

“Suffering Together”

Hebrews 10:32-34

God not only gave us Himself, He has also given us each other. Yet belonging to the family of God is a part of the gospel we who live in modern society seem to understand or value very little. We think of church as a building where people participate in religious services and then go home. While we're there we sit beside people and may say "hello" or engage in light conversation, but once we get in our cars our life together ends. Most of us would acknowledge that being part of a church is a good thing and that God wants us to be involved at a deeper level with other believers, but if we're honest we don't have any time or energy left over after our busy work week. And as long as we're healthy and have enough money we don't really feel much need to be with each other either. But if a time comes when we face widespread economic hardship or an increased level of persecution, suddenly our appreciation for one another will rise dramatically. We'll need each other and we'll know it.

In these few verse of Hebrews we are given a brief but vivid picture of believers standing shoulder to shoulder in the midst of tribulation. The author chose his words carefully when he wrote this passage, and if we look closely at what he says we'll see what it means to belong to the family of God in a whole new light.

A. What did he say?

- 1) v 32 - Remember the early years following your conversion (being enlightened”).
- 2) v 32 - You suffered like athletes engaged in a fierce struggle.
- 3) v 33 - Some of you were dragged into public arenas (lit: “theaterized”) and there subjected to verbal and physical abuse (Ac 16:19-26; 19:29).
- 4) v 33 - Those who escaped being persecuted cared for those who were like members of their own family, which must have included bringing food, clothing and blankets to those in jail, opening their homes to those left homeless, and most importantly praying for them.
- 5) v 34 - You refused to abandon one another during those times, choosing instead to “suffer together” with those who had been arrested and were being held in stocks and chains (Ac 16:24, 26).
- 6) v 34 - You joyfully accepted the hardships that your faith in Jesus Christ produced. Your homes were broken into and robbed and your farms were plundered.
- 7) v 34 - Through all of this your faith sustained you. You remained confident that the spiritual riches given to you in Christ were worth far more than those things that were being lost, and you knew His riches could never be taken away.

B. Principles: What lessons can we learn from their example?

- 1) God does not intend us to face hard times alone.
 - (v 32) “becoming sharers” (koinonoi)
 - Koinonia: to hold things in common like a family
 - Family-like care for one another
 - Acts 2:44, 45; 4:32-37
 - 1 Corinthians 12:26 “...if one member suffers all the members suffer with it...”
 - Hebrews 13:1-3
- 2) We are placed into God's family as a birthright, not a reward
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free...”
 - Ephesians 2:19 “...you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household...”
- 3) Suffering together is an important indication that God's love dwells in us.
 - 1 John 3:16-18 “...whoever has the world's goods.”
 - James 2:15, 16 “If a brother or sister is without clothing or in need of daily food...”



LIFE LESSONS

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- 4) Circumstances that would normally terrify people actually bring us joy.
- Hardship presses the church to love at a new level, and our faith is built when we see God working through His people.
 - Summer mission: "Look at what God did."
 - People working harmoniously together is a miracle.
 - People serving others with nothing in return is a miracle (RFKC, summer mission)
 - Unbelievers are drawn to the warmth of such practical love and it results in evangelism.
 - "...the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Ac 2:47).
 - The treasures of heaven become more precious when we see the futility of hoping in this world. Our focus on eternity grows stronger.
 - "...knowing you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (Heb 10:34).
 - We are drawn closer into God's family. We learn to do things corporately as a community.
 - Food co-op
 - Child care, elder care
 - Shared housing
 - Communal vegetable gardens
 - Clothing exchanges

C. Application: But even if we haven't arrived at difficult times yet, what steps does God want us to do now?

- 1) Be aware of what Christian love can look like
- Ephesians 1:18 "...the eyes of your heart will be enlightened, so that you will know... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..."
 - God has not only given us Himself and heaven, He has also given us each other. He has adopted us into His family.
- 2) Be aware that God expects us to "suffer together" with those who suffer, even now, not just in times of economic collapse or persecution.
- Medical suffering
 - Family suffering
 - Loneliness: Stephen Ministry
 - Poverty: Food Pantry, Thanksgiving, Christmas toy drive
 - Mission: Food and medicine (PNG), training pastors (Peru), women's health (Kazakhstan), Nepal, South Africa
 - We're responsible for family members in other parts of the world
 - Prayer: Covering one another during hard times (like we do for a mission team)

D. Conclusion: Let's listen to Jesus in Matthew 25:31-40

E. Questions:

- 1) Can you remember a time when the Body of Christ took care of you in a way that surprised you?
- 2) In what ways does God use you to serve other Christians in need?