

BETTER
Better For Worse
Hebrews 10:32-39

Every wedding that I have ever performed (and most that I have witnessed) use the following words to establish a permanent commitment between lovers.

I ____ take you ____ to be my wedded (wife/husband), to have and to hold, from this day forward, **for better for worse**, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

It makes perfect sense that every marriage should start with these powerful words. **They address the realities of life that every marriage WILL face. These words will scare you, stretch you, and even scar you at times in your married life.** Now, when Jesus invited us into a relationship with himself, he made the exclusive nature of that relationship very CLEAR to all of us. He is faithful to us NO MATTER WHAT comes; good or bad, for better for worse. But Jesus also told his followers to “take up their cross and follow” him NO MATTER WHAT he leads them through! That is the essence of life with Christ. He expects his disciples to follow in his footsteps as he guides them along. He is our heavenly husband that loves and leads us perfectly! Now, I have heard some husbands say that their wife is their better half (funny, but I don’t remember ever hearing a wife say this), but when it comes to our covenant relationship with Jesus, Christ is ALWAYS the BETTER HALF! **However, he is never a Better Half that criticizes and complains about us; instead, he offers every aspect of himself to us for the sake of our betterment! [I have seen this done by my wife in our relationship, so I know that my Lord is able to do this perfectly!] I am so glad, because I need his faithful love and leadership on a daily basis. Here is why.**

The truth is, some believers grow weary and discouraged in their daily Christian life. **[My own experience at times this year!] What’s more; some believers may even STRAY from Christ for a period of time in their Christian life. (This grieves the heart of God, and God’s discipline is guaranteed for those who stray!) But some may ask, if Christ is truly BETTER in every way, then why would a person who belongs to Jesus EVER stray away from or grow discouraged with him? The answer is of course not simple, but it does have a common ROOT: A failure in FAITH. We drift or grow discouraged because in some way we have failed to ACT in faith, knowing that Jesus is working to make what is worse better in our lives.**

The Christian life is a life of faith from start to finish. We are saved by grace through faith. We walk by faith. We grow by faith. We develop an intimate relationship with God by faith. We change the world by faith. When we FAIL to live by faith, then we will naturally either grow discouraged in our walk with Christ or even stray away from him FOR A TIME in apathy, disobedience, and sin. Faith MATTERS greatly because it affects EVERYTHING in our Christian life!

Now be warned, some who stray away from Christ do so because they never belonged to him in the first place. They were like the shallow or rocky soil that took the seed in just enough for it to grow, but not enough for it to take root and push beyond the thorns of trouble or the temptations of pleasure. John wrote in **1 John 2:19** that “these left us to show that they were never really of us in the first place!” Oh, my prayer is that you will not be one of those pretending professors who does not know Christ, and maybe does not even know that he does not know Christ! Stay out of the GRAY! Know that you know him! But not all who stray are pretending professors. I believe that much of the reason why some people lose heart or stray away from Christ is because they have failed to understand or accept the fact that life with Jesus involves something unpleasant.

Faith accepts suffering as a part of the Christian life.

Now, I know that I have taught you this principle before, but I am teaching it again today because I NEED IT and because I want you to know how to protect your Christian walk from drift and discouragement. Your ability to accept the fact that your life with Christ WILL INCLUDE seasons of “FOR BETTER and FOR WORSE” is ESSENTIAL to your spiritual health! We live in a broken world, and God wants to display his glory in that broken world through the lives of his children as they encounter difficulties with faith. **Will you trust him in times of trial?** This is why Jesus made it clear to us that we would face persecution and trouble, even as a DIRECT RESULT of our relationship with him. **In fact, Jesus made it clear that ALL of his promises to us will INCLUDE suffering on this side of the grave.** He told Peter that “everyone who gave up houses or land or relationships for him would receive IN THIS LIFE a hundred-fold houses and land and relationships . . . WITH persecution!” Jesus never soft-sold his promises. If Jesus is truly better, than he is worth what it costs to follow him! This is why the writer of Hebrews said these words to the Christians of his day: **Hebrew 10:32-34a NLT**

32 Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. 33 Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. 34 You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy.

There is a fantastic world of truth in that passage, and I want you to spend some time on it yourself during this week, but today I want to simply highlight the fact that people of faith KNOW that they will go through difficulties for the sake of their Savior. First, they know this because Christ told them so! **Second, they realize that the better life that Christ promises CANNOT be experienced apart from suffering.** This is a fact of life that we all instinctively know. Every athlete accepts the fact that suffering is a part of all success. You will not become a better athlete without pain. In the same way, every marriage is strengthened by the troubles and

sorrows that the couple experiences and not just by the joys that they share. **Scripture affirms that pain and suffering are an essential part of our preparation for God's use because it TRAINS US to depend on him for our strength and support. We tend to look to ourselves in times of success.**

Now, before you conclude that you are just gonna avoid giving your life to Jesus if it is going to involve all of this pain and difficulty, let me remind you of a fact that you already know: **Suffering is already a part of your life NO MATTER WHAT, so WHY WASTE IT?** Why would you want to experience the pain of living in a broken world without the PURPOSE and VALUE that Christ can bring to it? I love the fact that Christ has not yet wasted one single moment of suffering that I have gone through in my life. He has used it to instruct me, discipline me, or strengthen me for his use in some way. **I am BETTER because of the purposeful pain that God has allowed in my life.** I have had to TRUST him in that. **Do you trust God with your present pain, or is your lack of faith causing you to grow discouraged or even tempting you to DRIFT away?** Maybe you need to embrace the fact that suffering is a part of this present life. But faith does better than simply accepting hard truth.

Faith perseveres to receive God's promises.

Faith believes God in the midst of suffering in order to experience the joy of receiving the promises that Christ has made to us. Perseverance is defined as **one who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.** They are WORTH the trouble that accompanies them because they are better promises. We can see this truth in the second half of today's passage: **Hebrews 10:34b-39 NLT**

34 You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever. 35 So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! 36 Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. 37 "For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. 38 And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away." 39 But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.

The first fact of this passage is that TRUE FAITH perseveres. I am absolutely certain that people of faith WILL persevere in their lives. They may have seasons of doubt and failure, but they will always push through. Since Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith, then he will be certain to COMPLETE what he has BEGUN in us! This is why the writer finished his thought with the words, **"We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved!"** Your Better Half has you! But this does not exempt you from responsibility. You are called to live by faith and persevere through trouble in

order to receive his promises. There are a couple of things that you should realize about this.

First, you cannot BELIEVE his promises if you do not KNOW what they are! I wonder, are you spending enough time in his word to even know what are the promises that I am talking about? Faith is not wishful thinking; it is reliance on the word and will and power of God. But if you are not spending time with Christ in his word, then you are missing out on a world of glorious expectations that you ought to have with regard to your life in Christ. He speaks through his Word to us. My wife and I have learned this together in my years as a pastor here at CHC. In one of our most trying periods, we read Beth Moore's book **Believing God** together, and it helped us to refocus on what it means to trust God to fulfill his promises for us. As she reminded us of so many promises in God's word, she encouraged us to stand on them by saying out loud: **"God is who he says he is. God can do what he says he can do. I am who God says I am. I can do all things through Christ. God's word is alive and active in me!"** We embraced those truths together, and God used it to carry us through a great season of struggle!

Second, you will never experience the fulfillment of those promises if you do not CONTINUE to do God's will through times of difficulty. Some of you give up before you see God show up in a big way. The season of pain is a TRYING TIME. (A time of trial that is intended to stretch and test your willingness to BELIEVE GOD even when he does not seem present!) There is no magic dust for this. Faith simply endures. Beyond this, you should know that there are some promises that you will only receive IN PART from the Lord while on this earth. God uses our trials to help prepare us inwardly for what we will one day experience outwardly. We simply could not handle some of the promises that our transformed bodies will be able to joyfully embrace. This is what allowed the believers who have inspired us in the scriptures to keep going in spite of overwhelming opposition in their lives. They persevered in believing to the very end. **Hebrews 11:13 NLT**

13 All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.

Now, they did receive and see SOME of what God promised, but not ALL of what he promised. Some of God's people saw great miracles and experienced great deliverance. That same God is still alive and working today! But others DID NOT experience the miracles or deliverance that they desired. Now, that same God was still SOVEREIGNLY working FOR HIS OWN GLORY in their circumstances. And they trusted him for BETTER and for WORSE. **Hebrews 11:33-39 NLT**

33 By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was

turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. 35 Women received their loved ones back again from death. **But others** were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a **better life** AFTER the resurrection. 36 Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. 37 Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. 38 They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. 39 **All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.**

These people of faith are an inspiration to us because they believed God no matter what! They may not have experienced a miracle outwardly, but their character and life was an inward miracle of grace that gave God great glory! This is because of another practical aspect of a faith-driven life.

All faith-driven people are VISIONARIES that willingly forsake TODAY'S pleasures for the reward of TOMORROW'S promises. Moses was a prime example of this in the Old Testament. He could have lived the high life in Pharaoh's palace if had so desired, but he chose a much harder route. That made all the difference.

Hebrews 11:24-26 NLT

24 It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He thought it was **better to suffer for the sake of Christ** than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was **looking ahead** to his great reward.

Only faith could allow someone to see that suffering for Christ was BETTER than all of the wealth that Egypt could afford for a short life. **Moses chose this by faith before he ever experienced his FIRST miracle.** He would never have led the children of Israel out of Egypt or seen the parting of the Red Sea apart from this decision to walk by faith in his life. **Are you willing to lay aside your desire for wealth or pleasure or power today and step into suffering for the sake of your Savior before he shows you a miracle?** You will when you "GROW UP!" Sadly, some of us are more like the children of Israel who were whining about their wilderness travels and begging for the leeks and onions that they ate as slaves in Egypt. The prophet Jeremiah wrote about the way that the Israelites dishonored and strayed from God in a poignant passage: **Jeremiah 2:5, 13 NLT**

5 This is what the LORD says: "What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves. ... 13 "For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me--the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!

My friend, are you beginning to return to those OLD SOURCES of limited satisfaction instead of staying close to the Fountain of Living Water that flows within you? They will not satisfy you any more today than they did when you were enslaved by them! I plead with you to TRUST the One who promises to supply your every need according to his perfect will. You need to heed the words of Hebrews and REMEMBER how you trusted Christ when you FIRST met him. He was more than sufficient to carry you through some of your hardest trials then. He is still able.

There is one other fact about a faith-driven life that chooses to trust God for better and for worse that you should know: **Your faith is what PLEASES God the most.** He loves it when his children trust him IN SPITE of circumstances.

Hebrews 11:6 NLT

6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

The only way that you will EVER see the power of God IN your life AND give God pleasure WITH your life is through faith. He delights in answering his children's prayers and meeting their needs by his divine power when they truly trust him. **The greatest joy of faith is simply the RELATIONSHIP with God that it creates!** In fact, it is about faith-filled believers that he says the following: **Hebrews 11:14-16 NLT**

14 Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. 15 If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. 16 But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Did you catch that? God is NOT ASHAMED to be called their God! It is just this kind of people that bring God the most glory. They demonstrate an intimate trust in God no matter what is going on around them, they firmly believe that God is ABLE to do whatever he sovereignly CHOOSES to do, and they REST in that confidence. I long for you and I to do the same thing: ACCEPT suffering as a part of this present life, and PERSEVERE to receive God's better promises.

One day our faith will COMPLETELY be sight. I believe that with all of my heart. But until that day, I am learning to trust God to work in and through my life no matter what comes to give me BETTER FOR WORSE. He is who he says he is, I am who he says I am, and he can do what he says he can do. Case closed!

Let's pray.