

Perseverance and Preservation

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0 : 00] We have been going now probably for two or three months, I suppose, and we're coming near the end of that series.! We just got done talking about the different conflicts that Christians have, and today we are going to talk about finishing the course, finishing the race, about persevering, God preserving us.

So, which one of these is true? The Christian must persevere all the way to make it to heaven to finally be saved, or God preserves the Christian so that she or he won't be lost and she will make it all the way to the end.

Which of those is true? Both! Very good. Both. Both are true. We must persevere, and God has promised that he will preserve his people. Both are true.

They're separate truths, they're separate, but they are connected. And they need to be separate but connected truths. They're like two wheels on a bicycle. And maybe you have seen a bicycle with just one wheel on the back, and that bicycle is not doing so well.

That bicycle is not going to take you anywhere. And some people are riding their Christian bicycles with only one wheel. And it makes for hard going. We need to understand both. We need both.

Perseverance and preservation.

[1 : 41] So, John Newton, in his famous hymn that we sing, Amazing Grace, he wrote this, Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.

And what is the next line? Tis. Go on. Yeah, it's his grace that has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

So, there are dangers, and there are toils, and there are snares. We've already talked about that, those conflicts that the Christian has to go through. But at the same time, grace is there. Grace will lead us home.

You kind of see both of them there. And so, I have four points this morning. And the first point is, you must, Christian, you must persevere.

You must persevere. This is of absolute necessity. Now, there is one book that is really all about the need, and the encouragement and the warning that you must persevere.

[2 : 52] It's the book of Hebrews. It's full of warnings and encouragements to persevere. It has some of the strongest warnings in all of the Bible.

And so, I want to look at some of those. And so, I'm going to ask you to take your Bibles and turn to the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 6, verse 4. Hebrews 6, verse 4.

We don't really have time to talk about the entire context, but it's obviously mostly written to Jewish believers, and they're coming under persecution.

Great pressure. Things have happened. And it seems that they might be considering dropping out of the Christian race.

Hebrews 6, verse 4. And remember, the big point here at the very beginning is, you must persevere. So, I want you to always have that in the forefront of your mind as we're reading some of this.

[3 : 55] So, Hebrews 6, verse 4. It is impossible for those who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance.

Because to their loss, they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. Now, this is probably the most stark and radical, I would say, warning that you find in the book of Hebrews.

There's others, and we're going to have a chance to look at them. But it is so strong that some people have really wrestled with, how do we interpret this?

Some people have blunted this warning and made it hypothetical. And they usually come at the book of Hebrews, and they probably come at all of their Bible reading, from a very top-down perspective.

And what I mean by that is from a God's eye view, from a very strong, high, Calvinist view.

[5 : 13] And so they see this, and they say, well, how can this person who has shared in the Holy Spirit, what is that about?

How can they fall away? And so they come at the book of Hebrews from a very, very strong Calvinistic perspective, and that's okay.

Okay. And what I mean by that is it's a very, from God's view, from a very high perspective, looking at all of salvation and all of those truths from that upper view.

And so they have a hard time saying, what does this mean? Sharing in the Holy Spirit, tasting the heavenly gift, tasting the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age.

That's strong stuff. So how can this person fall away? And they blunt the warning, and they can make it hypothetical, or they say, well, this person just, they simply put it in the category of, well, this person wasn't ever saved, and that's not me, so I don't have to worry about it.

[6 : 25] And what I want to say is, that is to look at the book of Hebrews from the wrong perspective. Hebrews is not, so to speak, from God's transcendent view, where he knows the end from the beginning, he knows those who he has saved.

It's not from that perspective. It's not from 3,000 feet up when you're in the Goodyear blimp, and you're looking at the entire race as it's being run. Hebrews is, you are in the race.

You are on the road. You are running. You know that. Let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us.

Hebrews, the book of Hebrews' main point is this. You are not done until you are done.

You are out of the woods until you are out of the woods. And so you can't ever become complacent.

You can't ever say, I'm going to take it easy.

[7 : 32] I'm not going to pay such close attention. When you are in the race, you need warnings.

You need to say, don't go this way. You need to follow the directions. You need encouragement.

And so we sing that song. We run with the saints of old still lying the way, retelling the triumphs of his grace. And Hebrews 11 is this great cloud of witnesses who are watching us run the race.

They are watching us. And by their lives and by their example, they are saying, keep on believing. Keep on running. Keep on.

And the warnings are real. They're real. And we have to hear them. And we have to feel them. So Hebrews 3.12.

Turn back. Hebrews 3.12. See to it. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another daily.

[8 : 39] We're running together as a group. And you know who my brother's keeper is? I am.

We're all in this together. And we're meant to cheer each other on and encourage each other and make sure that we don't have this unbelieving heart that turns away, that goes down the wrong road.

Hebrews 4.11. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest so that none will fall by following their example of disobedience.

The Israelites' example of disobedience. They didn't believe God. They did not enter into the promised land. Hebrews 2.1. Look at that, please.

Hebrews 2.1. We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

[9 : 40] For if the message spoken by angels was binding, that's talking about the old covenant, the law, if that message spoken by angels was binding and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?

Now, look at the context. Is ignoring the salvation that he's talking about here in Hebrews 2, ignoring such a great salvation, is that just talking about I hear the gospel and I don't believe it? I don't receive it at all? I think, I mean, that's obviously an application of it, but he uses a synonym in chapter 2, verse 1, for ignoring the gospel.

Do you see what it is? What's the synonym for ignoring such a great salvation in verse 1?

Anyone? Drifting away. Ignoring such a great salvation is not in the first place. I hear the gospel and I just ignore it.

[11:06] It's not that. It's, I hear it, I believe it for a time, I understand it, I taste of the powers of the age to come, I taste the goodness of God, I taste the goodness of the word of God, and then, I drift away.

I ignore it. I lose track of it. I wander away. Now, remember the point is, you must persevere. And that's what the book of Hebrews is saying. Don't wander away. Don't drift away. Remember the salvation that God has saved you with. Do not ignore it.

So some of you have been saved for 20, 30, 40, 50 years. You can't ignore the salvation that has taken a hold of you. You can't wander away from it.

It's no good, what the book of Hebrews is saying is, it's no good to run for 20 years and not finish the race. You only, you're only done when you're done.

[12:08] You're only out of the woods when you're out of the woods. Now, if anyone had a reason, so to speak, to be complacent, to just, you know, obviously, I'm saved.

Obviously, I don't have anything to worry about. It was Paul. But listen to what Paul says. Listen to what Paul says. I do not run like a man running aimlessly.

Okay, think of a child running aimlessly. Where are they going? I'm not going anywhere. They're just happy to be running, right? They're out in the yard. They're running.

Paul's saying, I don't run like a person running aimlessly with no point. I do not fight like a man beating the air, like a shadow boxer. I'm not fighting nothing.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

[13:19] Paul saw the risen Christ. Paul was taken up into the third heavens and he was shown things that were so amazing, so great, he was not allowed to speak them to others.

Paul was the chosen apostle to the Gentiles. Paul wrote at least 13 books of the New Testament. And Paul is saying, I don't want to be disqualified.

I don't want to be disqualified. I want to win the prize. You must persevere. So brothers and sisters, if you're complacent, if you're saying to yourself, well, I was saved, that happened to me, and so I'm good.

I'll just, so to speak, coast in. I'll just coast in. I want to say this as your pastor, and as someone who God has given the care of your soul to, and I feel the same way that Paul felt about the Thessalonians.

Who is my joy and my crown on the day when Christ is revealed except for you? I want to say this. You aren't saved all the way until you are saved all the way.

[14:47] You are not done until you are done. The race is over when you cross the line. When you cross the line. So that's the first point.

You must persevere. Now here's the second point. God will preserve you.

God will preserve you. The Bible gives us great assurance. Great assurance. We must persevere, God and he promises to preserve us, to keep us.

Now those promises shouldn't make us complacent, but rather hopeful and encouraged. That's how you see the promises of the Bible.

That's how you should read them. They're to give you assurance and confidence. They should not make you inactive. So turn in your Bible.

[15:55] I guess you don't have to turn there. John chapter 10. Let me just read this to you. Jesus is talking. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them.

there's no doubt about who they are. There's no doubt he knows you and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.

No one can snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand.

I and the father are one. Jesus is saying the father and I are one in this.

This is something that we are both all in and we're all in this together. I have you. He has you. No one can snatch you out of my hand.

[17:03] No one can snatch them out of the father's hand. We are both in this together to keep you safe. To keep you in those conflicts when you're tired.

When you feel like wandering away, we are going to keep you. Philippians 1, Paul says that he's confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Remember again the whole point of Romans 5-11. In a single word you could say the whole point is hope. Here's why we can have hope.

Yes, we are saved. Here's why we can have hope in our conflict. Here's why we can have hope when we're facing the world. Here's why we can have hope when we're dealing with our flesh. Here's why we can have hope in the face of everything.

We can have hope despite all these things because God's purposes for us cannot fail. Romans 8-29 and those following verses.

[18:15] Those he justifies, he sanctifies, and those he sanctifies, he glorifies. Listen to Sinclair Ferguson. He directs us to another place of assurance.

God did not spare his own son. So think about the cost in which God, at what cost God paid for you. God did not spare his own son, but gave him up to the death of the cross.

This is what Sinclair Ferguson says. It is unthinkable that he would withhold from us the grace we need to persevere. Christ's death properly understood guarantees perseverance.

Guarantees perseverance. So the point is, if God gave up his son, and he paid such a high price, is he going to now just let us go?

Is he going to just let us wander away? No. Here's some other sources of assurance that we have. God has chosen us in Christ.

[19:29] This is what we talked about weeks ago now. We are chosen. We are elect. We have been picked. And we've not only been elected, we have been predestined.

We have been appointed to a certain end. We have been predestined to glory. So Peter says, we are shielded by God's power for the inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us.

So God protects us but he protects us for a reason in order that we might receive our inheritance that's reserved in heaven for us.

So heaven is reserved for us. Our name is there. So when we show up, they're going to have a table ready for us. That's what we're saying, what he's saying.

There's a table waiting for us. But I want to add, we have to get there, don't we? We have to get there. So more than that, God indwells us by his spirit.

[20:37] The spirit of Christ dwells in us. He dwells in us like we dwell in our houses. So who here would buy a house and then let that house fall into ruin around them?

Well, we might do something like that. But God is a much better home owner than we are. Listen to Thomas Watson. He who dwells in a house keeps the house in repair, keeps it fixed up.

And so the spirit dwelling in a believer keeps grace in repair. Life. He keeps life in repair. He keeps that love and faith and hope and joy, all the fruit of the spirit, all the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He keeps that not in shambles, not broken down, but he keeps it in repair. Grace is compared to a river of the water of life.

This river can never be dried up in the Christian because God's spirit is the spring that continually refreshes it. We have eternal life and it wells up within us because it's the Holy Spirit in his life.

[21:54] And so we can have great assurance. So more than this, more than all that, why can we have assurance? Well, because Christ prays for us.

You know, we take great comfort when someone prays for us. It is comforting to know, hey, my brothers and sisters are praying for me. Well, Jesus is praying for us.

He took his place in heaven to intercede for us. Remember what he told Peter on the night that Peter was going to betray him? Not betray him.

Yeah. Deny him. He said, I have prayed for your faith that it would not fail. Peter was going to be sifted like we. The devil was going to shake him all around every which way to try to get him to let go.

And the Lord said, Peter, I prayed for you that your faith would not fail. So think of this. If this is something that you struggle with, with assurance, with I don't, I'm afraid I'm not going to make it, I'm afraid that I'm going to fail, I just want you to think of this, that Jesus' prayers would have to fail.

[23:14] Jesus' prayers would have to fail before we are lost. The Lord, the Father in heaven would have to say, I did not hear that.

I'm not paying attention to that. I'm going to say no to that prayer before we are lost if Jesus is praying for us. Charles Wesley put it like this in one of his hymns.

It's not a hymn that we sing, but it goes like this. see where before the throne he stands and pours the all-prevailing prayer.

That means it prevails, it conquers over everything, this all-prevailing prayer. He points to his side and lifts his hands and he shows that I am graven there, I'm written there, I'm carved there. He ever lives for me to pray. He prays that I with him may reign. Amen to what my Lord does say, Jesus, thou canst not pray in vain.

[24 : 25] He's holding up his hands and our names are there. He's pointing to his side and he's saying, I want them to reign with me.

And those prayers prevail. And so we are kept safe, despite the world, despite the devil, despite ourselves. Despite ourselves. So our assurance doesn't come from how determined we are. We can't say, I'm so determined, that's why I know I'm going to be saved, and that's how I know I'm going to make it to the end. Our assurance doesn't come from how determined we are, but how determined the Lord Jesus is.

He will have the prize for which he died. He will. And we're that prize. He's going to have us. Now, third, so our first point was you must persevere.

The second point is God will preserve you. The third point is this, we need to talk about the threats, the dangers, the attacks on our perseverance.

[25 : 32] The threats to our perseverance. Jesus in the parable of the sower and the soils laid out two of those dangers.

We talked about one of them a few weeks ago. Some people receive the gospel with joy, and they spring up, but it's rocky soil. And as soon as troubles and difficulties appear on the horizon, they wither away.

The troubles, the difficulties, of the Christian life are too much, and so they wither away. Now, I had a place in my yard where I planted some grass, and it grew up nice, as well as all the other grass, but as soon as it got hot out, all the grass died instantly, and it was just a small patch of round dirt in my yard.

And sometimes I can get obsessed with things like that, where it's like, why won't that grass grow? And it really bothers me. Well, this past summer, I said, I'm going to get to the bottom of this, and I started digging around in this hole in the yard, and about eight inches under the surface, my shovel hit something hard, and I thought it was a rock, and so I said, I'm going to dig this rock out, because the only way my grass is going to grow is if I can get this rock out of there.

Well, I started trying to find the edge of it, and once I cleared off some of the dirt, it became apparent that it was not just like a naturally occurring stone, there was a chunk of concrete this thick, and it was getting bigger and bigger, I have no idea how it got there.

[27 : 15] that's why the grass wouldn't spring up, that's why the grass would spring up, and then die as soon as it got hot out, because this much soil is enough soil to make grass grow, but it is not enough soil for grass to live in an Indiana summer.

Now, so the summer heat killed it, that's what Jesus is saying. The difficulties, the hardships, the heat kills the plant.

What are some of the, what are some of the, some examples of summer heat that can kill a Christian's life, a professing Christian's life? What are some examples?

Anything? Persecution. Persecution. You really don't know how strong you are until you've been persecuted. Sickness.

Long sickness. Probably not 24-hour flu. Long sickness. Depression. Prayerlessness.

[28 : 33] What do you mean by that? Okay. Or at least where you feel like you're shut off from him. So we're talking about these difficulties.

What else? Love of money. We're actually going to get to that. That's the next soil. But you know what? Let's just say that is the next soil.

That's the next thing we have to worry about. What? Someone said something over here. Death. Addiction. Addiction. Disappointment.

Yeah. That's one of those I had. When life doesn't go your way or it doesn't seem like God is living up to his side of the bargain, when you think you have this quid pro quo relationship with God and he says, no, actually, that's not how this works at all.

And you come to terms with that or you have to come to terms with that. It's a long disappointment. That can be difficult. difficulties. Just in general, when it's hard to do the right thing and it keeps on being hard to do the right thing.

[29 : 47] Now, when we're going through those kinds of things, we have to persevere through them. We have to keep going through them.

We can't give up in the middle of them. We have to persevere in the face of persecution. I mean, just think of what that means for some people.

It's easy here. Think about what that means for certain people in certain countries. You have to endure it. You have to persevere.

You have to realize like, okay, my mom, my dad, is going to hate me. My dad is going to try to kill me. You think you have strained relationships.

You have to endure times of trouble. Whatever that trouble might be, it can be dangerous times. Because they can be like that 18th mile of the marathon when you hit the wall.

[30 : 54] And every part of your body is screaming and telling you to stop. the only way to finish the race is to go through it.

The other threat to perseverance are those thorns. This is what Stan says comes in. The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. We talked about this a few weeks ago.

We talked about how the world has those two hands. the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth and they want to choke your life out of you.

The world wants to sidetrack you to get you all worked up and obsessed with other things. With things that won't last. With worries.

With wealth. And you have to see what it's trying to do. You have to see what the world is really up to.

[31 : 56] It's agenda. Remember the world the god of this age. The god of this world is the devil. And so the world has his agenda in mind. And what is it trying to do? The world is like the Star Trek villains the Borg.

And does anyone know what is the Borg's motto? Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated. resistance is futile. You will be assimilated. You will be assimilated. when the Borg shows up in Star Trek they always show up on the screen and they say those words.

And the point is there's no point in fighting. Just let us do what we're going to do. so they win with no battle.

That's the world's motto. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile. My question is do we then just lie down and let them do it?

[33 : 07] No. Resistance is not futile. You have to fight. Proverbs 4 23 says guard your heart for it is the wellspring of your life.

Guard your heart. Keep your heart. Put a century over your heart. Protect your heart. Because what the world is trying to do is get those worries in. The deceitfulness of wealth in.

It wants to believe those lies. It wants to sneak in under the wall and get you thinking that money and wealth and all these things that you have to worry about.

Everything that the world is worried about are the most important things. And when your heart is infested and infected with those sorts of things, what happens is it chokes your spiritual life out.

We don't know exactly what happened to Demas. But Paul's commentary is simple. He says, Demas has left me because he's loved this world.

[34 : 08] We don't know if he left the faith or left Paul, but the point was Demas' spiritual barometer or compass or whatever metaphor you want to use was now pointed completely the wrong way and it was because he loved this world.

So guard your heart. There are threats to your perseverance and the answer is to guard your heart. Now last, the fourth point. Let's talk about helps to perseverance.

perseverance. So we have assurance. We see we have to persevere. God promises to persevere or preserve us. We've seen some of the dangers or the threats to that.

And now let's talk about what can help us to keep going. And God generally uses means. He uses other things to help us.

And I just want to talk about a few means. And maybe they're not the normal things that you're thinking about. And I'm not saying like we could talk about the word of God and we could talk about prayer and I think we might talk a little bit about being with each other.

[35 : 22] We could talk about all of those. And those are all good and right and necessary. I want to talk about a couple other things that are that God uses to make sure that we keep going.

And the first one is I just want to tell you a story. So about a month or two ago we were down in the Smoky Mountains National Park, my family and I, and we were out hiking and we made it all the way out.

I don't know how long it was. Seems like forever when you're in the mountains. Out to Andrews Bald and the whole family. And then we were going to head back. And anyways, things happened and Cayman and I, we got separated.

Cayman and I together and the girls are together. together and they were going to go ahead and we were going to catch up with them. And so Cayman and I went down this trail and we thought we were following them and we went further and further down the trail and I started to get worried because we weren't catching up with them.

I didn't even see them ahead of us. And the meanwhile, there's no phone reception or anything like that. And the path that Cayman and I were on, it was going from moderate to rugged.

[36 : 39] It had been sort of like taken care of and now we're like going down river beds. You know, things are not looking good. And so finally we made it up to the top of this mountain and I got some reception and thankfully Google has hey, the trail's right on the GPS and we are going the wrong way and we are making good time doing it.

And anyways, it became clear that we were nowhere where we were supposed to be. So Daniel Boone, I am not. But by the time we had got to that point, we were 45 minutes down the trail at least and it's really rugged.

We're going the wrong way and we have to turn around. And it's hard. But at long last we got back to where we started on Andrew's Bald and then we had to go the rest of the way home.

And we had been hiking for a couple hours by this point. I don't know. But you know what kept us moving when we were really hot and tired and we only had one water bottle between us?

And I'll tell you what it was. It was a healthy sense of desperation. Right? A healthy sense of desperation.

[37 : 59] Cabin and I were hot and tired. It was painful but we kept moving and we kept moving and the reason we kept moving is we were desperate to get back. To make sure the girls were okay.

So we couldn't meander our way home. We couldn't hope that the trail that we were on was going to take us there eventually. We had to have the right trail and we had to make good time and we had to keep going despite that we were tired and you know what will keep you moving in the Christian life?

A healthy sense of desperation. And what I mean by that is there is a hell to escape and there is a heaven to win.

My soul is at stake. two other examples both out of Russia.

You know what kept the Soviet Union fighting in the winter of 1941 when the German army was 18 miles away from Moscow and it was winter and the Russian soldiers and peasants were digging trenches in the snow with their bare hands.

[39 : 13] You know what makes you do things like that? Desperation. Like it's either we do this or we don't survive. In the summer of 1812 Napoleon had the largest army ever assembled in Europe to that point and he invaded Russia and the Russians fought a delaying retreating tactic all the way back.

There was only one big battle and it was sort of a draw but they kept on retreating and finally in I think September they entered the city of Moscow and what they found there what Napoleon found when he got there was a city almost completely empty and already the fires were burning everywhere.

The Russians burned down their own capital. capital. What makes you burn down your own capital city?

It's desperation. So read the book of Hebrews and you have to realize that there is this strain that's going through it that you must persevere or you will be lost.

You have to keep going or you will be lost. What are some other means? The word of God. The word of God is like that water bottle that Cayman and I had.

[40 : 37] It refreshes us. It encourages us. It shows us the way. It gives us hope. We could talk about fellowship. You know going back to what Cayman and I like Cayman was the one saying okay dad let's keep going.

Let's keep going. And so hey we kept going. He cheered me on and I cheered him on and we went together. And that's the way that this Christian life is. We were met to do this together.

We were met to be encouraging each other. Warning each other. Helping each other. Very last point. Another means is a good sense of duty.

A good sense of duty. You know what we need to do sometimes is what we don't feel like doing. But we do it because it's the what we're supposed to do. Sinclair Ferguson says this more failure in the Christian living can be traced to this failing in our duty than to almost anything else.

[41 : 46] God calls us. God calls you to do certain things. not just when it's easy but when it's hard.

Firemen don't do their duty when they're sitting in the fire station doing nothing. Firemen do their duty when they're in dangerous situations fighting fires.

Soldiers do their duty when they go through a war. We have a duty to God, a charge that we've been given. And persevering means day by day, faithfully discharging what God has called us to do.

And I just want to say duty has become a bad word in the Christian life, in the Christian world. And it's not a bad word anywhere else, is it?

Soldiers aren't condemned because they do their duty. Firemen aren't condemned because they have a healthy sense of I fight fires because this is what I'm called to do.

[42 : 48] And so, we need to work with a sense of duty. And it's ridiculous to think that that shouldn't be a motivation for us.

And so, this is where we're going to end. Let's stick with it. Let's persevere. And trusting that Christ himself will preserve us.

We're dismissed. Okay.