

Warning of Judgment; Suffering in Hope

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

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As we turn to God's word, let me pray for us. God, indeed, we do thank you for your word. And we thank you for the way in which you use it by your spirit to bring to remembrance all the good things of the gospel.

Lord, this weekend, as we remember those who have served and who have done so with courage, God, we are thankful for them. Pray for them in particular.

God, we pray for us that you would open up our hearts. That you would be encouraged by your word this morning. To hear its warnings and its encouragement. And so to follow our Lord Jesus. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Hebrews 10, verses 26 through 39. Let me read this for us. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

[1 : 13] But a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

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.

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

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.

[2 : 22] Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

For yet a little while in 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.

Well, friends, imagine that I were to give you a blank sheet of paper. And I were to hand out some colored pencils or crayons or markers, whatever your sort of art supply of choice is.

And I were to ask you to draw a picture that best represented the Christian life. I wonder what sort of picture you would draw. Would it be a picture of sitting on the beach, enjoying a sunset?

Or would it be a picture of walking through a field of wild flowers, ready to have a picnic? Maybe there's some truth in those kinds of pictures. But you know, Hebrews paints quite a different picture.

[3 : 35] The Christian life here is a race, is a marathon. In fact, in verse 32, the word translated struggle literally means an athletic contest.

So, the Olympian making her way around the final curve of the track. Her lungs drawing deep breath. Her face set with determination for the finish line.

This is the picture of the Christian life that we find in Hebrews. And for this race, for this marathon, we need endurance.

This is one of the great themes of this book. As our text says in verse 36, you have need of endurance. You need staying power for the race ahead.

The finish line is approaching. A wreath of glory lies ahead, but you have need of endurance. Because there will come times when we will want to throw in the towel.

[4 : 44] When external pressures and internal doubts will tempt us to give up the race. I remember the last time I played a serious game of basketball. The first few times up and down the court, I felt great.

My form was good. I was hustling back on defense. I was thinking to myself, man, I love basketball. Why am I not out here playing more often? And then some external pressures started to set in. It was a hot summer day. I was badly out of shape. My legs were getting tired. Pretty soon I was sucking wind and sweating and feeling a little bit lightheaded. Looking for the closest water fountain. And then came the internal doubts. Is this game really worth it? These guys can probably finish without me. I'm not even really sure I like basketball to begin with.

Now you see, spiritually and much more seriously, the same thing can begin to happen. External pressures start to come. We even see some of these outlined in verses 33 and 34.

[5 : 54] The original audience of Hebrews had been publicly shamed for their confession of Christ. Some of them had even been imprisoned. Others had had their property broken into and stolen. And it seems the authorities just looked the other way.

And all of this for identifying with Jesus. What pressures are you facing for being a Christian? Maybe it's nothing that severe.

Of course, many of our brothers and sisters around the world do face persecution just like this. But maybe that's not you. And yet the pressures are still there, aren't they?

Friends and co-workers poke fun at Christians not realizing that you're a Christian yourself. And you're sort of caught in the midst. Maybe you're under pressure to make some decisions at work that go against your faithful obedience to Christ.

And you know that there'll be a cost. Or maybe you're just tired of waiting for a good Christian guy or girl to come along to date.

[6 : 54] So you start dating some non-Christians. The pressures are there. And then don't the internal doubts start to come? And we find some of those echoed in verse 29.

Was Jesus really who he said he was? The son of God? Or was he just another religious figure from long ago? Was Jesus' death really necessary? Really saving?

Or was he just another martyr for a good cause? And finally, grace. I'm basically a good person, aren't I?

Is it really all of grace? Do I really need radical forgiveness? External pressures. Internal doubts. And so you see, along this race, we all need endurance.

Jesus himself gave us a picture of this when he told the parable of the sower, didn't he? A farmer goes out and spreads his seed on the field. And some seed is snatched up right away by the birds. And some seed, after a while, it doesn't get deep enough.

[7 : 57] So it's burned by the sun. And some seed gets choked out by the thorns. And none of these endure. But the seed that falls in good soil, that seed takes root and grows up and produces a lasting crop 30, 60, even 100 times what it began with, Jesus says.

A great flourishing harvest. So we have need of endurance. And our text here in Hebrews gives us two powerful reasons to endure in the faith.

One is negative and one is positive. One is a warning and one is an encouragement. So first, let's look at the warning in verses 26 through 31.

We're told here that we must endure in the faith. Because apart from Christ, there is certain judgment. A warning. Now, Hebrews has been punctuated by a series of what's called warning passages.

And warnings, of course, are extremely loving, aren't they? The parent who warns his or her child about not running into the street, about the extreme dangers of oncoming traffic, is a loving parent.

[9 : 20] And so Hebrews, by giving us these warnings, is an extremely loving book. And the warning is, as he says in verse 26, that we would not go on sinning deliberately.

Now, we've got to sort of look a little closer at what he means by this phrase. What exactly is he talking about? What sort of deliberate, continuous sin does he have in mind here?

Well, he explains in verse 29. This is his unpacking of what he has in mind. What exactly he's talking about.

And what does it involve? Look at verse 29. Trampling, profaning, outraging, or insulting. That is, decisively and consciously and continually rejecting what?

Christ is the Son of God. The atoning power of his death. And the Spirit's offer of grace. So you see, the warning here is not necessarily against what we would call besetting sins.

[10:31] Those habitual sins that we fall into again and again and repent for and fight against and can't seem to shake. That we all wrestle with as believers. That's not what he has in mind here.

Rather, the warning is against decisively and consciously, deliberately, continually rejecting the claims of the gospel. The person of Christ.

The work of Christ. The grace-giving Spirit. Now, what does that look like? Well, the example that Hebrews has given us that's running like a thread throughout this book is the example, is the picture of the Exodus generation.

Think back to all that that generation had seen and partaken of. Do you remember the story? God had brought them out of slavery with a mighty hand. God had then taken them through the Red Sea.

He had fed them in the wilderness. They heard his own voice speaking from Mount Sinai. And then Moses continued to speak God's word to them. And yet, when they get to the border of the promised land.

[11:39] So close to the finish line. The promise right there. They refuse to believe God's faithfulness and turn back.

They reject God. And God judges them all. Hebrews is saying that it's possible for us to get a taste of the supreme exodus in Christ.

To get a taste of God's final and superior word in Christ. And yet, still to not actually believe. And yet, still to get so close and then fall away. Now, does this mean that you can lose your salvation?

No. It doesn't mean that you can lose your salvation. But it does mean that, like Jesus' parable of the sower. It does mean that some people can make what looks like a really good start.

[12:46] And not really have saving faith. We might know all the answers. We might have received the knowledge of the truth. We might do all the right things morally.

And live a life that sort of looks Christian. We might even have had some spiritual experiences. Chapter 6 talks about tasting the goodness of the word of God. And the powers of the age to come. We might undergo all that. And yet, none have truly given our lives to Christ. And when the pressures come.

And the doubts come. And the sun bears down. And the thorns crowd in. We throw it away. And Hebrews goes on to say that if we reject Christ in that way.

Then there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. That is, he's saying that there's no salvation to be found anywhere else. The original audience of Hebrews.

[13:52] You know, these first recipients of this letter. Couldn't go back to the Old Testament sacrifices. And think that those were going to cover them. If they turned away from Christ. And we can't think that we can turn away from Christ to anything else.

Whether it be another belief system. Or our own moral record. And think that that's going to be enough. To make us right with God. God has made.

Cleansing in Christ. That is sufficient. And total. And free. And perfect. For all who come to him. And it can't be found anywhere else.

So to reject Christ is to put yourself in a place. Where there is no sacrifice for sins. Imagine a great storm coming up.

Across the plains. And taking refuge. In the safe, warm home of Christ. And in that place. No matter how hard the rains beat.

[14:54] And no matter how hard the wind rocks against it. You're not harmed. That house is utterly secure. But if you throw open the door.

And run into the night. Hebrews is saying there's no shelter out there that can keep you safe. There's no refuge from the storm. Apart from him.

So I hope you see what this verse isn't saying. First of all. It's not saying that there's going to come a point in our Christian life.

When the effect of Christ's sacrifice will maybe run out. When Christ will say to us. Well I've paid for your sins up to this point. But you know I'm done with you now. I'm not going to pay for them any further.

No. Everyone who comes to Christ. Who takes refuge in him. No matter how great their sins. No matter how many times they keep stumbling and falling. Will continue to have complete forgiveness.

[15:50] But if we leave him. If we reject him. Hebrews is saying we're stepping out from the shelter. And into the storm.

And again does this mean that the true believer can lose their salvation? No. Those for whom Christ has died. Those whom the spirit has caused to be born again. In saving faith. Can never fully fall away. But it is possible. For someone to profess faith. And not really be genuine. For there to come a point.

When through pressures and doubts. They turn away. And Hebrews warns us. That to reject Christ in this way. Means turning toward.

What he calls a fearful expectation. Of judgment. In these verses. Hebrews is clear. That to deliberately and continually. Forsake the gospel.

[16:48] Means facing judgment from God. A judgment that he says. In verse 29. Is deserved. And in verse 30. He says. It's certain. And in verse 31.

He says. It's ultimately fearful. Of course. The reality of God's judgment. Is something that we struggle with today.

Like the parent warning the child. About the very real danger. Of running into the road. It's not something we delight to talk about. But we have deeper doubts. Don't we? How could a loving God. Really judge? Isn't talk of punishment. And fire. Like we have here in this passage. Beneath. A loving and good God. Well I think it's helpful to remember.

As we wrestle with questions. And with texts like these. That it was actually Jesus himself. Who talked more about eternal judgment. Than anyone else in the Bible. And that ought to give us pause.

[17:52] Sober pause. Before we simply reject the idea out of hand. But also remember who God reveals himself to be. God is the one who is utterly good.

According to the Bible. Who creates the world. In his goodness. Who delights over creation. In his goodness. Who satisfies our souls. With his goodness.

And whose goodness doesn't spoil. Or fade. Or waver. And because he is good. And completely so.

It means that God ultimately says no. To evil and injustice. And sin. And wrongdoing. You see friends. If God didn't judge. We couldn't call him good.

And in fact. We wouldn't call him good. And what's more. It's not until we see the depth. Of the reality of God's judgment. That we can finally see the real depth.

[18:52] Of God's love. And goodness. You see what God in Christ. Willingly endured on the cross for us. Was the full weight. Of judgment. That our sins deserved.

That there. The wrath of God was satisfied. For all who believe. Do you see the depth. Of the love of God. For you. That Christ would step out.

Into that storm. So that you would always be safe. To be safe. So you see why. We're being warned this morning.

Not to forsake this Christ. But rather to endure in the faith. Because apart from Christ. We face God's good and right. Justice. Now perhaps you're here this morning.

And maybe you're thinking about giving up. On Christianity. Maybe you've identified as a believer. Up till this point. But anymore. And maybe you're just not so sure.

[19:55] Friend. Perhaps this warning. That we're looking at this morning. Is for you. What do you hope to find. Apart from Christ.

Life. Freedom. Joy. Joy. Maybe you'll get a glimpse. Of all these things. But it will be fleeting. The life will dry up.

The freedom will wither away. The joy will wind down. And apart from Christ. When your race is run. And you stand in the light.

Of God's utter goodness. Your creator. And your rightful judge. What will have been worth. In that moment.

Forsaking Christ. And treating his death as common. And rejecting the grace. That he offers you now. Through his spirit. Jonathan Edwards once said.

[20 : 53] Even if there were no flames in hell. The pain of guilt and shame. Would be fire enough. To see all that God.

Had done for you and me. And to turn away. What a dreadful place to be. Friend. God doesn't want to leave you. In your guilt. And that's why. This warning is here. Don't go that way. Take Christ.

In faith. And rest in him. As your only. Refuge from the storm. If you've been wandering. Turn back. The gates are open.

Come in. And united to him. You'll not just find refuge. But Hebrews goes on to say. Great reward.

[21 : 52] That's the next step. In our passage. As we need endurance. For this race of faith. Hebrews now encourages us. In verses 32 to 39. To endure in the faith. Because in Christ. There is great reward.

And he starts by telling us. To recall the former days. Remember the former days. When you endured. A hard struggle. With sufferings. Don't you remember. He says. You've done it before. You can do this. Remember your past. Victories in the face of hardship. Recall. How you. Endured. Friends. Rehearse.

The past. Faithfulness. Of Christ to you. This is one of the reasons. Why God calls us. Into community. So that we can be reminding. One another. Of the mercies.

And faithfulness. Of God to us. And the realities. Of our everyday life. Because I'm forgetful. I don't remember the times. When God saw me through. But you. Because you see my life.

[22 : 49] Can come to me with that word. And say. No. Nick. Remember. When Christ saw you through this. The struggles you're having now. The pressures you're having now. The doubts you're having now. He's faithful.

He can see you through. Remember. When God showed himself. Faithful. How much of our spiritual weakness. Comes because we're forgetful.

We. We so quickly say. I can't go on. But listen to the spirit. Who's saying. Remember. In Christ. You did it once. And you can do it again.

He won't let you down. And then Hebrews. He lifts up our eyes. From our past. To our future. What allowed these first Christians.

To undergo such hardship. And to endure in the midst of it. Look again at the end of verse 34. They were able to endure. Because they knew. That they had. What he calls. A better possession.

[23 : 45] And an abiding one. Verse 35 says. A great. Reward. Haven't we been hearing that note. Again and again. Through Hebrews.

Better. In Christ. We have something. That's better. That's greater. That's superior. And here it's our future. Possession.

That's better. In the Old Testament. The promised possession was what? It was the land. But that was just a shadow. Of what God's ultimate plan held. And in the new. We see that the ultimate possession. Of God's people.

Is even better. It's not just the land. But it's the new heavens. And the new earth. It's the world.

Restored. In righteousness. It's that. Festive. City. Of Sabbath. Rest.

Yet to come. Where God dwells. In all of his beauty. How much time do we spend. Building. Our possessions.

[24 : 40] Shopping for houses. Planning for retirement. None of that's bad. It's good stewardship. You should do it. But friends. If that's our hope. If that's our security.

And we're building our lives. On a foundation. That just doesn't. Stand. But Christ offers us. A possession. That is better. And that is abiding.

It's one that lasts. And it will last through hardship. And it will last through suffering. And it will last through loss. And it will last even through death.

And this means that nothing. That in Christ. Nothing. Nothing. Of permanent value. Can be taken away. From you. In this life. Do you realize that?

The audience of Hebrews. Had their homes broken into. And robbed. They lost their wealth. But they didn't really lose. And they were publicly shamed. And exposed to reproach.

[25 : 38] They lost their reputations. And yet they didn't lose. Though they lost their money. And their reputation. They lost nothing. Of permanent value.

And they weren't shaken. Because in Christ. They knew. That they had a better possession. And an abiding one. It's like all those stories. That come to us.

About the rich princes. Who for a while. Decide to go out into the world. And see what it's like. And they sort of live. Among those. Who are poor. And yet. Even that prince knows.

That if they lose everything. They haven't really lost anything. Of permanent value. Because back home. With the king. It's all secure.

So they can go out into the world. And serve. And love. And lose. And do it with complete security. And freedom. Friend that is true of everyone in Christ.

[26 : 35] What God has promised us. Is a great reward. One that never spoils. Or fades. And why does it never spoil. Or fade. Because ultimately. What has God promised us? Nothing less.

Than himself. Do you remember what God said to Abraham. In Genesis 15. When Abraham was doubting the promises. And he was looking at his family. Which was non-existent.

And said. God. The one who is going to inherit my estate. Is a distant relative. Is a servant. What does God tell him? He says. Abraham. I'm your shield.

I'm your reward. Trust me. Go out and look at the stars. Can you count them? A little later he'll tell him. Go number the grains of sand on the shore.

Can you figure it out? That's how certain my promise is for you. I am your great reward. And I keep my promises.

[27 : 35] Friends. Don't you see? That the reason why you and I in Christ. Are like that prince who never fears losing his possession. Because he's got the kingdom back home.

The reason that we can live in that way. Is because we know. That the true prince. Did go forth. And lost everything. Even lost the father. So that you and I could gain everything. And never lose the father. Jesus died and rose again.

To take sinners like you and me. And to bring us back into the family. And to give us a better and abiding possession. The father's own heart.

And that means we can undergo anything. And we can do it as Hebrews says. With joy. Did you see that in verse 34? Before. It's shocking.

[28 : 35] Isn't it? You joyfully accepted. The plundering of your property. Beth and I have been kind of in and out. Traveling a lot. The last couple of weeks. I'll be honest with you.

If I came home to my apartment. And found that it had been. Plundered. And looted. I don't think I would have faced it with joy. Right? Where's my TV? How am I going to watch Netflix? Or maybe a little more.

Seriously. Maybe even more seriously. All those memories that I had. Now lost. Burned. Thrown away. The safety. The safety. That I would feel had been lost.

The security. The sense of violation I would feel. Are my children now safe? Am I now safe? And yet. Hebrews says.

They joyfully accepted. The plundering of their property. You see friends. Yes. Christianity is a race. It's a marathon. There is hardship. And there is struggle.

[29 : 36] But there is joy. Just last week. I had the privilege. To speak with a pastor from India. Who's currently. Staying at the OMSC. And his church.

Has undergone intense. Persecution. Members of his congregation. Himself included. Had been physically dragged. Into the street. And beaten by mobs. Who hated the name of Christ.

On various occasions. The school. That the church. Had built. To educate orphans. Had literally been bulldozed. By the local authorities. Because they were accused.

Of proselytizing. And yet. As we spoke. This brother in Christ. This fellow pastor. Showed me pictures. Of the men and women. Who are getting baptized.

In clandestine ways. Out in the forest. For fear of persecution. But getting baptized. And he showed me. The churches that were growing. And the pastors. He was raising up. And then he showed me.

[30 : 30] The plans. Of the school. That one day. They were going to build. On the rubble. Of the old one. And he recounted. All this with joy. Friends.

What could produce. Such joy. Is it not. The grace of Christ. That the son of God. Shed his own blood. To bring me.

Into the family. Of the king. And to have an abiding possession. How sad. That we often think. That joy. Is found apart. From Christ. Isn't that why.

We so often go astray. Because we think. That happiness. That joy. Is found in the approval. Of our friends. Or in the comfort. Of a spouse. Or in the security. Of many possessions.

Friends. None of these things. Bring you the depth. Of joy. That Christ brings. The sort of joy. That resounds. And grows.

[31 : 25] And reaches a fever pitch. Even when everything. Is stripped away. Friend this morning. Do you know that joy? It's for all of us.

In Christ. I've heard the stories. Of some of you. I know that you do. Remember. That joy. And friends. Endure in the faith.

Because in Christ. There's great reward. And the fullness. Of joy. I think it's fitting. That our passage. Ends. On this stunning.

Note of confidence. We are not. Of those who shrink back. And are destroyed. But of those who have faith. And preserve their souls. That's pretty categorical. That's pretty confident. In verse 37 through 39.

Hebrews quotes. The Old Testament prophet. Habakkuk. Habakkuk too. Lived in times of hardship. When it seemed like all hope. Was lost. And God gives him. A message to endure. My righteous one shall live.

[32 : 25] By faith. It's easy to think of our endurance. In the faith. As our work. Isn't it? As we think of the Christian life.

As a marathon. As a race. We often think. That the expression on our faces. Is one of grim. Self. Effort. As we push. Toward the finish line. But no friends.

The righteous. Live. By faith. In response to. And resting in. The grace of God in Christ. Why is Hebrews so confident.

That we are. Of those of faith. Why is he so confident. That we will. Persevere to the end. Because for ten chapters.

He's been telling us. About the one. In whom. In whom. We put our faith. The one who endured. That judgment. That is so fearful. The one who won.

[33 : 23] The reward. For us. Through his righteous life. The one who ran. The race before us. And broke open the gates. So that we can enter in. So that we can be brought in.

In his train. Friends. We run this race. We run this race. Not in grim. Self-effort. But we run this race. Together. Behind Christ.

Our forerunner. Who secured. Our victory. The look on our faces. Is one of joy. Of gladly. Pressing on. Because he.

Pressed on. For us. Because he. Endured. The hardest. Struggle. And won. So brothers and sisters. Endure.

In the faith. When the pressures mount. When the doubts creep in. Don't be surprised. Christianity is not. A day at the beach. Christian life is not a picnic.

[34 : 16] Amidst the wildflowers. Although we are going to have. Some of these picnics this summer. We hope you'll come. Ultimately. The Christian life is a race. To be run. But here's the message.

Of the gospel friends. It's a race. That's been won. So let us run. With joy. Together. In the spirit. Of grace.

Following Christ. Our forerunner. And our great reward. Let's pray. Oh Lord Jesus.

We pray. That you would send your spirit. And blow into our hearts. The deep encouragement. That we need. To hold fast.

In these days. Lord. Give us a very real sense. Of these warnings. And what's at stake. In following you. And God. Lift up our eyes. To the great joy.

[35 : 12] That we have in you. And most of all. Lord. Help us to see you. Our forerunner. And victor. Jesus.

We thank you. That in you. There is sufficient sacrifice. For sins. That there is fullness. Of your spirit. God. Help us. To do this together.

That we might encourage. One another. For the great race. Of faith. And God. I pray. That as a church. As we run this race. Lord. That the vision.

That our city would get. Is not of a bunch of. Grim. Self-determined. Religious. People. But of those who are glad. In Christ. And that they would catch.

The aroma. Of Christ. And that they too. Would be caught up. In your train. And place their trust in you. God.

[36 : 08] And that we would begin to see. The renewal. That we so long to see. Father. We pray this. In the name of Jesus. And in the power of your spirit. Amen.