

## Perseverance

I spoke to Edwin in the week about our subject this morning and we both thought we would continue with the topic of perseverance which Edwin started last week.

I think we were of the belief it was where we both are - In our Christian journey that is, the need to persevere, to stay in there, to press on. In fact we felt it was where CBC was generally as a Church, we have been given some promises for growth, and we have a desire to see things happen, but it hasn't appeared to have taken place! (Not yet anyway). It may be also where you are personally, the need to keep going - to persevere in some difficult situation in your own life?

But the truth is the Christian life is a walk of perseverance, we are always in this position as Christians of needing to persevere, to endure, to stand up under some trial, to push back against a wind of conflict or adversity blowing against us.

Why is that? - Well the reality of the Christian life is that it's not plain sailing! We are on this "narrow road" – in fact Jesus says *"in the world you will have trouble"* (John 16.33). The book of Acts says *"we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22)

There is no need for perseverance when things are easy! – The word perseverance becomes redundant – effort and endurance become a non necessity.

And the word perseverance doesn't fit into life styles like "plain sailing" "easy living" "self indulgence"

When I'm coming down a hill on my bike I can freewheel – I go with the flow – there is no resistance. But our walk of faith isn't a 'freewheel' or a downhill saunter into the long grass!

I love what John Calvin wrote:

*"All whom the Lord has chosen and honoured with admission into the society of his saints ought to prepare themselves for a hard, laborious, and unquiet life, replete with numerous and various calamities. It is the will of their heavenly Father to exercise them"*

And this word perseverance in the Bible is nearly always linked to trials to difficulties, listen to these references: - *James 1:12. "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him"*.

*Rom 5:3-4\_ "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;"*

*Rom 12.12 "Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer"*

So for the Christian, perseverance should be second nature to us - our closest companion on our walk of faith, it's like fuel is to an engine. They are of critical importance to one another.

As sure as trouble follows the Christian around, perseverance should be the course of action or state of mind to combat it.

But why do we persevere? Well, it's true of anything we do, a hobby, a course of learning that we may take up or more specifically & far more importantly, in our case, our walk of faith, we need to feel it is worthwhile, we have to have some end goal, something to look forward to make it worthwhile.

It is even said of Jesus:-

*"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2)*

So this verse is telling us: - That Jesus persevered because he knew there was a joy awaiting him, he the 'Lord of life', had a purpose, an end goal.

And that is the major thing about any perseverance - we have to have some end in sight, we have to have something to aim for.

The apostle Paul says in the book of Phillipians *"forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"*.

Again Paul perseveres because of the prize.

We mustn't be embarrassed thinking we are too self-orientated to have a prize in sight! To aim for a goal, spiritually - to increase the talent we have, to win the prize. Rather than being selfish it is a Holy ambition.

Have you noticed also that perseverance is always one directional? And that direction is always forward. Who as ever heard of anyone persevering backwards? *"But forgetting what is behind and straining (or persevering) towards what is ahead"* - You can't win a race looking backwards.

In John Bunyan Pilgrims progress: The story of Christian's dangerous journey illustrates the perseverance of every true Christian. The Christian life is a series of battles which must be fought in the strength of Christ. There will be failures no doubt – just as Christian fell into the Slough of Despond, sinfully listened to Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, was wounded by Apollyon, and locked in Doubting Castle. But just like Bunyan's pilgrim, each obstacle is eventually overcome and 'progress' is made in the journey to the Celestial City. This is what pilgrim said:

*“To go back is nothing but death; to go forward is fear of death, and life everlasting beyond it. I will yet go forward.”*

That is why it is so important to be able to persevere, we have to start well – to get our foundations right, if these are not sound and secure we will find we run out of ‘puff’ or hit a road block or come off the rails, and the main foundation is a certainty in our faith.

If these foundations are not right they are a barrier to perseverance and when the going gets tough, it will find us out, we won’t be able to persevere and a ‘blind faith’ or a wishy washy wishful thinking won’t do! There has to be a certainty. A certainty based on truth and our faith.

Let me give you an example – if you look at the area of our salvation. The Bible says *“if we confess with our mouth & believe in our heart Jesus is Lord we will be saved”* (Rom 10:9) it also tells us if we are born again *“we are a child of God”* and *“no one will snatch us out of his hand”* (John 10:28) so when the going gets tough we can hold onto that clear word those promises with certainty – but if we don’t believe this word in faith and believe this about ourselves, doubt the certainty of them, then when the storms come, we will doubt our salvation and it will be difficult to persevere.

Or an example with the kids on a Wednesday night:

Have they come in by chance? Or by design? I.e. they heard something going on in this building and wanted to get out of the cold? - Or has God bought them along - not by accident but by his pre-determined plan?

Is it just ‘wishful thinking’ these young could come to faith? Or “when one comes to faith like a domino effect others will fall”? (Which has been said numerous times) or is it just again our own romantic wishful thinking?

The word you had Edwin, about “not entertaining them” but giving them the gospel? Is that what God is really saying to us? We need to be sure of these things, test them, if we are going to persevere with them. Or are all these ‘red herrings’? A distraction? We need to have a clear foundation; a clear understanding of what God is doing and God’s word to us.

But the nature of the word persevere means action, activity, a plan, you can’t just passively let these kids in and let them do what they want! That’s not perseverance that’s indifference, that’s passivity.

This is what I am saying about perseverance it has to be active, you have to, in faith, have that certainty, it can’t be ‘blind faith’ or ‘woolly’, because when things go wrong you will struggle, you will doubt - you won’t have a foundation to stand on.

We have to go back to first principles, the word of God, “did God really say”?

Just to emphasise this, I just want to look at this word perseverance in the bible – what it really means from the original text – and we have touched on some of its meaning already - it translates from the Greek word, *hup-om- oné*

Which is a compound word made up of two other words: *hypo* (meaning 'under') and *moneo* (a verb meaning to 'remain' or 'abide'). Thus, the idea is to 'remain under' or 'abide under' difficult circumstances.

The best definition of *hupomoné* may be "courageous endurance." "Cheerful or hopeful endurance" is another good definition as it includes a degree of optimism—and when we remember who is on our side and how this Christian story ends, we have every reason to be optimistic while persevering.

Common translations of this word in the Bible are: - perseverance, patience & endurance.

There is almost (as I see) a dual definition here if you look at the words endurance and patience, they are perhaps more passive words.

It is like when you're in a supermarket cue or traffic jam you have to be patient, there nothing you can do! No action you can take - you have to endure and this is part of the meaning of the word.

But also translates to words like "perseverance" "constancy," and "steadfastness" all of these have a sense of activity, of actively straining against some pressure or outside force.

As Edwin said last week, perseverance is predominantly an active word, a verb and if you think of being patient or enduring you have to show self control, so you are even active in resisting the will to be impatient.

So to persevere you have to fully engage whether that be your mind your body or will - it's always intentional. Always in need of some action or engagement on our part.

We have to press on, we have to endure by an act of our will and this is so important because some people tend to see the Christian life as like a central heating system!

You put your faith on; you walk your Christian walk like putting on your boiler at home! So when difficulties come, they see it as some sort of heating thermostat that kicks in automatically when things get too hot or cold! – They have to do nothing at all, the temperature in the boiler like the difficulties in their faith that come along all get adjusted back to the optimum position automatically.

But it's not the truth! We are active not passive every step of the way in our Christian life, praising, giving thanks, resisting, defending, standing, using the weapons of our armour, confessing, repenting, proclaiming the truth, it's a full time activity. We have to use our total being.

There are no 'half days' or 'Friday afternoons' or days off in our Christian faith, because we always have the world the flesh and the devil to contend with.

It's the same with perseverance, it's always active in some way - you cannot have passive endurance, perseverance or patience.

And looking through the Bible though at the best examples of perseverance, one name stands out above all the rest by a long mile? Of an incredible example of perseverance under trial and can you guess who that is? I say this with awe and reverence - that is God the author and creator of life.

I have said it before, God's perseverance with the nation of Israel and our humanity generally reveals God's amazing long suffering and endurance in this area of perseverance.

Regarding the nation of Israel: They wanted to turn back many times in the wilderness and greatly tested God's patience.

Here this cry from Exodus: from God's chosen people after he brought out from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

*"If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger".*

Or Moses – God had chosen him – had shown great miracles of his presence but when God told him Moses He had chosen him to lead the people out of bondage - he said:-

*"O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past or even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup> now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." <sup>13</sup> But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else."*

And what did God do? He showed amazing perseverance with him - he sent his brother Aaron to speak for him instead. I could recount numerous other accounts from the scriptures, characters like Abraham, David, Jonah, Peter, that testify to God incredible patience, long suffering and perseverance with them and by example to us to.

It gives me great comfort in my faith to know that God is persevering with me but also everyone of us; we are an 'unfinished work' that God will never give up on and the greatest act of love and the outworking of God's greatest work of perseverance was sending Jesus to die for us - to reconcile us to the Father. He could of give up on us a long time ago!

Look humanity is still here today after 6000 years of creation even with all its disobedience, rebellion, turning its back on God. We as a Church are still worshiping in this building after all these years of 'ups and downs' we are still 'keeping the faith' or being kept in the faith by God, because that's God's character- perseverance and us too, as we are created in his image.

*"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6)*

Amen.

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