

# Battle Fatigue

a sermon in the series  
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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## Hebrews 10:32-39

*But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; 33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. 34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. 35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. 37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

Pain is a well-known stranger to us. We know it well, and yet we act as if it is a stranger when it arrives. We want to avoid it, ignore it, and escape it. But pain will not be avoided, ignored, or escaped. Pain comes to us all and in so many different forms. It can be physical, but it also can be emotional. A man can be physically well and strong but suffer excruciating pain in his mind and soul.

When it comes to pain, our churches have taken a very similar position as the world. We act as if it doesn't exist, and when it strikes, we panic and wonder if the world is quickly coming to an end. Some conjecture that we may be in the beginning of the Great Tribulation because we have assumed that Christians are not supposed to experience pain. We have wrongly concluded that God's job is to keep our lives and our churches pain-free. Evidently, those who subscribe to this way of thinking have not studied the book of Hebrews. In fact, I question if they have read the New Testament. It is a repeated premise throughout Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament that the Christian life is an intense struggle against unbelief. It is a war that knows no cease-fire.

If churches are a collection of believers, then we can only believe that churches will also come under the fire of suffering and be attacked with pain. Such was the case with those whom the writer of Hebrews was addressing. We do not know if it was one or many Jewish churches that were addressed in the book of Hebrews, but we do know that however many churches there were, they were feeling the pain of conflict and the fatigue of battle. They were not a thriving, suburban, steepled church with two or three Sunday morning services, cushioned pews, and a soundproof nursery. They were a church under siege.

But the unique thing about the conflict they were enduring was its source. The source was not Satan but the loving Heavenly Father. This seems unique to us because we have dropped at least two truths from our belief system. We have abandoned the precept of God's providential control over all things and the idea that the Lord God tests His people. We are constantly ascribing to Satan our troubles, and we are missing God and His purposes. I ask where is God when we hurt? Has He taken a leave of absence? Is He impervious to our suffering? I speak from the authority of God's own word that He is not impervious to our suffering, and He has not taken a leave of absence. Where is God when we hurt? Why, He is right there with us, superintending the suffering of us, His children. The writer of Hebrews was so certain of this that he writes in the twelfth chapter that God chastens those whom He loves. He does not say Satan inflicts pain, but rather he said God disciplines, corrects and instructs us.

I am not saying Satan is not involved. He is a tool that God uses to develop us. I was asked this week what the purpose of Satan is and here we see one of his purposes. He is used by the Lord to develop our faith and hardness as soldiers of God's glory. That is why tribulation is always with us. It is why a church will be continually sifted like wheat. I want to speak today on the idea, "Battle Fatigue," and the first conclusion that I wish for us to draw from our text is,

## **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LIFE OF CONFLICT**

*But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used (Hebrews 10:32-33).*

Except for the brief moments that the Lord gives us rest from the attacks of the enemy, we are engaged in a struggle with eternal consequences. And even the moments of rest can be dangerous and laden with hazard. For it was when David rested from combat and took ease that he saw Bathsheba and sinned. Often in times of ease we are tempted to shift our dependence from the Lord to ourselves. So I say we must always be vigilant for the conflict endures.

Life is arduous. But submitting to Christ brings a suffering peculiar to those who place their faith in Christ. Our Commander-in-Chief rallied us with the admonition, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). When Paul was saved, God sent a man named Ananias to pray and to instruct Paul. God told Ananias concerning Paul, "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16). But this suffering is not promised to Paul only. For the same apostle wrote to his protégé, Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). If we are truly branded with the mark of Christ, we can no more hope to escape hardship, tribulation and trial than could have our Lord. The promise is ours, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12).

The author reminds the Hebrews of a former "great fight" where persecution had occurred. It would appear that this church or churches had been established for some time. He admonishes

them to remember that after their conversion a persecution had befallen them. He said, “after ye were illuminated.” This was a suffering that could only begin after one is saved. My dear fellow pilgrims, once the Savior found us, we became involved in a conflict that will not end until we finally arrive at the Celestial Gate.

The Hebrew Christians of our text had experienced pain on behalf of Christ and by the decree of Christ. But how can I say this when it is obvious that people who had been inspired by the devil were persecuting them? The answer is in Hebrews chapter twelve. They were now undergoing another wave of persecution, and in Hebrews chapter twelve the writer calls it the “chastening of the Lord.” The word “chastening” does not always mean punishment or correction. In fact, the same word is used to mean nurturing in Ephesians 6:4, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” These men and women were not being punished or corrected for something they had done wrong, but rather they were suffering because they were living for Christ in a very visible manner. No doubt Satan was attacking this church, but, ultimately, it was God’s chastening hand developing His church. Satan is on God’s leash. God uses him in my life and yours to burn the dross out of our hearts and to strengthen our firmness and faith.

This flies in the face of what we customarily think about suffering. So many believe Christ is supposed to make life simpler, easier, and more comfortable. Not so! In the case of the Hebrews, conflict and suffering came in the form of persecution. For us, it may be different. It might be illness, financial difficulties, loss of relationships, etc. No matter the form, suffering will come, and it will always be aimed at your heart and faith. No doubt Satan aims at your heart to get it to doubt. God aims it at your heart to remove the things that captive your heart. He aims suffering at your heart to deepen and strengthen your dependence upon Him.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12). But today we are nearly overwhelmed when the burning trial singes our lives. Our faith in God is shaken, and we believe the devil and his hellish hordes have won the day. Many Christians will not stand in faith but reel in doubt. Often we think we suffer because we did something to bring on the pain. Sometimes this is the case. But often it is not. Our theology of suffering is no better than that of Job and his so-called comforters. Their doctrine was if pain is in your life, God is punishing you. I do not see much difference in that unbiblical statement of doubt and our so-called statements of faith. This very week I heard two leading “faith teachers” say that no one has to be sick, broke, or hurt. They had learned how to defeat problems by using the right words and by avoiding the wrong words. According to them, if you are sick, broke or hurting, you have unbelief in your heart. Therefore, they were saying you have sin in your life because unbelief is sin. God did not appreciate the words of Job’s friends, and I cannot believe He has changed since then. If He was opposed to Job’s friends’ theology of suffering, He must be opposed to the theology of suffering many of us have today.

Let’s look at verse thirty-four and see how the suffering Christians handled their first experience of suffering the battle. It says they joyfully accepted the spoiling or seizing of their goods. “For

ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods” (Hebrews 10:34). This is exactly what Peter says we ought to do when we endure trials, pain and suffering.

*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:12-19)*

In verse twelve Peter clearly says trials are not strange things to the Christian. We should not be shaken by the trial coming upon us nor by the severity of it. God makes no guarantee to the believer of a life free of pain or misery on this earth. Actually, He promised that you would experience such.

Peter outlines our proper response in verse thirteen, “But rejoice.” We are to rejoice. Rejoice? How could God expect any of us to be glad in suffering? This is one of the reasons that some view Christianity unbelievable and a myth. No one rejoices when they have problems. How dare Peter say rejoice? The rejoicing that Peter is speaking of is not a joy in the actual pain but joy in the outcome of the pain. First of all, Peter says we are being identified with Christ if we suffer for Him. “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings”(1 Peter 4:13). Again, in verse fourteen, he makes this connection showing our suffering as a means of identification with Christ, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.” We have been counted worthy by God to suffer on behalf of His glory because the world and Satan have viewed us in the same way they viewed our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, we can rejoice because this suffering is producing a joy that cannot be equaled by anything that is on this earth. “But rejoice . . . that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13). I will speak more about this later in this message.

Peter is quick to warn in verse fifteen that a Christian should not suffer because of committing an act of sin. But rather he says to you and me, if we suffer, and we have not injured someone else, we should not be ashamed. In other words, we should not be ashamed of Christ and His reproach, nor should we feel ashamed as if we have done something wrong. Why? Because, according to verse seventeen, God is judging His own people. Currently, judgment is in the house of God, meaning God is allowing the fire of trials and suffering to clean, purify and strengthen His people before He judges the unsaved. We must change our minds about the trials we are made to endure and gladly receive them as God's means of preparing us for an infinite joy that is

both unthinkable for men nor lawful for angels to share. Oh, the joy that our Lord is personally preparing for us, and He is personally preparing us for it! Albert Barnes makes two observations about this judgment of believers through suffering.

1) That the judgments which God brings upon his own people make it certain that the wicked will be punished. If he does not spare his own people, why should he spare others?

2) The punishment of the wicked is merely delayed. It begins at the house of God. Christians are tried, and are recalled from their wanderings, and are prepared by discipline for the heavenly world. The punishment of the wicked is often delayed to a future world, and in this life they have almost uninterrupted prosperity, but in the end it will be certain. The punishment will come in the end. It cannot be evaded. Sooner or later justice requires that the wicked should be visited with the expressions of Divine displeasure on account of sin, and in the future world there will be ample time for the infliction of all the punishment which they deserve.

So we see that the judgment we are now experiencing is a sanctifying work not a work of punishment. It is this work of sanctifying suffering that is evidence of a suffering for the non-elect that will be infinite in wrath and will be devoid of mercy. Not one drop of compassion will be found in the eternal justice of God against the wicked.

In verse nineteen, Peter finishes by saying that if a man is not suffering due to his own error, then He is suffering as a result of the will of God. Peter states, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls [to him] in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). The writer of Hebrews, as well as Peter, never mentions that the suffering is the fault of Satan. He avoided such an accusation because he knew such was not true. He also knew that if Christians believed such then they could never have confidence in God. If Satan can disrupt the plan of God for our lives, then he must be at least equal to God in power if not greater.

Someone suggested to me that my daughter Victoria, who has Downs Syndrome, was born that way because of Satan. They said God could never do anything like this. With constrained emotions, I quickly explained how Satan could have had nothing to do with it, but that she was fearfully, wonderfully made by my loving Father. Sometimes the Lord does things that we would deem wrong, but it is only because we see with such a small eye. What we can see of God's good and perfect plan is so limited that it's like trying to view the Grand Canyon through a tube. We cannot get the full range. If Satan is the one who is in charge of our suffering, then how can we have comfort that all shall be well for us? You say it is because God will prevail. Yes, He will, but is He not already prevailing? Is He not already powerful enough to intervene and prevent the suffering? Why, of course He is. Satan is not so strong as to confuse or confound the Almighty. If God so desired that your trial which now engulfs you had never befallen you, then you can be assured it would not have occurred. It is wisdom and right to believe that the trial that has been thrust upon you has a holy purpose through which you will be the better and God will be glorified.



So, if the Christian life is a non-ending conflict of open hostilities between the kingdom of darkness and us, we need strength to endure.

## **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LIFE OF ENDURANCE**

Paul exhorts young Timothy, “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). Endurance is a quality that is necessary to your obedience. In verse thirty-six the text says “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” The word “patience” is translated from the Greek word “endurance.” There are times, especially during hardship and heartache, when the presence of God seems gone and all you have is a sheer determination to hang on. You must practice a stubbornness that refuses to throw in the towel. You must have the same endurance as a prisoner of war who is being tortured to reveal secret strategic information. No matter the pain, he must remain faithful to his nation.

You will be tempted to give up. You will have to fight emotions that will make you think quitting is the right thing. But it is then, my dear friend, you must trust the Word of God and endure. It is obvious that this church or churches had been enduring conflict for a great deal of time. The longer the duration, the more difficult it can be to maintain confidence in God. The writer says in verse thirty-five, “cast not away therefore your confidence.”

There are three means of gaining and strengthening endurance in the text:

### **1) Support of each other (vs. 33-34).**

*Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. 34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods... (Hebrews 10:33-34).*

In verse thirty-three the author says they had become a “gazingstock,” meaning a public spectacle because of the persecution they had received. Some of the church’s members had been imprisoned for their faith in Christ. Others who had not been imprisoned went to the jails and ministered to those incarcerated. It was very common in those days that the jails and prisons did not feed or clothe the inmates. They survived only through the care of family or friends who brought them food and clothing.

At the risk of being arrested and imprisoned themselves, Christians began to go and minister to the imprisoned by feeding and clothing their fellow brothers and sisters who had been arrested. The author of Hebrews even says that they ministered unto him while he was imprisoned. Because of this act of love and courage, many of the saints who visited the prison had their own properties confiscated.

These early Christians took very seriously the encouraging and support of one another. Their strength was in the interconnection and dependence with and upon each other. Once again the

writer of Hebrews is teaching us the necessity of shoring each other up by exhorting and caring for one another. There are times when conflict becomes so hard to endure that you and I need loving encouragement to not quit and give up. How very precious is that brother and his word to you to keep trusting in Christ! It makes you know that you are not in this alone, and that others are counting on you to fight. And you are to encourage others to fight the fight of faith. It may mean seeing a brother or sister whose joy seems tarnished and your applying polishing words that bring back the luster.

## 2) Promise of reward (vs. 35-36)

*Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise (Hebrews 10:35-36).*

The promises of God are so extremely important to our endurance. I have always known this, but it is becoming increasingly vital to me of recent months. God's promises literally are to be the fuel for the Christian life. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Because of the severity of the conflict against unbelief and Satan, we can easily become fatigued. If we are not careful, we will become engrossed in trying to find pleasure in this temporal world in order to ease the pressure of the fight. We will begin to hold on to our present possessions and find them difficult to turn loose. Our writer reminds his audience that when they were first persecuted, they joyfully accepted the seizing of the homes and possessions because they knew they had something much better and enduring. They believed that the possessions which God would give them in heaven were far superior to what they had lost here on earth. It was the promise that made this difference, and it will make the difference in you. If you possess this knowledge, then the loss of material goods is endurable.

It is not foolish to remind ourselves and each other continually that heaven is worth it all. Someone asked me recently if we should sing songs about heaven. I understood the question to mean that we should sing songs that worship our Lord and exalt Him. Yes, we should. Such songs should be the major portion of our worship, but now and again we need to be reminded of what our Father is preparing for us. We need to be encouraged by the promise that the loss of what little earth offers is not even worthy to be compared to the glory yet to be ours.

## 3) A Warning (vs. 37-38)

*For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:37-38).*

If we are to gain endurance, we need not only promises but also warnings. Over and again the writer of Hebrews has stimulated his audience to endure by warning them of the terrible and

frightful consequences of not enduring. The warnings are a part of God's security system in preserving His saints. As I see myself losing endurance and not fighting the fight of faith as strongly as I had before, I am reminded by the warnings that those who slack off eventually will become deserters. I hear the thunder that is in those frightening words, "but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." My heart trembles at the prospect of losing my Father's pleasure in me, and I pick up my sword and shield and once again enter the fray.

Thirdly and lastly, I want to explore our text and see our author's connection with faith and our endurance.

## **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LIFE OF FAITH**

We must not only know we have a better and an enduring possession in heaven, but also we must believe it with all our soul. He tells the beleaguered Hebrews, "Do not cast away your confidence (meaning faith), which has great reward. For you have need of endurance." Once again we see faith is the fuel of endurance and combating battle fatigue. Verse thirty-eight, "Now the just shall live by faith."

In verse thirty-nine it says, "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." The word "believe" is connected with the idea of saving. But this belief occurs not just at the moment of conversion but is a continual believing that evidences itself in our final triumph over all our enemies. It is faith by which we are saved and are continually being saved.

Now faith can only survive when it is resisted. Resistance is necessary for healthy faith. Therefore, God permits, arranges, and decrees seasons of great testing. You must see this or the next two chapters of Hebrews will mean nothing to you.

Here's how our faith is developed by suffering. Faith must be dependent upon someone or something. Faith is only as strong as the person in whom it is placed. If our dependence is upon ourselves, then that is where our faith is. Those to whom the author of Hebrews was writing had at one time bravely endured difficult suffering because their faith was dependent upon Christ. Now because of continual battling, fatigue was setting in, and their dependence on Christ was less than before. When their faith was strong and they were depending totally on Christ, they were willing to lose all and do it with joy. In order to love God and depend upon Him, it takes a detachment from the possessions you have accumulated in this world. It appears that the ground for courage in radical obedience to Jesus is freedom from the love of things, or even from the simple dependence on things. Love of things is a deterrent to desperately depending on Jesus.

Suffering is God's means of tearing from our hearts the endearing love we have for things in which we place our confidence. George MacDonald put it this way, "How often we look upon God as our last and feeblest resource! We go to Him because we have nowhere else to go. And then we learn that the storms of life have driven us, not upon the rocks, but into the desired haven."



God is taking you and me to places of great insecurity so that we may be very secure. I would think myself safe in saying that a great number of you really and truly want to see God supreme in your lives. His supremacy in all things is very important to you. However, you are not sure of the cost. And what is the cost of God being highly exalted in you? Oh, it is trusting in nothing but Him. It is desperate dependence!

I am very encouraged this morning because I can see God at work in you. What is it that I see? It is your restlessness. It is your forlorn countenance. It is your unsettled souls. The Lord God in tender mercy is shaking your dependencies. He is turning your lives upside down and all around that He might pry you away from the confidences of this temporal and fleeting physical life. You have tasted a small morsel of what God is like, and it has left you unsatisfied. It makes you unsatisfied in that you want more of Him. You cannot just have a taste, you must feast off of Him. It also makes you unsatisfied with the world. You can't enjoy the things which at one time brought you the most pleasure. Yet if you choose to try to hold on to them, peace will elude you. If this is you I am now describing, remember, pleasure is fleeting. Unrest is now what seems to rule in your hearts. Die, my friends. Die so that you may live. Die to your earthly havens of rest. Die to your earthly dependencies. Die, and then you will live in the Haven of Rest; you will have Heaven's resources on which to depend. This is the way to fight battle fatigue. Amen.