Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Perseverance of the Saints, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-270

As you know, it was last Sunday night that we came to the final message in the epistle of Jude, that marvelous statement with which Jude closes his letter, “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time now and forever. Amen.” And Jude closed out his epistle with that great statement that we are kept from falling. We are kept by God, and therefore God deserves all the glory.

And that introduced us to a doctrine that is known as the “perseverance of the saints.” The perseverance of the saints. True believers will persevere in faith to the end. Often that doctrine is called the doctrine of “eternal security.” Sometimes it’s sort of cryptically said, “Once saved, always saved.” And, of course, all of those things are true.

I want you to understand that this is a historic doctrine. I pointed out last time that it’s the most important component of salvation, because if salvation were not permanent, then the doctrine of election would be called into question, the doctrine of justification would be called into question, the doctrine of sanctification would be called into question, and the doctrine of glorification would be called into question. The calling of God would be called into question and therefore the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit would all be called into question as well.

And so what makes the whole of the doctrines of salvation come together and stay together is the eternality of salvation, the perseverance of the saints. And this has been the historic doctrine of the true church.

The year was 1644, the place was Westminster Abbey, that famous London church. The room inside the abbey was called the “Jerusalem Room.” The gathering there in the year 1644 was a gathering of the best theological minds and the greatest biblical scholars in England. The Puritans were the dominating force there, the well-known Puritans, lovers of scripture, lovers of God, lovers of Christ, lovers of truth. And these Puritans gathered together, about a hundred of them, with lords and commoners together. And they embarked upon a five-year endeavor, five years of intense study of scripture, five years of intense dialogue, five years of intense scholastic effort, five years of discussion, five years to produce a statement of doctrine.

Five years later, in the year 1649, they completed their task and what they produced is known as "The Westminster Confession of Faith." The Westminster Confession of Faith. Well-known Puritans like Thomas Goodwin, James Usher, Jay Lightfoot, Samuel Rutherford, Jeremiah Burroughs, and the chairman of this group, a man named Twisse – T-W-I-S-S-E - labored for these five years to produce what has become the most important Christian creed called "The Westminster Confession of Faith."

In that creed, among other things, is a statement about the security of salvation, about the fact that salvation is eternal. This, they were convinced, was what the Bible taught. They didn't call it the "security of salvation," they actually called it "perseverance," and they named it correctly. In The Westminster Confession of Faith there is a brief and unambiguous declaration.

The Confession says this - and I quote. "They whom God hath accepted in his beloved Son effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit can neither totally nor finally fall away from a state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved."

That is the biblically accurate and well-summarized statement of the perseverance of the saints in The Westminster Confession. And frankly, that statement needs no amending. It needs no altering. As it stands, it is biblically accurate. Anyone who has been accepted in God's beloved Son, effectually called unto salvation, and sanctified by the Spirit can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein in that state of grace to the end and be eternally saved.

This is supported, of course, by many, many scriptures. It wasn't as if they had to look a long time to find passages of scripture. This was only one of the things they were engaged in clarifying over those five years. But passages, for example, like John 5:24. "Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears my Word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." John 3:16 and 18. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. He who believes in him is not judged, or condemned."

Other passages, perhaps familiar to us as well, John 6:37. "All that the Father gives me shall come to me, and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me, and this is the will of him who sent me, that of all that he has given me, I lose none, but raise it up on the last day. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day."

There is that monumental text in which we see that no one falls through the cracks in the process of salvation. Whom the Father chooses, he draws, whom he draws he draws to Christ, whomever is drawn to Christ comes, and when he comes, Christ receives him, keeps him and raises him on the

last day. The same thing is stated another way by Jesus in John 10:27-29.

“My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand, I and the Father are one.” Indicating the security of the believer, he knows who we are, he holds us in his hand. The Father holds us in his hand and no one can take us out.

Many other scriptures are worthy of our attention. I think of John 4:14. “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” Once the well is opened up, it never runs dry. It is a wellspring of eternal life. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 we read that those who are in Christ - verse 8, 1 Corinthians 1 - are “confirmed to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are confirmed to the end and found blameless in the end. Well, what if we sin? Well, we do sin. But our sins, having been covered by Christ, leave us blameless.

And verse 9, so important. “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.” God is faithful, who called you to confirm you, all the way to the end and bring you blameless into his eternal presence.

And again, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. “Now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely. May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There’s that same affirmation that God who sanctified us will preserve us complete intact, blameless, again, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The next verse, verse 24 says, “Faithful is he who calls you and he also will bring it to pass.” He was faithful to call you into salvation. He will be faithful to preserve you until that salvation is complete.

And I remind you again of 1 John 2:19. “They went out from us, but they were not really of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us. They went out in order that it might be shown they are not all of us.” The true believers stay, and abide, and remain, not because they have the power on their own to do it - they don’t, as I pointed out last week - but because the same God who called them, the same God who justified them, the same God who is sanctifying them has promised to glorify them.

The Westminster Confession accurately affirms that saving faith cannot fail. It cannot fail. And at this point, I think it’s crucial for us to understand what the perseverance of the saints does not mean. This will help us to understand what it does mean.

First of all, it does not mean that Christians don’t ever fail. It does not mean that Christians don’t fail seriously and severely in their Christian lives. We do. What it does mean is what the Confession says

it means: They do not completely nor finally fail. Fail, yes. Fail severely, yes. Fail repeatedly, yes. Fail completely, no. Fail finally, no.

The Westminster Confession went on to say this, and I quote again, “Nevertheless, believers may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, through the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, through the neglect of their means of preservation, fall into grievous sins and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God’s displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.”

And the writers of the Westminster Confession understood that this is not to say we are perfect. To say we persevere is not to say we are perfect. There is corruption remaining in us. There is the neglect of the means of grace. There is stumbling into grievous sin and continuing for a time therein. There is the incurring of God’s displeasure, and grieving of the Spirit, and bringing upon ourselves the deprivation of some measures of grace and comfort. There is the reality of hard-hearted sin and wounded conscience that doesn’t function as it should. There is the reality of hurting and scandalizing others in the church and outside, and bringing upon oneself temporal judgments and disciplines.

In other words, perseverance doesn’t mean perfection. That is not what we’re saying. In fact, there is no perfection to be had here at all. And so this, in a sense, describes all of us to one degree or another. So when we say that believers persevere, we’re not talking about perfection. We’re not talking about reaching a state of sinlessness. We’re talking about persevering in faith, not unaccompanied by failure.

Secondly, it is important to understand that not only does perseverance not mean perfection, but it also does not mean that anyone and everyone who “accepts” Christ can therefore live any way they like without any fear of hell. It is not enough to have a superficial faith in Christ. It is not enough to have a superficial commitment to Christ, a superficial interest in Christ. It is not enough to have some good feelings about Jesus and make some momentary commitment to him. That is not what the Westminster Confession was saying.

And that is why - this is important - the correct way to describe this doctrine is the “perseverance of the saints” rather than “eternal security.” It is not just that we are eternally secure, it is that we are eternally secure because our faith perseveres. In John 8:31-32, Jesus said, “You’re my true disciple if you continue in my Word.” True disciples continue in faith and they don’t live like non-believers.

Backed by their fruits, you can know them, because as Ephesians 2 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them.”

A person who's "accepted" Jesus, made a decision for Jesus, prayed a prayer, and goes on to live in a sinful pattern of life with no fear of hell because they think they're eternally secure is deluded. That's why we have to be careful when we talk about the doctrine of eternal security as if the one prayer makes you forever secure. And by the way, this is what is taught by many people. All those people who deny the doctrine of the Lordship of Christ, all those non-Lordship people, affirm that one prayer prayed one time makes you eternally secure without perseverance. That is a misrepresentation of what scripture teaches and that's why I wrote the book *The Gospel According to Jesus* and the follow up, *The Gospel According to the Apostles.* That is not true.

So to speak of the security of the believer is not in itself wrong. We are secure. But the other expression is more careful and it's more accurate. It is not true that someone is secure no matter how much they live in sin, no matter how much they turn against Christ and even flatly deny him, as many have said. Security is simply a reality because of perseverance. A believer may sin, as I said, may sin seriously, may sin repeatedly, but he will not abandon himself to sin. He will not come again under the utter domination of sin. He will not lose faith in Christ, and he will not deny his Lord and the gospel.

No true believer will shun holiness and embrace sin all together. 1 John 3:10 - very simple. "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God." It's that simple. Anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God. And the prior verse says, "No one who is born of God practices sin." It's not the unbroken pattern of your life. So it isn't enough to say if you prayed a prayer one time, make a decision one time, no matter how you live, no matter what your pattern of life, no matter if you deny Christ later on, you're still eternally secure. No. The doctrine of the believer's security is tied to the believer's persevering faith.

The doctrine of perseverance, then, is this. At salvation you are given a supernatural faith from God to believe the gospel, to believe the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ, and therefore to believe in Christ, and having come to Christ, you have come to know the true and living God. This faith is a supernatural gift from God. It is a gift of grace and it is a gift of mercy.

Again, Ephesians 2:8-9. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;" The grace is from God and so is the faith. And what kind of faith does he give you, a temporary faith? If saving faith is a gift from God, then what kind of gift would God give you? He would not give you a temporary gift of faith. And if your salvation depends upon a human faith, I will promise you that it will die, and that's what I said last week. If we could lose our salvation, we would lose it.

That is why Jesus said, "He that endures to the end, the same will be saved." You can tell who the saved are. You can tell who those are that are going to enter into the full salvation in the next life.

They are those whose faith endures to the end, because it is an enduring faith. That's the kind of faith God gives. Very different than human faith, very different.

I can give you a simple illustration of how human faith works. We live by human faith. I mean, we live by human faith every day of our lives. You go to a restaurant, you order something and you eat it. That is an act of faith. It is. You don't know what it is. You don't know who's been playing in it. You don't know where it came from. You don't know what condition it's in. You don't know who cooked it. You have no idea. They put something in a glass and you drink it. They tell you what it is, but you don't know what it is. That's an act of faith.

Even more than that, you turn on your faucet at home, fill up the glass and drink it and have no idea what's playing in your pipes. It's an act of faith. You get into an automobile, you turn an ignition switch, and you set off a series of somewhere between four and eight explosions, and you have no fear that you're going to blow up even though you have an internal combustion engine right at your knees. You go roaring onto the freeway at 65 miles an hour, full blast, never expecting to see a semi coming down your lane in the opposite direction. It's an act of faith.

You go to the doctor and you say, "Doctor, put me to sleep, and cut me open, and take out anything you want." You don't know the doctor or anybody else in the room, and you have no clue what they're doing in there. I would say that's a pretty significant act of faith. We live by faith all the time. All the time.

But there's a reason for that. That's an educated faith. That's a trained human faith. We've been around long enough to know that engines don't blow up, and we've been around long enough to know that doctors usually take the right thing out and don't leave their tools inside when they're done. We've been around to know long enough that the food that you get is okay because you've been eating it for years, and drinking the water's okay because you've been drinking it for years. And so this is an educated and trained kind of human faith.

But when it comes to putting your faith in Jesus Christ, you literally have to deny yourself, completely abandon yourself to someone you've never seen and never experienced, and can't know or experience until you come to that complete abandonment. That requires a faith that is beyond the normal human faith. It requires a faith that is a gift from God, a supernatural faith. And the only kind of faith that God gives is a faith that endures.

You could not muster up your own faith to be saved, nor could you muster up enough of your own faith to stay saved. And were you to depend upon your own faith, it would fail you when God didn't do what you thought he should do, when he didn't take care of your life in the way you thought he should, and when you had your many disappointments and tragedies and sorrows, et cetera, et cetera, your own human faith would constantly be weaker and weaker, and you would begin to call all

kinds of things into question because your experience would not be sustaining - at least visibly for you - what you expected from God, particularly if somebody told you, “Come to Jesus and everything will be great.”

It is the gift of faith, supernatural faith given by God, that endures so that you believe even when everything does not go the way you think it should. This enduring faith is inexplicable humanly. It’s inexplicable humanly. It has taken martyrs all the way to the stake, all the way to the guillotine, all the way to the loss of everything. It’s not explicable humanly. Security in Christ, then, is tied to a persevering faith that endures to the end.

And any idea of salvation that leaves out security is a distortion of the truth. And any idea of security that leaves out perseverance is a distortion of the truth. You cannot have salvation without security. You can’t have eternal life that’s not eternal, and you can’t have a secure salvation without a persevering faith.

So obviously, it doesn’t mean that we are perfect, but it means we persevere. And it’s not enough to pray a prayer at one time and then live like a non-believer the rest of your life and figure you’ve got it and you’re secure. That’s a terrible distortion. I’ll say it again. Any idea of salvation that leaves out security is a distortion of the truth. And any idea of security that leaves out perseverance is a distortion of the truth.

Now, there are so many texts to study in regard to this, but let me take you to one text that I think will be very helpful for us. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 1. 1 Peter chapter 1. This is a very, very full, rich text. This is one that kind of expands before your very eyes. But I want you to look at verses 3 through 9 - verses 3 through 9. And I want to read them to you. This comes as a kind of doxology, much like the end of Jude and it is a pronunciation of glorious blessing on God for our eternal salvation. Listen to what Peter writes.

Verse 3. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you - ” here’s the key phrase, “ - who are protected - ” You can underline that. That’s the heart of the passage. Peter is blessing God for divine protection. “ - who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Now notice those two things are tied together. We are protected to the receiving of this eternal inheritance, and that protection comes to us through faith. Verse 6. “In this you greatly rejoice - ” Of course. Who wouldn’t? You greatly rejoice that you’re protected. “ - even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, - ” and they come “ - that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to

result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen him, you love him, and though you do not see him now, but believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

Now I just want to get you the heart of the passage. Verse 5. You are protected and you are protected through faith, verse 5. Verse 8. "You don't see him now, but you believe in him." There again is the emphasis on faith. Verse 9. "And obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." And he means there the final salvation, glorification.

You see, this matter of security, of being protected, is tied to an enduring faith. Now, before we look at the details of that passage, I want to just kind of give you a bigger picture. I don't think I'll be able to get through this, so we'll finish it up next Sunday night, or maybe we'll finish it up next Sunday night, I don't know.

That was written by Peter. Now let me just stop and talk about Peter. We all know about Peter, right? If anybody - if anybody - was to write a treatise on the perseverance of the saints, it should be Peter. It really should. He is the right person to give testimony to perseverance because if there was any New Testament person who was constantly prone to failure, who was it? It was Peter. It was the very man who wrote these words, because he was the man who most frequently experienced the protection of a persevering faith. I guess in his case it was kind of a bounce-back faith.

Based on the record of the gospels, none of our Lord's disciples - except Judas, of course - failed more miserably than Peter: Impetuous, erratic, ambitious, selfish, vacillating, weak, cowardly, hot-headed. On several occasions he invited strong rebukes from the Lord. I think none more severe than Matthew 16:23, where Jesus looked at him in the face and said, "Get thee behind Me – whom? - Satan." Now, I mean, that's the limit. When the Lord identifies you as the tool of Satan, you have seriously stumbled. And you remember that low point occurred almost immediately after the high point of his life recorded in the same chapter in verse 16 when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, "Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

But Peter is this great example of the high and the low, the extreme high and the extreme low. Peter is proof that a true believer can stumble, and stumble seriously, and fail, and fail seriously, and be weak, and cowardly, and make temporary denials, but because he has been given protection by an enduring faith produced in his heart by the sovereign work of God, he never fails completely and he never fails finally.

It wasn't long after that denial that he went out and did what? Wept bitterly, desperately wanting to be restored. Jesus even told him in Luke 22 this was going to happen. He said to him in Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat." Do you understand

that Satan can't do anything to anybody unless he has permission? Satan is the servant of God, he can do nothing other than what God allows him to do. He wanted to tear into Peter because he knew how important Peter was to the gospel mission. But look at verse 32. This is something to underline, folks, something to never forget.

Luke 22:32. Listen. "Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;" To shake you, to find out if you're real. I love this. Verse 32, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail;" Wow. "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail;" And I'll tell you something. If that's how Jesus prayed, that's what will happen. His faith won't fail.

Peter, you know, thought the Lord didn't understand how strong he really was. Peter thought he'd be fine, and he gives testimony to that in verse 33. "He said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!' And he said, 'I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me.' "

Jesus let it happen. Satan could not tempt Peter if the Lord hadn't allowed it. And he allowed it knowing that Peter's faith could not fail because he prayed that his faith fail not. And his prayer is always heard and answered by the Father, because Jesus always prays according to the Father's will, just as the Spirit intercedes according to the will of the Father.

You say, "Why in the world did he let it happen?" So that the trial would prove to Peter the enduring character of his faith. The Lord didn't need to know his faith was real, but Peter did. And I'll tell you why later in the text. You say, "Well, yeah, the Lord prayed for Peter that his faith fail not, what about us?" Turn to John 17. Turn to John 17. Here, you find the Lord praying. This is his great High Priestly prayer.

And we can pick it up in verse 9, "I ask on their behalf; - " praying for those who believe " - I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom thou hast given Me; for they are thine; and all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I have been glorified in them." Jesus is praying for believers, not just those alive then, but in the future. And verse 11, "I'm no more in the world; - " he was sensing that he would be leaving " - and *yet* they themselves are in the world, - " I'm going to have to go and leave them here. " - and I'm going to come to you. Holy Father, - " he says this. "Keep them in thy name, *the name* which thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we *are one."*

Wow, what an amazing prayer. Father, keep them. Not just Peter, not just Peter's faith not fail, but none of them. Keep them all, all the ones you have given me, all the elect, all the justified, all the sanctified, keep them, keep them in your name, consistent with who you are, the great, powerful, almighty, omniscient keeping God, so that together we may be one in the glory of that day when all of redeemed humanity is gathered into your presence.

More specifically, drop down to verse 15. Jesus is going on to pray, says this, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, - ” We need them in the world to evangelize “ - but to keep them from the evil *one.”* Here is Jesus interceding as our great High Priest on our behalf, asking the Father to keep us, keep us, protect us that our faith fail not. Verse 17, He adds, “Sanctify them in the truth; thy Word is truth.” Verse 18. “As thou didst send me into the world, I’ve sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those who believe in me through their word.

“Not just for the believers now, but the ones that will believe through the Word *that these believers preach*. I want them all to be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou hast given me I’ve given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfect in unity, that the world may know that thou didst send me and didst love them as thou didst love me.”

Jesus says this, “Father, I want you to show them the glory. I want you to bring them into eternal glory. I want you to protect them. I want you to hold on to them. I want you to keep them. I want you to make sure their faith never fails, so that we are all together as one in eternal glory, as was planned and intended at the foundation of the world when you set this redemptive plan in motion. Keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them by your Word. Bring them to eternal glory, that they may share with us in that glory and not just these - ” verse 20 says “ - but everybody who will believe in me through their words.” And you and I are included in that verse, verse 20, because we believe through the words that were written by the apostles.

So, you see, the Lord Jesus Christ is interceding for Peter as an illustration in Luke 22. It’s not an oddity, it’s not unique. It’s the same intercession that he carries out in John 17, and it’s not just for the apostles then, but for all who would believe that the Father would keep them and bring them to eternal glory intact, as one in him and in the Son.

And by the way, this was not just a momentary prayer that Jesus offered up there in John 17 in the garden that night. He prays like that today and every day and all the time. Hebrews 7:25. Listen to this great verse. Hebrews 7:25. “He is able to save forever - ” that’s what that phrase should be. “He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through him.” “He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through him - ” here’s why “ - since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

This prayer in John 17 is a prayer that Jesus continues to pray at all times, our great High Priest at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, able to save us forever because he always lives to make intercession for us. We are kept by an enduring faith that is sustained and maintained to the

end by the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And as I mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit weighs in on this same great keeping ministry. Romans 8, the Holy Spirit helps our weaknesses. We don't know how to pray as we should. "The Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words - " that's not speaking in tongues or something like that. It's not what you say, it's what the Holy Spirit says, and it's not in something uttered, it's in something not uttered. It's a silent, private, inner trinitarian communion where the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. There are no words. It's the Spirit interceding on our behalf. "And he who searches the hearts - " that's God " - knows the mind of the Spirit because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

So Christ prays according to the will of God that our faith not fail, that the Father keep us. The Spirit prays according to the will of God. And as a result, "All things - " next verse " - work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose in whom he foreknew...he justified, and whom he justified he glorified."

Christ's intercession guarantees our future glory. The Holy Spirit's intercession guarantees our future glory. And the Father's purpose guarantees our future glory that he foreknew us, he predestined us, he called us, he justified us and he will glorify us because his purpose at the beginning was to conform us to the image of his Son. He didn't save you for a temporary enterprise, he saved you to conform you to the image of his Son in eternal glory, to give you the very holiness of Christ.

When you think about heaven, it's not that we will look like Jesus physically, it's that we will be like Jesus in terms of perfect holiness. We have been chosen, called, justified, sanctified, and will be glorified. We are kept until that hour and we are kept by an enduring faith sustained by the intercessory work of Jesus Christ who prays that we will be protected from anything that would assault that faith, whether it be the flesh, or the world, or Satan himself.

And added to the intercession at the right hand of the Father in heaven is the intercession from the heart of the Holy Spirit, who is praying in ways we don't even know how to pray in a silent inner trinitarian communion for the will of God, and God hearing and answering that prayer causes everything to work out for good - everything.

And so we are sustained by our supernatural faith given to us by God. And when Jesus said to Peter, "I pray that your faith fail not," he was saying to him what is true of all of us, the Lord intercedes for us that our faith may endure. And he always prays according to the will of the Father who always answers prayers according to his will.

As I said last week, if your salvation was up to you, you'd never be saved. If keeping your salvation was up to you, you'd never be saved. Your human faith can't save you. Your human faith can't keep

you. Therefore, you need a faith that is not human, a faith that is supernatural, that has to come from God. The faith to believe the gospel in the beginning came from God and it is an enduring faith that always believes.

Listen to Jeremiah 32:40. This broadens your understanding of this because it takes us into the Old Testament. Jeremiah 32:40. Listen to this great statement. This is the statement about the New Covenant, the Covenant that saves us. “I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts - ” listen “ - so that they will not turn away from me.”

What a statement. It is the nature of this everlasting salvation covenant that God will never turn away from us and he will put in us, in our hearts, a fear of him that is supernatural so that we will not turn away from him. It is an everlasting covenant of an everlasting salvation based upon an enduring faith. This faith never fails. There are no true Christians who are drop outs.

You say, “Well, wait a minute. Isn’t scripture full of warnings to people not to fall away, such as we read in Hebrews 6:4, not to fall away and put Christ to an open shame? Such as we read in 1 Timothy chapter 1, those people who made shipwreck of the faith, aren’t they warned about that? Those who have been delivered over to Satan to learn not to blaspheme, aren’t there warnings?” Yes, of course. And those are warnings to false believers. Those are warnings to people who are uncommitted. Those are warnings to people who have come close to the gospel and made a superficial acknowledgment of the gospel, but not a real one.

And so it’s very crucial for us to understand that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not mean that people who pray a prayer, or “accept” Jesus, or make a decision for Jesus in some emotional experience are necessarily secure and can live any way they want to live. No. If they have really come to Christ, there will be in them an enduring faith that will be characterized by a love for righteousness, a love for Christ, and a hatred of sin. It will not be perfection, but it will indicate direction in the way of righteousness.

Well, our dear Peter, he understood the keeping power of God. I’ll tell you what, if Peter could have lost his salvation, he would have. How close can you get to Satan so that the Lord looks at you and says, “Get thee behind me, Satan?” You can’t get any closer than to be espousing Satan’s desires. But did Peter ever rebound from that. Look at John 21. After all those denials, and they were on three occasions. If you multiply all of them, he did it six times on three occasions. But when you come to John 21, Jesus finally confronts Peter.

Just to give you a quick background, Jesus after his resurrection met with the apostles, Jesus said to the disciples, “Go to Galilee and wait for me there.” Well, they went. When he finally comes – 21:1 - the disciples are at the Sea of Tiberias and there they were, Simon Peter - always named first every

time because he's the leader - and Thomas and Nathanael, and James and John the sons of Zebedee and two others, probably Peter and Andrew. They had the fishing background.

And Simon said to them, "I'm going fishing." And the Greek language here has a certain finality about it. He says, "I'm going to go back to fishing." And what he was going to do was go back to his old career. And, of course, they went out, got into the boat and couldn't catch anything. Why? Because the Lord rerouted all the fish. They knew that lake like the back of their hands, they grew up fishing there, they knew exactly what time of day, and what season of the year to find fish in what spot.

And Jesus showed up and asked the question that you never want to ask somebody who's fished all night and caught nothing, "You don't have any fish, do you?" They said, "No." And then He said this ridiculous thing, "Cast the net on the right hand side of the boat and you'll find a catch." That's very insulting. What do you think, we fished one side? Or maybe you think the boat stays in one spot? Or maybe you think the fish know the right from the left? What kind of a statement is that?

But always Jesus spoke with authority, so they did what he said. And they got so many fish they couldn't handle them. And then that disciple therefore whom Jesus loved - that's John - said to Peter, "Huh, it's the Lord." And Peter, bless his heart, did he have enduring faith? Sure. Was it weak? Yes. Did he fail? Yes. But, oh my, did he rebound.

Verse 7. "When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped down to his inner garment *for work*), he dove into the sea. The other disciples came in a boat." He was in such a big hurry to be restored. He hated so much the sin that he saw in himself. He hated his own disobedience. And just impetuously dove in and they were a hundred yards away and, of course, the rest of them were saying, "That's Peter, he leaves us to drag this huge amount of fish into shore."

They came in and the Lord had prepared breakfast. You know how the Lord prepares breakfast, don't you? Breakfast. And they brought in some of their fish, 153 fish, verse 11 says. "Jesus said, 'Come and have breakfast.' And nobody said, 'Who are you?' They knew. And after breakfast - " in verse 15 " - Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, do you love me more than these?' " What a provocative, penetrating question. Do you love me more than these fish, these nets, this way of life? Do you love me more than these other disciples? You said that if everybody forsook you, you never would. You said you were willing to go to death with me. You didn't, you denied Me.

And I guess the right question is, " 'Simon, son of John, or Jonas, do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love you.' And he said, "Then teach my lambs,' " "Then do what I tell you, I called you to preach and to teach, not to fish." And remember, Peter had denied Him three times, so the Lord was going to restore him three times.

“He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ And he said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. You know that.’ And he said, ‘Then shepherd my sheep,’ ” Do what I told you to do. “And he said to him a third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do You love me?’ Peter was grieved this time, - ” this hurt. “He was grieved because he said to Him the third time ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to Him this, ‘Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.’ ”

Why? Because God himself had given to Peter an enduring faith, an enduring love for Christ. Weak? Yes. Vacillating? Yes. Stumbling? Yes. But never completely, and never finally, and always the first to be eager to be restored. And Jesus said, “That’s all I ask. Tend my sheep. You’re the shepherd I’m looking for.” “When you were young - ” verse 18 “ - you used to gird yourself, walk where you wanted, not you’re old, you’ll stretch your hands out - ” He was speaking of Peter’s crucifixion, which is how he finally died “ - someone else is going to tie you up, bring you where you don’t want to go.’ And this he said signifying by what death he would glorify God.” Peter, you’re going to be a martyr. And Peter was faithful to the end, and when it came time to be crucified, he wouldn’t let them crucify him the normal way, because he wasn’t worthy, he said, to be crucified like his Lord, so they flipped him over and crucified him upside down, a more excruciating way to die. He endured to the end.

There isn’t anybody better, really, to write about the perseverance of the saints, about an enduring faith, about an enduring love, about remaining faithful to the end. There’s nobody better to write that than Peter, the man who repented with tears, the man who was so pained by his own failure that he dove into the water to swim as fast as he could to Jesus, the one who was so confident of his own genuine love and faith that he asked the Lord to read his heart, knowing that what he saw there He would know is the real thing. And so it’s appropriate that Peter tell us about persevering faith.

Go back now to 1 Peter, - one final comment. When Peter, then, in verse 5 says, “We are protected through faith,” when he says in verse 8, “we believe in him,” when he says in verse 9, “the outcome of our faith is the final salvation,” Peter is speaking from personal experience. He knew what it was, in spite of his weakness, to have an undying enduring faith. And that is the faith that belongs to every person who is truly saved. And as I said, in the end Peter was faithful to proclaim Jesus Christ in the face of death.

Now, in verses 3 through 9 there are six elements of our protection. Six elements. And I’m going to tell you what they are next time. We are protected by a faith that has six elements, six dynamic spiritual realities operating in it, and Peter unfolds them for us for next time.

Lord, thank you for this confident truth that our salvation is forever, that eternal life is obviously eternal, that those whom the Father chose he will conform to the image of his Son, that all whom he effectually calls will reach glory, that all who are predestined to be made into the image of Christ will indeed be made into his image, that all who are covered by his righteousness will one day stand

before you in heaven blameless, that all who are being sanctified will be glorified.

Lord, we thank you for this enduring faith, and though at times it struggles, and stumbles, and tumbles, and though we sin, and sin seriously, and sin severely, and sin repeatedly, we see ourselves in Peter running back weeping, longing to be obedient, longing to be useful, longing to be restored, longing to be forgive, longing to be washed. We remember Peter stumbling at the last supper, blurting things out that indicated his ignorance. But when confronted, saying, “Lord, cleanse me from top to bottom,” and therein is the essence of that enduring faith.

It loves you in spite of how it acts, it loves you in spite of its weakness and failure, and it longs for restoration, and it longs for cleansing. This is that true saving faith. This is that gift you have given us for which we thank you. We thank you and are comforted in the confidence that we will persevere to the end, because this gift of faith is an enduring faith, and it endures because you ever live to intercede, because the Spirit prays for us, and both the Son and the Spirit always pray according to the will of the Father, and the will of the Father is that all he gives to the Son, the Son will raise to eternal glory and none will be lost. We thank you, O God, that all the Trinity is gathered to sustain us to that eternal glory, in this we rejoice in the Savior’s name. Amen.

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