

## Perseverance – May 6, 2018

[slide] This morning we will be focusing on “perseverance” from Hebrews 10:32-39. But before we endure a message about perseverance you get to exercise your own as I give you an extra mini-message just to touch on the “warning paragraph that comes just before.

These Jewish Christians are feeling a growing persecution and some in this [probably Roman] congregation are considering backing away from their faith in Christ and returning to Judaism. The previous passage brought every argument from the past 9 chapters to bear in the plea: **Don't back away from Christ, DRAW NEAR TO GOD through Christ.** Then comes a warning vs: 26-31

Three quick things I want you to understand about this warning: [slide]

**1. God is not joking about the destructive effect sin has on His beloved Creation.** He's described as the source of: 27 ... judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. He's described as the one who says: 30 ... “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” And, 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. **Sin seeds death among the wheat of God's good Creation** and God is adamant that this will be put right.

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**2. This is not condemning a Christian who loves Jesus but knowingly lied or was unforgiving yesterday in a moment of weakness.** This is about a person who has 29... trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? **It's about someone who has known Jesus but has decided to “deliberately keep on sinning,” decided to reject Christ with an arrogant antagonism.** This warning is against full-blown apostasy. In the graphic words of scholar Thomas G. Long: Apostasy is to know in the depths of one's soul that “death has been swallowed up in victory” but to choose nonetheless to pitch one's tent in a death camp. Apostasy is to know full well where the next earthquake will be and to leave “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” to build one's life on the fault line.

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**3. To belong to Jesus and to have missed the mark, even knowingly cannot erase our salvation.** 1John 2:1 My little children, ...if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **Even so as in Heb 3: 12** See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. **Apostasy seldom springs up full-grown so It's important to guard your heart.**

[slide] Alright let's talk about perseverance which is: steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success –persistence, tenacity, determination. Generally speaking, we humans are pretty good at it. Sabre-tooth Tigers and Giant Cave Bears are gone but we're still here. We've persevered our way through plagues and famines and floods and earthquakes and stock market crashes and horrendous world wars- complete with Atomic bombs. And still here we are: having breakfast, going to work, coming home, mowing the lawn, hitting the sack and doing it all over again until that brief shining moment we call the weekend and then we do it again. *The hamster wheel keeps turning and we persistently hang on.* **We persevere through our work,** which leads to defense mechanisms that give an illusion of control. Like these signs... [slide]

*"Tell me what you need and I'll tell you how to get along without it."* [slide]

*"I love deadlines. I especially like the whooshing sound they make as they go flying by."* [slide]

*"Accept that some days you're the pigeon and some days you're the statue."*

**Now I know most of you are retired.** But for those who aren't and because people want practical tips for living in their sermons I have, for you, the top five things to say if caught sleeping at your desk. Just in case. [slide]

5. *This is just a 15-minute power nap like they raved about at the last Time Management Course you sent me to.* [slide]

4. *This is one of the seven habits of highly effective people!* [slide]

3. *Ah, the unique and unpredictable circadian rhythms of the workaholic.* [slide]

2. *I wasn't sleeping. I was trying to pick up a contact lens without my hands.* [slide]

1. *...Amen.*

**Now there's a relative aspect to perseverance.** What requires perseverance on my part might be a breeze for you. Maybe you love waiting in line but you hate to iron anything. Maybe the continuous growth of your grass is no big deal cause you love cranking up the lawn mower. But typing up a letter on your computer requires a never-ending panoply of perseverance.

For instance these Computer error messages in the form of a haiku.

. [slide] -- *A file that big? It might be very useful. But now it is gone.*

. [slide] -- *Chaos reigns within. Reflect, repent, and reboot. Order shall return.*

. [slide] -- *First snow, then silence. This thousand dollar screen dies so beautifully*

. [slide] -- *with searching comes loss. and the presence of absence: "My Novel" not found.*

**Church will be the safe haven of rest.** [slide] In this sacred sanctuary God will protect us from boredom, meaningless tasks and foolishness. Nope the church is made up of humans. And other humans are the classic reason to engage our perseverance.

These are "supposedly" actual misprints from church bulletins:

-*The Pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday morning.*

-*Pastor is on vacation. Massages can be given to church secretary.*

-*Low self-esteem support group will meet Thursday at 7-8:30pm. Please use the back door.*

-The Rev. Meriwether spoke briefly, much to the delight of the audience.

-Weight watchers will meet at 7pm. Please use the large double doors at the side entrance.

-Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community

All this, to laugh at ourselves a bit and say this morning we are concerned with perseverance as in Heb Ch 10. As I've already mentioned this morning this congregation of Jewish Christians heard about Jesus and embraced Him as Lord, Messiah, and Son of God. And because of it, they endured some significant persecution in the early days of their faith. But that was a while back. Things calmed down and life went on. But now, some years later, persecution of Christians is on the rise again [Romans & Jews]. And the temptation to leave their faith in Christ behind like a passing fad and return to the ancient ways of the patriarchs has become very strong. **The entire book of Hebrews is one long argument to say Don't give up, don't turn back! Hang on to Jesus!** Especially here in ch10. [Note: NAS in pew/NIV regularly/ for this we're using Today's English Version aka Good News For Modern Man]

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**Heb 10:32** Remember how it was with you in the past. In those days, after God's light had shone on you, you suffered many things yet were not defeated by the struggle. You were at times publicly insulted and mistreated, and at other times you were ready to join those who were being treated in this way. You shared the sufferings of prisoners, and when all your belongings were seized, you endured your loss gladly, because you knew that you still possessed something much better, which would last forever.

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Do not lose your courage, then, because it brings with it a great reward. You need to be patient in order to do the will of God and receive what he promises. For as the scripture says, "Just a little while longer, and he who is coming will come; he will not delay. My righteous people, however, will believe and live; but if any of them turns back I will not be pleased with him." We are not people who turn back and are lost. Instead, we have faith and are saved.

Within this short passage I see four aspects of Perseverance carefully tucked away. They are: [slide] **Courage, Patience, Faith, & Hope**

**I. COURAGE:** [slide] The ability to continue in the face of fear or discouragement, **a blend of freedom and boldness.** It's a quality of mind and spirit that enables one to face danger, loss, or vicissitudes [unexpected changes] with confidence, self-possession, and resolution.

**10:35 "do not lose your courage because it brings with it a great reward"**

1. voice lessons Gerry Bergstrom (sweetness and light/ lessons in her bright comfortable home/"favorite student") A small voice scholarship to SPU so they assigned me their best baritone voice teacher. His studio was a square cement block room with a piano and a music stand and [I kid you not] it was dimly lit with a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Enter Dr. Vernon Wicker, mostly bald with tufts of hair on either side, wide glasses, a fairly short man, but he had the largest head I had ever seen on anyone's shoulders –like the mad scientist in bugs bunny cartoons. He spoke in a clipped Germanic accent and he was clearly awkward with other humans- not serial killer awkward but in the ballpark. Going from sunshine Gerry to the dark Dr. was like trading "You Are My Sunshine" for Wagner's Ring Cycle. He scared me, and my lack of confidence and courage made me quit my lessons and I lost the reward of the knowledge that resonated within his super-sized cranium.

The world was a scary place for our Hebrews (publicly insulted mistreated property seized)  
There was distrust and distaste of Christians by State Authorities- Rome.  
There was distrust and distaste of Christians by their neighbors – "orthodox" Jews .

## **The world was scary then and it is now too.**

The moral climate of 2018 [2000] is frightening and discouraging:

- \* Children with guns blasting their classmates.
- \* Almost Daily reports of abductions and violent crime.
- \* The populace believes a man's lack of morality is of no concern if he does the job they want.
- \* Movers and shakers in the world of science see people of faith as the enemy
- \* Talk radio, Editorials and best-selling authors feature "experts" who debunk Christianity and the Bible.
- \* And when a Christian gets the chance to speak in defense of Christianity or the Bible somehow it's always the one with the most conservative viewpoint who will use the language of law and exclusivity to effectively drive away anyone who might have had an interest.

*Jesus told us to be innocent as doves and wise as serpents and too often we are neither.* Satan has [with our help] effectively made Christianity [Evangelicalism] into the white male of Religions- taken seriously by few and considered the enemy by many. [Note: written in early 2000.]

## **But following God is never easy**

Remember the description of what our Hebrews suffered.

I need the courage of **Gideon** or **Samson** or **Abraham, James & John** Some of this frightens me and worse yet **it discourages** me such that sometimes I just want to walk away, not from God but from this cracked up world.

Considering everything lined up against me how can I make any difference?

How can I go up against 120,000 with my 300 guys?

How can I win this battle, all I have is this Jawbone of an Ass?

How can I leave Ur, I'm talking to myself I must be crazy?

How can I just leave my father in the boat and follow him?

How can I die for him... or better yet how can I live for him?

**Without COURAGE that comes from God NONE of us can do anything - including persevere.**

**II. PATIENCE:** [slide] ability to wait without panic. Bearing or enduring pain, difficulty, provocation, or annoyance with calmness. Capable of calmly awaiting an outcome or a result even in difficult circumstances

10:36 You need to be patient in order to do the will of God...

## **Gods timing has been described as never early but always right on time.**

Waiting seems to be a critical requirement of being God's people.

- **Noah** waited for the rain and then he waited for the dry land.
- **Abraham** waited 25 years for Isaac to be born (patient? )
- **Jacob** waited and worked 7 years only to end up marrying the wrong woman then another 7 years in order to Marry his beloved Rachel.
- **Joseph** waited through slavery and prison
- **David** waited to be king- all the time on the run from the current king's efforts to kill him
- **The Israelites** spent 40 years waiting and wandering in the desert and after Jerusalem's destruction they waited in exile 47 years (give or take)

## That's a whole lot of waiting going on, a whole lot of endurance

**But listen to what Hebrews says of these patient ones:** [slide] 11:13 It was in faith that all these persons died. They did not receive the things God had promised, but from a long way off they saw them and welcomed them and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refugees on earth.

Foreigners and refugees do not make plans for tomorrow they are busy surviving right now in this moment. [slide] Jean-Pierre de Caussade, was a Jesuit priest in early 1700s in France. The Spiritual direction he gave to the Nuns of the Visitation was gathered up and turned into books. Containing the following piece of Christian wisdom: "To escape the distress caused by regret for the past or fear about the future, this is the rule to follow: leave the past to the infinite mercy of God, the future to His good Providence, give the present wholly to His love by being faithful to His grace."

***The secret to persevering patience is to focus on the moment.***

Where am I and what am I doing right now? How can I yield myself to God and do his will right now, in this sacred moment? If we focus on "now" we cannot be so easily disarmed by the threat of the future. And the mistakes of the past can't disable our present.

**And so we can wait without panic and persevere with patience.**

**III. FAITH:** [slide] 11:1 to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. Faith is confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, an idea, or a thing. In this case God. The belief that God is present, concerned for, and actively involved in our good.

10:38 My righteous people will believe & live [The righteous will live by faith... Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11]

10:39 ...we have faith and are saved

In vs 32-34 The author reminds his readers of their faithful response to their previous persecutions. He's reminding them who they are by reminding them of what they've done. Then he uses inclusive language to encourage his readers:

[slide] 10:39 *We are not people who turn back and are lost. Instead, we have faith and are saved*

Look and see where you've come from! Look at the great ones who have gone before you... and then the author pulls back the curtain on the Heroes of Faith Hall of Fame. The Heavenly dream team, the holy all-stars: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham & Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, Rahab...

And we are connected to them as well. We have a part in **Abraham.** We are kindred of **Samson and Gideon.** We are family with **Deborah and Rahab-** who cheer from the cloud-- along with Mary Magdalene, Paul and Peter and Simon of Cyrene, Junia, James and Priscilla, Agnes of Rome, Clement and Origen and Augustine and Luther and Calvin and Fox and the Wesleys, Catherine Booth, C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers and J.R.R. Tolkien, Billy Graham, Mother Theresa, Mickey Rooney, Mr. Rogers, Bono, Jane Fonda, Barry McGuire, Kevin Sorbo [Hercules], Russel Wilson, Judy Nolan, Phyllis Main, Maryrose, Polleen, Jim and Butch and Maudie and Sandra [all of them] and Shiloh and Anna and you and you and me.

Those OT people of faith **are our people** and we are **their representatives** in the here and now- Children of Abraham's faith and siblings one and all with Jesus.

We have come along with them, not to Mt Sinai with its storm and darkness and blazing fire. But with them we are a part of Mt Zion the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem with its thousands of angels. [slide] We have come to the joyful gathering of Gods first-born sons and daughters whose names are written in heaven. We have come to God who is the judge of all people and to the spirits of good people made perfect. We have come to Jesus who arranged the new covenant and to the sprinkled blood which promises better things than even the blood of Abel. [paraphrase of 12:23-24] **By your faith in Christ you are a central character in the great sweep of Salvation History. The faithful stock of the Hebrews is our faithful stock as well.**

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**IV. HOPE:** the certainty that promised things we can't yet see will come to pass. To look forward to with confidence and expectation.

**10:34 ...possessed something much better that would last forever 10:35 ...it brings with it a great reward 10:36 ... and receive what he promises 10:37 ...he who is coming will come;**

Let me take you way, way, way back to the **Fall of 1999** [slide] we prepared for, installed & programmed a new and extremely difficult ticketing system at Pacific Science Center. When it wasn't working as it should and continued not to work, the IBM experts were baffled and threw up their hands in dismay. Perhaps they got it working in the last 19 years. But at that time it was a source of intense frustration for yours truly. At the same time my manager was diagnosed with cancer and would be undergoing surgery and then chemo therapy and radiation and then recovery- she would be gone for months. At the same time the 3 of the supervisory staff beneath me decided to leave. One week after my manager started to return she fell and broke her leg- putting her out for more recovery time (at this point what's another month.) That put me doing the work of three or four people at 60+ hours a week running from the time I arrived to the time I left. Now that wasn't the hardest part. The hardest part, the darkest time was when I couldn't see any possible chance of it ending.

When it seemed like there was no end to the tunnel- no hope.

**I can get through anything if I just have some hope.** [slide] Even Jesus In the garden didn't want to die but he saw the end and knew the pain was only temporary and the reward was eternal.

Things as they are now- the world as it is- cannot go on forever. The Enemy of our souls must be destroyed and this world of ours and all its systems must be freed from death and decay- and us along with it. All of it must, by the power of God, be put to rights- returned to God's original intentions for it all.

The Heroes of Faith in Heb 11 know this too and they "pressed through" their difficult circumstances because they had a vision [HOPE] of a healed and blessed Earth that glorified God. This vision had an effect on their immediate situation and this hope empowered them to approach their situation for the glory of God. Listen to these beautiful words of hope...

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**Is. 65:17** "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. **18** Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness.

Her people will be a source of joy. **19** I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more.

**20** “No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young! **21** In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards. **22** Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses and confiscate their vineyards. For my people will live as long as trees, and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains. **23** They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune. For they are people blessed by the LORD, and their children, too, will be blessed. **24** I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers! **25** The wolf and the lamb will feed together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. But the snakes will eat dust. In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain. I, the LORD, have spoken!”

**Mic. 4:1** In the last days, the mountain of the LORD’s house will be the highest of all—the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship. **2** People from many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob’s God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” For the LORD’s teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem.

**3** The LORD will mediate between peoples and will settle disputes between strong nations far away. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore. **4** Everyone will live in peace and prosperity, enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees, for there will be nothing to fear. The LORD of Heaven’s Armies have made this promise!  
Also: Amos 9:13-15 and Isaiah 11:6-9

## **Hope strengthens our tired resolve and gives a vision of what to work for now and here.**

And the glorious thing is that all the parts of perseverance the **[slide] courage the Patience, the faith and the hope** are all yours for the asking. Our Father knows what we need and he knows how to give good gifts. His track record is impeccable...

- If you need courage seek it from **the God of Gideon** who with a mere 300 men went up against 120,000
- If you need patience seek it from **the God of Jacob** who waited and worked, enduring his uncles deceptions for 14 long years in order to marry his beloved Rachel.
- If you need faith seek it from **the God of Abraham who with Sarah** received the son of promise in his old age and also sharpened the knife and willingly laid that son on the altar
- If you need hope seek it from the one who promises: **“Behold, I am making all things new... [Rev 21:5]”**

He is not slow in keeping his promises. He will come for us. He will renew and restore all Creation and put our world to rights. And we say may it be soon, Lord Jesus. But until he does we must actively maintain our **hope** and **persevere to the end**. We must take **courage** in the face of the enemy- that ol’ snake- and wait with **patience and faith [slide]** so we can say with confidence: *We are not a people who turn back and are lost, Instead we have faith and are saved.*