

Title: It's a Long Run to Heaven
Date: 5/4/25
Subject: Perseverance is necessary in the Christian life.
Scripture: Hebrews 10:32 - 39

I recently finished the book *The Greatest Generation* by Tom Brokaw. He gives brief stories of men and women who fought in WW II. One story is of Gene Glick (pp. 383, 384) who was a combat infantryman with the Army's 45th division fighting in the Alsace-Lorraine in late fall of 1944. Glick told Brokaw, "I'll never forget November 11th, 1944, at 11 AM. I dove into a slit trench. You dig a slit trench when you don't have time to dig a foxhole. It's about the size of your body - about two feet deep. There was a thin layer of ice. The shells were exploding all around. The ground shakes. You think that at any moment you're going to be killed or maimed for life. I remember thinking, wouldn't it be wonderful if WW II ended the way WW I did - on November 11th?" He spent almost an hour face down in freezing water. He made a vow: "If I get out of this alive, anytime in the future, if it gets tough, I am going to remember November 11th, 1944."

50 plus years later Glick said of that time, "It's like a guiding star. When things don't go right, when people disappoint me and projects don't work out, I think, 'Hey, Glick, November 11th, 1944. No problem!'"

The author of Hebrews invites followers of Christ to take a mental trip to recall earlier days. When some look back at the past, they wear rose colored glasses and pine for the good old days. Others are forgetful and don't remember... or choose to forget. Others have so many things going on that they can't find the time think about the past. While we aren't to live in the past, we should occasionally pause to reflect.

The petition is to recall what it was like when they first followed Jesus Christ. They had received light from God and were no longer living in darkness. They'd been saved from their sin, received forgiveness, no longer belonged to the devil but were adopted as children of God, and received eternal life.

Read Hebrews 10:32-39

I. Remember the good old days 32 - 34

As we heard, the good old days weren't all sunshine, roses, rainbows and unicorns. The first readers had their share of difficulties and suffering. The writer uses sports terminology to describe life. They were competing in a contest - bigger than the Super Bowl, World Series, NBA Championship, NCAA Final Four and Olympics combined. It was the game of life...and they were playing against the devil and his sidekicks.

There was pain and suffering. Sometimes they felt it personally. They were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. Being publicly exposed was a phrase from the world of theatre. It meant they were on stage with the spotlight on them. Whichever way they moved, the spotlight followed. They couldn't escape from persecution. Their family may have disowned them. They may have been ridiculed and mocked. They may have lost their jobs. They may have been beaten. The text mentions their property was confiscated by government or religious authorities, or neighbors who hated the cause of Christ. The Christians joyfully accepted it as part

of being a Christian. They were like the disciples in Acts who rejoiced they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

What is meant by they joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property? Were they jumping out of their skin - "This is so exciting! You forgot to take those stone jars over there." Probably not. Joy means gladness, cheerfulness, calm delight. It isn't joy because of circumstances but in spite of circumstances.

They likely remembered Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:10-12): "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Suffering also was a familial experience as their brothers and sisters in the Lord were persecuted. The extended family was being attacked. They sympathized with those in prison who had been shunned by blood relatives and friends. The only aid came from fellow Christians who provided food, clothing and medical care. In so doing, they put a bullseye on themselves.

The Christian community exhibited a strong defense as they stood their ground against the opposing team. They didn't backtrack from their conviction that Jesus was the Savior. They stood side by side with other believers. They were in it together, "all for one and one for all." No one was left alone. They cared deeply for one another and provided tangible evidence of that. They were battle tested, and having done everything to stand, they stood (Ephesians 6:10-13). They didn't retreat or run for cover.

Chapter 11 (vv. 24-27) gives the example of Moses who grew up in Pharaoh's court and was treated as a son. He chose to be mistreated with God's people rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He had lots of stuff he could have enjoyed as Pharaoh's son - wealth, power, an adoring and subservient public. However, he regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. He persevered because he had an encounter with God and trusted him. He didn't retreat or make excuses when it would have been easy to have done so.

Why did the Hebrew church stand their ground? Were they crazy? Maybe crazy like a fox. They knew they had better and lasting possessions. They knew that "This world is not their home, they're just passing through, their treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." They believed "It will be worth it all when they see Jesus. Life's trials will seem so small when they see Christ." They didn't know how far was heaven, but they believed that there will be a day when Jesus was coming back, it was gonna happen someday and might even be tomorrow, that they would be going home, because they weren't home yet, but then they would be finally home, where they belong, but until then, they would sing the hymn of heaven. (Ten songs mashed up)

What do we recall about the early days after we received the light? What were they like? Most likely we didn't encounter as much opposition as the Hebrew believers. We may have faced some difficulties. Most likely we didn't face much opposition at all. People were excited about us trusting in Christ or were neutral. We had the promise of sins forgiven and eternal life. We were new creations. The old was gone. We had hope.

We're to remember the past, the earlier days of our salvation experience and the changes that took place, but we aren't to live in the past. We're to live in the present. Our memories and our previous lives are the initial part of the logic equation. Since that happened, now what?

II. Live life now 35 – 39

Don't throw away our confidence, our trust in the Lord of the relationship we have with him, that we're his followers because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. The writer to Hebrews pleads with the readers to hang in there. Persevere. Don't give up partway through. Keep on going till the end because that's when the reward comes. The first readers may have been tempted to think it would be a lot easier to go back to Judaism. In our time believers might feel it'd be easier to compromise with the world, have half-hearted devotion to the Lord which is really no devotion. The plea is to not throw away confidence in Christ.

We aren't to throw away our confidence as we discard trash. In the village it's simple to do so - trucks come around every Friday morning. Some people are inconsiderate as they throw bags from their fast food meals out the window as they drive along. Sometimes people find creative ways to get rid of their trash.

A few years ago, during a New York City garbage strike, trash was piling up along the sidewalks. People were having a hard time getting rid of their trash. Crime was also bad. A guy wanted to take advantage of the situation. He put his trash in a box, wrapped it like a present with a ribbon and bow. He put the present in his car, left it unlocked with the windows down, hoping someone would come by and steal it. Someone did. Hopefully the thief didn't remember what car the gift came from and go back later and do some damage.

We need to hold on to our confidence. The reason is we will be richly rewarded. This comes just a few words after the reminder in v. 34 of the better and lasting possessions. God is using the author of Hebrews to keep his promise in the forefront of people's minds so they, we, don't forget about it.

How do we maintain our confidence? The signal from the captain of our faith is to persevere. Persevere and perseverance are used 20 times in the New Testament. Their companions endure and endurance are used 31 times. Some people put the terms together - enduring perseverance or persevering endurance. It involves persistence, patience, steadfastness, remaining faithful and maintaining the faith.

Perseverance is most often revealed when a person is experiencing a trial or difficulty. Perseverance is a word that comes from athletics.

Interview with Jonathan Schutz about persevering as a runner.

As Christians we are called upon to persevere to the end of the run, which is when we cross the finish line into heaven. In the meantime, while we're running the race, we encounter bumps and bruises of difficulty, aches and pains of suffering as we progress toward the goal. Persevering gives evidence to our faith.

What's the area of perseverance? Doing the will of God. The Bible mentions specific things as the will of God: doing good (1 Pet 2:15), giving thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18), being sanctified and avoiding

immorality (1 Thess 4:3). Other places don't use the phrase "will of God", but speak of what the Lord requires: "to act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). And then there are lots of commands that express the Lord's will.

The sense in Hebrews 10:36 seems to be the overall will of God - living lives that please him. It's living according to God's will, purposes and priorities, obeying him and his moral commands. We are to persevere in doing the will of God.

What's in it for Christians? People often want to know what's in it for them if they put in extra work on the job, buy a particular car, do a favor. God doesn't leave us in the dark. He tells us what's in it for us if we live in ways that please him even as Jesus came to earth to do the will of the Father and please him (John 4:24, Heb 10:7, 9). V. 36 - "You will receive what he has promised." Other Scriptures: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

This is the third time in 5 verses where our reward is mentioned. God considers it of primary importance and wants to keep it in the forefront of our brain so we won't forget. He knows our memories have to be jogged because our attention span is like – squirrel....

The Lord prods our minds by bringing in a quote from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk in vv. 37 and 38. God gives us his promise about "he who is coming." The prophet wrote these words 600 years before Jesus came to earth. And since they're in a book written after Christ's death, the fulfillment of those words didn't take place at Christ's first coming but will in his second coming.

God's people are to be people of anticipation. We're to live in the light of that future day. We're to live by faith - live out our faith in Christ. We're to align ourselves with God and live lives based upon God's words and promises being true. We're to persevere as we wait and trust in God. We're to be active and not sedentary.

A more familiar place in Hebrews also uses athletic terms connected to our perseverance: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

We're to keep on keeping on living in faith, even if at times it seems like we're taking three steps forward, two steps back, three steps forward, two steps back. Keep going. The opposite is to shrink back, loosen grip on trust, retreat in times of adversity. God isn't pleased with that outcome. It seems the use of "shrink back" is different in v. 39 as those who do are destroyed, which would make them unbelievers who fully retreat from Christ.

The reward for perseverance is mentioned for the fourth time in the very last phrase of chapter 10: those who believe and **are saved**.

Since this is true: let us pay more careful attention to what we've heard so we don't drift away (2:1), let we who share in the heavenly calling fix our thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess (3:1), let us strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees (12:12), let us make level paths for our feet (12:13), let us make every effort to be holy (12:14), let us not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings but be strengthened by grace (13:9), let us look for the city that is to come (13:14), let us persevere so that when we've done the will of God, we will receive what he has promised (10:36).