

Christian Endurance

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] So, just to think for a few moments, what do we mean by Christian endurance? You know, endurance is one of those words, it's like perseverance, resilience.

It's a quality that we value in ourselves. We want to grow in our ability to stay the course and stickability. It's something as parents we want to see develop in our kids.

What do we mean? What comes to our mind when we think of endurance? You know, perhaps we think of the extremes, the Ironman, the ultra-marathon endurance races. Perhaps you think of someone like Ernest Shackleton.

I've just begun reading the diary of the sailing of the endurance as Shackleton attempted to cross Antarctica, a well-named boat, because his story was one of endurance.

Him and his crew endured as their boat was trapped in pack ice in the midst of the Weddell Sea, and then endured through a 16-day, 800-mile voyage on a small lifeboat to find help for the rest of the crew, left stranded, going through huge stormy seas and freezing conditions, to rescue men enduring freezing conditions, camping on a rock of ice for 128 days.

[1 : 27] So, we think of endurance, perhaps that's where we go. My question is, is that a helpful picture for Christian endurance? John writes to believers who need to endure.

They are facing danger. It's interesting that either side of our text, so chapter 2, verse 26, he says, I'm writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

And then in chapter 3 and verse 7, Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. So, this is a church experiencing the danger of drift.

They have seen in their experience a division within their church, the departure of some of their leaders who it turns out were false teachers. And on top of that, they are experiencing within the Roman Empire this daily reality of being a marginalized minority, beginning to be more and more targeted, living on the margins of society, a weak church at this stage.

And endurance for them, and probably endurance for us in our circumstance, endurance is not primarily going to be about the spectacular exploits of the Iron Men or of the adventurers like Shackleton.

[2 : 54] Endurance is about living the life of faith in the face of opposition and attack. It's enduring in a daily walk of Christian obedience, of practicing the truth, of committing to love their neighbors, of pursuing integrity.

It was a hard calling then. It's often a hard calling now. And it's interesting that John, throughout his letter, gives us the key to Christian endurance. So, here in chapter 2 and verse 28, it begins, And we've said this before, it's the abiding word.

The key to Christian endurance is abiding in Christ. Jesus himself famously used that image in John 15, I am the vine, you are the branches, we need to remain to abide in him, by the Spirit, if we are to find strength, vitality, and life from Jesus, if we are to bear fruit.

That's the secret to Christian endurance. And that's what we're going to think about, as John gives us some instruction, and some wonderful truth in this section.

It's so interesting to think about their experience, and why he's writing, is to understand that John believes, that when we struggle as Christians, when there are difficulties facing us, what we need is good doctrine.

[4 : 30] We need gospel hope in suffering. We need something that is secure and true, if we are to have hope, and if we are to persevere.

And so he brings gospel truths, about God's great love for his people, and the promise of future glory, at the return of Christ.

And all the way along, he is encouraging believers, remember God has worked, God is working, God will work for your salvation, therefore endure. Stay the course, follow the way of Christ. So let's get into our text. And the first thing I want us to think about is this, we are called by John to continue in Christ, confident about his return.

Again, just to say one more thing about the context, chapter 2, verse 18, we looked at this a few weeks ago, John describes the time that they are living as being the last hour, and a time of many antichrists.

[5 : 39] So we are to picture a time of intense, spiritual opposition, spiritual opposition, a time of discouragement and confusion, perhaps, for the church, as there are those who deliberately set out to oppose Christ, to be anti, to be against Christ Jesus.

And what does John say to believers in that kind of situation? What's our need? We need to focus on our certain future with Christ.

And now, dear children, verse 28, continue in him so that when he appears, we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

So there's a certain knowledge. Christ will return. He will appear. His glory will be revealed.

Everyone will see him as he returns as victorious, conquering king. The same idea is there in chapter 3, verse 2. We know that when Christ appears.

[6 : 41] So that's a certain hope for the future. And there's another certainty in verse 28. We will stand before Jesus Christ at his coming.

And one thing that John anticipates, and Jesus does the same, is that standing before Jesus at his coming will either be a moment of joy or a moment of profound shame.

There will be those who are true believers who will welcome Christ the King at his appearing. And there will be those who will cry out to the rocks, fall on us. How can we be confident on that day to welcome Christ as our King?

John says it's as we continue in Christ, as we abide in him, with our faith in him, drawing power from him, receiving grace and the Spirit.

That's the key to security in the present and hope for the future. Persevering in Christ, enduring in faith, is the basis for us to have real confidence as we think about the return of Christ.

[7 : 55] But here's the really crucial thing for us to understand, and it's there throughout the Bible. This is a work of God's grace in his people. Our confidence rests always in God and in Christ and not in ourselves.

So that's why we heard from John chapter 10. Here is Jesus, and he describes himself as a good shepherd. And as a good shepherd, he calls his sheep to him, and he speaks with such authority and power that his sheep follow him.

He gives the gift of eternal life, and his authority and power and love are so strong that no one can take a believer out of Jesus' hands, no one can take a believer out of the Father's hands.

There is security, not because of our faith, but who our faith is in. Philippians chapter 1, verse 6.

Here is something we can be confident in, being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

When it comes to salvation, God always finishes what he starts. And so believers can be confident.

Romans chapter 8, Paul again, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 19] Because it's God's unbreakable commitment to save his people for his glory that enables us to persevere and endure.

And we're presented with this wonderful outcome for the true believer. When Christ appears, rather than hiding in fear, there is this confidence.

And that word, the confidence word there, has the idea of there's a joyful access to our God and our Savior. There's an ability to speak freely because we have a real living relationship based on love.

The difference, in a sense, is the difference between the first two people that we meet in the Bible, Adam and Eve, before and after they fell into sin. So if we begin at Genesis 3, if we begin after they disobey God, they take the forbidden fruit, they say no to God's word and God's authority.

Sin interrupts their fellowship with God. They have this reality of shame and guilt. So when God comes to speak with them, they hide.

[10 : 33] They cower in the shadows. But we know that that wasn't true before sin. Beforehand, created perfectly in the image of God to know and enjoy Him, God met with them.

God spoke with them openly. And they enjoyed life with their creator, their king, and their friend. And here is what John is saying. When Jesus returns, that relationship that Adam and Eve enjoyed that was lost because of sin and the fall, that will be fully restored.

Never to be broken again. And so John teaches us, just as for a believer, we have bold confidence to come to the throne of grace today. Whenever we pray, we're invited to come with confidence to our Father to find grace and mercy and help in our time of need.

We will have the same bold confidence when Jesus comes back. But we'll have that reality in a whole new way because then we'll see Him face to face and we'll think about that. And then in verse 29, He reminds us that future hope makes a difference for how we live today.

If you know that He is righteous, this one who is appearing, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. And so the logic that John gives us is that likeness is a proof of relationship.

[11:55] He says that's true in a biological family and it's also true in God's family, that those who have been born through the work of Christ, by the work of the Spirit, by the Father's love, will look like and pursue a life of righteousness.

Jesus is the one who is truly and perfectly righteous, but the life of a believer will be characterized by doing what is right according to God's will. Now we will not do that perfectly, but that's our direction of travel.

That the family of Christ will persevere in pursuing righteousness. So John writes to the believers then and by extension to us and he says we need a focus that is on our future, that is Christ-centered as we live today, knowing what will be true of us then, drawing on the grace that He supplies by the Spirit, enabled to endure because we have this hope that when Jesus returns there's a glorious eternal homecoming for us as those who belong to Him.

So we are to continue in Christ confident about His return, but we're secondly to continue in Christ confident in the Father's love.

That's the beginning of chapter 3. And just before we get to our text, just to think about a phrase that we use a lot, you know, we perhaps talk about things being out of this world.

[13:28] Lots of people talking about, you saw Hallin's goal midweek, out of this world. We sometimes use it of really simple things like a meal or an experience. But John wants to capture that language and wants believers to appreciate something that truly and genuinely is out of this world.

And it's this, it's God the Father's love for His children. Verse 1, See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.

That word see, if you're familiar with the authorized version, behold. It's the idea of contemplating. Here is what we need to meditate on, to focus our attention on, and it's the Father's love for His children.

When it says, See what great love the Father has lavished, what kind of love, what manner of love, literally, John is saying, this is love from another country.

This is a love that is foreign. In other words, it's utterly unique. The love that God the Father has for us is the out of this world love that He wants us to appreciate, and we find it in the gospel.

[14:45] And in the context of what John is writing, he says, if we are to keep enduring, to use Eugene Peterson's language, to pursue that long obedience in the same direction, here is something we need to know and to think about.

It's how deep the Father's love for us is. We need to let that sink deep into our heart, our mind, and our soul. He says, this love gives the believers a new name.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. By God's gracious initiative, our identity is transformed.

No longer what we are by nature because of sin, enemies of God, rebels against His will, strangers to His grace, now because of God's work for us in Jesus, children of God.

And he says, this out of this world love from the Father gives us a new status. Verse 1, that's what we are. We are children of God. Verse 2, dear friends, now we are children of God.

[16:02] Something has happened. There's been a legal action that's taken place. Then there's been a change of status freely granted to us. Now we are children. Now we are heirs of God, our Father.

It's a transformation that is so great that John says it's like the world doesn't recognize us, just as it didn't recognize Jesus. Now we are this new community with a new citizenship being made more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Adopted into the family of God. How do we receive this love? How do we receive and enjoy this new identity? It's through God's work for us in the gospel.

And it's the truth of the gospel that we need to behold, to understand that it's in the gospel that we see on full display the Father's love for us.

Because it's in the gospel we discover, how is it that sinners like us can be reconciled to a holy God? How can people like us be in the family of God despite the reality of our sin and our guilt?

[17:16] And so in the gospel we learn about this idea of justification. We encounter a God who is both loving and just. A God who cannot simply turn a blind eye to sin.

He cannot ignore our faults. He cannot sweep our guilt under the rug but because He is holy He must punish. His justice must be satisfied.

So God is just but He's also loving. And we see His love in the gospel as the Father sends His Son. The righteous one. The pure one.

And the punishment that we deserve is poured out on Him. He becomes the means of atonement. Dealing with covering our sin because of His sacrifice.

And by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven and guilt is removed. This great exchange happens where Jesus is counted as if He were the sinner and we are counted as if we were the righteous.

[18:24] And now because of this great work of God as we are credited with Christ's perfect righteousness we can be adopted by God's grace to become His children.

The goal of being justified being declared right in God's sight is that we would be adopted into His family to know the love of the Father.

And notice that just as John began this section thinking about the return of Christ John connects these two truths in our next couple of verses the truths of the Father's love and the return of Christ.

And again it's for the basis of our hope and endurance to remind us of God's love and God's grace and what He's laid up for us. So chapter 3 and verse 2 dear friends now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known.

So here's a wonderful reality. As much as the greatest minds in all of church history are able to fathom something of the depths of the theology nobody will ever be able to comprehend what God has in store for those who love Him.

[19:43] We can get a true sense but we will never get a complete sense of how wonderful our eternity will be. God is so kind to give us tastes and glimpses in the gospel but they are just a reminder and anticipation of a feast to come that it's so good that we cannot get our heads around it.

And yet having said that John does bring three wonderful truths to our attention. First here's the first thing we know verse 2 we know that Christ will appear.

So we've said that already we know there is a day coming when God's glory in Jesus will be on full display. The first time Jesus came in humility born in a stable placed in a manger the second time He comes the sky will be split open and everyone will see Him as He comes as conquering King of glory.

Connected to that here's the second thing we know we shall be like Him. Which at very least means that when Jesus comes glorified resurrected Savior we too will be glorified we too will have resurrection life resurrected bodies 1 Corinthians 15 It means at very least Revelation 21 that we will live for eternity free from sin and suffering and death and it means 2 Corinthians 3 that we will be then transformed into His glorious image by the Spirit that process that the Spirit is involved in now making us more and more like Jesus will be completed when He returns and the third thing that we know is that we shall see

Him as He is so now it's true for us as believers we walk by faith and not by sight we have the wonderful gift of faith and the gift of faith enables us to have these glimpses of Christ's glory and we experience the joy of His presence but we know all too often as believers that those moments are real but they often feel faint and they're hard to keep hold of you know it's wonderful isn't it when we have those moments perhaps in a church service or when we're reading our Bibles or when we're praying and we know that God is close and we experience His love in a particular way but that's really hard as much as we love to try and keep hold of that so often it comes and it goes it's

one of the reasons why we need worship it's why as Ian said we need to be reading God's word we need to be hearing the gospel we need to be sharing the Lord's Supper these are all chances opportunities for us to see

[22 : 54] Christ by faith but at His return then we see by sight then we see perfectly then there's no coming and going but we have that perfect fellowship perfect love and this is the goal of our faith it's the center of our hope to see Jesus as we are made like Him like those men who came to the disciples shortly before Jesus would go to the cross we want to see Jesus the longing of our heart we want to see Jesus when Jesus returns that longing is answered Psalm 27 verse 4 the longing of David one thing I desire to gaze on the beauty of the Lord the promise of Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God

Revelation 1 verse 7 look he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him and so John takes discouraged and weak Christians who have seen some of their church depart and are tempting them to believe lies and untruths he takes them to the glory of the father's love and he reminds them listen the father who loved you enough in Christ to make you his children is the father who will love you and bring you home to heaven and to the new creation saying to them and to us if we are to persevere we must hold our gaze to hold our ground to fix our eyes on God's love for us in Christ to contemplate to consider the electing unshakable eternal love God the father has for his children and then there's verse 3 of chapter 3 all who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure and there's this interesting and we've thought about some of the moral tests that we find in John's first letter and here's another he says if our future hope is truly fixed on

Christ and seeing him and being like him that has implications for how we live today it means we will want to be as like him as we can be today Christ is pure so we want to participate with the spirit in a purifying process if heaven is our true home if that's where our true identity our citizenship is then holiness is the road we are going to be walking on until we get there some of us are familiar with the idea of culture shock you move to a different place a different country and everything seems so different as believers we want to avoid culture shock in heaven because we want to be living today and tomorrow the values of heaven here on earth as we know he is pure and perfect by the help of the spirit and the grace that

Jesus supplies that is this ongoing purifying in our lives making us more and more like Jesus and so it's interesting for John that these glorious truths of the Father's love and future hope have a very practical outworking they lead us to persevere in seeking after moral purity in conclusion thinking about this little section John is saying to us Christians true believers will endure because of God and the gospel because of truths about God and his work in salvation how are we to stay the course it's through God's work to return to Shackleton's voyage for a moment Captain Worsley wrote a really nice diary an account of the voyage and early on when it became apparent that this ship the Endurance was going to have to be left behind that it was going to sink he wrote this he said Shackleton had a genius it was neither more nor less than that for keeping those about him in high spirits we loved him every man among us had unbounded faith in Shackleton we knew that if mortal man could lead us to safety Shackleton was that man it was a great tribute to that adventurer as a leader but you know my gut reaction was wow I am no Shackleton and then I started thinking wow if that's the kind of leader that a church needs if a church is going to survive then we're in trouble because that's not me and that's why we need to hear the gospel because our endurance is not on me and it's not on you and it's not our ability to endure who's the leader that we place our faith in one who is infinitely greater than

[28 : 38] Shackleton who's the genius that gives us our unbounded unshakable confidence it's the Lord Jesus Shackleton failed he never made it across Antarctica but the Lord Jesus he never ever fails and he is how we will stay the course in the Christian life to come back to reality come back to Monday morning how will I pursue a life of faithfulness how will I love my neighbor how will I speak and act with truth and integrity in my workplace how will I serve family friends colleagues classmates mercifully we don't need the heroic character of a Shackleton because our perseverance and endurance begins and ends with God he calls he keeps he gives eternal life those who abide in

Christ those who continue in him we draw from his supplies of grace we find strength from him in our weakness we can bear fruit as he supplies the spirit we can continue in Christ with confident hope that Christ's first coming his work on the cross demonstrates the father's love for us and Christ's return will bring us into an eternal experience of that perfect love and so we're called to take

heart when our hope is in Christ knowing that God will finish what he starts that God perfectly loves and never lets go of his children and God's commitment makes sure that his children will keep going until our faith does become a perfect site and to go to the heart and to heart!