

“Persevere in Tribulation”
(Romans 12:12)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Paul has been describing biblical love.
 - a. It’s a love that changes the way we look at the world: hating evil, loving good.
 - b. It changes the way we look at each other: as brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers.
 - c. It changes the way we behave: making us lower ourselves to lift others up, filling our hearts with zeal, and making us active in our service to the Lord.
2. Last week, Paul told us about its heavenward focus:
 - a. It causes us to look forward towards eternity, towards our hope.
 - b. And seeing that hope, to rejoice in it here by faith.

B. Preview.

1. This week, we’ll see more of this heavenly focus:
 - a. This love, this desire to be with God and His Son, Jesus, will cause us to persevere in the Christian life, even during times of difficulty.
 - b. The Christian life is often likened to a race:
 - (i) “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Cor. 9:24).
 - (ii) “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).
 - (iii) Paul writes to the Galatians, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth” (5:7)?
 - (iv) It’s not a sprint for most of us, but a marathon.
 - (v) To reach the end, we must endure; it often hurts, it’s often difficult because of the obstacles, but we can’t give up.
 - (vi) We need to persevere through suffering, to endure hardship.
2. This morning, the Lord encourages us to be steadfast in our resolve to enter into heaven no matter what might stand in our way.

II. Sermon.

A. First, Paul reminds us first that difficulty is a part of the Christian’s life.

1. He calls it tribulation.
 - a. The word comes from a Greek word meaning “pressure, a pressing together” (Friberg).

- b. It is used figuratively in the NT of suffering brought on by outward circumstances, affliction, oppression, trouble; it involves direct suffering, persecution.
2. Where does all this suffering come from? It comes from the three enemies we just face: ourselves, the world, and Satan.
 - a. First, we are redeemed, but still fallen, meaning we will struggle with sin: desire for evil that will bring us into trouble – the Lord’s discipline.
 - b. Second, we live in a fallen world, still largely under Satan’s control: we will have enemies.
 - c. Third, we have a particular enemy because of whose we are: we are the Lord’s and the devil hates us. Peter writes, “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).
 - d. These three are constantly pressing down on us making life difficult; usually one more than the others.
 - e. They are also aimed at one thing: keeping us from pressing forward, stopping us in our tracks, even knocking us out of the race (the latter is not possible for a true Christian, but is for a false professor).
- B. What should be our response to these difficulties?
1. The answer lies in why the Lord brings them into our lives in the first place.
 - a. James writes, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:2-4).
 - b. Peter writes, “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge; and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness; and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*” (2 Pet. 1:5-12).
 - c. Tribulation actually promotes perseverance, which is why the Lord brings it: Paul writes, “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” (Romans 5:3-4).
 2. The Lord wants us to persevere: “Persevere in tribulation.”

- a. To persevere means to refuse to flee, to hold out, stand your ground, endure, be patient under, suffer, put up with, continue firm.
 - b. It means to continue to bear up despite difficulty and suffering (Friberg, Lowe-Nida).
 - c. Perseverance doesn't mean anything apart from some difficulty or obstacle that stands in the way.
 - d. The Christian life is full of difficulty. If we don't understand this, we won't be able to make any sense out of the things that happen to us.
 - e. The Lord uses these obstacles to build us up, make us stronger, make us able to stand our ground, so that we will make it to the finish line.
 - f. It has the opposite effect on those who aren't His, but strengthens those who are.
3. Obviously, the Lord Jesus, our great example, had to endure.
 - a. He didn't have to endure any sinful desire, for He was born the spotless and pure Lamb of God; but His Father still disciplined Him through suffering.
 - b. The Father used these experiences in Jesus' life to perfectly equip Him for His work, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10).
 - c. He endured persecution at the hands of sinful man. The author to the Hebrews points to Him as an example, so that we won't give up, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3).
 - d. And He was constantly pressed down by the great enemy of our souls, the devil.
 - e. The author to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus persevered to the finish line, which is why we must fix our eyes on Him (Heb. 12:2).
 4. We need to fix our eyes on Him because we must also endure these same difficulties.
 - a. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation" (John 16:3).
 - b. Paul, writing to Timothy, commended him for following his example, which included persevering through tribulations, "But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:10-12).
 - c. James pointed to the prophets as models for us, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful" (James 5:10-11).
 - d. If we follow Christ, we will also suffer.
- C. Third, why should we want to endure?
1. To put it negatively, if we don't persevere, we'll fall away and be lost forever.

2. But positively, if we persevere, we will reach heaven. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12).
 - a. The early Christians were hungry, without clothing, without housing, fugitives.
 - b. The martyrs were torn apart by wild animals, crucified, burned at the stake, killed by the sword.
 - c. Why do you think they were willing to endure so much for following Christ?
 - d. They knew they had to endure to the end to receive the crown of life.
 - e. They had their eye on the reward, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).
 - f. “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (Heb. 10:36).
 - g. Paul told the saints in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
 - h. We must endure whatever we face in life and stay the course, if we are to see heaven.
- D. Lastly, how can we endure?
1. Only through the Lord’s help.
 - a. Yes, we will have difficulties to face in this world, but Jesus tells us, “Take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:3).
 - b. Paul prayed for the Colossians, that they might be “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” (1:11). He did this because this was Christ’s will.
 - c. The Lord promises that He will defeat all our enemies, so we should not worry. David writes, “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret, *it leads* only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be *there*. But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (Psalm 37:7-11).
 - d. If we wait on the Lord and trust in Him, He will bring us safely to the promised land, to heaven.
 - e. If you’ve never trusted Him, do so now and receive His life.
 2. Since the Lord has committed Himself to see us through, let’s press forward.
 - a. “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).
 - b. Fix your eyes on Jesus and follow Him. Amen.