

Perseverance

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[0 : 00] Are one. When I was training for ministry, which is now a long, long time ago, one of our annual tasks was being examined on doctrine.

! And one of the examinations that we had, I think it was in two parts, was the Westminster Shorter Catechism, those lists of questions and answers. And question 36 reads, What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from?

Justification, adoption, and sanctification. Good question. And the answer is, the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from, justification, that's being declared righteous, adoption, being made a member of God's family, and sanctification, being made holy, are assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and fifth, and finally, perseverance therein to the end.

The people of God make it to the end. This is a teaching that is throughout Scripture. God has a way of sticking with people.

And you might ask, why? And the answer is, I don't know. I don't know why he sticks with me. I don't know why he sticks with us. It's not about us. It's about him. It's about his character.

[1 : 24] It's about his commitment. It's about his word. It's about his truth. When he begins, he continues. And when he continues, he concludes. That's just the kind of God he is.

Because as you read through the pages of Scripture, and you read through the pages of your own life, you see much that would discourage you, much that would dishearten you.

You look at the characters of the Bible from beginning to end with one exception. These are fragile, and these are flawed, and these are finite creatures. They constantly get it wrong.

And we are fragile, flawed, and finite creatures, and we constantly get it wrong. And the theme I want to emphasize here is not the strength of our faith, important as that is, not the depth of our commitment, as important as that is, but what I want to demonstrate from God's word is the strength of Jesus' commitment, and the depth of his commitment to us.

Because as we look at John chapter 10, it's quite remarkable. It's quite remarkable what he says about himself. It's quite remarkable what he says about us. And it's quite remarkable what he is offering to you and to me.

[2 : 43] Because here we have none other than God, man, fully God, fully human. He became flesh. He made his dwelling among us. We see God in the flesh, with all power, with all authority, with all wisdom, with all grace, with all goodness, and with all love.

So when you hear the voice of Jesus, you hear the very voice of God. And when you observe the actions of Jesus, you observe the very actions of God. So we have a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

And he tells us two profound things. In verse 7 and verse 9, he says, I am the gate. And in verse 11 and in verse 14, again, I think it's interesting, both of these I am sayings are repeated.

So if you miss it the first time, you can get it the second time. I am the good shepherd. I am the good shepherd. You see, Jesus wants us to know who he is.

Who we are is important. Yeah, absolutely. We are made in the image of God. We are infinitely precious and valuable. That's right. We are chosen by God. We are redeemed. We are restored.

[3 : 51] We are renewed. All that's true and all that's really important. But first and foremost, our attention is upon him. Yes, we want to find ourselves in the story, but we want to first find him.

Because if we find Jesus, then we have a point of orientation. We have a point of reference where we can identify ourselves in terms of him, who he is, and then who we are.

So Jesus says that he is the gate. I am the gate of the sheep. Verse 7, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. And he says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. You see, this is all relational language.

There's a relationship between God and people. Between the God who dwells and who inhabits eternity. Between the God who creates the heaven and earth, the God who sustains all things.

[4 : 54] The God who is perfectly pure, righteous, holy, good. This God enters into relationships with human beings. Not just any human beings.

You and me. Us. Those of us who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. We might be very ordinary, but when we come to know Jesus, we have just become extraordinary.

The Bible tells us that we are now temples of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit dwells within us. The Bible tells us that we are adopted. We become members of God's family. God now becomes our father. Jesus becomes our elder brother. And we're now part of a worldwide family that numbers millions upon millions and billions upon billions. It's remarkable. So Jesus wants us to know that he is the gate or the door.

And he wants us to know that he is the good shepherd. And the great thing about Jesus is that he not only says it, he shows it. He not only describes himself, but he describes himself in terms of what he does.

[5 : 56] He describes himself in terms of what he provides. Words and actions together. Because he says that he is the gate for the sheep, and that he is the gate through which the sheep enter and are saved.

So the gate to God, the door, is no longer shut. You see, sin creates a closed door. What's the scene that you have at the end of Genesis chapter 3?

Sin means it's time to go. You see, there are two big arrows of the Bible. Arrow 1 is the away arrow. Sin moves you away from God.

Sin moved Adam and Eve out of Eden. Time to go, folks. Can't stay. But the gospel reverses that arrow. The gospel of Jesus Christ turns the arrow back towards God and says, the door, folks, is now open.

The door is now open not because of who you are. The door is now open not because of what you have done, but the door is now open because of Jesus, who he is and what he has done.

[7 : 02] He says, I'm the gate. If you enter through me. It's not that he points to the gate. It's not that he shows us the door. He says, I am the door. It's as if, you know, the door on the hinge, it pivots, and the door opens, and we are ushered into that new relationship with God.

And notice how he describes it here. I am the gate, verse 9. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. So this is a place of sustenance.

This is a place where you can be sustained and nourished. The thief, however, you see, isn't that interesting? There's a contrast. There's a contrast between the genuine and the false.

You see, it's one thing to say. It's another thing to show. Jesus tells the truth. He tells the whole truth, and he tells nothing but the truth. He says when we enter through him, we find safety.

We find security. We find salvation. We find sufficiency. Our cup, indeed, overflows. So the gate enables us to come in.

[8 : 09] Notice in verse 11 and verse 14, the descriptor, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, who he is and what he has done.

And we see these truths brought together time and time again. Using theological language, we would say here is the person of Jesus and here is the work of Jesus. And they are inextricably linked, who he is and what he has done.

What was it that John the Baptist said? What was it, John chapter 1, verse 29? Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, describing who he is and describing what he has done.

I am the good shepherd, says Jesus. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And notice in verse 14, the good shepherd establishes a relationship. The sheep know the shepherd and the shepherd know the sheep.

Now this is a much better illustration with one of our former ministers here, Douglas McMillan. Douglas was a shepherd. He was from a family of shepherds.

[9 : 15] And he told the story in his book, The Lord, Our Shepherd. He said he and his brother sounded identical. You know, so much so that Mary would often mistake them on the phone.

But on the farm, when Douglas would go back to the farm and he would call the sheep, who were his brothers, they didn't come. Even though his voice sounded identical to us, it didn't sound

identical to them.

But when his brother, who sounds just as Douglas sounded, he would call the sheep and they would come running. Why? Because they were his sheep. You see, that's remarkable. I don't know animals.

I'm not a shepherd. I don't know animals well. But I think Jesus is telling us that the shepherd intimately knows who his sheep are. And there's a relationship, a two-way relationship here. The sheep know who the shepherd are. This is the shepherd who cares for them. This is the shepherd who feeds them. This is the shepherd who protects them. This is the shepherd who guides them and leads them.

[10:14] And this is the shepherd they hear. This is the shepherd they heed. This is the shepherd they follow. So you see, the good shepherd lays down his life. Why? To establish a relationship with the sheep.

So this is who Jesus is. And this is what Jesus has done. But notice that this magnificent passage tells us that Jesus has come to give us something.

Gift. Gift. I think we all love receiving gifts. It's Christmas time and the presents are rightly wrapped. It's birthday. And you get these lovely gifts from people that love you.

Well, we have two lovely gifts here from one who really loves us. Chapter 10, verse 10. It's an easy one to remember. 1010. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. The thief will lie, steal and kill.

[11:22] But the good shepherd, the gate for the sheep, he's come to give us life. And not life that's empty, but life that's full. Not life that's narrow, but life that's broad.

Life that is fulfilling. Life that is satisfying. This is what he has come to do. He wants you to have life and have it to the full. You'll see in verse 11 and verse 12.

You have the genuine carer. And you have the thief in verse 10. You then have verse 12, the hired hand.

You see, Jesus is often drawing these sharp contrasts between light and darkness. True and false. And he says, yeah, they're hired hands. They might do the same thing as a shepherd does.

They might have some of the same tasks. But there's no relationship there. Just like the thief. The thief might say the same things. You know what the serpent said in Genesis chapter 3.

[12:25] He tempted Adam and Eve. He tempted them with things that sounded right but weren't right. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. There's no relationship there.

There's no commitment there. You see, the shepherd loves the sheep so much that he lays down his life. So how do we get life that's abundant?

We get life that's abundant not because of who we are but because of who he is. You see, if you want to know what abundant life is, you look at the life of Jesus. You see the fullness of his life.

The fullness of his character. Wherever he went. In fact, when the apostle Peter was describing the ministry of Jesus in chapter 10 in the book of Acts. He simply described the ministry of Jesus.

He went around doing good. He went around. That's not a bad description, isn't it? That's not a bad summary. If somebody could say, well, actually, this man or this woman, these people, they just simply went around and they did good.

[13:24] Wherever they went, things were better. Wherever they went, things were brighter. When I came here, I came to study now an obscure figure in Scottish history, the Earl of Roseberry.

I could tell you many things. But one thing that he did which was interesting, he wrote an appreciation of Thomas Chalmers. And I read this appreciation of Chalmers before I became a Christian.

And I was struck that Roseberry recognized something remarkable in this life. But he was describing Chalmers' ministry in Glasgow. Chalmers in the St. John's parish was attempting to reach this huge population of this growing Scottish city with the gospel.

And Roseberry said, Chalmers warmed Glasgow. He brought warmth to a cold city. I thought that was a great illustration. You see, when you become a follower of Jesus, you bring warmth where there's coldness.

When you become a follower of Jesus, you bring light where there was once darkness. When you become a follower of Jesus, you bring hope where there previously was only despair. Not because of you, but because of who you represent.

[14 : 33] Because Jesus has a way of doing the impossible. He shines light. He brings hope. He brings warmth. He brings love. He brings peace. And he then infuses that love, joy, peace, hope within us.

And enables us to be channels of that blessing to others. So the first gift here is life that's abundant. Life that's full. But the second gift, and you see this at the end of the passage when we stopped from verses 28 to 30.

Not only does he say, here's life that's full. He says, here's life that's eternal. Life that never ends. Verse 28, I give them eternal life.

And they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. So the key here is not the strength of your commitment to Jesus.

The key here is who is the object of your faith. Not how strong your faith is. Not how deep your faith is. Not how broad your faith is.

[15 : 39] But who is the object? In whom are you trusting? If you're trusting in yourself, I think you'll be disappointed. If you're trusting in other people, I think you'll be disappointed.

If you're trusting in ideas or philosophies, I think those ideas and those philosophies will leave you cold. But if the object of your faith is Jesus, I give them eternal life.

And they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. You see, the shepherd keeps a close grip on his sheep.

He doesn't lose them. He doesn't let them go. He doesn't take his commitments lightly. So when we talk about perseverance, it's so easy to think perseverance is what I do as a Christian.

I need to keep praying. Yes, we do need to keep praying. Yeah, I need to read the Bible. Yes, we need to read the Bible. I need to keep going. Yes, all these things are absolutely true. But ultimately, the ground of our perseverance is him.

[16 : 52] What he does. His commitment. His strength. His perseverance. R.C. Sproul, an American theologian, he put it this way.

He said, I think this catchphrase, perseverance of the saints, is dangerously misleading. It suggests that the perseverance is something that we do, perhaps in and of ourselves.

I believe that saints do persevere in faith, and that those who have been affectionately called by God, and have been reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit, endure to the end.

However, they persevere not, because they are so diligent in making use of the mercies of God. The only reason we can give why any of us continue on in the faith is because we have been preserved.

So I prefer the term preservation of the saints, because the process by which we are kept in a state of grace is something that is accomplished by God.

[17 : 56] My confidence in my preservation is not in my ability to persevere. My confidence rests in the power of Christ to sustain me.

With his grace and by the power of his intercession, he is going to bring us safely home. The sheep know the shepherd.

The sheep recognize the shepherd. The sheep hear the shepherd's voice. The sheep follow where the shepherd leads. And the shepherd protects and preserves and brings the flock home.

Maybe that's why Jesus told that parable of the ninety and nine. The shepherd was not satisfied with a 99% success rate.

Most of us would be satisfied with 99%. It's almost 100. It's almost perfect. The shepherd's not satisfied. There's one missing.

[18 : 51] And the shepherd does everything that is required to make sure that all the sheep are safely home. This is what we mean by perseverance, or if you prefer, preservation.

We have a God who holds and doesn't let us go. And if you didn't get it in verse 28, again, when you see repetition in the Bible, God isn't filling out words.

He's not using, God doesn't use extra words. He doesn't waste words. So if verse 28 says, I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will 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. Now there are profound mysteries in these verses.

I will not deny that. But I think what Jesus is saying here is that we are safe in the hands of Jesus. And we are safe in the hands of the Father.

[19 : 57] We are secure 100%. No one and nothing will take us out of that place of safety. No one and nothing will remove us from the Son or from the Father.

Not only because he says it, but because he shows it. He holds on to us. I remember as a kid, I was obviously smaller than I am now.

You know, when you're a kid you kind of think, especially when my dad was a big man, he had big hands. And there were times where I tried to struggle out of his hands. It was absolutely impossible. His hand was so big, it just wrapped around my hand. And no matter how hard I tried, I wasn't going anywhere. And you see, no matter how hard we tried to remove our hand from his hand, we're not going anywhere.

Because, let me put it to you this way, folks. If there's a test of strength between you and Jesus, I'm going to tell you who's going to win. If there's a test of commitment between you and Jesus, I'm going to tell you who's going to win.

[21 : 02] And he's going to win all the time. He holds on to us. Earlier, Neil read from Psalm 129. And I don't know if you've read anything by Eugene Peterson.

I love Eugene Peterson. He wrote a book called A Long Obedience in the Same Direction. And he was looking at the Psalms of Ascent. Psalms 120 to 134. The journey psalms where the pilgrim people of God would journey towards Jerusalem.

And he makes this important statement. He says, the people of God are not tourists. We're not visiting church. We're not kind of looking around. The people of God are a pilgrim people.

We are on a journey. Oh yeah, I mean, you might be based in a particular place. I've been here for 35 years. But we are a pilgrim people. We are moving. We are moving onward.

And literally, we are moving upward. Jerusalem was a city that was on a hill. So the songs of ascent were songs of elevation. The people of God were going up. Go up, they said to me.

[22 : 03] And each of the Psalms, Psalm 129, which Neil read earlier, Peterson translated. He's a Bible translator as well as a commentator as well as a pastor.

And he translated the opening words of Psalm 129 in this way. They've kicked me around ever since I was young. This is how Israel tells it. They've kicked me around ever since I was young, but they never could keep me down.

Their plowman plowed long furrows up and down my back. But God wouldn't put up with it. He sticks with us. They've kicked me around my whole life, but God sticks with me.

They kicked me around my whole life, but he wouldn't put up with it. And I think that captures something of the grace, of the power, and of the persistence.

Yes, of the people of God, but more importantly, the God of the people. He is persistent. He is powerful. In a tribute in that same book, Peterson's son said that his father preached for many, many years.

[23 : 15] But effectively, he had only one sermon. And he said his sermon had four points. He said this, that God loves you. He is on your side.

He's coming after you. And he's relentless. That's the God that we worship. The God who loves us. The God who is on our side. The God who comes after us.

And the God who doesn't take no for an answer. He will hold us fast. He will keep us to the end. So maybe your faith is weak. Well, let me tell you this.

It's much better to have a weak faith and a strong savior than a strong faith and a weak one. You see, there are many people who have a hope or a faith in something or someone which is weak. So if you have a weak faith but a strong savior is the object of that faith, you're okay. You're safe. You're secure. It's not the strength of your commitment to him.

[24 : 11] It's the strength of his commitment to you. He gives you abundant life. He gives you eternal life. He promises no one can snatch them out of my hand.

I don't think you or I will be the first one that's lost. I don't think you or I will be the one who proves the exception to the rule.

The life that's abundant. The life that's eternal. Well, it's forgiven at the hands of the one who himself opens the door. The one who himself is the door.

The one who himself lays down his life so that we can have life that never, ever ends. This is who he is. This is what he's done.

And these are his promises. And we lay hold of them by faith. we receive we accept and we say thank you Jesus thank you for abundant life and thank you for eternal life let us pray our father in

heaven we thank you for your power we thank you for your grace we thank you for your goodness we thank you for your word we thank you that even though we might testify that we have been knocked down our whole life you wouldn't put up with it you stick with us you protect us you preserve us and we thank you that you will bring your people home that the good shepherd knows his sheep he speaks and we listen he calls and we follow and there's a day coming when he will make certain that all of his will be safely at home secure in the father's house and until that day remind us that he is committed to us remind us that he loves us that he's on our side that he comes after us and that he's relentless because we pray all in jesus name amen