**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (32): The Book Of Better Things**

**“A Well-Timed Word Of Encouragement”**

**Hebrews 10:32-39**

**January 26, 2025**

As I have said on numerous occasions, encouragement is something *everyone can do*. And encouragement is something *everyone must have*. Every single Christian is called upon to encourage others. Contrary to what you may be thinking, you are no exception. The reason I know this is because I have been reading the book of Hebrews (as I hope you have been too).

The author of this letter is addressing the entire Christian community when he says, “But *encourage one another daily*, as long as it is still called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (3:13). He gave the same exhortation earlier in Chapter 10; “*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching*” (v. 25).

There are times when even the strongest of saints needs encouragement. And such encouragement is even more uplifting when it is well-timed encouragement. As we read in Proverbs; “*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances*” (25:11, NASB). That’s the beauty and value of the verses before us today (10:32-39).

Our author has just warned his readers about the tragic fate of an apostate (10:26-31). As we have seen, there were some who were in danger of abandoning their church gatherings and repudiating Christ. How? By trampling the Son of God underfoot, and by profaning the blood of the covenant, and by insulting the Spirit of grace (v. 29). For such people, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of God’s righteous judgment (v. 27).

But now our author shifts gears. Like the previous warning (6:4-6), so this warning is followed by words of reassurance and encouragement. He begins by *reminding them* of their courageous faith in the past; they “*endured in a great conflict full of suffering*” (vv. 32-34). Then he *urges them* to endure the pressures and trials they are currently experiencing (vv. 35-36). Finally, he *assures them* he has every expectation they will press on in faith and thus be saved (vv. 37-39).

**A. The Reminder of Their Enduring Faith in the Past (10:32-34):** “*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions*” (NIV, 2015). There are a number of important questions that must be asked in light of these amazing verses.

**1Q.**  What were “*those earlier days*?” (v. 32a) **A.** They were the days immediately following their enthusiastic response to the gospel, which is presumably what is meant by “*after you had received the light . . .*” That “light” of God’s saving grace shone in their darkened hearts and minds, enabling them to see the beauty of the saving work of Christ. That’s when things began to get *worse* for these readers, not better. That’s when they were subjected to the public insult and persecution our author is referencing.

**2Q.** Where did this opposition come from? **A.** This wasn’t an angry group of neighbors showing up on their front porch because they didn’t like the bumper stickers on their cars. Nor had a group of disgruntled co-workers harassed them in the workplace. No – this was official, political opposition on the part of the governing powers and civil authorities. Some, we are told, were imprisoned (v. 31).

**3Q.** How specifically had they “*endured in a great conflict full of suffering*” (v. 32b)?

**A.** They didn’t hide, or run away, as cowards so often do. They fought this conflict on three fronts: **(a)** Sometimes they “*were publicly exposed to insult*.” They were slandered. Their names were dragged through the mud. They were falsely accused. They were mocked and ridiculed for their faith. This was verbal abuse at its worst. In Hebrews 13:13 the author will use the same word to describe the insult, or the “*reproach*” (ESV) or the “*disgrace*” (NIV) that the Lord Jesus himself endured. These believers so identified with Christ that they endured the same humiliation which He had suffered.

**(b)** Sometimes they were exposed to “*persecution*.” They were beaten; they were deprived of food and housing. They were thrown into prison without any probable cause. Evidently the non-Christian world that surrounded them hated their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and was doing everything possible to snuff them out. We don’t know what provoked this persecution, but whatever it was, it was deemed “politically incorrect.” The civil authorities had taken action to silence them.

**(c)** At other times “*they stood side by side”* (v. 33, NIV) or were“*partners*” (ESV) with those who were so treated. Instead of keeping their distance, or turning away in fear, they stood with them. They embraced them in Christian solidarity. They said to those who were persecuting their fellow Christians, “these are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We stand with them. We are not afraid to let you know we are “partners” with them.”

The word translated “partners” (ESV) is the Greek word for “fellowship.” When we talk about fellowship today, we usually mean having coffee with fellow Christians, or sharing a meal together, or sitting next to one another during our Q and A’s. But for the Hebrew Christians it meant much more. It went deeper than that. Their “fellowship” displayed itself in their open and willing identification with members of their church family who were suffering the most.

**4Q.** How did this translate into action, and what was the consequence? **A.** They “*suffered along with*” (NIV), or had “*compassion on*” those in prison (ESV), and “*joyfully accepted the confiscation of their own property* . . .” (v. 34a). Imagine that! When the light of God’s grace shone in their hearts, their lives began to change. There was a *transformation* which moved them from being selfish and self-protective to being *compassionate*. They were so burdened by the burdens of others that they couldn’t remain silent or keep still. This led them to step out of their “bubble” and go to the prisons where their brethren were being held – perhaps to bring them food and warm clothing, but always to encourage them, and undoubtedly to pray for them. They made no secret of the fact that they were Christians.

What happened next isn’t all that surprising. The authorities stepped in, went to the homes of these Christians, and “*confiscated*” their property (NIV) or “*seized*” their property (NASB), or “*plundered*” their property (ESV). We don’t know exactly how this happened, or if it involved the wholesale destruction of everything they had worked so hard to get, but they *suffered great loss*. The *real* shocker is how they responded: they *joyfully accepted* the loss of everything they had (v. 34 b).

**5Q.** How is this response possible? **A.** It *isn’t* possible unless the saving grace of God enables us to know that the eternal glory which God has promised is better and more lasting than anything we could own in this life. That’s the answer that is found in the last part of verse 34 – “*because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions*.” This wasn’t some sort of wishful thinking – they *knew* it. When their money was being looted and their houses were burning to the ground, they were confident they had a “*better possession*” and an “*abiding one*” (ESV). In the words of F. F. Bruce, “The eternal inheritance laid up for them was so real in their eyes that they could lightheartedly bid farewell to material possessions, which were short lived in any case” (The Epistle to the Hebrews). Only God’s soul-saving grace can free us from being enslaved to things, money, possessions, and property!

**B. The Call to Enduring Faith (10:35-36):** “*So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised*.” The basis for this exhortation is their past record of enduring faith. This becomes evident by the little word “*so*” at the beginning of verse 35. “*So*,” our author says, since you showed such courageous faith in the past, do not abandon it now. What you need is patient endurance. You must remain loyal and steadfast, and not give up doing God’s will (which *does* involve suffering).

In the book of Hebrews, “*confidence*” is a synonym for “*faith,*” as in 3:6; “*And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory*.” This same idea is expressed in Hebrews 4:14: “*. . . let us hold firmly to the faith we profess*,” (literally, our “confidence”). Maintaining such faith, says our author, “*will be richly rewarded*.”

**Q.** In what sense? **A.** Persevering faith not only reveals that we are genuinely part of God’s household (Cf. 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23; 1 John 2:19), it assures us that we will receive our *promised* heavenly reward, described earlier as entering God’s rest (4:1, 9). As we have seen throughout our studies in Hebrews, we are saved by persevering faith, just as Jesus said; “*He who stands firm to the end will be saved*” (Mark 13:13), and as Paul taught; “*By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I have preached to you*”

(1 Cor. 15:2).

**C. The Author’s Confident Expectation (vv. 37-39):** “*For ‘in just a little while, he who is coming will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.’ But we not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved*.”

In verses 37-38, our author draws upon two Old Testament passages to support his call for enduring faith. The words, “*In just a little while*” are from Isaiah 26:20, and may have been used because they referred to the soon coming of the LORD *in judgment* of His rebellious people (Isa. 26:21). Then the author quotes from Habakkuk 2:3 to reinforce the same idea (v. 37b): “*He who is coming will come and will not delay*” refers to Christ’s return (Cf. Heb. 9:28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:4, 9).

Then in verse 38, our author quotes from Habakkuk 2:4, which contrasts the two responses to the promise of Christ’s return: *those who are righteous* live by faith and will be saved. However, those in whom He takes no pleasure are *those who shrink back*; meaning, they retreat or fall away into unbelief, which is precisely what our author has been warning against (2:1-3; 3:6-4:13; 6:4-6; 10:26-31). What awaits them is God’s righteous judgment on that final day.

Finally, this section closes with “a ringing affirmation of confidence” (Leon Morris) in which the author identifies himself with his readers. He sees only two groups of people in verse 39. On the one hand there are those who *do not have* saving faith and thus eventually fall away (“shrink back”) into destruction. On the other hand, there are those who do *have* saving faith and thus will persevere and receive their heavenly reward. *He doesn’t envision a third group*; those who have saving faith and later fall away or apostatize.

For this we can only give thanks and praise to the God of grace! He *preserves His people from falling*. That’s the reason for our author’s confidence when he says, “*We do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved*.” We praise God for the encouraging and reassuring truth: What God starts, He finishes!

Yes, encouragement is something everyone can (and should) do. Encouragement is something everyone must have. When we encourage one another, we are putting one another in touch with the reality of God’s steadfast, preserving love and His purpose for our lives.

Encouragement begins with a *commitment* to reach out and touch someone who is struggling – just as our author has modeled for his readers – and for us: “*You need patient endurance . . . don’t throw away what you know to be true . . ..* Never doubt in the darkness what God has revealed in the light. Press on . . . for in the end, you, too, will be richly rewarded!

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Hallelujah! What a Friend!

Saving, helping, keeping, loving,

He is with me to the end.