

Title: An Upside-down Faith
Text: Hebrews 10.35-39
Theme: Perseverance
Series: Hebrews #31
Prop Stmt Persevering faith is watching God take the enemies of our soul and turn them into tools for our sanctification.

Read Text:

One of the major, block-buster movies of 1972 was *The Poseidon Adventure*. It is the story of a luxury cruise liner that was making her final voyage, when she was struck by a 90-foot wave caused by a Tsunami. The massive ship capsized, and the survivors' only hope of being rescued was to go to the bottom of the ship, because that was now at the top. Of course convincing people to do that was not easy.

We live in a world that is much like that ship. It is upside down, but it is all that we know. When Christ came to this world he did not turn it right-side up. He came in order to rescue us from drowning in our sin. He came to show us the only way to safety. But, of course, convincing people that the world is upside down is not easy. But, those who really understand the message of Christ (the gospel) are those who realize that not only is this world upside, but that I am part of the problem and unless someone rescues me, I have no hope. But, here is the irony. When you become a follower of Christ, you are following One who was killed because he dared to point out to people that the world and their lives were upside down. When you follow Christ, your life will look to others as if you are upside down. And, by the looks of things around you, it is.

How can you descend a staircase, and know that you are going up? How can you climb up to the floor and believe that you are going the right way? You will only do that if you are absolutely convinced of the rightness of your path because everything else around you is not necessarily corresponding with it.

The recipients of this letter (Hebrews) were attempting to live right-side up in an upside-down world and they were paying a price for it. The AH is encouraging them to persevere in spite of the adversity. These verses at the end of chapter 10 are particularly challenging as he calls them to 1) Remember your focus (32-34) and 2) Remember how close you are (35-38). When the world is upside down, then what looks like it is an upside down faith is actually right-side up. Brothers and sisters, as you follow Christ, and it feels like the wind is in your face, it is. As you seek to live out the gospel and it feels like you are going uphill, you are. Just like these Jewish believers in Rome, to whom this letter was written, "you have need of endurance" (v.36). So, why should anyone believe this? It is at this point, that the AH goes back into the OT (which is not only the history of the people of God, but is the record of their ancestry) and says, we've had some experience with this before. He then takes a short line from Isaiah's prophecy and a longer statement from Habakkuk and puts them together (37-38) as a reminder from God's actions in history that he is faithful to keep his word. The implication is two-fold.

1) Look at what God said and when he said it. 2) Look at what God did. Then, he concludes his argument with a strong admonition in v. 39 to “look at who you are.”

1. **Remember what God said.** (37-38)

A. To Isaiah

What do you know about Isaiah? In the near future, I trust that we will know a great deal more than we do now, because at this point, it is my intent to preach through this glorious book after we get done with Hebrews. Isaiah was a prophet whose ministry took place in the southern kingdom (Judah) before the Babylonian invasion and the exile of the people of God. He was a prophet for around 50 years that spanned the reigns of four kings in Judah. That part of the world was going through a time of major political, economic and military upheaval. The 10 northern tribes had split from Judah which formed Israel and Judah respectively. The immediate threat to everyone was the growing influence of the Assyrian empire that appeared to be unstoppable. So, Syria gets into a league with Israel in order to stop Assyria and they demand that Judah join with them. Join us or we will invade you! Judah refuses, and pays Assyria to attack Syria and Judah. Syria fell to Assyria in 732 BC and Israel also fell 10 years later. Judah is the lone holdout to this world power and in 701, Sennacherib invades Judah. There is no earthly power that can stop Assyria. This time, God intervenes and in one night the angel of the Lord wipes out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, who were poised to destroy Jerusalem. This defeat sends shockwaves through the international community, which were felt far away in the land of Babylon that was itself attempting to break the power of Assyria, which it did. And before Isaiah's prophecy is done, he predicts that Babylon will be more of a threat than Assyria, which it was. These are ominous days for Judah. But the real problem is not the external threat of these other nations, but the continual rebellion of the people of Judah against God.

Ever since Genesis 3, when sin messed up the entire world, the world has been upside-down. God set Israel apart to be a people who would live right-side up in this upside-down world. But they did not. They wanted to be like the other nations, meaning they wanted to worship like them, and live like them. So, the people who were supposed to be right-side up ended up being upside down, except for a remnant. So, when Isaiah preaches to Judah, he is addressing two different crowds. The one crowd are the rebellious majority and the other is the believing minority. To the rebellious he preaches a message of judgment. To the remnant he declares a message of comfort. The remnant is going to go through the consequences brought on by the rebellion of the majority. And yet, God is not going to abandon them. Even through the coming turmoil, the invasion by the Babylonians, the destruction of Jerusalem and even the Temple itself, God still has a plan for his people, because God is using all of these events to build a kingdom for His Son Jesus Christ. Chapter 26 talks about the day in the future when the people in the land of Judah will sing of God's protection and they one day will sing, “*You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.*” It is in this song of hope, that we have these words in v.20. “*Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed*

by.” In other words, beloved, we are about to go through a time of intense pressure. But, there will be an end and God’s plan will go on. The AH picks up that phrase, yet “a little while” and uses it here in Hebrews 10 in order to remind these people that they too are part of a remnant. Just as Judah was attacked by unbelieving Israel and then within Judah itself the vast majority failed to trust in God, so too, these Jewish believers were just a handful of people who naturally wondered if it was worth all of the pressure. The AH, like Isaiah is saying, “a little while and (not only will the storm pass over but) the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith.” Now, this part comes from Habakkuk.

B. To Habakkuk

What do you know about Habakkuk? I imagine that you know less about him than you do about Isaiah. Habakkuk’s ministry came after that of Isaiah’s. What Isaiah saw coming in the future, was for Habakkuk an immediate reality. In 612 BC, Babylon conquered the Assyrian capital of Nineveh and usurped her as the world superpower. Like the cloud of and armies of Mordor, pressing toward Minas Tirith, the hordes of the Babylonians are now approaching Judah. This little book is a powerful dialogue between Habakkuk and God about what God said he was going to do. God told Habakkuk that because Judah had become so sinful that he (God) was going to raise up the Babylonians as an instrument of judgment against Judah. Habakkuk cannot believe it! He knows that Judah is sinful, but the Babylonians are off the chart evil! God, how could you?! There is some intense, honest-to-God, heart-cry conversation that that the prophet has with God. And at the end of the day, God essentially says, “I am God. I am Sovereign. I have ordained this. Habakkuk, you (and the remnant) can either get on board with what I am doing and submit to me, or get run over by it. It is a tough little book, but it is one of the most spectacular gems that is often overlooked in the OT. By the end, Habakkuk bows his knee and submits to the all-wise purposes of God. And he ends his prayer by saying, *“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the LORD, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.”* I will trust you God, no matter what.

It is in the midst of this little book (2.3-4) that God promises that he is not delaying in carrying out his plan. And that the righteous are those who live by faith. To the people in Habakkuk’s day, that meant, listen to what God has promised. Believe it, accept it, and go with it. Those who live by faith in what God has revealed are those who are truly righteous. And those who are truly righteous are those who will live – forever. Now, does that phrase sound familiar to you? It should. Where else do we read that? There are two other places in the NT where this phrase appears, once in Galatians and once in Romans. Now, where were these Hebrews living who received this letter? They were living in Rome. These words would have resonated with them. Why? This was the phrase that Paul used in the letter that he sent to them about fifteen years earlier in which he said, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is*

revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Rom. 1.16-17) Beloved those are hard words to really hear because not only is our world upside down, but our religions are almost all upside down with the world. It seems to our natural, upside down way of thinking that if I am going to get my sins forgiven that I have to do things in order earn that. But how many things do you have to do that will earn you enough favors from God to get your sins forgiven? How much does it take from you for God to be satisfied? How good is good enough? And don't think that you have done your best, because no one has done their best. But most religions will tell you stuff like, be kind to others, give to the poor, help your neighbor (if they are into the social gospel stuff) while others will say here are the church ceremonies that you have to follow: get baptized, confirmed, confessed, communioned, married, last rited and buried by the church and you will eventually make it, we think. But that is not the gospel! The gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes! The rescue for our sin is not based upon our goodness, but is based upon our faith. That is what it is from faith to faith. And this is what struck the heart of a young priest who over 490 years ago was reading this very text and realized that he thought of Christianity as a religion of fear. He was living by fear! He had joined a monastery and had become a monk because he was afraid of the judgment of God and he did the most extreme thing that he could think of in order to earn the favor of God, only to realize that Christ had already taken his judgment in his place when Christ died on the cross as the full and final payment for his sin. His grace has planned it all, tis mine but to believe and recognize his work of love and Christ receive!

Beloved, we become followers of Christ, by faith alone in Christ alone. Not only are we born into the family of God and made members of his kingdom by faith alone in Christ alone, but we are kept by faith and we grow by faith and we persevere by faith and we press on by faith, and by faith we have an enduring boldness.

Now, I realize that I am spending a lot of time on this, but if we are going to understand what this means to us today, we must first understand what it meant to the original audience. So, I am attempting to help us think like these believers who received this letter who have been encouraged and admonished to press on as pilgrims. And of course the question is – why? Why should I press on? What confidence, hope and assurance can you give me because my world thinks I am crazy and sometimes I wonder that myself. In fact, when I look around me, either I am upside down, or my world is upside down and it gets a little tough going down as the means to going up.

So, let's summarize this so far. These believers were like a remnant, like their forefathers who were a remnant. God, through his prophets told them what was going to happen as a means to drive a steel rod into their backbones of faith, so that in the day of calamity, they would not shrink back. Here, by means of these OT quotations, the AH is taking these Hebrew believers back to their ethnic and spiritual heritage and reminding them of the promises of God in the past. Remember, what God said. The second implication is...

2. **Remember what God did.** (37-38)

So, what did God do? The answer is; God did everything that he said he was going to do. The Assyrians came and went. The Babylonians came and went. The Medes and the Persians came and went. Alexander the Great came and went. And now the Romans were in power, but they won't last either. Why? They are all part of an upside world, that is going to be shaken by the voice of God. And when God utters that word and the earth is shaken, then everything that is upside down will be dismantled and destroyed. But, what is going to come and what is going to last (Heb. 12.28) is "a kingdom that cannot be shaken."

So, you have need of endurance (10.36), so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. And God always keeps his promises. We have to be careful that we do not create promises that he did not make. He promised that his people would have tough days because we live in an upside world. He never promised that you would have your best life now. He did promise grace and strength to sustain you through the storm. He promised songs in the night and strength in weakness and joy in sorrow for those who cling to his promises. "my righteous one shall live by faith". But this glorious promise comes with a strong warning. "*and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.*"

Now, I am going to address this in a mini-series starting next Sunday that will probably be about 2 sermons on the topic of, the perseverance of the saints, in which I will attempt to tie together the warning passages in Hebrews and other texts to help us understand this eternally important issue. I want us to really consider these warnings because I want your theology and doctrine to be correct and your thoughts of God and his gospel to be glorious. And yet, the tenor of this book is not harsh, but encouraging. For even though this warning is real, notice how this chapter ends. (v.39)

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

If you have repented of your sin and trusted in Christ alone as Lord and Savior, recognizing that his death on the cross was the full and final payment for judgment that you deserved, then we are more than friends, we are brothers and sisters forever. We are part of his church, part of his kingdom, part of his people. We have a new citizenship because we have a new identity. The Scriptures help inform us as to what that identity is. We, in our heart of hearts, in the very core of our being, in our eternal person, are forever, followers of Christ. And as followers of Christ, we are part of an eternal fraternity made up of people who do not shrink back. Perseverance is in our DNA.

There are people who shrink back when faced with pressure – but not us. There are people who give up and quit fighting temptation, and quit fighting habits and quit fighting against pride and lust and bitterness and discouragement, but not us. There are people who lose all joy, and lose all heart and lose all courage and lose all hope, but not us. Oh we have our days. And we have long nights, and we have times of aridness, but we do not shrink back. We are those who have faith and preserve their souls.

This last verse of chapter 10, in many ways probably ought to be the first verse in chapter 11. In fact, I really don't even like the chapter division here. Chapters and verses were not part of the original letter and here I think it makes an unnecessary break in the flow of thought. Because, the AH has just said, we are not of those who shrink back, we are of those who have faith and preserve their souls. He then in chapter 11 takes us back through a history of the people of God and tells us about the men and women on whose shoulders we stand. He tells us about their enduring boldness. He tells us about their clinging to the promises of God. He tells us about the lives of these weary warriors who were marked by unfinished business, broken hearts, unfulfilled dreams, and unrealized plans and tells us, that it is now our race to run, our lives of enduring boldness, our tenacity of belief in the face of adversity that will help continue the race that they started, and a race that in our lifetimes we will not complete, but yet we run and hand the baton to the next generation in hopes that they will run even faster and go farther, and we, then through them will see this race run to its end and see the kingdom come, and together at the finish line we tell each other stories of endurance, stories of struggle, stories of perseverance, stories of long nights and desperate prayers, stories of courage, stories of faith, stories of believing the promises of God in spite of the odds, stories of not losing heart and stories of finishing in the gospel. And we will look back with gratefulness for God's mercies and look around with satisfaction and realize, we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Beloved, that is who you are. That is what you have been reborn to be. Press on Pilgrim!