

Weekly Reflection – Hebrews 11: “A Better Possession”

Hebrews

- Author – the author does not identify himself.
- Recipients – the general consensus is that the letter was written to Jewish Christians, either in Palestine or Rome.
- Date – Likely before 70AD because there is no mention of the destruction of the temple and the author writes as though priests were still offering sacrifices. 63 AD – 65 AD is often suggested.
- Purpose – to prevent readers from abandoning their faith in Christ. To encourage them not to go back to the Old Law. To show the superiority of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.
- There are several warnings in this letter:
 - The warning against drifting from or neglecting salvation. (Hebrews 2:1-4)
 - The warning against falling away from God. (Hebrews 3:12-15)
 - The warning against disobedience (Hebrews 4:11-13)
 - The warning against dullness of hearing. (Hebrews 5:11 – 6:6)
 - The warning against neglecting to meet together. (Hebrews 10:23-25)
 - The warning against sinning deliberately. (Hebrews 10:26)
 - The warning against throwing away our confidence. (Hebrews 10:35)
 - The warning against shrinking back. (Hebrews 10:39)
 - The warning against refusing to listen. (Hebrews 12:25-29)
 - The warning against being led away by strange teaching. (Hebrews 13:9)
- A key word found throughout this letter is “better” or “greater”.
 - Jesus is better than the prophets as a better Spokesman. (Hebrews 1:1-3)
 - Better than angels, by virtue of His deity and humanity. (Hebrews 1:4 – 2:18)
 - Better than Moses, because while Moses was a servant of God, Jesus is the Son of God. (Hebrews 3:3–4)
 - Better than Joshua, because Jesus brings a greater rest to the people of God. (Hebrews 4:8-9)
 - Better than Aaron, as His priesthood is a superior one. (Hebrews 4:16- 8:6)
 - The New Covenant is better, for it is based on better promises. (Hebrews 8:7-13)
 - Based on a better sanctuary. (Hebrews 9:1-28)
 - Based on a better sacrifice. (Hebrews 10:1-18)

Hebrews 10:32-39

To encourage the readers to endure, to persevere, the author has given warnings, and laid out the superiority of Jesus and now he adds to this remembering. The writer describes a hard situation of persecution and imprisonment that had happened some time ago in the church he is writing to, and he wants them to remember it. Recall the former days, when, after being enlightened [= converted to Christ], you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. The point is that they had faced these things and had endured them. They could take a look at their past endurance and be encouraged to keep standing strong in the future.

How did they become that kind of person?

How do we more and more become the kind of people who are willing to give up comfort, security, safety, to reach this community with the love of Jesus and the gospel? Where do we get the endurance to continue to live a life characterized by selflessly giving ourselves for the sake of the Gospel, characterized by compassion for others, willing to suffer for others?

Before we get to the answer, notice that this love, and this chosen suffering was not a gloomy, miserable duty that they did because Christians are supposed to. It says that they joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. But how did they become people like this? This is utterly against the way humans are by nature. We love safety and comfort and ease and fun and lots of possessions and money and free time to do what we want to do. And if we get that we rejoice, and if we don't, we complain. But here are people who rejoice when they lose possessions and share in sufferings.

The key to enduring and living a life that produces love and good works that is willing to suffer for the cause of the gospel of Jesus is "knowing that you have for yourself a better possession and an abiding one." When you know that you have a better and a lasting possession, you are not paralyzed by loss. If that better possession is great enough, you will even be able to rejoice in loss.

What is this "better possession and abiding one"?

It's all the good news that is in this letter.

- It's the triumph of Jesus over death and the devil (Hebrews 2:15).
- We can enter God's rest and rest from works (Hebrews 4:9-10).
- That we can be near to God (Hebrews 7:19, 25).
- God will be our God forever (Hebrews 8:10).
- We can know God (Hebrews 8:11).
- The removal and forgetting of all our sins (Hebrews 8:12).
- Purified our conscience from dead works (Hebrews 9:14).
- Triumph over every enemy (Hebrews 10:13).
- Christ has made us righteous and freed us from the guilt of sin (Hebrews 10:14).
- A Kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).

In other words, "the better possession and abiding one" is not a thing. It is a person and a great salvation. A great relationship of acceptance with God and fellowship with God and enjoyment of God forever. Notice the two adjectives: "better" and "abiding." It is better than anything this world can offer.

And it last longer than anything this world can offer. Psalm 16:11, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy (a better possession); at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." (An abiding possession) So, Hebrews 10:34 is saying that the key to running with endurance and living a life for the glory of God and the sake of the gospel is knowing that you have this better and abiding possession.

So where does that "knowing" come from? That confidence?

The answer to that is what this whole book is written to supply. Our confidence comes from Christ and what He did perfectly on the cross and at the resurrection, what He is doing now for us in heaven and what He will do for us at the second coming and to all eternity.

- Christ is the one who destroyed the power of death (Hebrews 2:15).
- Christ is the High Priest who opens the way to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:15-16).
- Christ is the one who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).
- Christ is the mediator of a new and better covenant that insures the forgiveness of our sins, and the writing of the law on our hearts, and the presence of God in our midst forever and ever (Hebrews 8:6-11).
- Christ is the one whose blood cleanses our consciences (9:14) and obtained an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12).
- Christ will come again a second time to save all who are eagerly waiting for Him. (Hebrews 9:28)
- Christ's death is the single sacrifice that perfects us for all time (Hebrews 10:14).
- Christ will make all enemies a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 10:13).

All that we ever hope for is owing to Christ. Christ is the seal and the guarantee of our hope in all the promises of God.

What are the practical implications of this?

One is that we must warn each other continually how terrible is the price of throwing away our confidence. The other is that we must remind each other continually how great is the reward, how much better the promises of God are compared to earthly things. You see each of these in verses 38-39.

In other words, don't look at the temporary cost of love and shrink back from confidence in God's infinitely superior promises. Not only will you lose out on the promises; you will be destroyed. Hell is at stake here, not just the loss of a few extra rewards. So, we warn each other: Don't drift away. Don't love the world. Don't start thinking nothing huge is at stake. Fear the terrible prospect of not cherishing the promises of God above the promises of sin.

But mainly we must focus on the preciousness of the promises and help each other value above all things how great the reward is that Christ has purchased for us. We must say to each other what verse 35 says: "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward." And then we must help each other see the greatness of the reward.

So, the whole book of Hebrews is written to give foundation to the hope that is the foundation of a life of radical, risk-taking, sacrificial love. What more can he say than he has already said to help us have this hope so that we live out this radical love? Chapter 11 is the answer: he can give us examples of people who have laid hold on the future reward of joy with God in such a way that it makes a great difference in their lives here and now. That's what chapter 11 is. It is meant to deepen your confidence in God's promises so that you turn from the fleeting pleasures of sin and live out the radical kind of love that comes from having your hope in God.