

Introduction:

1. Devotion to Jesus requires a certain mindset. It is one where we give ourselves no option of turning back or quitting. Paul expressed this mindset in Hebrews 10:32-39. While it is possible to draw back unto destruction, we allow no room in our hearts to seriously consider such an option.
2. We are devoted to Jesus—come what may! There must be no dilemma, discouragement, disappointment or distress that deters us and dissuades us from following Jesus.

The Lesson:**I. The saints of God must persevere in the face of every foe.**

- A. The Hebrew saints endured suffering. It is called a “great struggle with sufferings,” Hebrews 10:32. This was after they were illuminated. They suffered because they were Christians.
 1. The key word here is not suffering or struggle, though many of them suffered greatly. The Hebrews were those Jewish Christians who were born and lived in Palestine. These saints lived in the very heart of Judaism and were hated by Jewish unbelievers.
 2. The key word is “endured.” They persevered in the face of severe persecution. Some saints may have given up on Jesus in the midst of persecutions, but these had not.
- B. These Christians were publicly ridiculed, Hebrews 10:33.
 1. To be made a spectacle is to be publicly mocked and to be held in open scorn. They also became companions of those who were so ridiculed. Even when they themselves had not been subjected to these trials, they had great sympathy for those who were.
 2. Whether experiencing these things or sympathizing with those suffered, they endured!
- C. They had lost earthly possessions, Hebrews 10:34.
 1. Paul says they had compassion on him while he was imprisoned. They were not imprisoned with Paul, but they felt his hurt and sent aid to him.
 2. Even though they were not imprisoned, their goods were plundered. It was common for persecutors to plunder houses of Christians, drive them out and take everything they had.
 3. What motivated the saints to endure these losses?
- D. They knew that in heaven they had an enduring possession, Hebrews 10:34. Persecutors can't touch what is in heaven. It is enduring, and it is better than what they were losing on earth.
- E. They are urged to hold on to their hope and not cast it away, Hebrews 10:35.
 1. The word “confidence” means boldness, to be outspoken, certain. It is not a doubt word.
 2. No one could take it away, but the saints could cast it away. They must be bold and confident in the face of every persecutor and plunderer. God would certainly reward them.
- F. They would receive God's promise, Hebrews 10:36.
 1. They needed endurance because it is so easy to murmur and complain against God (as though He was the cause of the trouble). It is easy to sink in the midst of suffering, especially when the suffering is long. We must keep the faith regardless of time or temptation.
 2. No matter how long we suffer, God will yet keep His promise. Has He ever failed anyone?
- G. The people of God would be vindicated, Hebrews 10:37-38.
 1. The paraphrase of the Lord's words from Habakkuk 2:3-4 is used as a promise of relief. Habakkuk had asked how long it would be before God brought judgment on Israel's enemies and gave relief to the just man living by faith. God told him that help was on the way.
 2. The Hebrew saints are given assurance that God is coming in judgment against their tormentors. This is likely a reference to the Lord coming in judgment upon Jerusalem.
- H. They believed unto salvation, Hebrews 10:39. The message is: Don't give up! Believe God's promises and be saved.

II. Early saints had no illusions about what they would have to endure.

- A. It is the view of some that being a Christian leads to a life of health, peace and prosperity.
 1. The Christians we just saw in Hebrews did not have that kind of life, did they?
 2. It is an illusion propagated by the devil that Christians will find a life of ease, and that God won't let anything bad happen to you. One might think that this illusion would cause more to follow God, hoping for such a good and easy life. Actually it causes more people to give up on God, thinking He has abandoned them when trouble comes.

3. This illusory view might be expressed (or thought) in numerous ways.
 - a. “God will not allow us to suffer.” The Hebrew Christians did not believe that.
 - b. “God will protect us from the common distresses that everyone else has. We won’t be sick, have accidents or experience natural disasters.” Though rarely spoken, it is believed by many. *Common* distresses come upon everyone, 1 Corinthians 10:13.
 - c. “God will protect us from death.” What does that do to Hebrews 9:27?
 - d. “God will protect us from ridicule.” A look at the lives of early Christians proves otherwise. God promises judgment upon the one who ridicules His children.
- B. We have looked at Hebrews 10:32-29 and seen the plight of early saints; they had no illusions about what they would have to endure. They were not immune to suffering for the gospel; and were not immune to the common distresses of mankind. Let us now look outside the Bible to the historical record of what the saints endured. We go to the texts of Christians in those early centuries after the Bible was completed. How did they view the things we are discussing?

From Minucius Felix (ca. 166 AD); a debate between the Roman Caecilius and the Christian Octavius:

Caecilius (speaking of the Christians): They despise our temples as houses of the dead. They reject the gods. They laugh at sacred things. Wretched, they pity our priests. Half-naked themselves, they despise honors and purple robes. What incredible audacity and foolishness! They are not afraid of present torments, but they fear those that are uncertain and future. While they do not fear to die for the present, they fear to die after death. (Paraphrased from *M. Felix, Chapter 8*.)

At least learn from your present situation, you wretched people, what actually awaits you after death. See, many of you—in fact, by your own admission, the majority of you—are in want, are cold, are hungry, and are laboring in hard work. Yet, your god allows it. He is either unwilling or unable to assist his people. So he is either weak or unjust... Take notice! For you there are threats, punishments, tortures, and crosses... Where is the god who is supposed to help you when you come back from the dead? He cannot even help you in this life! Do not the Romans, without any help from your god, govern, rule over, and have the enjoyment of the whole world, including dominion over you yourselves? ...You pallid, trembling beings, worthy of the pity even of our gods! Thus, wretched as you are, you neither rise again, nor do you live now. (Paraphrased from *M. Felix, Chapter 12*.)

Octavius (replying to Caecilius): The fact that many of us are poor is not to our disgrace, but to our glory. For as the mind is relaxed by luxury, so it is strengthened by poverty. And yet who can be poor if he does not want, if he does not crave the possessions of others, and if he is rich toward God? He rather is poor, who, although he has much, desires more... And thus God is neither unable to aid us, nor does He despise us, since He is both the ruler of all amen and the lover of His own people. But in adversity He looks unto and searches out each one and weighs the disposition of every individual in dangers, even to death at last. He investigates the will of man...Therefore, as gold by the fires, so are we declared by critical moments. (Paraphrased from *M. Felix, Chapter 36*.)

How beautiful is the spectacle to God when a Christian does battle with pain; when he is drawn up against threats, and punishments and tortures; when, mocking the noise of death, he trods under foot the horror of the executioner; when he raises up his liberty against kings and princes, and yields to God alone, whose he is; when, triumphant and victorious, he tramples upon the very man who has pronounced sentence against him! For he has conquered who has obtained that for which he contends. (Paraphrased from *M. Felix, Chapter 37*.)

From Cyprian (ca. 240 AD):

It disturbs some that disease attacks our people equally with pagans. As if the Christian believed in order to have the pleasures of this world and a life free from illness, instead of enduring adversity here and awaiting future joy. It disturbs some that mortality is as common to us as with others. As long as we are here on earth, we experience the same fleshly tribulations as the rest of the human race, although we are separated in spirit. Thus, when the earth is barren with an unproductive harvest, famine makes no distinction; thus, when with the invasion of an enemy any city is taken, captivity at once desolates all; and when the serene clouds withhold the rain, the drought is alike to all; and when the jagged rocks rend the ship, the shipwreck is common without exception to all that sail in her; and the disease of the eyes, and the attack of fevers, and the feebleness of all the limbs is common to us with others. (*Cyprian, On Mortality, Section 8; ca. 240 AD*)

- C. It is plain that the early saints—whether in or out of the Bible—did not believe that they would have the best of both worlds and be protected from disaster, disease or distress. In fact, they generally believed that they must suffer these things because it prepared them for eternity.
 1. The references above that were selected for our study are but a sampling of the numerous texts that address the suffering of the early saints.
 2. While these things demonstrate their suffering, they also demonstrate their faith. God did not always take their problems away, but always gave His people strength to endure.

Conclusion:

1. If epistles like these just mentioned were written of us today what would they say?
2. How does our devotion to Jesus measure compared to theirs? Let us be devoted, come what may!