

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 30 January 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **No Turning Back**

### **Hebrews 10:32-39**

Every summer during my growing up years, my church's youth group would go off to a week of Christian teen camp; and on the Sunday evening after they returned, there would be a special church service. In this service, the teens sang the songs that they had sung at camp, quoted Scriptures, gave testimonies, and preached short sermons. Now, there is one thing about teen camp that I especially remember. Before camp, many of the kids were apathetic about spiritual things; and they had a rebellious attitude toward their parents, toward the pastor and church leaders, and toward authority in general. Many of them claimed to be saved; but there seemed to be little evidence that Christ was in their lives.

But then, they came back from camp; and it appeared that many of them had come to spiritual life! During the "teen camp" service, some of those whose salvation had seemed questionable got up and testified that God had gotten hold of their hearts that week, and that they'd "re-dedicated" their lives to God! Others who had never made a profession of faith at all would come back with the joyful report that they had been saved. At the end of the service, during the invitation, nearly all the teens would go down to the altar; and they would pray together, cry, and sing, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."

Did they follow through with that commitment? Well, for a month or so afterward, it seemed that they were following through. They would come to church every service, bring their Bibles, sing with enthusiasm, and actually sit up and take notes during the sermon (instead of *passing* notes around to their friends). Some even went so far as to burn their Rock music tapes and CD's at the church bonfire after the service! Without question, some of them really *were* saved; and what we were seeing was the beginning of a life of spiritual fruit for God.

However, within a month or two, many of the teens were their same old apathetic selves, listening to the same old raunchy, worldly Rock music, talking the same old foolish way, and hanging out with the same godless friends. Fast-forward to the present, and many of them are living lives that are so wicked, that if any of the people in their new circle of friends were to hear that there had been a time in their lives when they had attended a Baptist church, and had sung, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus," they'd be shocked!

How did this happen? It's simple: the devotion that they had once professed for Jesus Christ was never real to begin with. They had never truly been saved. On the other hand, some of those teens really *were* saved; and they are showing the fruit of the Spirit in their lives to this day. It is the latter group of people--those who are truly saved--that Paul is addressing in the last section of **Hebrews 10**. Last week we read **verses 26-32**, in which Paul gave one last warning to the *false professors* of salvation; but now, he is addressing the *true* Christians, and is offering them encouragement. It is my prayer that we who are saved will be strengthened by Paul's words, as well. The title of this message is, **No Turning Back**.

**Read Hebrews 10:32-39.**

## I. Remember what God has done for you (vv. 32-34).

In this passage, Paul gives two specific instructions to Christians. First, Paul calls God's people to "remember" the "*former days*" of their Christian walk. Now, *living on memories* is not what Paul is talking about, here. Recounting what God has done in your life *in the past* does no good if you are not continuing to trust God *now*. Past service to God, and past spiritual victories, don't "make up for" idleness and spiritual failure *in the present*. We must keep pressing on! Paul instructed believers in **Philippians 3** to forget those things which are behind, and to reach forth unto those things which are before.

### Read Philippians 3:13-14.

As we battle through our Christian lives, we cannot live on memories. We cannot keep rehashing our past failures, or else we will continue to be defeated; nor can we keep "living on" memories of past victories. However, that having been said, we *do* need to recall what God has done for us in the past; and we should do it often. When a Christian looks back on what God has done for him in the past *in order to reassure himself that God can show Himself mighty again*, that Christian's faith will be strengthened, and will find the enablement that he needs to face his present struggles against sin, the flesh, and the world.

Now, what, in particular, is Paul calling his readers to remember? He is calling them to remember what had happened in their lives after they were "*illuminated*." Let's read **Hebrews 10:32** again. (Read **Hebrews 10:32**.)

This word "*illuminated*" is very important. Why so? Because Paul used this same word earlier in this letter. In Greek, it is the word *photisthentes*. It is translated into *English* as two different words ("*enlightened*" and "*illuminated*"); but the same Greek word, *photisthentes*, is behind both of them. With this in mind, let's go back to **Hebrews 6:4-6**, and see how Paul used the word *photisthentes* in that passage.

### Read Hebrews 6:4-6.

In this passage, Paul is reminding his readers of a group of people who were "*once enlightened*." Now, *who* are these people who were "*once enlightened*"? And *when* were they enlightened? To answer that question, we must remind ourselves of who Paul's audience is. Paul was writing this letter to *Jewish people*. Paul is reminding these Jews of their own national history. As a *nation*, Israel was "*enlightened*" at Mount Sinai with a massive amount of divine revelation. As a nation, they literally tasted of the "*heavenly gift*" (the manna which fell from the sky every day). They were made "*partakers of the Holy Ghost*," in that they received constant instruction from the Holy Spirit (whether they wanted to receive it or not)! Moses, Aaron, Eliazar, Ithamar, Joshua, Miriam, seventy of the elders of Israel, and other judges of Israel, were given the Holy Spirit; and the people received intense instruction from them. Even a lost man, Balaam, was given the Holy Spirit for a brief time so that he could deliver a messianic prophecy to the children of Israel! Israel constantly tasted of "*the good word of God*." They heard it every single day. They also tasted of "*the powers of the world to come*." They saw miracles before their very eyes on a daily basis! These privileges didn't stop with Moses' generation, either. It continued throughout their history. Of all the nations

on earth, they alone were given the “*oracles of God*” (the Scriptures). In **Romans 3:1-2**, Paul asked the question, “*What profit then hath the Jew?*” His answer to his own question was: “*Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*” God made the Jewish people the custodians of His Word. In this sense, they, as a nation, were “*enlightened.*” Yet, just because they had received *national* enlightenment, it didn’t mean that every Jew had personally chosen to *believe and embrace* the truth. Many of them, despite being “*once enlightened,*” rejected the light. It was for that reason that those Jews in Paul’s day who were about to turn away the Gospel stood in grave danger of not being given another chance to repent and be saved. This is the message of **Hebrews 6**. Paul is warning unsaved Jews, “Don’t turn away from the Gospel that you’ve heard!”

However, when we come to the word “*illuminated*” here in **Hebrews 10**, Paul is no longer talking about *national* enlightenment, as he was back in **Hebrews 6**. Paul is now addressing those who were truly saved. He is addressing those who were *personally* enlightened by believing on Christ, and who were *personally* indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had entered their hearts at the moment they trusted in Christ, and had instructed them in all truth.

So, then, what happened after these people were saved? Everything was rosy, and all their problems vanished away, right? Wrong! Yes, they had peace in their hearts; but their outward circumstances weren’t so peaceful. They began to be persecuted for the name of Christ! Look again at what Paul says in **verse 32**. (Read **Hebrews 10:32** again.)

It doesn’t sound as though things were going so well for these believers, does it? Paul says that they had “*endured a great fight of afflictions.*” The good news, though, is that they were prepared to face that affliction. They hadn’t fallen under the persecution: rather, they had counted the cost of following Christ, and had “*endured.*” Christian, don’t be surprised when you are faced with persecution for your faith in Christ. Jesus promised that persecution would come! He said, “*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*” What kind of persecution might we expect to endure? Well, let’s examine the things that the believers in Paul’s day endured.

First, Paul says that **they had been made a reproach**. They were “*made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions.*” The word “*gazingstock*” has the idea of being publicly disgraced and ridiculed. It wasn’t enough that they suffered physically and materially: they were also *mocked* in the process. It was as though they were out in the public square, or in an amphitheatre, with masses of people laughing at their suffering. For many Christians in those times, this was their *literal* fate in the hours or moments before they died a painful death.

Christian, do you ever feel this way? Do you ever feel as though everyone is looking at you and snickering among themselves, as though you were a walking “freak show”? There’s a reason for that. As far as the world is concerned, you *are* a “freak show”! Get used to it. Embrace the shame that comes with being Jesus’ disciple. Jesus said, “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*” (**Matthew 5:11, 12**). Every true believer will be reproached and mocked. It “comes with the territory.” Christian, embrace the

cross! The cross means *death to self*. Self doesn't like to be ridiculed; but love for Christ compels us to endure reproach for His sake.

Now, what else does persecution involve? Persecution involves **being associated with other people who are persecuted.** (Read Hebrews 10:33-34 again.) In verse 33, Paul says that their "*fight of afflictions*" consisted of their being "*companions of them that were so used.*" In other words, they were being persecuted for helping and aiding *other* persecuted Christians. A good example of this can be found in **2 Timothy 1:16-18.**

### **Read 2 Timothy 1:16-18.**

As Paul wrote to Timothy from prison, he commended this brother in Christ, Onesiphorus. While other Christians were hesitant to help Paul, for fear that their association with an accused "criminal" would cause trouble for themselves, Onesiphorus didn't care. He went to the house where Paul was under house arrest, and gave comfort and aid to Paul. He was not ashamed of Paul's chain. The Hebrew Christians to whom Paul was writing had helped Paul, as well. Paul reminds them of how "*ye had compassion of me in my bonds.*"

Identification with Jesus Christ requires identification with His people. This may not seem like a big deal to us right now; but when persecution comes to Bible-believing Christians (and it *will* come to us, unless the Rapture happens very soon), protecting, helping, comforting, and being counted with other believers will become a *very* real issue! It was a very real issue for the Jewish-Romanian Pastor Richard Wurmbrandt. For a total of fourteen years, Wurmbrandt rotted away in a pitch-black underground cell, and was tortured by the communists in the most horrific ways imaginable. They would beat the bottoms of his feet with iron clubs for hours, until the flesh fell off. They would put him into the *carcer* for two or three days at a time. (The *carcer* was a box that was just big enough for a person to stand up in, with only the narrowest opening for air; and all around the inside walls of this box were sharp nails and razors. If you began to fall asleep, and moved even the slightest bit, you would be poked awake with the painful jabs of the nails.) The lightest form of punishment that he endured was having to listen, for seventeen or more hours a day, to a very loud recording of someone screaming, "Communism is good! Communism is good! Communism is good! Christianity is stupid! Christianity is stupid! Christianity is stupid! Give up! Give up! Give up!" For what reasons was he put to all these tortures? There were many reasons, of course (such as for daring to pray in the privacy of his own cell, or trying to witness to the guards and the other prisoners); but the most frequent reason that he was tortured was for refusing to reveal the names and addresses of fellow believers, so that the authorities could go and arrest them. After hours of beating, the only names they could get out of Wurmbrandt were: God; his wife Sabina, and his son Mihai (whose names, of course, they already knew very well); and the names of believers who had already died! Wurmbrandt was not ashamed of his Lord; and he was not ashamed of his brothers and sisters in the Lord. To betray your Lord is to betray your brethren; and to betray your brethren is to betray your Lord.

Just to get an idea of how important this matter is to the Lord, let's look at how Christ will judge the nations when He returns to set up His Kingdom.

### **Read Matthew 25:31-46.**

What is Jesus saying here? Is this a “works salvation”? Does helping another Christian who is in need contribute to your salvation? Of course not! Such an interpretation would completely contradict the Bible’s clear message that salvation is by God’s grace, and is received by faith alone, and not by our good works! What does this passage mean, then?

Remember, this event will happen *after* the Tribulation, when Christ has returned to earth to set up His kingdom. Scripture teaches that those who rejected Christ during the Tribulation, and took the Antichrist’s mark, will *not* enter into Christ’s 1,000-year kingdom, but will be slain and cast into hell. Yet, please notice what the *outward evidence* of a person’s salvation will be. You’d think that the “litmus test” would be whether or not you had the mark on your right hand or forehead, right? Yet, this is not the case. The evidence will be this: “Did this person render help and assistance to Christ’s brethren (God’s people, the saved)?”

Why will God judge the nations in this way? Is this really a “fool-proof” test of who is a true believer? After all, wouldn’t it be possible for some *unbelievers* to be sympathetic toward the Christians, and to give them aid and quarters? No! You see, the Tribulation period will be the most intensely Satanic time in history. By the end of the Tribulation, no unbeliever *anywhere* will show any mercy to Christians! Those unbelievers around you who respect you, and who help to you at times, will *not* have any such inclination if they are around during the Tribulation period, and if they take the mark! The world will go utterly satanic. The world will literally be divided into two groups—those who receive the Antichrist’s mark, and follow Satan, and those who refuse the mark, and follow Christ! In other words, during the Tribulation, the only people in the whole world who will help persecuted Christians will be other persecuted Christians! Just as Onesiphorus had the courage to visit Paul when he was in prison, so Christians during the Tribulation will have the guts to visit their brothers who are in prison—even though it could mean certain imprisonment and death for them, as well!

We are not anywhere near that point, folks. Our treatment from unbelievers isn’t nearly as hostile as what it will be for the Tribulation saints! However, what **Matthew 25** reveals is how highly the Lord values love, loyalty, and assistance to our brethren in the Lord! How did Jesus say that all men shall know that we are His disciples? Is it by the nice clothes that we wear on Sunday? Is it by the nice, leather-bound Bible that we carry around? Is it even by the correct doctrine that we hold? No. Surely, that last one *is* extremely important to God; however, knowledge without love means nothing to the Lord. Jesus said, **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”**

Persecution involves **being a reproach, and object of ridicule**. It involves **being associated with other persecuted believers**. What else does it involve? It also involves **seizure of possessions**. (Read **Hebrews 10:34** again.) Like believers in every age, the Hebrew Christians in Paul’s day suffered the “spoiling of their goods” (in other words, “confiscation of their wealth and belongings”). Yet, how did they react to this injustice from the authorities? Paul says that they took their losses **“joyfully”**! Their sights were set on Heaven, and not on earthly things. They knew that the things of this earth are fleeting, and that they would pass away; but treasure in Heaven is unending.

How precious is your “stuff” to you? How would you react if your possessions were seized and taken away from you tomorrow? If you think that it couldn’t happen, it can! Already, we are seeing people in the West having bank accounts cancelled simply because of what they believe. The stories of Christians who are being sued or arrested simply for saying something “hateful” (such as that homosexuality is a sin) are increasing daily. Be prepared, Christian. A time is coming when we will be able to show the world that Jesus *truly* is “all the world” to us; but this witness will come at a high price! Are you setting your eyes on the heavenly prize?

## II. Don’t lose your confidence (vv. 35-39).

(Read verses 35-39.) The second instruction that Paul gives to these believers is: “**Cast not away therefore your confidence.**” The Greek word for “**confidence**” that is used here indicates not only complete *hope or assurance* of something, but also *outspokenness, bluntness, or boldness to speak* of that thing in which you have placed your confidence.

As the days leading up to Christ’s return get darker and darker, true Christians will be increasingly apparent and distinguishable from false ones; and **boldness to proclaim the name of Jesus** will be one of the obvious earmarks of true Christians. A false Christian won’t speak of the name of Jesus if there be a price to pay for speaking His name! They don’t know Him; and they don’t have any true love for Him. “But,” as the hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote, “children of the heavenly King *will* speak their joys abroad.”

Now, it is interesting that after instructing believers to have confidence, Paul says, “**For ye have need of patience.**” Paul *links* patience to *confidence*. Is there a connection? Yes!

### Read Romans 5:1-5.

Paul says that Christians should rejoice not only in the **hope (or “confidence”)** that they have in Christ, but also in their **tribulations!** Why should we rejoice in tribulations? Because God uses tribulations to produce **patience**. There’s the link!

**Now, what is patience?** Patience is the heart attitude of waiting on God. And what does patience produce? It produces **experience**. As the Christian patiently waits on God, God puts him through trials; and during those trials, the Christian learns, by experience, that God is faithful. It is no longer “theory” to him that God is faithful; he has lived it, and *has seen* God prove Himself faithful. So, with *experience* under the Christian’s belt, what comes next? **Hope**. The experience of going through tribulations, and gaining patience and experience during those trials, produces more hope in God. And what does hope produce? It causes us not to “**be ashamed**” of our Lord, because our hearts are now filled with His love.

Perhaps this is why Christ’s churches usually thrive during times of great persecution, and wither during times of security and prosperity. *We* think of wealth and affluence as a *blessing*. However, wealth usually tends to be an *affliction* to God’s people—because with it comes the temptation to take our eyes off our Hope, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, wealth certainly doesn’t *have* to deter us from trusting God. God entrusted men such as Abraham and Job with great wealth; but their wealth did not diminish their faith. Though they *could have* trusted in their wealth, they chose to trust God.

You see, the problem for Christians who live in safe, prosperous societies, is *not* that we lack situations in which we can learn to trust the Lord. We *do have* situations in which we can learn to trust God, just as believers in oppressed countries have. We *do* have daily situations in which we can learn patience and experience. They are there! However, we often do not *recognise them*, because they do not seem colossal to us. We think we can handle them.

That fact is, God is just as glorified when we trust Him in *our seemingly* manageable situations as He is when Christians in oppressed countries trust Him in their obviously *unmanageable* situations. The problem with us is that we have the *illusion* that our problems are solvable in our own strength. We don't spend much time praying about our problems, because we think we have it under control. That is why God often has to bring hard times into our lives, to open our eyes to the fact that *we need Him*. If we don't pass the test during the "trial" of prosperity, God will put us through the "trial" of affliction.

Now, those who do not cast away their confidence in the time of trial are assured of a "**great recompense of reward.**" (Read Hebrews 10:35-37 again.) What is the "**recompense of reward**"? It certainly is not anything *earthly*, because Paul says that this reward will be received when Christ returns. The great "**recompense of reward**" is *treasure in Heaven*. Time and time again God promises His people that there is "treasure in Heaven" awaiting those who serve Him faithfully. It is far more glorious than we can possibly imagine!

The Hebrew believers of Paul's day were in need of this encouragement from Paul, because worse times were coming. Up to this point, they had had their possessions seized, and they had been mocked and threatened; but they had not yet faced death. **However, death was coming, as well!** Later in this letter, Paul said, "**Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.**" Obviously, this statement implies that "**blood**" was coming; and though their salvation was not at stake, their reward in Heaven *was* at stake. The same is true for us. None of us know what tribulations will arise as we continue to "**do the will of God**"; but we do know that we can hold our confidence firmly, no matter what calamity may come.

Now, let's read the last couple verses of this chapter. (Read verses 38-39 again.) As Paul closes this section of his letter, he once again contrasts the saving faith of true Christians to the "drawing back" of apostates; and, once again, he supports what he is saying with Scripture.

#### **Read Habakkuk 2:4.**

Paul's message is clear: A true Christian will continue to live by faith. Now, a believer *will* often fail and stumble. However, he will get back up. His faith *will* increase; and he will not abandon Christ. In contrast, a false professor *will* eventually abandon his hollow profession. In such "Christians" Christ has no pleasure! They do not belong to Him. They *never did*.

Paul had some fearful words to say to those who were turning away from Christ. However, Paul now assures the true believers, "**But we (meaning the true believers) are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.**"

**Conclusion:** In a moment, we will sing the hymn “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.” Before we do, though, I would ask: “*Have* you truly decided to follow Jesus?” The decision is not to “be a better person,” or to “be more religious.” The decision that you need to make is to turn from your old, sinful way of living; to let go of your own puny self-righteousness, and place your trust in Christ alone to save you; and to let Him take possession of your life. If you cannot say that there has truly been a time in your life when you made this decision, *please* do not put it off! Do it today! **If you *are* saved already**, I would exhort you to “*call to remembrance*” the former days in your Christian walk. Remember how God has upheld you in the past, and take courage for the present! I would also urge you to “*cast not away your confidence.*” Be strong in the Lord! Be bold! You’ve already trusted Him to save you: now trust Him to help you endure the afflictions that you will face on the road to glory. When it is all done, you *will* receive great reward--*if* you will only trust Him!