

Title: Quitting is not an option\*\*  
Text: Hebrews 10.32-39  
Theme: endurance  
Series: Hebrews #30  
Prop Stmtnt: Realizing how close we are, and how short the time is, press on.  
Aim: I aim to help my people see how close we are to Christ so that they are deeply encouraged to press on.

Imagine with me a group of young soldiers who have been in training for the battle that is just hours before them. Not long ago, they were fresh, raw, recruits who came from high schools in cities, villages, now shaved, shorn and suited up in the uniform of a soldier. They have heard the stories of old. They have been through boot camp and intense physical and psychological preparation. But, in the back of their minds, it was always training. Now, they are on the eve of the real thing.

Contrast that with another group of soldiers. Their hair is unkept, faces dirty, uniforms torn, and their bodies bear witness to many hardships. They have been in the battle. They have buried too many comrades. Their eyes are not wide-open with anticipation but steeled by reality. Their jaws are chiseled, their hands are calloused, and their gaze is fixed. Like the first group, they too are on the eve of battle. But unlike the first group they know what to expect. They know the realities of war. They know the seeming random choice of death. There is no nervous chatter, just the look of resignation and duty having lost any romantic and heroic view of war. They just want this to be over. They have fought enough and just want to go home. No one thought that it would last this long, nor be this tough. But there is one more battle.

These battle-hardened troops are more like the people to whom this book was written. Back in AD 49, Claudius was emperor of Rome when the Jews who were living in the city began to create a disturbance over Christ. Those who were accepting Jesus as the Messiah were leaving the synagogues and joining with the Christians, which, as you can imagine was more than a bit scandalous within the Jewish community. This tension broke out into persecution. Claudius did not care who believed what, he simply ordered all Jews out of the city. When they left, their homes and possessions became easy pickings for everyone else who pillaged their stuff and took over their properties. Of course, not everyone left, and those believing Jews who did not leave, attempted to lay low in order to avoid problems. But, that became easier said than done. You see, whenever someone today goes into jail, we assume that the prison will provide food and clothing to keep them alive. Back in these days, it was up to the family and friend to provide the food and clothes, for otherwise they would die. Several times Paul speaks of those who ministered to him while he was in prison.

But, here is the reality. Let's say that a Christian brother, is arrested because of his faith in Christ and sent to prison. Unless you help him, he will likely die. But, if you help him, you will be identified as one of them and you will jeopardize your own life and risk harm to your family. So, what do you do? You know full well, that you could lose your home, your possessions and be out on the street as soon as you are identified as "one of them."

There were plenty of mobs who knew when the governing officials would look the other way and allow them to attack the vulnerable without fear of reprisal. As a believer, you had no rights. So, what do you do? What did these believers do? In spite of the cost, they stood with their brothers and lost everything as a result. And yet, looking back, there was a sweetness of camaraderie and a relief even in discovering a freedom from things that one assumes that they must have. And yet, that was almost fifteen years ago. Now, Claudius is in the history books and Nero is on the throne. The wind of persecution is starting to blow again and this time it looks as if it may be worse. What these believers endured the first time was tough enough. Many had hoped that they had paid their dues, learned their lessons, “did their time” and the prospect of going through this again was discouraging. These people were weary warriors. Like the second semester of your sophomore year, the final game of a losing season, the 25<sup>th</sup> year on the same job, another month on the diet, another trip to physical therapy, your 8<sup>th</sup> surgery, your third round of chemo, the novelty is gone, the reality is tough.

Read Text:

I fear that the way Christianity is often portrayed is a misrepresentation of the truth. In an effort to attract (or reach) people we often explain the benefits of the gospel – and we should. But, we should also disclose the entire picture, and make certain that everyone understands the fine print. Persecution and rejection for followers of Christ is not “if” it is “when.” If you plan on quitting, don’t start. It does not matter if you are a fresh recruit or seasoned warrior. We all need to be challenged to press on. Here is how to Press ON... To some believers, we tell the stories of the faithfulness of others.

1. **Remember your focus.** (32-34)

A. **What it was like when you first came to Christ.**

*“recall the former days when, after you were enlightened”* (32a)

People who do not appreciate history, tend to be arrogant. They fail to appreciate the shoulders of the people on whom they stand. There is a lot of importance that God places on remembering. In this case, these believers were challenged to remember back to the days when they first came to Christ, when their eyes were opened and they realized, for themselves, the message of the gospel (explain) and they came to faith in Christ. These were Jews who had been trusting in their ethnicity who learned to trust in Christ. The joy of discovering the forgiveness of sins, the boldness of declaring this to others, the thrill of the Scriptures coming alive and grabbing one’s heart is something that all of us can relate with. But, in their case, there was more to it than that. These people came to faith in Christ in the context of suffering, pressure and persecution. Most of them knew that if they chose to be identified with Christ, they would face persecution. They signed up to follow Jesus, and were not surprised by suffering. They came to Christ with their eyes wide open to the cost, at least they thought.

B. **What it was like to endure a hard struggle.**

*“you endured a hard struggle with sufferings” (32b)*

The word “struggle” is an athletic word that could be translated as “contest.” The picture is that of an athlete who is in a severe contest with suffering, and who outlasted the suffering. The AH is reminding them of their own history. He says to remember your perseverance and endurance. Remember what you suffered with others and what others suffered with you! Remember your sacrifice and the glory that you brought to Christ. Remember how you outlasted suffering? Remember that you did not give up, give in, or wimp out? You endured. After all of that are you going to throw it away?

**C. What it was like to be exposed to reproach.**

*“sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction” (33a)*

These are hard words. Have you ever suffered shame? Shame is when you are associated with something or someone who is blamed for that which is atrocious. Some of you have been shamed by a family member or by your association with a particular organization. The same news trucks that can tell of good things, can shine the spotlight of notoriety upon shameful deeds as well. In this case, these believers were the objects of scorn in the news, in the gossip of the city, and in the policies of the government. If you wanted to beat up a Christian, you could expect that a soldier would simply look the other way. It is exhausting to live under the eye of scorn and wearying to feel the waves of ridicule wherever you go. But, yet, they stood. What kind of a world is this that taunts the righteous, jeers the humble, and scorns the faithful? Is it not distressing to see evil win? These believers knew the cost of standing with believers and chose it anyway.

**D. What it was like to stand with those who were being persecuted.**

*“and sometimes in being partners with those so treated” (33b)*

The word, for “partners” is the word *koinonia*, which is often translated as fellowship. When we use the word fellowship, we often think of eating cookies, drinking coffee and talking about college football (which we are not going to do today). These believers had an understanding of the fellowship; that is the membership of the church that goes way beyond us. I wonder, that if in our Discovering God’s People class, where we inform people of what it means to be a member of the Kingdom of Christ and his church, if we should not also make it clear that membership in this church means that if someone goes to prison for the sake of the gospel, we go with him and if you go to prison for the sake of Christ we will stand with you. That should also mean that, if you lose your job because of Christ, we will help you find another one and take care of you until you do. These believers had done that. They passed the test in spite of the personal cost.

**E. What it was like to love Christ, and his people more than your house.**

*“For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property” (34a)*

There are certain words that do not seem to belong together. Here is such a case. How does “joyfully accepted” fit with “the plundering of your property”? Assuming that this person is in his right mind, is there any angle at which you can look at this and not be confused as to how this person can joyfully accept the plundering of his property? This makes no sense! It makes no sense to people whose houses own them. It makes no sense to people who value house, possessions and economic security more than Christ, the gospel and the people of God. But these people considered the promises of Christ and their bond with other believers to be more precious than houses and possessions. Think of this. They put more value on the people of God than stuff and if the cost of loving the people of God and helping the people of God meant the loss of their stuff, they rejoiced at the opportunity to be free of stuff that they might be bound to their brothers and sisters. That is something that some of you have yet to understand. You are so bound by your stuff, that you are not free to even support the gospel and the people of God.

**F. What it was like to live with the confidence of a better and abiding possession.**

*“since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (34b)*

The AH essentially uses the same word (property and possessions) to contrast the difference between things that are at risk and things that are permanent. What are the things that are at risk? House, possessions, money, car, job, retirement, etc. What are the things that are permanent? Inheritance with Christ, bond with believers, joy in Christ, etc. So, what are you willing to give up? These believers had already answered the call. They KNEW that they were losing a house and possessions for something that was better and permanent. They had counted the cost and chose that which was truly precious.

But now, they were being called to go through it again and this time, they were having second thoughts. This time, it was not as exciting or novel. When a group of people first gather together and form a church, a class or a small group, there is naturally some excitement and enjoyment that comes from new relationships. When the first opportunity comes up for people to serve each other, the sign-up list for meals, the volunteers for babysitting or other forms of service are usually more than are needed. But after a few years, or when one particular need takes a long time to work through, a weariness sets in. A long obedience in the same direction does not always come with slaps on the back with every step. This time, there were some who were tempted to quit.

When I say, “this time” I need to let you know that the persecution under Nero was awful. The church historian Eusebius recorded that it was under Nero’s reign that the apostle Paul was executed. When the bad guys are on the throne and the good guys are being killed, it tends to steal your joy. And yet, the writer here helps them and us see that there is a reality that is just around the corner. Here is how to Press On...

## 2. **Remember how close you are.** (35-38)

Do you remember as a child waiting for Christmas? It seemed to take forever, whereas when you are an adult, it seems to come way too fast. Do you remember waiting for your 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, or waiting for your driver's license? I remember telling the Lord, that if it was all the same with him, could he hold off on the rapture until I had a chance to drive. Do you remember waiting for graduation, waiting for marriage, waiting for the birth of a child? All of these things seem so long when you are going through them, but years later when you look back they don't seem to be so bad.

Listen carefully. Some of you are in a long endurance. Some of you are wondering, along with the Psalmist – How long O Lord? Here the AH is saying, look at how far you have come! Look at what you have already been through! You are almost home now and when you get home, and you look back to this very day, it will not seem so bad. On that day, your endurance on this day will be worth it. So, endure! Endure boldly, that is to say, have an enduring boldness. Press on Pilgrim with an enduring boldness. And here he we are given three reasons why we must:

### A. **You are too close to your reward to quit now.** (35)

All that you have in Christ awaits you at the finish line and you are almost there. Don't quit now! Can you imagine quitting in a marathon at the 26 mile mark, knowing that you only have .2 of a mile left? Does a running back stop at the one yard line cause his foot is sore and he is tired of people trying to tackle him?

Now, let me talk really straight with you. Every single person in this room is going to die (unless Christ returns first). Dying stinks! Death is still our enemy. But, I have watched people die well and I have watched people die poorly. The people who die well are the people who prepared now by living well. Instead of always living on their feelings, they consistently considered the promises of God to be more important than anything else. The people who die poorly are the people who are weak in spirit, fragile in mind, who have not disciplined themselves in life. They live on the basis of what they feel at the moment. They are in constant need of being propped up and inflated because they have not learned to find their security and rest in God. So, when they get to the end, and they are faced with the hardships of life and the hardships of broken health and the hardships of pain and the hardships of suffering, they pout, and fret and fall apart because they have learned to live on the fleeting approval of others instead of the rock-solid, sin-destroying, soul-anchoring, heaven-securing, kingdom-changing, promises of God's gospel. To all of you who confess Christ; you have come too far to quit now. You are too close to your reward to quit now. Press on Pilgrim with an enduring boldness.

Young mothers, some day, that little fire-eyed, leather-lunged banshee will grow up. This time of short nights, and days of getting almost nothing done but disciplining your children will produce a harvest of joy. It will be worth it. Don't quit now. If you quit now, all that you have done for him will be wasted. Couples, are you in a season of selfishness, where it seems that all that you do is fight and criticize each other? It is so

tempting to think that life by yourself has got to be easier than this. You can work through these issues, and when you are resolved to persevere with an enduring boldness, you do.

### **B. You have not finished your mission yet. (36)**

What is this text saying? It is the will of God for you to endure. That means that God ordained the pressure. Beloved, I find great comfort in that. I do not like the pressure, but when I stop and consider that it has been ordained by hands that are scarred by nails for my salvation, then I can accept the fact that if he wills the means (endurance) and he has ordained the end (deepening my faith and stretching my heart), then he has ordained the cause (the persecution). Knowing that, whatever is in my path is ordained by God helps me realize that this is not meant to destroy me, but is part of my mission to make much of Christ and as long as I am here, I am here to do that.

End of sermon for today.

- What are you weary of?
- Is it a consequence of your own sin, or simply a reality of this present age?
- How will this day seem, when you are with Christ?
- What will you wish then, that you did now?
- What is Christ saying to you now?
- What are the believers who have finished their race saying?
- Look back at what Christ has done.
- Look back at when you first believed.
- Look back at the battles that you have been through.
- Look around and see your brothers and sisters with you.
- Now, look ahead and if you get on your tiptoes, you can barely see the lights of the city.

### **C. Christ is coming very soon. (37-38)**

Beloved, persecution is coming. Rejection is coming. Hardship is coming. For the last 2,000 years, believers have been treated like Christ was treated. They have lost everything, they have been killed, imprisoned, tortured, isolated, mocked and rejected. There have been times of ease, but they are not common. We have been in such a time and it appears to be coming to an end. We need to think biblically about this. Our ultimate goal is not comfort and ease, but being ready for the pressure.

### **3. Remember who you are. (39)**

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