

THE PERSEVERANCE OF FAITH

SERIES: THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

By Danny Hall

April 13, 1986 marked the crowning achievement of my (rather mediocre) athletic life. On that day I ran the Vienna Marathon in Vienna, Austria, along with a number of others from my office. This marathon provided a metaphor for much of the rest of my life, including my spiritual life, because life is like a marathon. We live out life not in a brief moment like a sprint, but over a long period of time. As we look into God's word to finish this series of messages, I'm going to refer to the marathon from time to time to illustrate how God is preparing us and encouraging us to live out our faith over the long haul.

The final occurrence of the statement "The just shall live by faith" is in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews is in effect a portrait of Jesus Christ. It exalts him as few other Scripture texts do in explaining to us how he is indeed greater than everything else as our Lord and Savior. In 1:1-10:18 the author shows him to be superior to the prophets as God's final revelation to us; superior to the angels; superior to the old covenant of Moses; and superior to the old sacrificial system, since he died once and for all for our sins.

In 10:19-25 the author encourages us to draw near to God because of our deliverance from our sin, to hold fast to the confession of our hope, and to be about stimulating one to another to love and good works.

In 10:26-31 he gives us another of several warnings that punctuate the book: to not forsake this glorious gospel and great truth. These warnings remind those who have heard the gospel and have even become involved in the community of faith, but have not yet fully submitted themselves to the gospel, that they are in danger of turning their backs on the gospel, of falling away from all that glorious truth, of trampling underfoot the wonderful sacrifice of God. The author warns them to stand firm.

Now in the paragraph we are going to examine, 10:32-39, there is an important transition to the subject of God's call to endure to the end.

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 an abiding 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.

**"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.

The key point of this paragraph is given in verses 35-36: "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." The word translated here as "confidence" (*parrhesia* in the Greek text) appears over and over again in the book of Hebrews. Sometimes it's used specifically, as in drawing *boldly* (this is the same word, *parrhesia*) into the presence of God because of what Christ has done (see 4:16; 10:19-22). But here it's used in a broader sense that is almost synonymous with faith. It is a boldness, a faith we have in God to go

forward. It is trusting him completely.

“Don’t give that up!” the author says. “You need to endure.” All of us face struggles in our Christian life. No one ever said the Christian life was going to be easy. It’s impossible! We are going to have questions we cannot answer and difficulties that seem insurmountable. One of the shortcomings in so much modern preaching is that you’re told if you come to Christ, somehow everything is going to be wonderful. You will cease having problems, everything will be straightened out, and you’ll be healthy, wealthy, and blessed. Now of course, when we come to faith in Christ and are rightly related to him, our lives are enriched beyond measure in many wonderful and beautiful ways. But the truth is that we also live our faith in a world filled with difficult situations. How do we meet those challenges, endure, and keep hold of our confidence?

The author points to three things that will help us endure to the end. One is given in the first part of our paragraph, one in the last part, and one by implication in the surrounding context. Let’s examine them.

First, he calls on us to remember God’s gracious provision for our endurance in the past.

Remember God’s provision in past suffering

“But remember the former days . . .” The author is saying, “You’ve already gone through difficult times and you’ve made it this far.” Focusing on what God has already done reminds us that we can trust him for the future.

I found a parallel to this in my experience with the Vienna Marathon. Running the marathon on April 13th necessitated training for it during the winter, which was difficult. One day of training sticks in my mind. I was in Kraków, Poland with a colleague, and the temperature outside was 10 degrees Fahrenheit, but the wind chill factor was subzero. There was a foot of snow on the ground. This colleague had originally intended to run the marathon with me, but had become injured and had to quit training. He was lying on the bed in a warm hotel room, wearing his long johns, reading a book, and laughing at me while I laced up my shoes to go run in that cold, bitter wind. I did the 12-mile run my training schedule called for that day in those miserable conditions.

There were times when running the actual race got difficult as well. At the beginning I could easily run way faster than I needed to in all the excitement, and toward the end I got energized by the excitement of finishing. But all that distance in the middle was hard. At about the 25th kilometer (of 42 total), I started having excruciating pain in my right knee. I wondered how I was going to make it to the end of the race. In the process of handling that, one of the things that happened was that I began to remember all my preparation, all the things I had already accomplished up to that point. I found I had built up mental strength as well as physical strength, knowing what I had accomplished. I was able to draw on it when my knee was killing me.

In the same way, in our spiritual lives we’ve already come a long way, the author says. “Remember the former days when things were really tough? You were being persecuted and challenged, yet you were able to make it to this point through God’s grace.” That is one of the ways we are able to endure.

How do we mentally prepare for difficult times? Notice the kind of people we have to be in order to have past experience to draw on. “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 an abiding one.”

These people were characterized by two things. The first was a willingness to suffer for their faith. They had lived out their faith in the face of opposition. They had been persecuted and challenged. Second, they were willing to identify with others who were suffering. At the height of the persecution of the church in the first years of its existence, some were being imprisoned for their faith. Prisoners were sometimes starving and very cold. There are beautiful stories of other believers who went and ministered to them. They took food and

clothing to them, risking their own safety by being identified with those who were incarcerated for their faith. The author of Hebrews champions them: “You’ve been wonderful in that way! You were willing to give your all for Christ!”

When you and I adopt the mentality in life that Christ is everything to us and we’re willing to live our lives totally and sacrificially committed to him, regardless of what we face--whether it’s persecution, seizure of our property, or loss of other things that are precious to us--God graciously sustains us. Then we build up a legacy of God’s faithfulness that we can draw on later.

I’ve grown fond of the book *Finding God at Harvard*. It’s a collection of personal testimonies by men and women who attended Harvard and Radcliff over the years. They speak of their faith in Christ and what that has meant. In the epilogue to that book Kelly Monroe, the general editor and founder of the Veritas Forum, writes these words:

“The following year, we worked with World Relief in El Salvador, helping to redeem the condition of eight thousand people living in the city dump. Writer Peter Clark introduced us to a man who forgave his torturers and visited them in prison. As I relayed this story to Becky Baer [another friend], she told me about her South African friend who threw himself around a boy who was about to be burned, “necklaced” [a burning tire placed around the neck], for being an informer. He knew it was a gamble, because they might have killed them both. ‘As Christians we have many freedoms,’ says Becky, ‘one of which is the freedom to die because of the hope we have in the resurrection from the dead.’ This life has no hold on us, so we are beginning to live it with courage.” (1)

Once we are able to completely yield ourselves to Christ, we are free in ways that no one else can understand to give ourselves completely to his glory and live courageously for him. These people were not absorbed with worldly things, not even their own safety. They were motivated by eternal values. Paul says in Romans 8:18 that there is no suffering in this world that can compare to the glory that Christ has for us. We too must become men and women who have values of eternity, who are not tied down by the things of this world. While God may bless us with all kinds of wonderful things to enjoy, we must hold on to them lightly, because to live for God’s glory allows us then to experience his gracious help in times of trouble, and on that we build a legacy of God’s faithfulness.

One of the many lessons I learned while working and traveling in Eastern Europe was what it meant for people to love God so much that the things of this earth meant little to them. Most of my friends in Eastern Europe then were rather poor. They didn’t have anywhere near the resources I had even living as a missionary. God gave our team wonderful opportunities to meet some very gracious people. We would go into their homes and they would prepare a meal for us, and I knew they were putting food before us that was way more than they could afford, and perhaps even the only piece of meat they would enjoy for the whole month! I was so humbled by their gracious love and hospitality.

One such occasion occurred on my son Christopher’s third birthday. Ginger and Christopher and a young woman who was working in our office were accompanying me to Poland. We all celebrated Christopher’s birthday in the morning at a hotel in Warsaw. Then we drove to a small village in southern Poland where we were to spend a couple of days with some dear friends of ours, Czeslaw and Helena Basara. They had two children, Bogus and Dorotka. We found out that Dorotka had a birthday that day, too. She turned six. When the Basaras found out about Christopher’s birthday, they pulled out the food left over from her birthday party and had another party for us.

Their children were always so gracious to Christopher. There was a particular little teddy bear that Christopher latched on to. He played with it a lot that day and the next, and when it was time for us to leave, Dorotka gave that teddy bear to Christopher because he had enjoyed it so much. The young woman who was traveling with us told us later, after talking to Helena, that the teddy bear was the only birthday gift Dorotka had received. But she had great joy in turning around and giving it to her little friend. These folks held the things of this world

loosely because their love for God and the love for others that grew out of that were far greater.

That's the kind of people who are described here in Hebrews 10. They gave themselves so fully to God that they were free to live their lives courageously. And as they saw God graciously support them, that legacy of God's faithfulness was built up and enriched. That's the first way we are able to endure.

The latter part of this paragraph gives us the second way we can endure: we believe in the ultimate victory of God.

Believe in the ultimate victory of God

Notice that the author expresses the idea through Old Testament quotes, which include the theme statement of this series. Verses 37-38:

“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.”

These quotes are taken from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was available in that day. The first phrase, “For yet in a very little while,” is a quote from Isaiah 26:20, the context of which is similar to Habakkuk, which we studied in the first message of the series (Discovery Paper #4671). In both of these texts there is a call to patiently await the day when God will bring his justice to pass.

The rest of the quote comes from Habakkuk itself. “He who is coming will come” is a slight change from the Hebrew. Habakkuk says, “It will certainly come,” referring to the fulfillment of God's promise to bring judgment on the evil nations that had attacked Israel. The author of Hebrews personifies that day of God's justice in the Lord Jesus Christ, who in his second coming will rule as the just Lord and Savior of all. The author renders the expression intensely: “He who is coming will come.” The duplication of the idea signifies the surety of that event.

What he is asking us to do is to look forward to the day when God's justice will reign, when Jesus Christ, the risen Lord of the universe, will be revealed in all his glory at his coming, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess him as Lord. That day is sure! As we struggle to endure in faith, we are told to lift up our eyes toward that day when he will indeed set all things right and vindicate his people for having been faithful to him throughout their lives.

Then the author says, “But my righteous one shall live by faith.” He's emphasizing that it's the ones God has called out, his own, who will live by faith, trusting in the assured outcome of God's victory, and keep going. He contrasts these to the ones who would shrink back. The quotation here inverts the order of these two ideas from Habakkuk 2:4 to emphasize living by faith over shrinking back and not really trusting God in his ultimate victory. The translation “shrinking back” is from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

What the author is saying is that there is a finish line to all of this, a day when the suffering will be over and Christ will be crowned before all the universe to see, and we march forward toward that great day in faith.

Remembering my marathon again, I thought I was going to have to quit, the pain in my knee was so intense. Between the 25- and 30-kilometer points, with every step it felt as if someone were sticking a knife into the side of my knee. But I pushed forward, getting closer and closer to that finish line. I passed the 30-kilometer point, took a drink at one of the drink stations, and tried to find some way to stretch that knee out to relieve the pain. I realized that after the months I'd been preparing for this, I was going to somehow finish this race if I had to drag my leg over that finish line. I don't know if it was the endorphins that kicked in or what, but as I took off again, the pain went away. I kept running and ran the last 10 kilometers faster than any other part of the race,

and the last stretch the fastest I had ever run.

The cool thing about the Vienna Marathon is that it finishes in the Heldenplatz, which is right in front of the old Hofburg, the palace where the ruling family lived back in time. Heldenplatz literally means Plaza of the Heroes. The course of the Marathon curls through enormous stone archways and onto the Heldenplatz, and there's the finish line. So as you draw closer, you realize you are about to enter into the Plaza of the Heroes, and you're energized to finish the race! You see that finish line!

In Hebrews 12:1-2 the author talks about Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith, and says that we are to keep our eyes fixed on him. Jesus is our finish line. He is the perfecter, the finisher, of our faith. And by keeping our eyes on him, by believing absolutely in the ultimate victory of God, we go forward toward that goal, able to keep our confidence and endure.

A third way for us to keep going is implied by the context of this paragraph. Summing up in verse 39, the author says, "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." We are part of the company of the faithful.

The faithful encourage us

This paragraph transitions us into chapter 11, which presents a fuller explanation of what faith does in illustrations of life after life after life of those who remained faithful to the end. These are stories of men and women of faith throughout the history of the Bible who laid everything on the line for God, having only the future outcome of God's glory and victory to trust in. They hadn't yet even tasted what we have now following Christ's death and resurrection. But these wonderful stories of the faithful in chapter 11 then lead into the introduction of chapter 12, where the faithful are described for us as a "great cloud of witnesses." We do not have to endure this alone. God has placed us in the company of others who are faithfully running the race, and now we have this great cloud of witnesses who faithfully stood for Christ, and their very testimony cries out to us and cheers us on.

The last memory I want to share of finishing the marathon is about the crowd lining the streets. Some in that crowd I knew personally: Ginger, Christopher, who was still three at the time, and some other wives and children of friends of mine who were in the race. They were at the starting line, and they hopped on the subway to different points of the race as we ran in order to keep cheering us on.

On that particular day it was very cold for April, and I started out wearing gloves, but I got warmed up early in the race and threw them to Ginger at one point. But when we crossed one of the bridges over the Danube, there was a howling, freezing, north wind plowing through the river valley. By that time not only was I dead tired, with my knee killing me, but now I was freezing again and my hands were numb from the cold. But there was our little entourage cheering us on again, so I yelled, "I need my gloves!" Ginger was having trouble finding them, so one of the other wives pulled off her own gloves and tossed them to me. In the pictures of my finishing the race, I have a pair of women's red wool gloves on my hands!

It was so encouraging to have others there cheering us on, not only the people I knew but the whole Austrian crowd. Europeans have a great way of making a high "Woop, woop, woop, woop!" call as you run by instead of whistling or cheering. As I was coming toward the finish line, the street was lined with hundreds or thousands of people, and every step of the way they were yelling, "Woop, woop, woop," and clapping and cheering us on. And the crowd gave me energy!

That's the picture here. We draw strength from the community of the faithful around us, and it spurs us on toward victory.

If we can grab hold of these three things--remembering that God has graciously brought us this far, believing in the ultimate victory of God, and drawing strength from the community of faith, we can hold on to our

confidence and endure to the end.

Let's review what we've learned about what it means to live by faith in this series. First, living by faith means that we see things through God's eyes, not through our own narrow perspective. Second, it means we trust God for the resources that we need to break the bonds of our own sinfulness and provide everything we need for life and godliness. Third, it means we keep our eyes on the goal, enduring to the end. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.)

Scripture quotations are taken from New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Notes

(1) Kelly Monroe, *Finding God at Harvard*, © 1996. Published by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. Pps. 353-354.

Catalog No. 4673
Hebrews 10:32-39
3rd Message
Danny Hall
July 2, 2000

[Back to Index page](#)

Copyright © 2000 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the prior written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to: Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.