

A PERSEVERING FAITH

Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-39

Focus Scripture: Hebrews 10:23-36

Key Verse: Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23 (NRSV)

HEBREWS 10:23-36 (NRSV)

23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,

25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

26 For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

28 Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy "on the testimony of two or three witnesses."

29 How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

33 sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

34 For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the

HEBREWS 10:23-36 (KJV)

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly,

plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting.

35 Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward.

36 For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

INTRODUCTION

Just remember, you can do anything you set your mind to, but it takes action, perseverance, and facing your fears. (Gillian Anderson)

All of us admire winners. We pay good money to watch them in action, either live in stadiums or on television and other broadcast platforms. Sports fans have fond memories of watching champions like Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Serena Williams, and Roger Federer in action. (Did I just reveal my favorite sports?) We enjoy all of their victories. However, the sweetest wins come when they are trailing in the scores and have to come from behind to win. We just love to see them pull victories from what were inevitable defeats. Those victories show the defining characteristic of true champions. Winners find ways to push past obstacles to success.

It is this character trait the writer in the text is calling believers to display. The **key verse** is pivotal to the entire chapter. But consider how the writer lays the foundation for this call to endure. He explains why we must exercise the enduring faith. It has to do with the character of the one who made the promise, God. Christ is the true mediator who made atonement for our sins and paved the way for us to have eternal life with the Father. Before Christ, we had just a shadow of real atonement, which we had to renew every year.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

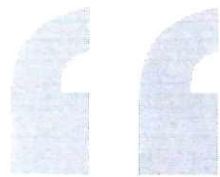
We can summarize the lead-up to the **key verse** in one statement. The law (Old testament provisions for the atonement of sin) was a temporary shadow or substitute for the real atonement (forgiveness) for sins that came by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The law could not give true atonement for sin, and the atonement provisions required annual renewal.

From that position, the writer then set out Christ's superiority as the real atoning lamb of God. The Jews understood that a blood sacrifice was required to atone for sins. Therefore, the priests offered the blood of animals yearly in the atonement rituals. Christ on the other hand offered the real sacrifice required by God. In this regard we see Christ as both the priest and the lamb. He offered himself. And as opposed to an annual offering, Christ's sacrifice was a once for all times offering. The yearly offering was just a yearly reminder to the Jews of the real sacrifice which was to come and came in the form of Jesus Christ. God had never intended the yearly sacrifice to be the permanent solution for the forgiveness of sin.

The writer emphasizes the symbolism in what the Jews practiced yearly. During the atonement rituals the Jewish high priest lifted the curtain (veil) that separated the Holy of Holies from the Most Holy Place. This ritual was to open the way to the temple's holiest place,

representing God's divine majesty.

The substance of this ritual access came at the crucifixion of Christ. Then, the curtain (veil) of the temple was torn from top to bottom. That tearing was God's sign to the world that access to the holiest place is now open to all. No further priestly intervention is needed. Believers can now enter God's presence directly and boldly.



As believers, we must use the access to God's presence we now have because of Christ.

Another ritual was washing the high priest's body in water, which he did before he put on the holy garments to enter the sacred place for the atonement sacrifice. The writer points out this ritual was symbolism for clean hearts believers must maintain to approach the holy God.

As believers, we must use the access to God's presence we now have because of Christ. One way of doing this is for believers to meet together for worship and fellowship.

When we consider Christ's sacrifice, we appreciate why Jesus Christ is the real atonement lamb. He is the substance of what the rituals in the law symbolized.

We no longer have substitutes. We have the real lamb. The call to stand firm recognizes that we will come up against people who want to pull us back to meaningless religious rituals. We will face opposition of various kinds and temptations in the form of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. In the face of these, we must hold fast and keep running the race to eternal life. That is the heavenly call to persevere. The saints in heaven are cheering us on.

SANKOFA

Often, people in the west have little or no ideas of what Christians in other parts of the world must endure practicing their faith. The closest we come to persecutions in our churches is when other members take our favorite seat in a worship service, or park in the spot where we love to park our vehicle. And, of course, there is the after-sermon gossip. Compare the above instances of persecution to what Christians face in northern Nigeria. According to reports in *Christian Today* (Jennifer Lee, 16 July 2020) about 1,200 Christians were

slaughtered in northern Nigeria in the earlier part of this year. Some human rights groups in that country say opposing religious extremists are practicing genocide against Christians.

The murders are only part of the story. In addition, many Christians are attacked and wounded, with many of them crippled for life. Christian worship centers are destroyed frequently, and women and

girls captured and raped. Still, Christians in north Nigeria hold on to their faith. They are convinced that the Christian faith is the true way to meaningful living now and in eternity. That is the perseverance that the writer of the Hebrews calls for in the **key verse**.

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CASE STUDY

In the USA, open persecutions of Christians are seen only in rare instances. However, the onslaught on Christian values is real and persisting. Observers of these issues see a trend in attacks on Christian values. And these attacks are becoming more frequent and more daring.

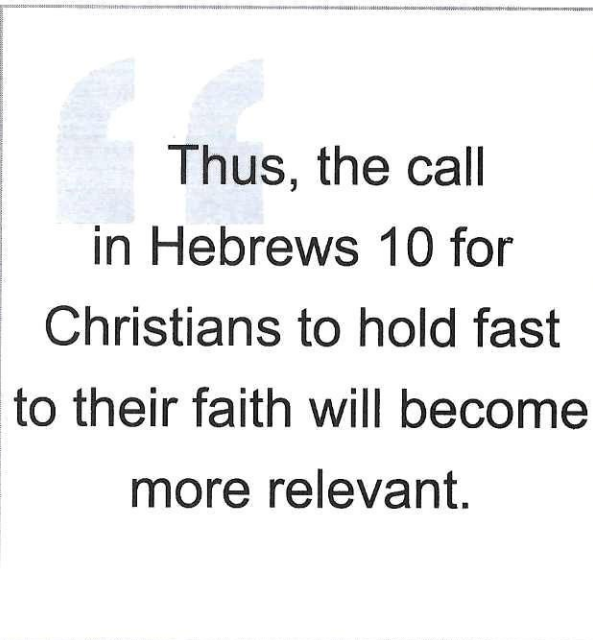
We can start with the banning of Bible reading and prayer in public schools. Before the 1960s schools played a vital role in imparting Christian values to students. But libertarians viewed the sharing of things religious as harmful indoctrination. Therefore, they use the court systems to challenge what they consider detrimental to students.

The challenge later extended to the display of things Christian in public spaces. Thus, the display of the Ten Commandments in courtrooms and public parks became an issue. The effort to restrict or remove religious symbols from public life extended to religious statues. Some

will argue that the church and Christian values are under attack. Others will argue that we live in a society where there are many different religious beliefs and that in public spaces no one religion can be privileged. How do we reconcile this debate?

There are instances that are hostile attacks on Christianity; we have seen churches set on fire, and Bibles burned

in public protest. Many observers predict that this trend towards restricting or removing the church's influence in society will grow and become even more blatant. Thus, the call in Hebrews 10 for Christians to hold fast to their faith will become more relevant. We must pay attention to these trends and prepare ourselves for the battles ahead. Remember in John 15 that Jesus predicted these events.



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LIFE APPLICATION

As believers, we know that in Christ, we have forgiveness of sins. We must affirm that provision when we know we have violated God's laws of life. Sometimes Christians forget this and fall into traps of sadness and depression when

people accuse them of intolerance. While we must never be complacent about sin, we must recognize that the blood of Jesus covers all sin. And repentance keeps the door to forgiveness open to us.

Nevertheless, suppose we recognize that a particular sin is a reoccurring problem. In that case, we should seek help from a pastor or mature Christian whom we trust.

If we accept, as mainstream Christians do, that Christ is the only way to salvation with God, we should expect judgments from those who see otherwise. As the text points out, there is now no other way to obtain forgiveness for sin. If we keep this in mind, we will avoid being victims to persons or religions that offer alternative salvation routes. Some of these persons and groups are very active on social media, offering the public “new” or “progressive” ways to heaven.

Similarly, we must be wary of persons who invite us to use them or their services to access God for divine favors. Believers have an open invitation to approach God openly and boldly. We don't need earthly mediators. We already have a mediator in the person of Jesus Christ. Speak directly to him in faith.

On a related note, let us say a word about prayer. Sometimes a person may ask other persons to pray for them because that person feels they cannot pray for themselves. That person may be influenced by the way other people

pray. There is a risk of deception in these cases. “Smooth” or “powerful” praying is not a requirement for effective prayers. The main ingredient is sincerity. God hears the sincere heart, irrespective of the fluency of the words used.

We are the best persons to put our requests and petitions to God. Each person must get comfortable in going to God, in their own way, with their own

words. It is the sincerity of the heart, not the fluency of words, that impresses God.

Questions:

1. What is your default or first response when faced with difficulty – fight harder, give up, or look for another way? Why?
2. What are your top ten reasons why believers should attend church regularly (in person or virtually), especially in light of Hebrews 10:25?
3. What are some ways we can be in solidarity with Christians around the world who experience severe persecution because of their faith?



God hears the sincere heart, irrespective of the fluency of the words used.

CLOSING DEVOTION

Closing Song: "To God Be the Glory,"
AMEC Hymn #21

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, I accept
that Jesus Christ paid the total price for

my sins once and for all. For that, I am
grateful. Also, I recognize that I must
make the effort to stand strong in the face
of opposition and trials. Help me by your
Holy Spirit to run the race of faith to the
end. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 9-August 15

Monday	Mark 8:31-37 (Save Your Life by Losing It)
Tuesday	1 Peter 3:9-19 (Respond to Abusers with Blessings)
Wednesday	Revelation 2:8-11 (Be Faithful Until Death)
Thursday	Hebrews 10:1-10 (Sanctified by Christ's Sacrifice)
Friday	Hebrews 10:11-18 (The Inner Life of New Believers)
Saturday	Hebrews 10:19-22 (Approach God with a Pure Heart)
Sunday	Hebrews 10:23-36 (Act in Ways That Preserve the Faith)