

## Hebrews 10:32-39

“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”

The holy writer says in our text: “it (*confidence in Christ*) will be richly rewarded” Hebrews 10:30 The expression “... richly rewarded” is one compound word in the Greek. Literally it means a “*pay-gift due you*” or “*payment of wages.*” The holy writer uses this expression three times in his letter to the Hebrews. He uses it in the sense of a pay-gift or payment that a person merits or earns and also in the sense of a payment or reward that is received without any merit or worthiness, but simply as a result of God’s grace.

If a person is disobedient to the Word of God and falls from the faith – there will be a reward (*pay-gift or a payment coming*)

that will truly be earned, namely – punishment and death. That terrible reward which is the just payment for sins is referred to in the verse preceding our text when the holy writer exclaims: **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:31** St. Paul speaks of this same thing when he writes: **“For the wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23**

But if a person remains obedient to the Word of the Lord and remains in the faith, then there is a reward (*pay-gift or a payment*) coming that God is eager and happy to give. The writer to the Hebrews is speaking of that when he writes: **“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” Hebrews 10:35-36** The Lord Jesus speaks of this very thing when he caused St. John to write this exhortation: **“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Revelations 2:10**

This *“rich reward”* is not and cannot be merited or earned by the believer. It’s always a gift of God’s grace, but it is a gift that God gives only at the end of the life of a believer, in the moment of his blessed death. For that reason the Scriptures again and again urges believers to be faithful unto death, to overcome all obstacles to faith - and so finally gain the great blessing which God has prepared for all who hold out until the end. On the other hand, Scripture warns against a temporal faith that flares up for a short time but then is blown out when contrary winds begin to blow.

As we today lay to rest the mortal remains of our fellow church member, we do so in the certain hope that he has finally overcome and obtained the victory. He no longer needs the services of Christ's Church, he no longer needs our prayers and supplications, he no longer needs to daily drown the flesh with its evil lusts. He is in the church triumphant and numbered with those who wave their palms before the throne of the Lamb. He is clad in white because while here on earth he trusted in his Lord Jesus, whose blood makes us as white as snow. But you and I are still numbered among the living and among those still in this "vale of tears". We still carry about with us our flesh (*along with its affections and evil lusts*) and must carry this wherever we go in this world of sin. Our three enemies: the devil, the world and our own flesh will constantly attack and ask us to give up our faith, and to disobey God and the Word he has given to us in the Bible. It therefore is necessary for us to pay attention so that we do not draw back unto hell. We will continue to believe in God in order to save our souls. So many people disparage of leading the sincere Christian life because it holds no reward in this world. God tells the believers that we must go through much tribulation in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Bible says followers of God must weep and lament and suffer persecution. The Bible further states: **"Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution, at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated."** Hebrews 10:33

Certainly the sincere Christian has no promise of a heaven here on earth and because of this conflict many people will draw

back from a Christian life. This was the very danger that threatened the believers who first received this letter to the Hebrews. These believers had made an excellent beginning but were in danger of falling from the faith. This entire letter was written so that they would not lose their “*rich reward*”.

We stand in need of this same encouragement as they did. We all are to pay attention so that in thinking that we stand – we might instead fall. Let those of us who still have a few days at the most to live here below be encouraged to remain faithful by considering the exhortation of our text. Let us note the sobering truth that:

**The reward of faith is given  
only at the end of a believer’s life**

Making a good beginning in one’s faith-life, which is comparatively easy, is not enough! The Christians who received this letter to the Hebrews had made a good beginning. The writer refers to their good beginning in the first part of our text. In the first years after their conversion (*after they had received the knowledge of the truth and been on fire by love for their Savior*) - they had to endure the persecution of their fellow-countrymen and rulers and this was done cheerfully. These Christians considered it an honor to be held up before men with scorn and ridicule, with reproach and contempt. We know that in the year 64 Rome was burned. The Emperor Nero was responsible, but he shifted the blame on the Christians and the result was a general

persecution of the Christians. It was during this terrible persecution that Peter was executed. So terrible was the persecution that all those who sympathized with those in bonds brought upon themselves cutting remarks, afflictions of all kinds, and even the looting of their property. But even this, the wrecking of their shops and homes, the property damage and the material losses - they suffered joyfully, for as the writer puts it: **“...because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.” Hebrews 10:34** The *“rich reward”* which they knew was waiting for them at the end of their lives made it possible for them to bear even these financial losses joyfully. What a good beginning these Jewish Christians had made in their faith-life!

But a good beginning is not enough, for the reward of faith is not given at the beginning but at the end of a believer's life. Faith must continue on through life and that continuing in faith is more difficult than coming to faith. Each one is brought to faith by the Spirit of God. Faith, especially when it is new in an individual, brings with it a wonderful first love and initial enthusiasm that is eager and ready to conquer the world for Christ. King Saul, Israel's first king, is an example of that sparkling enthusiasm when he first became king. But we know the sad story of how his faith slowly died. He then became a victim of judgment and his heart became hardened. There was enthusiasm for Christ on the first Palm Sunday, but we know that that enthusiasm didn't even last out that week. Making a good beginning is comparatively

easy, but it's never enough because the reward of faith is given only at the end of a believer's life. It just isn't enough to be baptized and confirmed – this is a wonderful beginning but we must be faithful unto death if we are to get the crown of life.

This tragedy of a good beginning but no more is brought forcefully into focus when the situation arises that relatives come to a pastor and request burial for such a Christian who has fallen from the faith. Then the sad story comes out that the former believer was baptized and confirmed and married in the church - but then there came the silence of unbelief. Silence depicts the following years of despising the Savior who wants all people to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. A Christian burial must be denied such a person because a good beginning is not enough.

The exhortation is not enough: *“Come to faith,”* but also – **“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Revelations 2:10** It means something today when we give a Christian burial to the deceased. By this service we acknowledge our belief that he not only made a good beginning but also continued in the faith unto his blessed end.

## II

To continue in the faith despite all obstacles is difficult but necessary. The holy writer exhorts these Christians in the book of Hebrews who had made a good beginning to continue in the faith. **“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly**

**rewarded.” Hebrews 10:35** Don’t despise, throw away, and disregard your confidence or faith. The Lord is waiting to reward your faith in grace as soon as you close your eyes in death. Hold out that long! The writer knew that this holding on would be difficult! So he continues in this way: **“You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” Hebrews 10:36** The word “persevere” literally means to “bearing up” under a burden. The persecutions that the early Christians had experienced were burdens to bear and so were all the other temptations that might make one fall from the faith. The writer says that these Christians have need of bearing up under those burdens so that their faith will continue, for only then will they receive the promise of eternal life - the “rich reward” spoken of in this text. Here now comes the encouragement: **For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay.” Hebrews 10:37** Sometimes we wonder how we will be able to go on but really the Lord tells us that our life span is very short. Compare a short life with endless eternity. God encourages us to hold on for a little while until our Lord comes either at the moment of death or on the last day to reward us in grace with our eternal blessing.

Today let’s thank the Lord that the little while has come for our friend. But as for those of us who remain, let us remember that only those who continue in faith will receive the promise. **“The just shall live by faith.” Romans 1:17** But what about those who fall from faith? **“He who is coming will come and will not**

delay. **But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be please with him.” Hebrews 10:37-39** God can have no pleasure in those who draw back, who fall from faith – he can have only displeasure.

What kind of believers do we want to be? Those who only make a good beginning and then draw back? Or those who make a good beginning and continue faithfully to the end. Surely we share the answer of the writer: **“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.” Hebrews 10:39**