

March 13, 2016

Hebrews 10:35-36

Therefore Sermon Series: “Hanging By A Thread”

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Have you ever known a discouraged Christian? Have you ever known a person whose Christian faith is hanging by a thread, whose faith is almost worn out? Have you ever felt like that yourself? Have you ever been a discouraged Christian?

In the Bible, the book of Hebrews was written for discouraged Christians, for people of faith who were hanging by a thread. Hebrews is a letter written to a specific group of Christian believers who were just about to give up. These were believers in Jesus who, like Jesus himself, had come from a Jewish background. These were people who had put their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, as their Messiah, as their Savior.

But now, years later, these were people whose faith was wavering. They'd had a hard time of it. These Jewish Christians had become outcasts in their own Jewish communities. They had faced intense persecution, at times, from the Romans who governed them.

These Hebrew Christians had been through a lot – and some of them were discouraged. “Why not just go back to our former faith?” they wondered. “Why not give up faith in Jesus, if it's causing us so much trouble?” These Christians were hanging on by a thread.

So the whole book of Hebrews, in our New Testament, is a letter that encourages them and challenges them to hang on. This letter reminds the discouraged Christians back then that

Christ is superior, that the way of Christ is supreme, that their faith in Christ Jesus will save them.

And in chapter 10, verses 35-36, our verses for today, we hear this reminder: “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 is promised.”

“You have need of endurance” – let’s zoom in on those words today. Because I think there are plenty of Christians in the world today – and in our church today – who are having a hard time holding on to faith. Many of us know what it’s like, don’t we, to be hanging by a thread in our faith life.

Faith in Jesus is important to us, or we wouldn’t be here, would we? Faith in Jesus, who died on the cross for us, is what being a Christian is all about. Faith in Jesus is the key to our forgiveness. Faith in Jesus is what saves us. So faith in Jesus is central to who we all are as children of God.

But sometimes our faith wavers. Sometimes our faith wears out. And, just like for the first-century Hebrew Christians – although for our own different reasons – we may feel like giving up and letting go. Yes, there are times when we are the ones hanging by a thread.

When God doesn’t give us what we want; when bad things happen to good people like us; when God’s promises don’t seem to be coming true ... our faith can be challenged.

When evil is winning out over good way too many times; when reason and science are making way more sense to us than the Bible; when we allow worldly pursuits to pull us away from the things of God ... our faith can be compromised.

When someone whose faith we admire betrays us or turns out to be a hypocrite; when we get tired of swimming upstream and battling against the culture; when we get tired of dragging our reluctant spouse and kids to church ... our faith can wear out.

When guilt over things we've done drives a wedge between us and God; when we long for some proof that God really exists; when someone we love is taken from us tragically ... our faith can suffer.

"You have need of endurance," the Scripture says. Lord knows we do! For all sorts of reasons! Lord knows it's hard to keep the faith! Lord knows it's hard to hang on! Lord knows we all have need of endurance!

Here's the thing, though. Endurance is not the result of what we do. When you're running a marathon, endurance is the result of hours and weeks and months of persistent training. But, when it comes to faith, endurance is never the result of my persistence, or the result of your strength, or the result of the level of our devotion to God. Endurance, for the Christian, is the result of God's faithfulness to us, God's strength at work in us, and God's incredible level of devotion to us.

If you're someone who's hanging on by a thread, it's not about how tight you can hang on to God. It's about how tight he is hanging on to you. Change the picture that's in your head. You're not really hanging by a thread. Instead, picture the strong, mighty hand of God reaching down to you.

We get so caught up in how we're feeling about God, and about how much we're struggling in our faith lives. We easily

forget about how God is feeling about us, and about how powerful and how persistent God is in keeping our faith alive.

The strong, mighty hand of God is grabbing hold of you today. The strong, mighty hand of God is going to be holding on to you tomorrow, too. That strong, mighty hand of God is never going to let go of you, no matter what you may endure in this life, in this world, in this body of sin and decay.

“You have need of endurance,” the Bible reminds us today. And, thank the Lord, he provides the endurance we need. For God’s faithfulness toward you is constant. God’s strength is infinitely immense. God’s devotion to you is immeasurable. You may feel like you’re hanging on by a thread, but God will never, ever let go of you.

I keep this crucifix on the wall of my office. Pastor Lew has one, too, and it’s pictured on the cover of our Lent bulletins. Many times, when I’ve sat there talking with Christians who are discouraged, with Christians who are hanging by a thread, I’ve pointed them to this cross.

If you’re ever a discouraged Christian, look to the cross. Remember and take to heart what God did for you there. If you’re ever not sure if God really cares, look to the cross. If you’re ever up against the ropes and feeling like God is not on your side, look to the cross. There is no better picture of God’s love for you, no greater proof of God’s devotion to you, than this.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

When it feels like you're the one hanging by a thread,
remember this. God is the one hanging on to you. And he
will never let you go. Amen.