

EFC

May 5, 2024

“The Path of Perseverance”

Revelation 3:7-13

Good morning, EFC. My name is Jeremy, and I’m one of the Pastors here. I’m grateful to open God’s Word with you, as we seek to know, love, and follow Jesus together – and help those around us do the same. This morning, we continue our series in the book of Revelation, as we consider Jesus’ letter to the church in Philadelphia.

Pray.

One of God’s great goals in Revelation: the enduring perseverance of Christians in faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel.

INTRO: What helps me persevere to the end of a long run/race? Good shoes, adequate hydration, and a clear goal.

As we’ll read in just a moment, the church in Philadelphia had “little power.” They lacked size and prestige and influence in the community. But they had persevered in faithfulness to Christ and to His Gospel. Now, Jesus’ command to them is that they keep holding fast.

Just as good shoes, adequate hydration, and a clear goal help me keep going to the finish line when I run, Jesus gives this church three aids to help them persevere faithfully with Him until the end of their race. As we read Jesus’ letter, we’ll see three things Jesus gives to help this church – and us - persevere. Turn with me to Revelation 3:7-13.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.' "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Revelation 3:7-13)

Jesus gives this church three aids to help them persevere faithfully with Him until the end of their race.

First, to persevere with Jesus, we need to know Christ’s person. We need to see clearly who Jesus is.

In this letter to the church with “little power”, Jesus spends more time reminding them of who He is than He does in the other letters. Perhaps He knows they need some extra encouragement that will only be found by focusing them on who Christ is.

- The holy one – OT reminder that it is God who is holy; Jesus, their Savior, is God Himself.
- The true one – genuine and dependable; He always proves true.
- Has the key of David – the long promised King who will reign forever.
- Who opens and no one will shut/who shuts and no one opens – Christ is sovereign, and none can successfully oppose Him.

Knowing who Jesus is, is foundational for us if we are going to persevere and hold fast to Him and to the Gospel of salvation in Christ alone. Jesus is the One who saves and who will give us strength to persevere, and we need to depend on Him in faith. If we doubt His holiness, His genuineness, or His power, we won't depend on Him like we need to.

Trust fall – you have to trust who is catching you

To persevere with Jesus, we need to know Christ's person.

To persevere with Jesus, we also need to hear God's promises. Jesus makes seven promises to this little church – far more to the other churches.

I can't help but wonder if Jesus made them so many promises because of their awareness of their own lack of power. The Bible is clear that humility is an essential ingredient to experiencing God's work on our behalf. 1 Peter 5:5-6 “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...” It is the humble who, without any power of their own, depend on God. And it is the humble who actually believe God. I think Jesus makes so many promises to this church, because they know He is their only hope, and they actually believe He'll do what He says.

Here are the promises Jesus makes to this church:

- “Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.” The open door to the kingdom.
- “Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet...” – Vindication as they will rule with Christ while their persecutors would be humbled.
- “...they will learn that I have loved you.” In the end, this is what matters!
- “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world...” Key statement for pre-tribulationists, who hold that Christ will rapture all Christians prior to the great tribulation, so that they do not pass through it. Others (mid-trib, post-trib) argue this means Jesus will keep Christians safe as they suffer through the tribulation. To me, the language seems most naturally to mean that Jesus will indeed rapture the Church prior to the Great Tribulation of the end times. However, this is not a point of division.
- “I am coming soon.” Jesus is our hope!

- “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it....” Pillar is a picture of permanence and strength and honor – quite a contrast with a church that is currently of “little power”.
- “I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God... and my own new name.” Identity, belonging, citizenship, close relationship with God.

Example of how promises help strengthen us.

To persevere with Jesus, we need to hear His promises. Hear, as in, actually hear His PROMISES! These are promises, from the very heart and mind and mouth of God Himself.

Finally, to persevere with Jesus, we need to trust His perspective.

As you read this letter, it should strike you that Jesus’ perspective on the challenges and “littleness” of this church is different than our natural, human perspective. There are three aspects of Jesus’ perspective that this church needed to trust, rather than their limited ability to see.

They were of “little power”, but Jesus is strong.

They indeed faced opposition, but Jesus is “coming soon.” However long that “soon” took, it would be short in comparison to their everlasting permanence in God’s presence, so it would be worth every effort.

They may not be powerful or influential or seemingly significant in their community, but God is far more interested in their faithfulness than He is in their “success.”

Proper perspective is an important aid to help us persevere faithfully with Jesus. This is really about faith; will we believe what God says is true, or will we rely on our own understanding?

“In hope [Abraham] believed (God) against hope, that he should become the father of many nations.... He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead... or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:18-25)

God desires that you and I persevere in our commitment to keep His word and remain faithful to Christ our Savior, so that we will receive the promised reward.

When we need help persevering faithfully with Jesus (i.e., every day), we need to know Christ’s person, hear His promises, and trust His perspective. But to know Christ’s person, to hear His promises, and trust His perspective requires active engagement on our part, as we respond to Christ in faith.

Jesus' command to this church is to "Hold fast what you have..." This could be translated "Keep holding fast what you have..." This is an active response on our part. We need to keep building up our faithfulness to Christ in dependence on Him. We need to cultivate rhythms of grace in our lives that will help us know Christ more deeply, hear His promises more consistently, and trust His perspective more fully.

At the beginning we read Colossians 3:15-17, which call us to some of these rhythms of grace that will help us see, hear, and trust Christ.

We see rhythms modeled there:

- God's Word dwelling richly in us
- Engaged with biblical teaching and application
- Regular connection as brothers and sisters in Christ
- Worshipping God through music
- Expressing thankfulness to God
- Purposefully and consciously living for God's glory in everything we do

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is coming soon, and we must remain faithful to Him so we are ready when He appears in rescue and judgment. To help us along the way, we need to know Christ's person, hear His promises, and trust His perspective. Are you purposefully engaging with God in His Word, in Christian community, in worship, in thankfulness, and by living for His glory in everything you do?