

September 19, 2010 by Steve Brandon



The Key to Endurance

Hebrews 10:37-39

1. Faith in His Coming (verse 37).

2. Faith in Your Living (verses 38-39).

In our exposition of the book of Hebrews, we come to the last three verses of chapter 10--verses 37, 38, and 39. In many ways, these verses are really a continuation from our text last week. Last week, if you remember, my message was entitled, "A Call to Endurance." This was the need of the original recipients of the letter. Life was difficult for them. They were being pulled away from their faith in Christ. They were being tempted to return to their Judaism. They were being persecuted for their faith. So, they needed endurance.

The writer of this epistle addresses their need by giving them several points of advice to help them. He told them to remember their past victories--to remember the way that God had carried them through in the past. Such a remembrance would be helpful for them going forward. He also told them to look to their future reward. When you have your eye upon the blessings that will come later, you are strengthened to endure the difficulties of today.

This morning, as we come to verses 37-39, we see the key to endurance. Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning: "The Key to Endurance." Last week, it was "A Call to Endurance." This week, it is "The Key to Endurance." Now, rather than telling you right now what the key is, I want for you to try to pick it out as you read the text. In order to catch up on the context, I want to read from verse 32, ...

Hebrews 10:32-36

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

And now comes our text. Listen for the key to endurance.

Hebrews 10:37-39

For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

What's the key to endurance? Faith. We see this word appearing in verse 38 and 39. Verse 38, "But my righteous one shall live by faith." Verse 39, "We are ... those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." Verse 37 puts forth the reality and hope of our faith, "he who is coming will come, and will not delay."

Incidentally, the word "faith" has only appeared 3 times in the book of Hebrews up until this point, and every time it has only been incidental, sort of in passing. In chapter 4, faith is used to describe those who enter the rest. Hebrews 4:3 says, "We who have believed enter that rest." In chapter 6, faith is mentioned as a portion of the "elementary teaching" that some couldn't quite ever grasp. So, they required repeated teachings about it. But, the author says that we should not be "... laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God" (6:2). Also in chapter 6, faith is mentioned as a trait of those who are worthy of our imitation. 6:12 says, "be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

But now, here at the end of chapter 10, we see the author focusing his attention upon "faith," this all-important characteristic that we must have to remain faithful through the trials of life. In many ways, this last paragraph forms the transition to chapter 11, where the word "faith" occurs 25 times. Indeed, it is the theme of chapter 11. In chapter 11, we see a definition of faith (in verse 1). Then, throughout the rest of the chapter (verses 2-40), we see many, many examples of faith. We see Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab are mentioned by name. But many others are mentioned only by what they did in faith ...

Hebrews 11:32-40

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword;

they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

In future weeks, we will set our hearts upon faith: what it means, what it looks like, what it accomplishes, how to live by faith. And here in our passage, this morning, faith is really introduced for the first time. In the context of our passage (and in the context of chapter 11), it is put forth at "The Key to Endurance."

Now, before we get into my points this morning, I want to give you a bit of background in the Old Testament. The reason being that the first two verses in our text is a quotation from the Old Testament.

Hebrews 10:37-39

For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

These verses are a loose translation of Habakkuk 2:3-4. The original readers would have known these verses very well and would have easily seen the connection with their situation. The message of Habakkuk fits very well into the whole context of Hebrews. And since our text is short, I want to put these verses into context for you this morning. Then we'll come back to Hebrews to see "The Key to Endurance."

So, turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk. The book of Habakkuk is really a great book that deals with suffering and the sovereignty of God. The book begins with Habakkuk in distress, crying out to the Lord. Habakkuk is a righteous prophet in the land, but is distressed by all of the wickedness that he sees around him in the land of Judah. Look at the book of Habakkuk: chapter 1, verse 1.

Habakkuk 1:1-4

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.
How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!"
Yet You do not save.
Why do You make me see iniquity,
And cause me to look on wickedness?
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;
Strife exists and contention arises.
Therefore the law is ignored
And justice is never upheld
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore justice comes out perverted.

You can feel the distress in Habakkuk's life. He speaks of witnessing iniquity and wickedness (verse 3). Destruction and violence and strife and contention all around him (verse 3). So overwhelming are those who are engaged in wickedness that they overpowered the righteous and deprived them of the justice that is due them (verse 4). Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules people groan." Habakkuk was groaning.

In his pain, he was praying to God. But, God was silent. This doubled the intensity of his sufferings. It's one thing for the wicked to rise up to power. But it's another thing when God does nothing about it. Thus the thrust of verse 2, ...

Habakkuk 1:2

How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!"
Yet You do not save.

I'm sure that there were many of the original readers who felt the same way. They were in the same situation. They were experiencing justice gone awry, as their property was being confiscated for no reason (Hebrews 10:34). They experienced the unjust public ridicule (Hebrews 10:32-33). But God was silent. He didn't stop the suffering. He let it continue on.

They experienced violence and were crying to the Lord for help, but nothing was coming. The silence is broken in verse 5, but it wasn't what Habakkuk was expecting.

Habakkuk 1:5

"Look among the nations! Observe!
Be astonished! Wonder!
Because I am doing something in your days--
You would not believe if you were told.

This verse sets up what comes next. It's nothing that Habakkuk would have expected. It's nothing that we would ever have anticipated. So, listen with eager ears to this astonishing message! He says, ...

Habakkuk 1:6

"For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans [which is another name for the Babylonians].

We know from history that the Babylonians eventually came and destroyed Judah. They killed many in the land. They destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. They carried many of the Jewish people away into exile into Babylon. But note how the text ascribes the event to God's control. He says, "I am raising up the Chaldeans." In other words, they didn't merely come upon the scene by accident. They didn't amass great power by their own ingenuity. They didn't come to be a world power through their own might. No, God's hand was upon them. God raised them up. God raised them up to come and destroy Judah.

The astonishing thing is that these weren't kind people. They were cruel and violent people, feared by the world. Look at how God, Himself, describes the people, ...

Habakkuk 1:6-11

"For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
That fierce and impetuous people
Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.
"They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.
"Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour.
"All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces moves forward.
They collect captives like sand.
"They mock at kings
And rulers are a laughing matter to them
They laugh at every fortress
And heap up rubble to capture it.
"Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on
But they will be held guilty,
They whose strength is their god."

The picture here is not good. The Chaldeans are a fierce people (verse 6). They are dreaded and feared people (verse 7). They have a strong army at their disposal, whose power is second to none (verse 8). They have known great victory, taking many, many captive in recent days (verse 9), so much so that their captives are compared to sand. They mock at kings and fear nobody (verse 10).

Regarding Judah, verse 11, "they will sweep through like the wind and pass on." It's almost as if Judah will give them no joy. It's like beating the Chicago Cubs, no big deal. They will simply move on to their next plunder. Now catch what's happening here. Judah has engaged in much sin, and their rightful judgment is coming. But, it's coming at the hands of those who are even more wicked than those in Judah! And so, Habakkuk objects. Verse 12, ...

Habakkuk 1:12-17

Are You not from everlasting,
O LORD, my God, my Holy One?
We will not die
You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge;
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.
Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,
And You can not look on wickedness with favor
Why do You look with favor
On those who deal treacherously?
Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up
Those more righteous than they?
Why have You made men like the fish of the sea,
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?
The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook,
Drag them away with their net,
And gather them together in their fishing net.
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.
Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net
And burn incense to their fishing net;

Because through these things their catch is large,
And their food is plentiful.
Will they therefore empty their net
And continually slay nations without sparing?

Habakkuk pulls out his theology. God is a holy and pure God (verse 12). God is so holy, that He can't approve evil (verse 13). Right? But, the Chaldeans are wicked people. According to verse 15, they capture people like fishermen capture fish - with hooks and nets. According to verse 15, they rejoice at such things. Even offering a sacrifice to their fishing nets! They are idolatrous people who "slay nations without sparing" (verse 17).

And so, the question of the day is this: "How is it that God looks upon the wicked Chaldeans with favor? How is it that God is raising up the wicked Chaldeans to accomplish His will? How is God looking upon these people with favor, when they are so wicked?" (verse 13). In chapter 2, verse 1, we see Habakkuk concluding his thought.

Habakkuk 2:1
I will stand on my guard post
And station myself on the rampart;
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,
And how I may reply when I am reproved.

Habakkuk has made his case. He thinks that it is air-tight, and that God is in trouble. And now, he humbly stands aside to see God's reply. And the reply comes in chapter 2, verse 2, ...

Habakkuk 2:2
Then the LORD answered me and said,
"Record the vision
And inscribe it on tablets,
That the one who reads it may run.

This sets up the tone for what's coming. A terrible time is coming. You may well want to run from the city before the Babylonians arrive on the scene. And now we come to the two verses loosely quoted in Hebrews 10, ...

Habakkuk 2:3
"For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay.

Verse 3 says that the vision is coming. It is sure. The Chaldeans will surely come and wipe out Judah and Jerusalem. Wait for it. It will not delay. It will come when God has planned it to come. And then, the all-important verse 4.

Habakkuk 2:4
"Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.

This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament. It is quoted in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and then our text, Hebrews 10:38. This verse was the catalyst for the entire Reformation. Our life before God is not to be lived by works. Rather, it is to be lived by faith. We will look at this verse more in detail when we return to Hebrews.

For those in Judah during the days of Habakkuk, it meant trusting God, that His plans are best. It meant trusting God, that His ways are right. It meant trusting God, that He will provide through the troubles. Even when things are bad. Even when you are surrounded by iniquity and wickedness. Even when your country is soon to be destroyed. "The righteous will live by faith."

Habakkuk learned his lesson well. The rest of chapter 2 is filled with God's declaration of judgment upon the wicked. Chapter 3 is all about Habakkuk's repentance and faith. Look at how Habakkuk ends, ...

Habakkuk 3:16-19
I heard and my inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise who will invade us.
Though the fig tree should not blossom

And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.

Such is the resolve of faith. Though things may go terrible for me, though I lose my farm, though I lose my job, though I lose my animals, though I lose my house, though I have no money left, though all I have is wiped out, "Yet (verse 18), I will exult in the LORD. I will rejoice in my salvation."

At the beginning of Habakkuk, he was looking at the wickedness of Judah. Then, he began to focus upon the Chaldeans. But, he ends by looking at the Lord. And it's there that he finds His strength. Verse 19, "The Lord GOD is my strength." And this is the faith to which the writer to the Hebrews was calling his readers. Yes, things are hard. Yes, you are being mocked for your faith in Christ. Yes, you are being ridiculed because of your believe in the Messiah. Yes, you are going through physical sufferings (Heb. 10:33). Yes, some are coming and taking away your possessions (Heb. 10:34). But, through it all, you must endure. "You have need of endurance," he says (Heb. 10:36). The key to your endurance is faith.

And the faith to which those in the days of Habakkuk were called is the faith to which the original readers of Hebrews were called. And this is the faith to which we are called, today. Trust the LORD! Exult in the LORD! (Hab. 3:18). Rejoice in the LORD! (Hab. 3:18). Let Him be your strength! (Hab. 3:19), regardless of your circumstances.

What's the key to enduring like this? It's faith. It's believing God and trusting Him, like Habakkuk did. Now, let's turn back to the book of Hebrews. Please remember that the reason why he quotes these verses is to give us counsel on how to endure.

I have two points this morning, and due to our time in Habakkuk this morning, they will be short. What's the key to endurance? It's faith. Particularly, as I have placed it in my first point, it is ...

1. Faith in His Coming (verse 37).

Hebrews 10:37

For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay.

I said earlier that this is a loose quotation from Habakkuk. (Some will even say that the writer pulled from Is. 26:20 as well). Here's why: In the case of Habakkuk, the coming was a coming of the Chaldeans to destroy Judah and take her captive. But, the writer here brings a positive swing to the quote. Here, he takes the quotation to refer to the return of Christ. It's not the Babylonians who are coming to destroy. Rather, it's Jesus, who is going to return to save. "He who is coming will come, and will not delay" (verse 37).

There is something about being close to the finish line that helps you endure until the end. Have you ever seen a cross-country race? Runners are off and running. Some are going faster than others, to be sure. But, almost all of them are keeping up a steady pace, according to their ability, until the finish line is in sight. And when they can see the finish line, they give it all they've got. While they were jogging for miles, they come sprinting into the home stretch. Why is this? It's because they know that the toil is soon to be over. Once they cross that finish line, they no longer have to put forth any energy. So, they can use it all up on the race-track.

Well, in a similar way, we are to live our Christian lives, eagerly anticipating the return of Jesus. Believing that He is coming is one of the things that will help you endure. The salesman will continue to work very hard, when the sale is about to be completed. The student will pull and all-nighter, when the final exam is the next day, after which comes summer vacation. The roofer will work until dark, when the rain is coming that evening. The parent will stay up late on Christmas Eve to insure that all is ready for Christmas morning. I know that you have all found yourselves in such a situation at one time or another. We all push through the difficulties when we know that the climax is soon to come.

And such is the thought that ought to prevail in our lives. The nearness of His coming should press us on. Note the way that verse 37 reads, "For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come." This has been the hope of Christians for centuries. We have always hoped in the soon return of Christ.

While on earth, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Paul said in Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Peter said, "The end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7). James said it this way, "The coming of the Lord is near" (James 5:8). In the final verses of Revelation, we hear Jesus promising His soon return. He says, "Behold, I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:7). He says, "Behold, I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:12). He says, "Yes, I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:20). Such an eager anticipation hasn't escaped the author of Hebrews either. In Hebrews 9:28, the writer refers to believers who are "eagerly awaiting Him."

I know that I've told you this story of Florence Chadwick before, but it makes the point so well, that I feel compelled to tell it again. More than 50 years ago, Florence Chadwick waded into the water off Catalina Island (in California). She intended to be the first woman to swim the 21 miles from the island to the California coast. Long-distance swimming was not new to her; she had been the first woman to swim the English

Channel in both directions. The water was numbing cold that day. The fog was so thick she could hardly see the boats in her party. She swam more than 15 hours before she asked to be taken out of the water. Her trainer tried to encourage her to swim on since they were so close to land, but when Florence looked, all she saw was fog. So she quit, less than one-mile from her goal. Later she said, "I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the land I might have made it." [\[1\]](#)

For the early Hebrew Christians, the same was true. When you can see the finish line, it's easier to finish. Do you believe that He is coming? It will help you endure. If you fail to believe this, you will not endure.

What's the key to endurance? Faith. Faith in His Coming (verse 37). Second, ...
2. Faith in Your Living (verses 38-39).

This is verse 38, ...

Hebrews 10:38
but my righteous one shall live by faith;"

You say, "What does that mean?" First of all, it surely means everything that Paul taught about justification by faith. He said in Galatians 3:11, "Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith'" In other words, living by faith means that we don't look to our own law-keeping to justify us before the Lord. Rather, we look to the Lord for our justification. In this way, we follow in the footsteps of our spiritual father, Abraham, of whom it was said, "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6).

In other words, it's not the righteous living of Abraham that gained him favor before God. Rather, it was his faith that gained him favor. When God looked down upon him and saw that he believed in the promises of God, then God considered that faith to be righteousness. Such is the heart of our faith! "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 3:28).

This whole doctrine of justification by faith alone is the hinge upon which the entire Reformation was swung. Listen to the testimony of Martin Luther, the central figure to the Reformation. He wrote, ...

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the righteousness of God', because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous ...
Night and day I pondered until ...
I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressible sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven." [\[2\]](#)

On one level, this is what it means to "live by faith." It means to live before God, trusting that your faith - and your faith alone - is the only thing that makes you righteous before God. But, I do believe that this phrase, "My righteous one shall live by faith" means a bit more than that, especially here in this context. It means, as Habakkuk experienced, enduring the difficulties, trusting that God will be your help.

This is the greater context of the book of Hebrews. Yes, things are difficult around you. But, believe and trust in God to carry you through. Because, when trials come, you can easily lose your way. You can start doubting God. You can start trusting in yourself. You can turn to other things you think will help you. But, ultimately, it is the righteous, who will live by faith.

There is another way that people choose to live. Rather than living by faith, they shrink back. Verse 38 says, "If he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in Him." This idea of "shrinking back" is the opposite of living by faith. When you live by faith, you press on! When you live by faith, you endure the hardships. When you live by faith, you trust in God's ways.

I learned this week about the life of Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher. He was born in 1844, the son of a Lutheran pastor. At the age of 20, he studied theology at the University of Bonn. But, he quit after one semester, losing his faith. From there, his life went downhill. Oh, in the world's eyes, he was quite successful. At the age of 24, he became professor of classical philology at the University of Basel. He went on to write more than a dozen books, the last of which is called, "The Anti-Christ," which he wrote when he was 44 years old.

This book was a full-on assault of Christianity! He declares his hatred of God. He writes, ...

"Wherever there are walls I shall inscribe this eternal accusation against Christianity upon them—I can write in letters which make even the blind to see. ...
I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, petty – I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind." [\[3\]](#)

A few months after writing these words, Friedrich Nietzsche went insane. He spent the last 10 years of his life unable to cope with life. Now, there are debates as to what caused his insanity. Some would point to a slow-growing brain tumor. Others would contend that it was syphilis that caused it. Others would put it as simple dementia. [\[4\]](#) I don't know enough to have an educated position. But, you can't help but notice the connection between what he wrote and what happened to Him.

Certainly, Nietzsche heard the truth of Christianity. Being born into a religious home and studying theology certainly gave him much exposure to the truth. When he writes his diatribe against religion, he writes it against Christianity, not some generic "religion." He hated the cross of Christ!

Friedrich Nietzsche was a man who shrunk back. And God had no pleasure in him. If God can control the rise and fall of nations, He can certainly control the rise and fall of people. Such was the fate of Nietzsche. Know that God will not be mocked. You can't write such words against Christianity and expect the blessings of God upon your life.

And neither can you shrink back from faith and expect God to continue His blessings upon your life. Such is the importance of faith. It is the key to endurance.

Finally, verse 39 comes as a final encouragement. He writes, ...

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

The author here is merely taking the phrase from Habakkuk and applying it to his day. He knows in his heart that he has faith. He knows that he isn't shrinking back to destruction. He includes many of his readers as well. "We are not of those who shrink back to destruction." Rather, on the flip side, we are "of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

Note the fruit of faith: it preserves the soul. This is another way to say that it produces endurance. Do you have faith to the pressing of your soul? In weeks to come, we'll talk more about faith.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 19, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] This illustration was found at <http://bible.org/illustration/florence-chadwick-iii>.

[2] As quoted by Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity, p. 364.)

[3] This quote is taken from the second to last paragraph in *The Anti-Christ*, Friedrich Nietzsche.

[4] <http://www.leonardsax.com/Nietzsche.pdf>.