

“We Will Not Bow”

(Hebrews 10:32-39)

Introduction

➤ For decades now, I have used the Sunday around the 4th of July to preach a “state of the church address.” My desire is to highlight or expose some prevalent threat against the church. In past years, I have preached on the topics of abortion, homosexuality, Mormonism, humanism, universalism, submitting to government, and the idolatry of family (etc.).

In recent years, this tradition has been getting easier and more difficult at the same time. It is easier in that, as our culture continues to spiral into moral depravity (Rom. 1:18-32), the number of topics to choose from seems to be ever increasing (e.g., gender issues (transitioning/dysphoria), transsexuality (transvestism), wokeism, post-postmodernism, anti-Christian society, etc.). This is also the reason why picking a topic is more difficult – there are so many topics from which to choose. Ask a variety of pastors (or Christians) what they think is “the greatest threat to the church” and you are likely to get a variety of different and impassioned answers.

The truth is, there are many different threats against the church today (different threats affecting different churches in different areas), and looming threats that seem to be coming on the horizon. This is the reason why I decided to preach a message that envelops them all. Rather than address a specific threat, this sermon addresses what we (as Christians) must do with any and every threat. For we are called to persevere in our faith, to remain faithful to Christ, no matter the challenge nor consequence.

Unfortunately, all too many professing Christians and church leaders all too quickly morph their Christian views and convictions to fit the culture in which they live. For example: when the culture has a negative view of church, they stop going to church; when the culture says they do not want to hear about Jesus (or the Gospel), they stop evangelizing; when the culture rejects biblical truth, they set aside their Bibles; when the culture embraces and promotes sexual immorality, they accept it; when the culture demands the right to kill preborn babies, they are silent; when the culture celebrates sin, they join in the unholy celebration.

➤ The passage before us today, Hebrews 10:32-39, is a much-needed call for Christians to persevere in their faith, remaining faithful to Christ, and not to give in to sinful world around them. We ought not to jump into the last passage of Hebrews ten without having at least a little understanding of the context. The book of Hebrews contains many stern admonitions for believers to carefully consider and faithfully obey. Most notably are the “Five Warnings” that appear throughout the book (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29). Perhaps the sharpest and clearest warning is found in the verse that precedes our passage this morning:

Heb 10:31 ~ “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

These warnings serve as sobering wakeup calls for professing Christians who are not faithfully striving to live in and for Christ. It is not enough to simply call yourself a Christian. Just because a person goes to church, owns a Bible, says Christian things, or affirms Christian morals does not mean that they are genuinely saved. A person can profess Christ and not possess Christ. Throughout Scripture we encounter unbelievers as well as false believers.

Matt 7:21-23 ~ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

➤ Such warnings ought to drive us to our knees in prayerful and biblical self-examination (1Cor.11:28; 2Cor.13:5). For true Christians are not Christians in name only (i.e., nominal Christians, carnal Christians). Though they stumble in the Christian walk, true Christians will not ultimately fall away from Christ (1Jn.2:19). True Christians, by God’s saving grace and sovereign love, will persevere to the end.

➤ Also throughout the book of Hebrews are many encouragements and exhortations (some of the most inspiring and assuring verses in all of Scripture). A couple of my personal favorites are:

Heb 2:18 ~ “For because He Himself [Jesus] has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”

Heb 4:16 ~ “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

➤ The passage before us this morning contains both admonitions and exhortations, warnings and encouragements. As with all Scripture, this passage is particularly applicable for us today and necessary for our edification and perseverance.

Heb 10:32-39 ~ “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For 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.

³⁵Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ ³⁹But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

➤ This passage exhorts all Christians to persevere in their faith, in their faithfulness to Christ, by doing two important steps.

I. Remember your faithfulness to Christ in the beginning (vs.32-34)

➤ The first command is to “*recall*” (*anamimnēskō*; lit. to bring to mind, remember) the “*former days*” (vs.32). This is not a call to reflect on “the good old days” or to simply reminisce about the past. Here there is a specific recollection they were to have in mind: “*when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings*” (vs.32). To be “*enlightened*” (*phōtizō*; vs.32; cf. Heb.6:4) indicates that these Christians had at least heard, understand and embraced the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Heb.10:26). They later demonstrated their faith in Christ by suffering persecution because of their faith.

Simply put, they were to (intentionally and carefully) remember the persecution they suffered for being a Christian. For they had already “*endured*” (*hypomenō*; lit. to remain/stay under) many trials and hardships for Christ. This was no small or light hardship, but “*a hard struggle with sufferings*” (vs.32). The Greek word translated “*struggle*” (*athlēsis*) is from where our English words “athlete” and “athletic” are derived. The word conveys a combat or conflict, like two boxers fighting in a ring or gladiators fighting in the Roman Coliseum. Clearly, this battle was not easily fought as it is noted to be “*a hard*” (*polys*; difficult or great) struggle “*with sufferings*” (*pathēma*; vs.32).

➤ In verses 33-34 we find some very specific examples of what they suffered. First, some were “*publicly exposed to reproach and affliction*” and others were “*partners with those so treated*” (vs.33). Whether by firsthand experience or by association, they endured “*reproach*” (*oneidismos*; insults and abuse) and “*affliction*” (*thlipsis*; pressure, tribulation) for their faith. To make matters worse, this occurred in

public for all to see. The Greek word translated “*publicly exposed*” (*theatrizō*; Eng. “theater”) may literally refer to an actual theater, where actors performed, used to here as a public courtroom to expose, ridicule, and punish those who believed in Jesus as the Christ (1Cor.4:9).

Second, we see that they “*had compassion on those in prison*” (vs.34). While this may not at first sound as painful as the previous one, we must remember that showing kindness to a prisoner (Matt.25:36), or being associated with one, could result in being thrown into prison with him. These people did not forsake those who were imprisoned for their faith, but had “*compassion*” (*sympatheō*; “sympathy”) on them – at risk of suffering their same consequence.

Third, whether by unofficial (civilian) looters, or by official (legal) seizure, these Christians “*joyfully accepted*” (*chara prosdechomai*) “*the plundering of [their] property*” (*harpagē hyparchō*; vs.34). When their material possessions were taken, or destroyed, because of their allegiance to Jesus Christ, rather than retaliate or fall into despair they accepted this persecution as a joyful part of what it meant to be a follower of Christ.

Acts 5:40-41 ~ “and when they [the Sanhedrin] had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” (see Acts 16:24-25)

James 1:2-4 ~ “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (see Rom.5:3)

➤ How could they, how did they, suffer so greatly and yet so joyfully? Reading on, we find the answer: “*since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one*” (vs.34). This is a clear reference to the reality and eternality of heaven, which awaits all who are true (faithful) followers of Christ. For the true Christian, persevering through suffering (especially persecution) is joyful because, among other reasons, it shows that his/her faith is genuine and strong. This assurance (“*confidence*”, vs.35) is a great gift to believers as they seek to be pleasing and honoring to Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-5 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Phil 3:8-11 ~ “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

➤ This kind of Christian persecution was normative for New Testament Christians in the first century – and for many centuries after, and still today in many places in the world. But this has almost always been the norm for God’s people, even the Old Testament saints:

Heb 11:35-40 ~ “... Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. ³⁹And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

Persecution

“³⁵... Some were tortured [*tympanizō*; “tympani” to be stretched out like a drum and beaten, sometimes to death], refusing to accept release... ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.”

Martyrdom

“³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword.”

Oppression

“³⁷... They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated [*kakoucheō*; to suffer evil, to be tormented] – ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

The reason

“³⁹And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

Heb 11:35 ~ “... so that they might rise again to a better life.”

Heb 10:34 ~ *“since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one”* (vs.34).

Rom 8:18 ~ “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

1 Peter 1:6-9 ~ “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials ... you believe in [Jesus Christ] and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

➤ As Americans, it can be difficult (although increasingly less difficult) for us to imagine truly suffering persecution for our faith Christ. I think it is important to point out that there is a difference between persecution and opposition. To be sure opposition can lead to persecution, but I do not think they are essentially the same thing. For example, someone simply disagreeing with your beliefs does not constitute persecution. Nor is it persecution when someone lives contrary to your values (e.g., hearing someone say “Happy Holidays” or “Seasons Greetings” does not qualify as Christian persecution). I would even go so far as to say that the removal of a blessing or privilege does not necessarily qualify as persecution (e.g., removing prayer from school, making fun of Christians on TV shows, movies, social media). These serve as evidence of opposition – that our culture, society or culture is opposed to our Christian beliefs – but technically not persecution (especially not the persecution we see that God’s people suffered (see 2 Cor.11:23-27; Acts 9:1-2; 20:22-23).

The truth is, most of us know very little of what it means to actually be persecuted for Christ. 1) How many of us can honestly say that we have suffered persecution in the form of intense suffering or personal loss because of our faith in Christ (i.e., imprisonment, torture, confiscation or destruction of possessions and property)? 2) How many of us have truly experienced hostile and cruel oppression because of our faith in Christ (i.e., publicly ridiculed, flogged, tormented)? 3) How many Christians do we personally know (family members and friends) who have been martyred for their faith in Christ?

We must be ready, ever-prepared, for suffering (1Pet.4:12). No wise person thinks he can prepare for a storm in the midst of a storm.

✓ Illust: “The followers of Jesus Christ have always faced the world’s hostility. From the inception of the church, the apostles and those closely associated with them endured intense persecution. They were ridiculed, scorned, denounced, hunted, arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Many even paid the ultimate price, giving their lives as martyrs for the sake of their Savior. A brief survey of ancient

Christian tradition reveals that Peter, Andrew, and James the son of Alphaeus were all crucified; Bartholomew was whipped to death and then crucified; James the son of Zebedee was beheaded, as was Paul; Thomas was stabbed with spears; Mark was dragged to death through the streets of Alexandria; and James the half-brother of Jesus was stoned by order of the Sanhedrin. Philip was also stoned to death. Others, including Matthew, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus, Timothy, and Stephen, were also killed for their unwavering commitment to the Lord” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John*; 16:1-11).

1 Peter 4:12-16 ~ “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” (see Phil.3:8-11)

2 Tim 3:12-13 ~ “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (see Acts 14:22)

- We are called to remember our past faithfulness, enduring opposition, oppression, and persecution for Christ. The original readers of the book of Hebrews had withstood severe trials, they stood their ground (together) when there was immense pressure and opportunity to forsake their faith. In comparison, our sufferings for Christ may be relatively small but recalling what we have endured for Christ – by His strength and grace – can encourage us to remain faithful to Him; even as persecution continues or intensifies.

2. Resolve to be faithful to Christ to the end (vs.35-39)

- While we are called to remember our past faithfulness to Christ, we are also exhorted to be resolute in our faithfulness to Christ to the very end. Again, remembering our past faithfulness to Christ is not merely “a walk down memory lane.” It is for the purpose of perseverance. Perseverance keeps us devoted and obedient to Christ, and it keeps us from sinning against and falling away from Christ. Perseverance does not save us, but it is an essential part of what it means to be saved.

Mark 13:13 ~ “And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures [*hypomenō*; “endured” Heb.10:32] to the end will be saved.” (see Matt.10:22; 24:13)

James 1:12 ~ “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast [*hypomenō*] under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (see Rom.5:3-4; 12:12; 2Pet.1:6)

2 Thess 1:4 ~ “Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness [*hypomonē*] and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring [*anechōmai*].”

- This is what the writer of Hebrews was referring to when he wrote: “*Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward*” (vs.35). This “*confidence*” (*parrēsia*; assurance, boldness) comes from knowing that your faith has been tested and proven by trials and temptations.
- Again, perseverance (or endurance) cannot save but those who are truly saved will persevere (endure). We see this in verse thirty-six: “*For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised*” (vs.36). To have “*endurance*” (*hypomonē*; n. of vs.32; lit. to stay under) is remaining under a hardship or trial without compromise or sin. It can be active (as in persisting to do good even when facing adversaries or difficulties) or passive (as in patiently bearing up under pain or sorrow).

To prove his point, the author cites various passages in the Old Testament: “*For, ‘Yet a little while [Is.26:20], and the coming one will come and will not delay [Hab.2:3]; ³⁸but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him [Hab.2:4]’*” (vs.37-38; see Rom.1:17; Gal.3:11). It is a relatively short time before the Second Coming of Christ. The Christian’s suffering will not last forever, but his/her salvation will.

It should be very sobering to read that God “*has no pleasure*” in faithless or fake Christians (vs.38; *ou eudokeō*). The Christian’s ultimate desire is to be pleasing to God. Those without faith, and those who’s “faith” does not endure, are not pleasing to God and face the eternal condemnation of His holy displeasure.

Heb 11:6 ~ “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

➤ True Christians do not commit apostasy (1Jn.2:19), though they may stumble and fall they will not ultimately fall away from Christ (e.g., Peter [Matt.26:69-75; Lk.22:54-62; Jn.18:15-18, 25-27]; see Jms.3:2). True Christians persevere in their faith, even through times of severe testing and trials. Those who are false believers – who profess Christ but do not possess Christ – have no saving faith and therefore will not persevere to the end.

1 John 2:19 ~ “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

Ps 37:23-24 ~ “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; ²⁴though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.” (see Phil.1:6)

John 10:27-30 ~ “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one.” (see Jn.6:39, 44; 17:12;

➤ For true Christians, however, “*we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls*” (vs.39). The proof of our faith is in its veracity and longevity. A faith that does not withstand the temptations and trials of this life, is not a true saving faith in Jesus Christ. To “*shrink back*” (*hypostellō*; fall away, i.e., apostacy) warrants being “*destroyed*” (*apōleia*; Matt.7:13; Phil.3:19; 2Pet.2:3) by God’s just condemnation. God will enable/empower His children to endure in faith and faithfulness. Although not perfect, the faith of a true Christian will never die and will ultimately persevere.

Heb 12:1-2 ~ “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

➤ As Christians, we must faithfully declare – with both our lips and our lives – that we will not compromise or renounce our faith in Christ. We must be resolute in our faithfulness to Christ, and resolute in our Christian walk. We must not give in to the secular and pagan demands of our culture. We must not cave under the pressures of “political correctness” or “cancel culture.” We must not bow to any godless (sinful) worldview, or any false god.

Conclusion

➤ The familiar story of Daniel, and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3), help illustrate this resolute conviction. In the beginning of the book of Daniel, we find Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as Jewish teenagers who have been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (see 1:1-7). Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest and most powerful of all the Babylonian kings.

Similar to his father's legacy, he attacked and ransacked surrounding cities, killed its leaders, captured many of its inhabitants, and exiled the most promising young men – from the royal family and of the nobility – back to Babylon to assimilate them into Babylonian culture (1:3-5). Once in Babylon, these young men would be indoctrinated in Babylonian culture, literature and religion [sound familiar?].

Around 604 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, captured the people of Judah, imprisoned (and later killed) Jehoiakim (king of Judah), destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and deported prominent young men to Babylon. Among the young men from royalty or nobility who were deported back to Babylon were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

➤ In Daniel 3:1 we read that Nebuchadnezzar had a statue of himself (or of a Babylonian god) made in gold:

Dan 3:1 ~ “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.”

This statue was absolutely ginormous. A “cubit” was roughly eighteen inches, so this golden image stood a staggering ninety feet (“*sixty cubits*”) tall and nine feet (“*six cubits*”) wide (let alone weighty and expensive; it was most likely overlaid with gold)! Nebuchadnezzar has this statue put in a prominent place for all to see (vs.1), and ordered everyone to bow down and worship this image (vs.4). Those who did not, would be “*cast into a burning fiery furnace*” (vs.6, 11).

Once the worship music started (vs.5-6; see vs.10, 15) everyone's forehead touched the ground except for three young men: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (vs.12). Nebuchadnezzar was furious and called for these men to be brought before him (vs.13) and threatened them with the excruciating death of being burned alive in the fiery furnace if they did not worship the image he had made (vs.15). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego adamantly and courageously refused:

Dan 3:16-18 ~ “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.’”

Nebuchadnezzar was “*filled with fury*” (vs.19) and ordered that the furnace be “*heated seven times more than it was usually heated*” (vs.19). The furnace was now so hot that “*some of mighty men of his army*” (vs.20), who were commanded to bind and throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace, were killed as they approached the furnace (vs.22).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not only completely unharmed by the furnace (vs.25, 27), but they were walking around in the furnace, “*unbound*” (vs.25), with another in the furnace with them. This “fourth” man, having “*the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods*” (vs.25), was either an angel of God, or a theophany/Christophany (a manifestation of God/the preincarnate Christ). God indeed miraculously delivered them from an excruciating martyr's death (which they recognized and declared that God does not always do; see vs.18).

➤ May we, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, resolve to be faithful to God to the very end. May we not bow to any “god” but the one true (Creator, Sovereign) God. May we not bow to political correctness or worldly philosophies. May we not bow to sexual perversion or promiscuity. May we not bow to fear or intimidation. May we not bow in the wake of suffering or loss. May we not bow to the gods of popularity and acceptance. May we not bow to our culture, or to a love of the world. May we not “shrink back” but remain resolute in our faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ our Lord!