

Hebrews

Hebrews 10:32-39 – Practical Lessons – Part I

July 26, 2009

- I. **Hebrews 10:32-39** . . . 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.

II. Prayer

III. Practical Lessons

A. **Hebrews 10:32** . . . But **remember** the former days.

1. God is saying
 - a. We are wise to call to mind those times when we have been most aware of God's provision and protection – as well as His faithfulness in His dealings with us.
 - b. We are wise to call to mind those times when we have experienced spiritual growth – that growth which has changed us from the inside out so that in those areas of change our old nature has been pretty much put out and a likeness to Christ has been put in its place.
 - c. We are wise to call to mind those times when we have exhibited unwavering trust in God – especially when those around us or our circumstances loudly proclaimed the foolishness of such faith.
 - d. We are wise to call to mind all the ways we have been obedient to God's will and word and how this obedience has worked a great good in us and brought glory to God.
 - e. We are wise to call to mind those times when we have loved God more nearly as we ought.

- f. We are wise to call to mind those times when we have resisted temptation – be it temptation coming from the devil, the world around us, or from our own sinful desires or fears – and how our resistance in the time of temptation has made it easier to remain godly in the face of future temptation.
 - g. We are wise to call to mind those times we have persevered in our pursuit of God and godliness to the point of genuine and measurable change and growth – in spite of all the failures along the way – be they failures due to lack of preparation, lack of vigilance, careless moments, or just plain willful rebellion against God in doing what we know is wrong.
 - h. We are wise to call to mind the times we’ve spent studying and contemplating and meditating on God’s word and how those times have enlightened us to new truth, directed us in the ways and wisdom of God, motivated us toward greater godliness, empowered us for holy living, and led us into deeper intimacy with God.
 - i. We are wise to call to mind those times we have endured hardship and rejection and verbal attacks and loss of what belonged to us and other ill treatment for the sake of remaining faithful to God and God’s command to overcome evil with good.
- 2. And why should we call such things to mind? So that we will take all the good that is in us and use it to build more good, stronger faith, greater zeal, purer hearts, and increased godliness. But even more than that, we want to use all the good from the past to fuel perseverance and endurance.
 - 3. Therefore, whatever good is in you, see it, nurture it, and by all means use it to build more good.
 - 4. One word of caution – don’t use the good that is in you to hide or ignore the bad that needs to be faced, repented of, and thrown out.

B. **Hebrews 10:32-33** . . . 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.

- 1. When this letter was written, some form of persecution was one of the expected outcomes for most everyone who became a Christian. In fact, for the first readers of Hebrews, they went right from

repentance and saving faith to being verbally, physically, and economically persecuted.

- a. What can we learn from their experience? I think there are two important lessons here for us today.
 - (1) First, there is more than one voice in the Church today. In fact, from what I read and hear there are many voices proclaiming a variety of messages.
 - (a) As a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is my responsibility to proclaim the truth of God regardless of what you think about it or me.
 - (b) And as members of the Body of Christ, it is up to you to decide which voice or which voices you are going to listen to – be it the voice of God, the voice of theology, the voice of “almost Christianity”, the voice of human reason, or the voice of self-exaltation and self-gratification cloaked in bible language.
 - (c) It is your responsibility to be discerning in regard to the voices available so that you listen to God’s truth even though your flesh wants to rebel and your family complains and your neighbors or co-workers make fun and the way it leads you is costly than that.
 - (2) Second, making the decision to repent of our rebellion against God and put our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from the penalty, power, and practice of sin is serious business – even if we are not facing persecution upon becoming a Christian.
- b. Why? Because such a decision goes way beyond gaining heaven over hell after we die, or joining a church, or serving in a church, or giving up certain worldly ways. This decision involves significant cost to the one making it!
 - (1) This decision requires a faith in God that compels us to live for God, trust in God, wait on God, and endure whatever God wills for us to endure.
 - (2) This decision entails an ongoing, enduring commitment to die to self – day-by-day and sometimes, situation by situation.
 - (3) It includes becoming an obedient child of God, and a humble servant of Jesus Christ.
 - (4) It requires yielding to the work of God in conforming us to the image of Christ.

- (5) It calls us to become spiritually healthy and a functioning member of the body of Christ.
- (6) It surely includes living in such a way that others are able to see our Christ-likeness and as a result come face-to-face with the worthiness and goodness of God because of our testimony in word and deed.
- (7) And if God wills it so, it can include persecution and even a martyr's death for the cause of Christ and the advancement of God's kingdom.
- c. Now regardless of how shallow or self-serving we have viewed God's saving work in the past, God is inviting us today to join the first readers of Hebrews in taking saving faith as seriously as God intends us to take it – and then to validate our serious-mindedness by learning to think, speak, and live as those who have taken it seriously.
- 2. **A few thoughts about persecution:** though persecution is a challenge to anyone's faith in God, the challenge of living in an evil, self-pleasing, independent minded, self-willed, and wealthy nation like ours is equally challenging.
 - a. And just like those facing persecution, we need the same rock solid faith in God and an unwavering commitment to do the will of God regardless of the cost to self in order to overcome the challenges and temptations of living godly in such a self-pleasing environment.
 - b. I do not mean to imply that those facing persecution are somehow dealing with less of a challenge to their faith in God than we are facing. What I am trying to convey is that both those facing persecution and those facing the challenge of being Christ-like in a society like ours are facing a threat to their faith in God and a threat to their spiritual well-being that though different is in many ways equally strong.
 - c. In fact, it is my belief that if we will not die to self for the sake of holiness, for the love of God, and for God's honor, we are not likely to endure persecution or death for God either.
 - (1) Ask yourself – better yet, think about this with me –
 - (a) Who will die for the prosperity gospel or a the me centered gospel?
 - (b) Who will endure persecution for a god who is here to serve me and make my life better?

- (c) Who will remain faithful in the face of not just being humbled but humiliated and degraded for a gospel that teaches we can become someone important if we will give our lives over to Jesus Christ?
- (2) I am convinced that if we won't die to our flesh – be it all or in part – we surely won't give our flesh to die in martyrdom for God.
- 3. Finally, regardless of what it is we face, standing together as a church and as believers on a wider basis is a strength and encouragement for each one who faces persecution or challenges to their faith.

C. **Hebrews 10:34** . . . accepted joyfully the seizure of your property.

- 1. It seems to me that there is a growing consensus among believers that the primary job of the church is to make us feel better – about ourselves, about the life we're living, about our relationship to God, and about God's commitment to us. In essence, what many are seeking is a happy Christianity.
- 2. Now let me be perfectly clear – I like happy. So I am not attacking happy. What I want to do with this **verse 34** is talk a bit about joy – which is a polar opposite to happiness.
 - a. The difference between happiness and joy is that happiness stands alone. It is not an ongoing state of mind, but rather a temporary feeling, emotion, or mindset that pushes other feelings or emotions or thoughts out.
 - (1) You cannot have happiness and sadness at the same time.
 - (2) You cannot have happiness and feel the pain of loss or sickness or injury at the same time.
 - (3) You cannot have happiness and at the same time weep with shame before God over how you have lived in the distant past or even the last several minutes.
 - b. This is not so with joy, for joy is a paradox, an incongruity, a self-contradicting state of mind. In fact, if you do a study of joy in the scriptures you will find it is most often linked with sorrow, pain, and suffering of some kind. What this means for us is that joy can always be present as a state of mind regardless of whatever other feelings, emotions, or thoughts are present. **Consider:**
 - (1) The readers of this letter knew joy even though they knew the suffering and sorrow of having their possessions

unjustly and cruelly taken from them – which meant not only losing their possession, but having to live in want because they had less to live on.

(2) James speaks of having joy in the face of temptations, trials, and testings – a joy that is an underlying state of mind for those who have faith in God that is driven by the potential godly outcome of life's challenges.

(3) Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross.

3. The point I want to make today about this matter of joy is that it is God's design that we Christians have joy on a continuous basis – not a stand alone joy like that of happiness which separates us from the other realities of life – but a joy that is present whether we are experiencing sickness or health, poverty or wealth, happiness or sorrow, gain or loss, shame and brokenness over sin or great spiritual strides, ease or tribulation, freedom of religion or persecution for our faith in God.
4. To put it another way, generally speaking, happiness is about me. Joy is about God being my God – and all that that great truth entails.

D. **Hebrews 10:34 . . . knowing that you have** for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

1. There is a Christian mindset related to **life here and life there** that is important to our faith in God, our love for God, and our living as those who belong to God in this world. This mindset has to do with determining the value of the differing aspects of life here based on the value of what God has for us there.
 - a. Jesus said that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21).
 - b. And John wrote “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. [17] **The world is passing away**, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (I John 2:15-17).
 - c. God refers to us as sojourners, pilgrims, and tent-dwellers who are looking for a permanent home in the heavens.

2. We are not to look at the here and now for the best that life has to give. We are to look to the future – God’s eternal future – for the best that life has to give.
 - a. So losing some or all of what we have here and now is not a great loss because it is not the end of our story.
 - b. The reality is, losing what one has here is only a great loss if here is the only good one will ever have. We fully expect unbelievers to think this way, but as Christians we are expected to think differently.
 - c. For us, all that is good and needful is yet to come – and it can never be taken away from us. As surely as Christ has an inheritance in the heavenly’s so do we!!

IV. Conclusion

- A. Remember the good and use it to build more godliness in your life.
- B. Remember that the decision to repent and put our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from the power, practice and penalty of sin is a very serious decision – for it is a decision that is very costly to your self-life.
- C. Remember joy is as different from happiness as day is from night.
- D. Remember that we are God’s people and our home is not here, but there!