

The Present Power of a Future Possession – Russ Kennedy / Tim Rech

Hebrews 10:32-39

Introduction

For most of our study of Hebrews we have seen Jesus decisively shown as better in all things. He is superior to the prophets, the angels, Moses, any high priest, and any sacrifice. There is no one like Jesus Christ.

But then in recent weeks as we have worked through chapter 10, the author has turned to our responsibilities in light of who Christ is and what He has done on our behalf.

Since we have confidence to approach God by the way Jesus has made as our sacrifice and as our high priest, verses 19-25 call us to continuously do three things. First, we are to draw near with a true heart to God in full assurance of faith that our consciences have been cleansed. Second, we are to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for the One who promises is faithful. We ought not waver – our faithful God can be trusted perfectly. The third is to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, which requires us to regularly meet together (hard to do otherwise). And when we meet, we are to encourage one another, and not to discourage each other. Because remember, we are to prepare for Jesus' return or going to him in our earthly death whichever comes first. Either way, it is not far away.

Verses 26-31 give us the danger of not obeying these three commands which is to go on deliberately sinning and essentially passing on the one and only offer of salvation from God therefore being left out in the open to face an angry and wrathful God. Please obey verses 19-25 and draw near to God, stop deliberately sinning, and be careful not to trifle with the living God.

Now it is clear that the original audience of Hebrews was dealing with something at the time. The details are not disclosed, but it seems they were facing severe persecution leading to a crisis of faith. They are tempted to turn back to the old, perhaps to Judaism. Hence the warnings given by the author throughout.

So, like he did back in chapter six, the author assures them again they are destined for better things. And he does this by taking them to the past to motivate them to a re-commitment to God's will through sacrificial love and good works by faith.

What are you facing today? Tempted to turn back? A look back in time may be for you as well.

We pickup in verses 32-34 ...

Noting the Excellence of their Past Conduct (v.32-34)

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ 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.

Memory is a good thing, for by it, we can revisit things useful. Unfortunately, our memories fail us. And this is yet another benefit of regularly gathering together – to remind each other where we have been and what we have experienced and more importantly, what God has done and is doing in Christ. Such memories inform what we face today. Many places in Scripture God says, “Believer, remember ...”

And when the author says, “*recall*” in verse 32, the sense is of an ongoing process and not a one-time remembrance. We need to remember over and over.

Its Characteristics (v.32)

Now look at what he shows them:

It was early in their Christian life - The words here convey that it came upon them after they believed, was connected to the fact of their believing and came soon after they believed.

It was a standing fast - They had a commitment to what was true and how that truth was to be lived regardless of the apparent consequences. They endured.

It was a conflict - Don't let the simplicity of these words fool you into thinking that this conflict was simple and easy. The description that follows shows how terrible a struggle it had become.

It was suffering - It cost them dearly in terms of pain and loss. It was dramatic and difficult, scarring deeply.

When they were young in the Lord, they endured a severe test of suffering.

Its Cost (v.33-34a)

And this suffering did not come without cost – lifelong cost. Listen to verses 33-34 closely. For these costs are not the experience of our lives today:

Spectacles in public - They were put up for public ridicule and scorn. They were exposed to slander and insults and persecution. There was a very real sense in which they were paraded around for their faith in ways that would cause great embarrassment. Just think how this can be done via social media today ...

Shared with persecuted - They chose to take their stand along with others who were suffering the same fiery trial. They did not turn away, nor ignore them nor leave them to suffer alone. They did not just admire them and honor them from a safe distance. They shared by standing alongside them.

Sympathy to prisoners - Even when it was costly to do so, they went and visited and identified themselves with those believers who were imprisoned for their faith. They identified themselves as being related to these *criminals*. And we know this was a present reality because the author will remind them at the end of this book to, “*remember those who are in prison*” (13:3)

Seizure of property - Their public testimony and sharing with suffering saints cost them their possessions, their homes, their livelihoods. We do not know whether it was confiscated by the government or seized by others. We only know that it left them physically impoverished and socially outcast. No more American Dream for them ...

Its Contrast (v 34)

A dark situation, was it not? Hard to comprehend. But even harder to comprehend was their response to the suffering, *persecution*, and loss associated with this darkness. The preacher of Hebrews says, “*you joyfully accepted*”. And this was not a sad suffering or one experienced grudgingly. Many Christians look like this ...

No, they accepted with joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and not dependent on a person’s external circumstances but upon an inner relationship with God

The word sense of joy here emphasizes the truth that “experiences of sorrow prepare for, and enlarge, the capacity for “joy” (same uses in John 16:20, Rom 5:3-4; 2 Cor 7:4; 8:2)

Any joy around here today?

Joy and gladness are vitally important to believers especially in times of suffering. In fact, in the economy of God, there is a direct connection between suffering and joy. I see this every time I see the gypsy and Borana believers overseas {give examples}.

Their joyful response reminds me of Acts 5:40-42, after Peter and the apostles were released from interrogation and threats by the religious leaders ...

40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

And where there is this joy, there is a strength of Christian character and a quality of faith. This life is being viewed biblically and correctly in view of the next life in heaven.

Now I ask myself (and you probably do too), why do I not have joy like this? Well, I can read this text and reason that it is because I do not suffer like they did. And that is because I live in the US where we do not have to suffer like that – must be God’s will that I live in this country and in this time, where Christians do not really suffer. Praise God, right? Question answered, let’s move on. But why does this answer not really satisfy the question?

Could it be that we are more “Americans” than we are “Christians”? Let’s face it, life in this country, compared to others, is an extravagant buffet. It is so easy to get swallowed by its freedoms and comforts. It’s so easy to rest in our safety. And do not forget our rights. We are Americans, right?

Now my flesh does not like it, and I suspect your does not either, but I believe the real answer to the question of why we do not suffer is we do not fully pursue God’s will for us. Today, how often do you share the gospel with unbelievers and especially where it might cost you? Defended Christ in ungodly situations? Spoke out about sin and unrighteousness? Put God and His priorities first in your life? Sacrificed your time, goals, and ambitions for another? Pointed to Christ exclusively as the Way, the Truth, and the Life?

Such suffering avoidance stunts our capacity for joy. Much to consider and a trip down memory lane to our early Christian life may be in order. Remember back then ...

Its Cause (v.34b)

Now what is the core reason for this joy in Hebrews 10? The answer is in last part of verse 34 where it says, "*since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*"

Such joy was not imposed upon them from the outside. "*You must be joyful!*" Nor was it achieved by a force of will. No, they accepted their terrible suffering with joy because of what they knew. They knew in Christ they had exchanged what they had, for something better, and something lasting.

They had something better ...

They believed in an obeying way that they had better possessions. The loss of all their earthly goods for the Name of Christ only caused their hearts to turn with rising gladness to treasure and value the things which no earthly means could destroy. They had their treasure in heaven and the earthly loss only freed happy hearts to run forward to take hold of it.

They had something lasting ...

They believed in an obeying way that they had eternal possessions. They understood by faith that all the world tends to grasp for and cling to and clutch at is fleeting, passing, decaying, rusting, and rotting. They had weighed each thing they owned in the balance of eternity and held fast to that eternal weight of glory with glad abandon.

Their joy came because of what they believed. Remember joy is more than just a feeling or emotion. It is a state of being that results from knowing and serving God. Joy may be an affection, but it bubbles like a spring in the pool of a heart believing the truth. It is a gift from God. O, that this was true of us - to be free from the grasp of material possessions and gripped by the better and eternal possessions that we can just see by faith.

Here is how saints of old and today think about *knowing*. Here's the key. You must have this confidence. It is the deep confidence about your future. That confidence frees you from fear and greed that kill love. It frees you from being someone who must have security and safety and ease and comfort. Where does this confidence, this knowing come from? It comes from Christ. It comes from understanding what He has done on the cross and in the resurrection. It rests in what He is doing now for us in heaven, and what He will do for us at the Second Coming. It is totally lost in the wonder of what Christ will do throughout eternity. It is a knowing confidence in Jesus, for all that we ever hope for is ours in Christ. We receive it, not by meriting it or earning it, but by trusting totally in Him. If we love it above all that earth offers, it is ours. So, when verse 34 says that the key to rising joy in the face of suffering and earthly loss is *knowing we have a better and lasting possession*, it means that we know this because of Christ. Jesus is the seal and the guarantee of our hope in all the promises of God. Ultimately, Jesus is the better and lasting possession. (Owen, Piper)

Also remember 10:19 *...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.* We always have confident access to God because of what Christ has done and is doing.

So, in pointing them to the past, he reminds them this was truly the best of times for them. No, not in the world's eyes. To the world, they were utter failures and people to be despised. But in God's eyes, their lives were beautiful – lives of obedience to him and sacrifice for Him and for people – people operating by faith with joy in their eyes and radiating from their hearts. It was their time to shine before man and before heaven, and they did.

Do you need to look back to your early Christian life today? Have you lost something along the way? One thing I have noticed in many Christians over time is they lose that joy, lose that enthusiasm. The

Christian life becomes a chore list (not necessarily drudgery but a list nonetheless) – routine sets in, once vibrant love for people becomes listless (obligatory), do not share their faith very often, don't speak up any more about the Lord in general, fellowship with other believers becomes complaints about life, aches and pains, and the condition of the world. And comfort looks, increasingly comfortable. Such desire for comfort leads us to say, *“Lord, I have gone far enough in this life to become like Christ – I am just what I am – not going any further”*

Why is that? What changed? Can be a lot of things. It is hard to be a Christian in this world (can be lonely and misunderstood), rejection (others do not want to hear the gospel), personal hurts with no end in sight in this life, fellow Christians let us down, aging bodies, some wrong doctrine allowed to take hold, etc. But at its core, the Christian has forgot what he or she knows about Christ and the reality of Him in day-to-day life.

If this is you, you have lost any joy you once had and are facing a crisis just like the original audience of Hebrews. Like them, your confidence in Christ has waned and you might be ready to toss it altogether. But hear the words of verses 35-39. They are meant to revive us and to keep us alert.

Hearing the Exhortation to Future Confidence (v.35-39)

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 is promised. ³⁷ For,

“Yet a little while, and the coming one 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 and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Its Caution (v.35)

“Don't throw your confidence away now!”, the preacher says. You have come this far, do not go back. And besides, the basis for your confidence back then (Christ) is still here. Nothing can or will change the reality of your better possession from verse 34, your possession is an abiding or enduring one. The reward is still ahead. You have simply lost sight of it.

Don't heed the temptation to throw away the very confidence that produced an other-worldly joy back in the glory days of your earlier Christian walk. Your very soul is at risk. Remember, the child of God will persevere us along this road of suffering and to its very end. Not to do so, questions the reality of your truly being in Christ. Your soul might be drifting.

Its Condition (v.36)

So turning away was not an option. What they really needed was endurance and perseverance and the same is true for us. Re-settle in your heart to do God's will again in full. Understand all over again that suffering is par for the course for the Christian and that better yet, so is the joy.

Also be aware that the path back to endurance is an assessment of the character of your walk. Drop any false doctrine you picked up over the years – examine yourself for sinful attitudes and habitual actions. Do you need to clear up a broken relationship? Make it right today.

Keep your confidence, endure, and persevere. The promised rewards are still ahead.

If we quit and fall in a heap now, what will happen to us when troubles on par with what our brothers and sisters are facing in other parts of the world, come to our door. Keeping our confidence and enduring in our walk with Christ defends us from present trouble and builds our character for harder things ahead.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, *“the joy of the LORD is your strength.”*

Its Consequence (v.35b, 36b)

So, do you see the method the author uses to stir up his readers to love and good works? To persevere in them and not throw away or discard their confidence as a disposable commodity? He motivates them in this way: the reward is sure (v.35b) and the promises will be received (v.36b).

These are not separate things. The reception of all that God promised to be for us in Christ, is our reward. The promises of God and the reward of Jesus are powerful motivations that draw us forward and heavenward in difficult times. This is the present power of a future possession. It enables glad acceptance and confident endurance in the midst of the great contest. It looks beyond the present exposure to insult and ridicule and opposition in great expectation. It accepts with joy, present loss and suffering, because it values its heavenly treasure. It reaches out with risk-taking love to share with Christians who suffer. And it sets itself to endure it all for the glory of its author and finisher, Jesus.

Its Content (v.36-38)

And from where does all this truth come from? The source is the Word of God. Verses 36-38 are a quote from Habakkuk 2:3-4.

If you recall, the prophet Habakkuk opens the book by complaining to God about the rampant unrighteousness in the land and God’s seeming non-response. Discouraging, right? But God responds and says in effect, “Don’t worry Habakkuk, am way ahead of you”. Quoting Habakkuk 1:5b where God says, *“For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.”* Yes, God’s judgment came about in the near term at the hands of the Chaldeans. It was hard for Habakkuk to accept. However, God was in control. He dealt with sin then and ultimately at the cross and delivered His people. Habakkuk simply needed to turn from his own resources, believe, trust, and accept with joy the suffering that would occur along the way to redemption. In short, God’s righteous were required to live by faith – not only in the past but today, and tomorrow. The same was true for the letter to the Hebrews and is true for us today.

So we are called to live by faith. How long? Well, for a little while (v 37) until He comes right on time, or we go to Him first in death. It will not be long – this life is flying by, right?

Its Comfort (v 39)

And the author closes this text in verse 39 by reassuring them. He again feels sure of better things for them. They are not the “shrink-back” type of people because they live by faith – faith that will carry them to the end of the saving of their souls. Would he have said the same about us?

Reflect and Respond

What will we lose if we do not hear and heed the call here?

We will little by little no longer really be walking by faith. Our trust in Christ and holding fast to His promises fades slowly away in the press of daily life.

We will lose confidence that Christ’s promises are better possessions than all else we actually possess. So in the loss of good things we may well lose the best thing.

We will lose our habit of Biblically gathering to encourage and exhort one another. So the danger escalates from we will respond wrong to suffering to we will deliberately and defiantly go on sinning.

We will lessen our love and lose our ministry to Christian sufferers. We will not risk our homes, our cars, our children to identify with the persecuted. The great, horrible loss is that we will no longer do sacrificial deeds of love.

So the question is: will we embrace this? Will we bank all our future in trust in Jesus? Will we wake up from the trance of this stupefying world and see and believe and rejoice and love? And will we suffer with joy?

What Kind of Joy

*Anybody in their right mind
Would've given up their preaching and headed for home
They've been warned a hundred times
But something inside them keeps giving them hope
And just when you think they'd be crying
Instead of the tears, there's joy in their eyes*

*What kind of joy is this
That counts it a blessing to suffer
What kind of joy is this
That gives the prisoner his song
What kind of joy could stare death in the face
And see it as sweet victory
This is the joy of a soul that's forgiven and free*

Anybody else with his pain

*Would want to shake their fist at heaven
And give up the fight
'Cause trouble had been Paul's middle name
Ever since he'd been captured by God's blinding light
But just when his hope should be dying
If you listen you'll hear him singing a song*

*What kind of joy is this
That counts it a blessing to suffer
What kind of joy is this
That gives the prisoner his song
What kind of joy could stare death in the face
And see it as sweet victory
This is the joy of a soul that's forgiven and free*

*What kind of joy is this
The Father has promised his children
What kind of joy is this
That Jesus has come to reveal
What kind of joy could give hope in this world
To someone just like you and me
This is the joy of a soul that's forgiven and free
I've found this joy for my soul is forgiven and free*

Steven Curtis Chapman, For the Sake of the Call, 1990

