

## Hebrews 12:3-4 "Consider Christ Who Endured Such Hostility For You"

If we can take just a moment and consider where this letter has been taking us up to this point it might help to put into focus the importance of where we are this morning in our text. Our writer has addressed these Hebrew Christians in a period in their lives when to be a Jew and a Christian was very disheartening at times.

Friends and family might very well have tried to discourage this "new religion" centered around a dead man who allegedly rose bodily from the grave. As a Jew the law was central and the traditions were essential to be a good Jew. This Rabbi, Jesus, taught that the traditions, as well as the law, were of no value in themselves in reaching heaven.

Those well intentioned rejecters of the Messiah may have argued against this new found faith as they argued how it was a false doctrine and a misrepresentation of the O.T. scriptures. And they certainly argued from the Scriptures.

Early on there was great expectation among the Jewish believers that the Messiah might come back for them at any time, after all, Jesus Himself told the disciples in ACT 1:8-11 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Those were exciting times even in the midst of persecution early on. But weeks turned into months and months turned into years and years turned into decades and the opposition to the Gospel of Christ still remained and so did the cries from unbelieving family and friends encouraging the believing Jews to turn away from this "Way", as it was referred to, and embrace, once again, the prophets of old whose words echoed in their O.T. Scriptures.

But what did those O.T. Scriptures speak of? The Son of God who was promised to come into this world to redeem men from their

sin. This Messiah was none other than God Himself come in the flesh. And this is where our writer begins this letter

HEB 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

This letter was written to encourage these Hebrew Christians and all Christians not to fall into the trap of thinking that maybe they made a mistake by putting all their eggs in one basket. Leave room for the possibility that this Jesus was an imposter and not who He said He was.

No, there is no room for that. And these Hebrew Christians needed to hear it in no uncertain terms. They needed to be reminded that the promises always pointed to Christ. And that, unlike many of their forefathers, they had embraced the true Messiah by faith and there's no turning back.

You see they were tempted to lay it aside and sit on the sidelines, not persevering to the end because the road got hard. Our writer reminded them in HEB 6:10-12 "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

Being a Christian could have been hard enough, but for a Jew to give up the ways of old and embrace a New Covenant found only in Christ was a tough thing when friends and family would not support them in their faith. And this new covenant with an infinitely better priest is the key to their salvation which is why our writer spent chapters 7 through 10 explaining and encouraging them as to who this Messiah is and what He accomplished for us.

HEB 10:10-12 "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

He's reminding them of the object of their faith, but their faith must be encouraged and built up as they consider Christ, and if that was hard to do, then he must show them how faith will move forward as they follow Christ. And so he gives them chapter 11 and encourages them with the faith of others who too had to walk in difficult times.

But by the end of chapter 11 it is clear that the faith God gives His people is a faith that will persevere because God is the One lifting us up in our walk with Him as He continually points to the prize at the end of the race; Christ Himself in a "city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Heb.11:10)

This is why we must fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (HEB 12:2)

Our Lord persevered to the end because He saw the prize set before Him, and that prize was His joy and caused Him never to look back as He went forward for you and me.

PHI 2:8 .... "he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!"

That's how much He loved us. No one in this world has ever experienced as hard a road as did Jesus Christ; not just from a physical standpoint, as hard as that was. But the perfect Son of God who enjoyed eternal fellowship with the Father was now forsaken by Him on that day at Calvary.

That is an infinitely measured burden He didn't shy away from. But He always looked to the Father and knew that to do His will was the ultimate act of faith, because He knew the Father would be faithful to receive His sacrifice for us and receive Him to Himself as His glorious resurrection demonstrated.

But to receive the prize He had to endure the cross and Jesus tells you and me to daily take up our crosses and follow Him. And by the way, that expression of our Lord's doesn't mean to simply bear a particular burden like putting up with a cranky mother-in-law or an overbearing boss. The cross was an instrument of death and Christ wants us to die to self and live to Him.

But that's a hard thing to do at times. But as our writer has been saying it must be done by faith as we trust Christ to be the One He says He is and follow Him no matter what. And to help us

consider how that can be accomplished he tells us in HEB 12:3-4 "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

All of us have tough times in our lives as we walk with Christ and try to honor Him in the process. But we all fail at times and sometimes we wonder if anyone else in the world knows what we're going through. And so we throw ourselves a pity party. A pity party that is. And I've given some great pity parties in my life.

But how do we snap out of it? Our writer says to quit looking at our circumstance and place our eyes on Christ, but not just in the sense of looking to Him as Lord and Savior and Deliverer, which is not a bad way of approaching Him, but to look to what He had to suffer.

HEB 12:3 "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

This was the danger our writer warns his readers of and that is growing weary and losing heart. Of course this isn't restricted to the Hebrew Christians. You and I have to deal with it too. This is also why Paul told the Galatians in GAL 6:9 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

He includes himself in that statement. But what moved Paul forward was the understanding of what Christ did for him and how He suffered for Paul. Its result in Paul's life was life eternal. And the result in our lives is the same as we've trusted the Lord for this eternal life.

Heb.12:3 begins "Consider him". This is an interesting statement because in the Greek it's actually a mathematical term which gives the sense of calculating what Christ suffered, actually weighing those things He suffered for us in a way where we add it up and see how much He gave for us. The word in the Greek is *analogizomai* which literally means to estimate, ie. to contemplate. We have a similar word in English; analogical, which is to make an analogy.

In this case an analogy between what Christ suffered and what we are presently suffering. If you weigh them side by side how can we compare? In this understanding we can see how our Lord did in

fact suffer far beyond what we do. But how does His sufferings for us help us not to grow weary and lose heart?

Good question. The first thing we need to consider is that while we may deserve to suffer because we were born with sin and by choice we do sin, Christ was righteous in all His ways. He didn't deserve wrath, but rather a reward for His perfect life. And yet we're told that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2CO 5:21)

His suffering was undeserved. How this should encourage us to know that God would love us so much that He would take our place in suffering the penalty we deserved. How that should make our hearts soar. If He had not suffered on our behalf we would still be in our sins destined to spend eternity in hell.

Dr. Donald Guthrie makes this comment: "The purpose of fixing attention on Jesus Christ is so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. Evidently the writer knew that there was a tendency for his readers to lose heart, not in a single moment but over a period of time, with a gradual slackening of resolve. A corrective for this tendency is an ever deepening attention to the glorious object of Christian faith, Jesus Himself."

Andrew Murray says this, "Looking to Jesus, the suffering One, will bring us the comfort of His sympathy, the courage of His victory, the blessed consciousness of conformity to Him."

And after all are we not to be conformed into His image?

ROM 8:29 "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed** to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

But when writing to the Philippians Paul also said this in PHI 3:10-12 "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

If it meant suffering for the sake of Christ then Paul was willing to press on knowing what Christ had done for him; suffering death so that we might have life in His resurrection.

Suffering in any form is not a very exciting thing to consider and yet when we are called upon by Christ to represent Him in this world through suffering, if we do it in an attitude that we will do it for Him, it takes the burden and turns it into an opportunity to shine for our God in a darkened world.

But, if we think that suffering is something only to be endured, like waiting for a bad tooth to be pulled, then we've missed how looking to Christ and His sufferings can enable us not to grow weary and lose heart.

In God's sovereignty He uses even suffering to not only conform us to His image but also to make us strong as we are given perseverance to endure for Him.

ROM 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

In all things God works for our good, even the times of suffering. He never leaves us alone, nor does He forsake us. And the idea that He uses those sufferings for our good may seem amazing, and yet nothing is wasted in God's economy. He loves us enough to use even what may have been intended as evil against us for our good.

This is what happened to Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery by his brothers and ended up in Egypt. Little did they know that God used Joseph's sufferings to be a blessing for his family when the famine came. In fact, the very sufferings which Joseph endured by faith in God were used to bring about a great nation as they carried the name of God out of Egypt and through whom the Messiah would come.

These Hebrew Christians our writer is addressing had suffered for our Lord to some extent, but as he points out in HEB 12:4 "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

Again, this is a comparison to our Lord who gave His very life for us. But the point is not just that they didn't shed their blood in their struggle against sin, because we know that many did give their lives; the point is to show how a sinless one struggled against sin which led to His death. But He didn't struggle against His own sin because He was sinless, rather it was against our sin and the sinners who placed Him on that cross.

That's what is meant by the first part of verse 3 ..... HEB 12:3  
Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men,...."

He was opposed from the beginning. Herod threatened His life as a baby where His family was forced to flee, to all places, Egypt, where He had led His captives free some 1400 years prior. He too would come out of Egypt to lead us, who were captives to sin, and free us from its penalty and power.

Was His suffering for us worth it? Should His suffering on our behalf keep us from fainting and growing weary? Yes, if we can see with eyes of faith to look beyond the suffering and to His perfect plan for us even in that suffering.

We're going to see, as we come to verses 5-13 that our Lord uses many different means to help us stay on the path He has placed us on. He loves us too much to allow us to wander off too far or for too long. His desire is for us to endure and to represent Him faithfully. But the reward of faith is sweet.

JAM 1:12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

Sometimes it's tough to persevere. But because God perseveres with us and will never let us go He will enable us to look up as He holds on to us and strengthens us for the task of being His faithful witness.

We often consider Job as the man who seemed to have an abundance of perseverance as he endured some horrendous things in his life. But the endurance Job gained from those trials are something you and I may not be able to understand, but what is true of us, who love Christ, was the same for him. The Lord worked all things to his good, to Job who loved the Lord and was called by Him to show his faithfulness in the midst of trials.

James says of Job in JAM 5:11 "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

We might say what kind of mercy and compassion could be found in Job's case? You and I would be looking with earthly eyes if we only saw the suffering. God saw the better thing it produced which is what He always wants, a closer relationship with Him and the

kind of life that loves Him, knowing that He is full of mercy and compassion.

We have a tendency to only look at mercy and compassion in earthly terms. And that usually translates out to, 'if my life is smooth sailing with no suffering, then God is showing His compassion and mercy on me.'

First it must be said that His greatest act of compassion and mercy was found at the cross, which was suffering. That hasn't changed. If that's all we got we would be eternally blessed. But His compassion and mercy continues in the way He is drawing us close to Himself even in this world.

What we find though is that it is merciful and compassionate for God to get our attention when we stray or when we begin to put more emphasis in the things of this world or when our attitude toward Him is more fleshly than spiritual. Would it be compassionate and merciful for our heavenly Father to let us wander and get far off the path?

Of course not. And this is why it's so important to see through God's eyes as did the saints of old who are mentioned in the eleventh chapter. They looked beyond this world and their trials and they trusted in the God who promised that He would be their God and they would be His people. And part of what that meant is that God was in the process of conforming them into Christ's image during their earthly pilgrimage through testings in their lives.

Do we really believe that? Or are we looking for a relationship with God on our own terms? Will we only follow and serve when it's convenient? Believe me I'm not picking on anybody. I know what it's like to be down and suffering and frustrated with my life and wondering why God seems to be picking on me when all I want to do is serve Him.

But that's not walking by faith which is knowing that God is working all things to my good, not my bad. If it's not walking by faith then it must be walking by sight. But by His grace he will remove the covering we've pulled over our eyes and the light shines in once again and we see how we've fooled ourselves one more time.

We have not suffered to the point of shedding our blood as we struggle against sin. That is not to overlook real suffering which



we may be experiencing. It is simply to help us to weigh the eternal against the temporal.

This is what Paul was conveying to the Corinthian Church.

2CO 4:15-18 "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

And this is the tough part for all of us because it may seem much easier to see the temporal than the eternal especially when the rent is due and you don't have the money, or the car is on its last leg and you're wondering if it will get you to the store one more time.

We certainly don't want to neglect the temporal and our Lord makes it very clear that we have responsibilities and obligations to take care of the lives He's given us, which is why He encourages us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Our Lord doesn't deny this, but He must be the One we constantly go to for even our physical needs trusting that an Almighty God can certainly meet our needs.

They may be met in the eleventh hour, as is usually in my case, but He means it when He says, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

We do not have an abusive heavenly Father. He sent His only begotten Son for His children, why in the world would He do something dastardly against us? He can't, even though we may interpret it thus at times. By faith we must understand that He does all things for our good.

And if it means turning up the heat once in awhile to melt off some of the dross in our lives then it is a good thing as it purifies us for His service as we bring glory to His name. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying I enjoy the heat any more than anyone else. What I am saying is that we all need to learn to embrace the heat for the purpose it serves as our loving heavenly Father uses it to draw us closer to Himself.

And if we can come through the trial having seen this, and now love our God more, than a good thing has been accomplished by our Lord. If we kick and scream in the process looking no further up than our ceilings as we cry out, 'why me Lord?', then maybe we didn't learn what our Lord was trying to convey.

I can tell you from personal experience that there were times in my life where I felt that maybe I just wasn't getting it. And like a loving Father who repeats the instructions for His children over again and again until they get it right, I would pray, 'Lord open my eyes and ears to get this thing right in my life so I don't have to go through it again.'

Or I would pray show me what it is I'm not getting. I don't like trials or suffering. Maybe I'm strange that way. But I also don't like thinking that my heavenly Father isn't interested in my growth. And if trials and suffering at times will enable me to be a better servant for Him then I am willing to come to Him and ask for the grace and the wisdom to learn through it and grow closer to Him.

This is a verse which has been indelibly imprinted on my mind because it has helped me to see from God's perspective what He is doing in our lives in those times which are tough and we may not understand.

JAM 1:2-5 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

Oh, to be mature and complete, lacking nothing as we go out in this world to represent our King, to be His ambassador, to go out in battle as a soldier for Christ. Soldiers are not born, they are developed through training and discipline and those who endure it might consider it a trial. But when they come through it they are now equipped to take on anyone.

God is training us for the battle we face every day from our enemy Satan and He's given us our armor to do battle as we come against his kingdom in this world. We must see with spiritual eyes remembering that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (EPH 6:12)

God is graciously equipping us to battle in this spiritual fight. If the training seems too hard at times, go to God and ask for grace and strength as only He can give it, and He most certainly will as we walk in that grace and strength by faith in Him.

May we declare with Paul in 2TI 4:17-18 "But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

That's our goal, to be brought safely to His heavenly Kingdom. That safety is found in the blood of Christ and the love of Christ. That safety is the faith we've been given to trust that God is an all wise God who does all things for our good.

GAL 6:9 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."