

Hebrews

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Hebrews 10:32-39



Vss. 32-34

- As we stated in part 1 of our introduction to Hebrews, a large part of why the book of Hebrews was preached and written is that there was a storm coming, a time of intense persecution. It is believed that the book was written in the late first century, so it is possible that what the preacher foresaw was the persecution under the Roman emperor Domitian. This was the same persecution that saw the Apostle John exiled to Patmos.
- He begins here by reminding them of how well the strength of their faith stood up when they were first saved, "enlightened", and the church was first formed. This seems to have been during the previous persecution under Nero some 15-20 years before. It too was intense, "a great conflict of sufferings", and had included being dragged out into the public spotlight, perhaps in the streets or the arena. And yet they had stayed strong and indeed grew even stronger by "becoming sharers with those who were so treated." It's the old saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. Such an ordeal commonly gets even the toughest cynic to start praying and the bond between those who shared the experience is one of the strongest relationships we know. For 2000 years, as the church has undergone these kind of persecutions, she has always emerged stronger. An even older saying going back to the 2nd Century points out how "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church".
- The preacher specifically reminds them of how the church "showed sympathy to the prisoners". This may be referring to how the church cared for each other while they were all imprisoned, but it also may refer to an impromptu prison ministry, so that like Paul and Silas before them in the Philippian jail, they were evangelizing the other prisoners, perhaps some who had also been swept up in Nero's purge. We should always be looking for opportunities to share the gospel and show the love of Christ wherever we may find ourselves.
- Finally, the preacher reminds them of how they "accepted joyfully" the seizure of their property. When they were arrested, they surely believed they would be put to death as both Peter and Paul were, along with a great many others, during the persecution under Nero. They were imprisoned and their property seized. But what good is property to someone who sits condemned and expects to be executed any minute? "Yes, go take it! I gladly give you all the material wealth I have, for I am about to go to a far greater eternal home!" Such an attitude had to confound, irritate, and impress their captors.

Vs. 35-36

- Following the end of Nero and his persecutions the church thrived throughout the empire. Not only did the church grow in number but it appears that the individual members were able to recoup their financial losses and begin to live in peace and live well. Now as the preacher surveys the church, he is concerned that easy living has made the church soft, that while they once stood strong under adversity, there is evidence to suggest that prosperity has done more damage than adversity ever could!
- “Don’t throw away your confidence!” Remember what it was like to stand strong. Be today what you were when you were at your best! Remember not only who you are, but WHOSE you are!
- “For you have need of endurance!” People have short memories. It only takes a generation to forget. The generation of Washington, Jefferson, and Adams were very much afraid that the next generations would not be willing to pay the price of freedom. The people of the WWII generation were confounded by their children’s rejection of their values, values they saw as imperative for freedom in the 20th century. The preacher to the Hebrews was concerned that his generation lacked the faith and internal strength that the coming persecution would require. He didn’t see in them the endurance they would need to do the will of God and receive the prize which was promised.

Vss. 37-38

- A preacher should always remember his audience, so to drive his point home he quotes the Hebrew scriptures, he quotes the prophet Habakkuk, who when he wrote was about to be hit with the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. The prophet’s message is clear: when the persecutor comes, “My righteous one shall live by faith!”. And the one who “shrinks back”, who has no faith will not bring pleasure to the Spirit of God. Adversity is often the refining fire where the separation is made.

Vs. 39

- “But we are NOT of those who shrink back...”. It is important that the preacher tell them straight up just who they are. Not faithless shrinkers, but people of strong faith who can persevere to the end. We are people who stay the course. We have already made the decision to die with Christ and for Christ when we chose to pick up our cross and follow Him. The end will surely come one day and in whatever circumstance it comes to us, we WILL have the faith to face it.