. But then reality strikes and suddenly you realize, I married a sinner; hence the title of Paul Tripp's book. Well, what did you expect? But that title doesn't just encapsulate marriage, it encapsulates life. When things go wrong, and we get caught off guard or taken by surprise, when trouble comes out of left field and life seems to ambush us and we respond with frustration and anger, or despair and sadness - well, what did you expect?

See, the Hebrews were undergoing trouble. They were experiencing persecution of some kind, not, as Hebrews 12:4 will tell us, to the point of shedding blood, but persecution none the less, and they are tempted to turn back and give up. They're tempted to return to the comfort of Judaism.

And I do think something like this is particularly tempting for Christians. We think the Christian life will be easy. A God is on our side after all right? Hasn't he promised everything is going to go our way? Of course, the answer is no. But if we think that, the temptation then is to give up when things get hard. Christianity, it doesn't seem to work, right? God isn't doing what he said, or at least what I thought he said. And so our writer begins by reminding the Hebrews of the troubles that they had had from the beginning.

Look at verses 32 and 34 again:

But recall the former days, when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction and sometimes being partners with those so treated, 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.

Now, we're going to get to this better abiding possession in a minute, but first, I want you to notice the struggles. The writer mentions *a hard struggle* and their activity was difficult. They had to endure with sufferings, and he spells that out in two ways:

First - they experienced their own personal affliction. People ridiculed them, they reproached them for following Christ. And yet it wasn't just verbal affliction. Verse 34, says their property was plundered. being members of a religion without legal protection in the Roman world, they probably had little they could do about it.

Second - they also identified themselves with others so treated. They didn't shy away from people who were ridiculed. That's our temptation, right? If someone is being picked on at school or ostracized at work or shunned in our community, we avoid that person like the plague. We don't want their shame to rub off on us. It's the cheese touch from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, or it's cancel culture in modern America. But the Hebrews were willing to become partners with those who suffered.

This is one of those more known Greek words: *Koinonia*, which, here, is the noun *koinonos* (which means friend, companion, or business partner) When someone goes into a business venture and there is the prospect of fortune or fame, you might say, I'm in! Let me partner/share with you in that venture. Normally, when we see people suffering, we don't say, I'm in! Let me share with you in that. That is what the Hebrews did. Like Jesus, they willingly entered into the suffering of others.

Now if you have lived a charmed life, if everything has been peachy keen and then trouble hits, it can throw you off balance. But the writer's first point is that trouble has been a reality since the beginning. And for us, even now, even if somehow you have lived a charmed life, well, just look around; suffering is the order of the day.

And we could ask, why is that? The world wasn't made to be a place of suffering, that is true. God created a paradise in the beginning; Adam and Eve dwelt in paradise with God, but sin has broken into this world. Things don't work as they were meant to work. Human hearts and human relationships and human societies have all gone wrong because of our rebellion against the goodness of God. But also disease and famine and natural disasters – these too are tied to the brokenness of the world brought about by human sin.

Everyone experiences this brokenness, without exception. We experience it within; we experience it without. There is evil outside of us and evil within us. The Psalmist talked about this, he said, many are the afflictions of the righteous. Paul said all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Jesus said, in the world, you will have trouble. This teaching is incredibly hopeful, by the way, because if the world is not broken, it cannot be fixed. But if it's not supposed to be this way, maybe something can be done about it. Now for Christians, our hope is that Jesus is going to make everything right; he is going to make everything wrong come untrue. He does that by first entering into our suffering: he bears all sin and sadness on the cross, he faces rejection and reproach and affliction, and he suffered and died in our place. But that was not the end of the story. On the third day, he rose again putting the nail in the coffin of death, defeating sin and entering into a new resurrection life where there are no more tears. He ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven where the psalmist says there are pleasures forevermore.

And yet while Jesus entered into resurrection life, Christians daily face the fact that we are not there. We continue to suffer and face difficulty. Now, for some, this is a problem. If Jesus came to make all things new, why aren't they new? Yet the pattern of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is just that, it is the pattern laid out for us in Scripture. Jesus has purchased life for his people by his substitutionary death in our place. But for us, too, the cross comes before the crown, death before resurrection, suffering before glory. The path to life continues to be: take up your cross and follow Jesus. In the world, we will have trouble. Jesus will come and put all things right. Absolutely. And we'll talk about that in a minute as we begin to look at the later verses.

But until that time, in the world, we will have trouble. What did you expect?

And I guess that 50% of our internal woe is that we expect glory now. No, we demand glory now. We want the crown without the cross. We want resurrection without death. We want glory without suffering.

But friends, in the world, you will have trouble.

And that's not just in the big things. Sometimes we think, Oh, I know, persecution at some point will come, and we brace ourselves for it.; we're ready to claim the name of Jesus at gunpoint if necessary. But then our kids disobey, or our roof begins to leak, or our car breaks down, or we get stuck with an annoying coworker and we think, *Oh, why does this always have to happen to me?*

In the world, you will have trouble.

This is a broken world, things break right? We're a fallen race. People are sinners, they will sin against you.

What did you expect? In the world, you will have trouble.

And the small things are no less a test of your faith than the big. Somebody steals your credit card number and charges a ton of stuff to it. Well, you know, this day and age, it's a hassle. But the bank will reverse the charges. But it's a test of your faith in the moment. Your air conditioning unit breaks down on the hottest day of the year or any other day for that matter. It's a test of your faith. Don't sit around, failing the little tasks, waiting for the big one to come.

In the world, you will have trouble.

It's not fun. It's not easy. It is burdensome and wearying and depressing. That's what makes it trouble. We shouldn't invite it right? We shouldn't pursue it. We shouldn't seek it out. But we should expect it, because in the world, you will have trouble. And that's point number one. It's simple: A hard struggle. What did you expect? We should expect trouble. We are in a broken fallen world. Troubles will come.

That brings us to point two - **A better possession: Where are you focused?**

Again, a large part of our internal angst is not because of our trouble, but because of where our eyes are in the midst of our trouble. You see, we want glory now. We expect glory now. We demand glory now because we think *now* is all there is. And if all of our hope is in this life, well, eat and drink for tomorrow you die. If this life is all there is, Christianity is a sham,

and you should give it up and never come back. And that's not just me talking. Paul says as much in the Bible. He says if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. If, in Christ, we have hope in this life only we are of all people most to be pitied. Why pitied? Well, because the life of an apostle was a life of rejection, beating hunger, shipwreck and toil. If this is our hope, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Don't become a Christian because you think it will improve your situation. It may, and it may make it worse. Paul's life did not become easier after he became a Christian. And neither did that of the Hebrews. It seems the moment that they were "enlightened" (v. 32), that is the moment, the very moment, they came to faith and began to believe the gospel and threw in their lot with that despised group in the Roman world, the followers of the crucified one. From that moment, they began to suffer. But despite the fact that, from that moment, they began to suffer, they did so with joy (v. 34).

Paul says something similar to the Thessalonians. He says, "and you became imitators of us and of the Lord for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit." Now how is it that one might receive the word in affliction, but with joy? How could the Hebrews possibly joyfully accept the plundering of their property (v. 34)? To put it differently, how is it that we can accept all of the little difficulties we undergo daily without grumbling and complaining and with joy? Well, the writer tells us how they did it in verse 34. He says, "For you had compassion on those in prison, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one".

See, they had their eyes set on a better possession and an abiding one. The great reward of their confidence (v. 35), what is promised (v. 36), the second coming of Jesus, (v. 37), and the preservation of their souls (v. 39), which is to say that they had their eyes set on things to come. Again, Paul says the same thing of the Thessalonians. He says, "You turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God, to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come".

The Christian life is one of reward. It's not a reward that we can earn. It's not a reward that we deserve, but a reward nonetheless. Our faith will be rewarded on the last day. We will reap what we sow. As Paul put it, "The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the spirit, will, from the spirit reap eternal life".

So where are your eyes? Is your hope that this life will go well? Is your hope that this life will satisfy your heart? The writer says there are better things to come, abiding things. Better, which is to say whatever good you enjoy in this life, whatever good you can imagine in this life, what is to come, is better. And of course it is, because God is going to make all things new. Death itself will come undone. Our hearts will be perfected. Our bodies will be made new. All of creation will become what it was always meant to be. And yet, not just better, but abiding. This world will pass away. Whatever good you enjoy, enjoy it as a gift from God, but also know that it won't last. Every good thing you enjoy in this life will, in the end, be taken away in this life. And the irony is, the longer you live, the more will be taken away, thing by thing, and in the end comes death. This is the vanity of Ecclesiastes that we talked about in Sunday school this morning. This life is a vapor ready to pass away; that is objectively true. Nothing in this life lasts forever.

But then there is this abiding possession. There is something that will last. There is a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, an unshakable kingdom that will not pass away.

Now, you might be saying to yourself - I know. I know that. I know there are good things to come. I know a world is coming that will not pass away. I know those who have faith preserve not just their bodies but their souls. But this world is so hard. But you don't know the struggles that I face.

It's one thing to know these things - the coming things - but my heart still grumbles. My heart still grumbles because it still focuses in in the wrong place. How do I convince my heart to joyfully accept the plundering of my property (v. 34) in light of the better and abiding possession to come?

Three passages that might help us here are:

Romans 8:18. Paul says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. That's where we need to start, isn't it? Consider and meditate on this fact: Our present sufferings, whatever they may be large or small, are nothing compared to the future glory. Compare the two in order to see that they are not worth comparing. Is the perishable worth comparing with the imperishable? Is the dishonorable worth comparing with the glorious? Is the mortal worth comparing with immortality? Are the weak things of this world worth comparing with the powerful? Are the temporal things of this age worth comparing with the eternal? Are the mirages of this age worth comparing with the weighty solid things of the age to come? Compare the two. And how do you how do you do that? Well, well, you read of the coming glory in Scripture. Paul talks about it frequently in Romans 8, in 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 4,5. You can read about it in Revelation 21, 22. You can read the promises of God and see if it is worth gaining the whole world, the world that is passing away, while forfeiting your soul, and the age to come.

2 Corinthians 4: 16 - 18. Again, Paul says this: "so we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen, are eternal." Paul there suggests that our present, light, momentary afflictions, are *preparing* an eternal weight of glory. That is, somehow in God's economy, our present trouble makes our future glory, more glorious. Now, there are many aspects to an answer to the so-called "problem of evil", but here is one that we need to take into our hearts and treasure: our present trouble makes our future glory more glorious. Now, I don't understand the math. The calculus of heaven eludes me, but somehow present trouble prepares future glory. When you face troubles in faith, looking to Jesus, keeping your eyes on things to come, it actually increases the joy of Heaven. It is the ultimate in delayed gratification, and I guess we do know this principle. We work hard and then we get paid. We plant seeds, and then we reap a harvest. And somehow our suffering works along the same lines, not that our suffering earns us Heaven; not that we could ever deserve it. The resurrection life to come is a gift of

grace through Jesus. And yet somehow, our joy in that gift is increased by present trouble. So we can face present troubles knowing that they increase future joy.

Matthew 6. Jesus says, "do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." You know, if you take all of your money and you invest in Apple, for example, (which is what I wish I had done about 20 years ago), if you do that, you will care how Apple's stock does, you will be concerned about it. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And the more you invest in this life, the more you allow the things of this life to take your time and your money and your talents, the more they will take your heart. Jesus has very practical advice. He says lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven. You know, if you invest in the Bank of America, your heart will be in the Bank of America, with the concerns of the Bank of America, with the rise and fall of the Bank of America. But if you invest in the Bank of Heaven, your heart will be with the Bank of Heaven, your concerns will be the concerns of Heaven, your desire will be for the increase in the flourishing of Heavenly things. Now, this doesn't mean that you despise this life, but you keep it in its proper place. We enjoy many oases in the desert of this life on the road to glory. Just don't settle there and don't accept it as the end of the road. This life is not your home This world is not the last stop on the train. We are looking for the world to come, when the coming one will come and all things will be made new. Invest there. Give your time and money and talents for the Cause of Heaven, and where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So there is a hard struggle. What did you expect? We should expect trouble in this fallen, broken world. But there's also a better possession. So where are you focused? Focus forward on the coming things, the better things, the abiding things.

The third: **There is an enduring faith: In whom is your confidence?**

Look again at the second part of our passage (vv. 35 – 39).

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

If you are going to stand fast in the midst of trouble, you need to: 1. expect that it will come, 2. focus on the good things that will come. 3. you need to know where your confidence lies. That is, you need to know who it is who is going to bring those good things, who is going to carry you from this life into the next. And yet, here's what happens when my world is interrupted, as I see it, by trouble, I go into damage control mode. You know what that's like - I start asking: what can I do, and what do I need to say, and how do I need to act, and who can I talk to in order to make all things right again? And if my focus is on my present kingdom, my little world, being perfect in the now, then of course, it's true that the

flourishing of my kingdom is on my shoulders. But God's kingdom is not on our shoulders. It comes in Christ's timing and it will consummate at Christ's return. Which means our part is to have faith in him. Our confidence is in Christ and his work. That is what we have seen in Hebrews repeatedly. We can endure because he endured, we live by faith because he worked for us. Our part is to keep our eyes on Jesus. Your confidence has a great reward. When you have done the will of God (which primarily means when you have walked by faith), you will receive what is promised. Those of faith preserve their souls. And so again, the encouragement to hold on to your faith, to keep your eyes on Jesus, is that your faith has its reward. And this is always the case with faith. We are looking to the reward, therefore, persevere in faith. This was Paul's hope. He said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race I have kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." This was Jesus' promise to his people. He said, "and you will be hated by all for my namesake but the one who endures to the end, will be saved." Again, he says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches, to the one who conquers, that is, to the one who perseveres in faith I will grant that they eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God. Don't give up your faith. Because in giving up your faith, you give up your reward. Rather, remind yourself of this: persevering in faith, and serving God is never in vain.

As some thought it was from time to time, some think it is from time to time. In the book of Malachai some were saying, "It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge?" Peter says that scoffers will come scoffing saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." In other words, his promises are not true. His word is not sure. Why bother following Jesus?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor *is not in vain*." And why can Paul say that so confidently, in light of everything else he said in that chapter? That is because of the resurrection. By raising Jesus from the dead God has demonstrated his faithfulness; he fulfilled his promises for his son. And if we belong to Christ, the Father will fulfill those promises for us as well. Wait for it, looking to Jesus, knowing that when Jesus returns, when the coming one comes, he will bring his reward with him as Scripture says. And troubles will come in this life, but we have a better possession and abiding one in the age to come.

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Keep your confidence in him, knowing that he who has dealt with sin at the cross will return not to judge but to save those who eagerly await him.

- So what did you expect? Expect trouble; this life is broken.
- Where are you focused? Focus forward on the promises of God for His people.
- In whom is your confidence? Stand fast, looking up, keeping your eyes on Jesus.

Let's pray: *Our Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the hope that we have, that he will return and make all things new. We pray that you would keep our eyes there, that you would keep our confidence there, that we would store up our treasure there, that we would wait for and long for that day, that that would be our joy and delight in this moment, that we have a better possession, an abiding one, whatever may come, whatever may happen. Thank you for Jesus who has secured for us this better, abiding possession. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.*

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