

The Perseverance of the Saints, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:6-9

Code: 90-272

We are continuing a study for these few weeks on the subject of the perseverance of the saints. That is a, I think, a good biblical title to describe a doctrine that is often called the doctrine of eternal security, or the security of the believer. The bottom line in this doctrine is that when the Lord saves someone, that salvation is forever, never to be reversed. The Bible is clear on that basic truth and the basic truth is that salvation by its very nature is irrevocable.

In spite of the clarity of scripture, however, on this, there are those who have fallen under the influence of teaching that denies it. There are many in the Christian church who are living in some kind of fear with the possibility that they could lose their salvation. They are warned that they can, by sin or failure to believe, forfeit that salvation which God has given to them. That is to say, a believer can become again an unbeliever, a new creation in Christ can become again the old. Those who are now the children of God can become again the children of the devil. Those who are citizens of heaven can become occupants of hell. In fact, all that is given to us in Christ can be lost and forfeit.

And inevitably those who teach that doctrine endeavor to support it in scripture. And they bring up a list of doctrinal passages to be used as a support for the idea that you can lose your salvation. I've dealt with this through the years many, many times and many fronts, and not the least of which is trying to help the Russians - the Russian believers - understand this doctrine, because for so many years they have been taught that it is possible to forfeit your salvation.

On one occasion, to illustrate the point, I was in Minsk in Belarus. Belarus is a very interesting republic, once a part of the Soviet Union. It is the one most dramatically affected by Chernobyl, because the radioactivity that came out of Chernobyl is in the ground, and therefore in the water, and in the food supply and the whole nation is dying. It's a really incredible place to go. I've been there on a number of occasions.

On one occasion we went to an old Communist military camp for a pastors conference, which is quite an interesting change, where Communist soldiers were trained, pastors were being trained. I was there for a week with them, sleeping in the barracks with them in that place, and teaching them the Word of God. Long, long intense all-day sessions, day after day, after day. And along the way, I said something about the fact that salvation was forever, was eternal, and could not be lost. And this was, I think, in the context of working our way through the book of Romans, most particularly chapter 8.

And I didn't make that as a major point, I just made some comment about it and went on to whatever else the issue was. And that was at the end of the day, and I went off after a little bit of refreshment to the section of the barracks where I was staying, and slept, and got up in the morning and went back into the hall where there was a little bit of breakfast and then we had our meetings.

And when I got back I was greeted by the person who was directing the meeting who said to me that what I said there at the close of the evening about salvation being forever and irrevocable caused no small stir, so that 27 of the leaders stayed up all night. And they stayed up all night and compiled a list of verses that caused them to have difficulty accepting that teaching. And they said, "Here are the verses. Now today, we want you to answer all these verses."

Fair enough, right? I mean, if it's true, it ought to stand the test of scripture. And so, with the best I could, I tried to work my way through those verses, and to show them how to understand those verses. And in all fairness to you, particularly those of you who have been perhaps taught that you could lose your salvation, you know some of those verses, as well, and it's important to make some kind of reference to them. And so I want to do that. Essentially, these are the verses that are very often – or they're the major ones that are very often - used for people to support the idea that you could lose your salvation.

John 8:31 is one. John 8:31 says, "If you abide in my Word then are you truly disciples of mine." And they will say, "Well, you see, if you don't stay in the Word, you would cease to be a disciple." And then there's John 15:6. "If anyone does not abide or remain in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." You're going to go to hell if you don't stay faithful. You're going to go to hell if you don't abide.

And then there's Matthew 24:13. "The one who endures to the end, he shall be saved." So, it really does depend upon your endurance. The same thing is mentioned also in Matthew 10:22. And then there is Acts 13:43, where Paul and Barnabas were speaking to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, "Urging them to continue in the grace of God." And so, it seems as though you have to will and commit yourself to continue in the grace of God to be saved in the end.

Other verses, Romans chapter 2. Romans chapter 2. "God - " verse 6 " - will render to every man according to his needs, to those who by perseverance in doing good, seek for glory and honor and immortality, he gives eternal life." In other words, if you don't persevere in doing good, persevere in seeking glory, honor and immortality, you won't receive eternal life. And over in the eleventh chapter of Romans - and there are other verses, these are just notable ones - Romans 11:22. Here is the kindness and severity of God, "To those who fell severity, but to you, God's kindness if you continue in his kindness, otherwise you also will be cut off."

And so, there are these warnings about abiding, remaining, enduring, continuing. Colossians chapter 1 gives a perhaps familiar one. It says, in verse 21, "Though you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet he has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death in order to present you before him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Talking about salvation, you used to be evil and now he's made you holy. Verse 23, "If, indeed, you continue in the faith, firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you've heard." So again, is this word "continue." The words are pretty much the same in all the verses: Abide, remain, continue. They all sort of trace back to a common Greek origin.

Hebrews chapter 3 adds some other input into this - and these are verses also that I was sort of forced to discuss with our dear brothers in Russia to help them understand them. In Hebrews 3:6, "Christ was faithful as a son over his house - whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence to the end." And verse 14, "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." It's about holding on. It's about enduring. It's about continuing. It's about remaining. It's about abiding. All of these passages are passages that have to be understood.

Are they warnings to hang on to your salvation? Are they warnings that if you let go, or if you drift, or if you deviate, or if you fail to endure, you're going to lose your salvation? Well if they are, then the Bible contradicts itself. Clearly, scripture teaches salvation is forever. It also teaches that salvation is of God and you can't save yourself, either initially or in an ongoing sense. You couldn't be saved initially by your own - the strength of your own faith, and you can't hang on by the strength of your own faith. We've been saying that.

The idea here is these are not warnings to believers to hang on with all their might, lest they lose their salvation. They are rather statements that those who endure, those who continue, those who persevere, those who hold fast give evidence of being the ones who are saved. So that you can take all of these verses and sort of answer them all in the same way. Jesus is saying, "If you're one who abides in my Word, then you're a real disciple. If you're one who does not abide, you're not a true disciple. If you're one who endures, you're going to receive your final salvation. If you're one who continues in the grace of God, and continues in the hope of the gospel, and continues steadfastly, and holds on, then you give evidence of having had the mighty saving work of God, because you possess the only faith that saves, and that's an enduring faith."

These passages then define the nature of saving faith. They are not warnings in the sense that believers would need to be warned to hang on. They are warnings to superficial believers, to sham believers, to professing believers who aren't the real thing. And they are saying, "if your faith is real, it will endure to the end, kept by God, protected by God."

But how does he protect us? Through faith. He gives us a faith that saves and a faith that endures to the end. We were saved by faith and we endure by faith. It is not natural. It is supernatural. It is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8-9 says. Just as you were not saved apart from faith, a gift from God, you cannot keep being saved until your glorification by any human faith, but rather by that same supernatural faith that God gives you. You were commanded to believe and you did, savingly. You were commanded to obey for salvation the gospel, and you did. You are now commanded to believe and obey for sanctification and you do. And you are commanded to persevere in obedience and faith to the very end and you will.

What the writers are saying is this is how you identify the real believer. You're the real thing if you persevere. And the text on which that whole interpretation really rests is 1 John 2:19. "They went out from us, but they were not really of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." When somebody abandons the faith it's proof positive that it wasn't saving faith. It wasn't the supernatural faith that God gives, because it didn't remain, because it didn't abide, because it didn't continue, because it didn't hold fast, because it didn't endure.

In 2 Timothy 2:12, we read this, "If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us." There are only two possibilities of people who profess Christ, the real and the false. If we endure, we're the real and we'll reign. If we deny, he will deny us. You remember what Jesus said? "If you confess me before men, I'll confess you before the angels of God or before my Father in heaven. If you deny me before me, I'll deny you." If ever anyone denies Christ, rejects Christ, all they manifest is that they never had the real faith, because the real faith is an enduring faith, it is the gift of supernatural faith that endures to the end.

2 Timothy 2:13. "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot deny himself." And he has identified himself with you. He has given you to share in his life. Those who endure are the true believers. Those who do not endure are false professing believers, and the true believers will have temporary struggles with their faith.

And it's true. There are times when our faith is weak. And do we forget the words of Jesus who said to his own devoted followers, "O you of - " what? " - of little faith?" But never outright denial in some final and complete sense. So, it really is fitting that we turn to Peter, because Peter had the real saving faith, but he also manifest temporary weakness and even a temporary denial when confronted at the trial of Jesus. So let's go back to our text of 1 Peter chapter 1.

Peter is the one to whom we turn for the strong testimony of persevering in spite of faith that is weak and being protected by God with a faith that cannot fail. Peter's faith had its weak moments. There were those temporary denials. I might just fill in a little blank for you. Peter had that terrible temporary lapse, you will remember, before Pentecost, before the Holy Spirit came to dwell in him. "And after

the Holy Spirit is come upon you, you shall have power,” Jesus said.

After the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, you never hear anything about a denial on the part of Peter again. He stands up before the whole population of Jerusalem and preaches Christ. But Peter understood persevering faith. He understood lapses, but he also understood persevering faith. His lapse was never final and it was never complete. He surely understood then the Lord's faithful love. He understood restoration. You remember how the Lord brought him and restored him. He understood grace. He understood the strength of the faith that the Lord had given him. If you're the real thing, your faith will not fail completely or finally. You will, to the very end, trust in Christ because you are kept.

Let's look at verse 5, 1 Peter 1:5. "Protected by the power of God through faith." That is such an important statement. Protected by the power of God through faith. How does God keep us? Through our faith, through our persevering, enduring, continuing faith. Now remember, Peter is writing to Christians who are being persecuted, even martyred. And in the face of that, they were wondering whether their faith would hold up, and they were very anxious about it. Would their faith fail if they were taken prisoner? Would their faith fail if they were facing beatings? Would their faith fail if they were facing death?

They didn't trust in their own strength because they knew their own struggles as believers. They knew they all lived like we do in Romans 7, not doing what they want to do and doing what they don't want to do, and battling the remaining flesh. And they wondered whether or not they would ever be able to survive in extreme trial of persecution. Not trusting in their own faith, they feared their faith might fail.

Peter writes this letter and notes that they're going to have some very, very trying times. Over in 2:20, he talks about being harshly treated and enduring it, enduring it with patience. In chapter 3, he talks about the harm that could befall them. In chapter 4, he talks about them suffering as a Christian - verse 16 - and not feeling ashamed, but glorifying God. I mean, it's pretty clear that they're going to have some very difficult times. 5:10. "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of grace..." and so forth, and so on.

And so the letter recognizes that they're under very serious intimidation and threat. And they're concerned as to whether their faith will survive. And Peter says in verse 5, "you're protected, you're protected by the power of God through faith." And what I've been saying is it's not your faith it's the faith that comes from God that's given to you as a gift. It's a supernatural faith.

Now we're looking at the elements or the components of this protection. And let me go back just to what we said last time. First of all, we're protected by a living hope. Protected by a living hope, 1 Peter 1:3-4. "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, undefiled, will not fade away - " I love this word " - reserved in heaven for you."

You have a living hope. What is that? A hope that cannot die, that's the point. It's a hope that cannot die. It can never die. Hebrews 6:19 says, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast." And what is our hope? Our hope is heaven. Our hope is to see Christ, to receive our eternal reward, to enter in to our heavenly home, to receive our inheritance.

This is the future for us, the future in the next life. This is an inheritance that Peter says is imperishable. I mean, how many ways can he say it? It can't perish. It's undefiled. It can't be corrupted. It's unfading. It can't be diminished, and it's reserved, and it's frankly reserved for you in heaven. And by the way, heaven is the safest place to put anything, that's why in Hebrews 6 it says that our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, has himself entered into heaven. He's entered into heaven. Listen to this. "This hope - " as I just read, " - we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us."

Jesus went into heaven and anchored there our eternal hope. This hope is anchored, secure in the safest place, which is heaven. I'm reminded of Matthew 6:19-21. "Lay up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust does not corrupt, and thieves cannot break through and steal." It's the safest place.

In Revelation 21:27, "Nothing unclean ever enters there. No one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it." No thieves can get there to steal your inheritance. 22:14. "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside of heaven are the dogs, the sorcerers, the immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices lying." It's the safest place you can put anything, because only the redeemed and the righteous are there. And what is in heaven is sealed.

Go back for a minute to Ephesians 1. Ephesians chapter 1 is this great statement made in verses 3 through 14. Verses 3 through 14, most Bible scholars say, is one sentence, which means Paul got pretty hyper here. He never put a period anywhere here. It just keeps flowing. But it starts out, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ - " every spiritual blessing. Every spiritual blessing. What does it involve? "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Now get this, will you please? "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

Before the world ever began, before time ever began, he chose us to be there when it was all over with him in glory. And so he's going to get us there. "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of his will, to the praise of the glory of his

grace.” He predestined us to be adopted as sons. This was his intention. This was his will. And it’s to the praise of the glory of his grace. So he determined in eternity past that he would bring us to glory. He predestined that.

“And therefore he freely bestowed this grace on us in the beloved, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished on us.” And down in to verse 11. “We have obtained an inheritance.” It’s an inheritance having been predestined according to his purpose. This is about an inheritance that was predetermined before time began. Our eternal destiny was locked up, sealed and delivered, as it were, before the world was ever created.

It was all according - verse 11 - “according to his purpose and he works all things after the counsel of his will. The purpose of it was that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be the praise of his glory. In him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed - ” look at this “ - you were - ” after “you believed,” what’s the next word? “ - sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Now, you can call the Holy Spirit a lot of things but when you call the Holy Spirit “the Holy Spirit of promise,” the Holy Spirit comes as a seal to guarantee something in the future, something unrealized as to yet. “You were sealed in him at the moment that you believed and the Holy Spirit of promise was given to you as a pledge - ” That’s the Greek word *arrabn*, down payment, “down payment.” Down payment. It also is a word for engagement ring, “ - of our inheritance.”

You were given the Holy Spirit as a seal at the moment you believed as God viewed the future and “the redemption of his own possession to the praise of his glory.” And that phrase, “the praise of his glory,” is repeated over and over there.

So, you understand, then, that the moment that you believed, you were sealed and your inheritance is unchangeable. That’s the way God planned it in eternity past, and that’s his purpose, that’s his will, and that’s exactly what he will do. From the moment you believed, you were sealed, and the Spirit was given to you as that seal.

Look over to chapter 4, same book, Ephesians 4:30. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of final redemption.” You have been given a living hope, beloved, a living hope, the hope that cannot die, an inheritance that cannot ever change, and you have been given a down payment, a guarantee in the indwelling Holy Spirit of promise, who seals you for that day. So, you are protected by the power of God through a living hope.

Secondly, we’re protected by God’s own power. And I just want to expand on that which is - I’ve already having commented on it. We just simply said last time that phrase in verse 5, “protected by

the power of God,” is intended to remind us that we are protected by the greatest power there is. “Protected by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” We are protected by the power of God until that salvation which is now ready. The word means “prepared, at hand, present, already accomplished,” until it’s finally delivered in the last time when we see Christ in his glory. It’s like Philippians 1:6. “He that begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” The day of Jesus Christ is the same as the day of redemption, the day we see Christ and enter into eternal glory. It’s the day that John had in mind in 1 John 3:2. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we’ll see him just as he is.”

And also in 2 Timothy - we can’t miss this one - 4:7. “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. In the future there’s laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all those who have loved his appearing.” We are sealed until a salvation to be revealed at the last time is ours. We are kept to that by divine power, the very power of God himself.

And that draws us in our minds into one other very important passage. Turn back to Romans 8.

And here in this section, probably the greatest passage on the perseverance of the saints, we see just how great the power of God is. Romans 8:38-39. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” There isn’t any power that can conquer the power of God and his love for his own. So, that’s review. We persevere through a living hope and through divine power.

Thirdly, and this is very important for us, we are protected by hope, we are protected by power, we are protected by trials. We are protected by trails. This may seem to be sort of counter-intuitive, against the grain of what seems reasonable at first, but I want to show you how important this is. If you don’t get anything but his, you will get the heart and soul of this wonderful truth here. Look at verse 6. “In this you greatly rejoice.”

Sure, of course we rejoice that we’re protected by God’s power, protected through a living hope. We do rejoice in that. “We rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, - ” if God determines that it’s necessary, “ - you have been distressed by various trials.” Now stop there for a moment.

“You greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.” And the trials are different for everybody because the spiritual necessities are different for everybody. We all are at different points along the sort of the path of spiritual development, and the Lord needs to do different things in our lives, so we get tests according to necessity that God determines we have for them and we rejoice in those tests.

Instead of these people looking at the possibility of being arrested, put in prison, tortured or martyred and fearing their faith would fail, he says, "You ought to greatly rejoice in these distressing trials." Verse 7. Here's the reason, "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."

Now, just take the first part of that verse. This is the proving of your faith. We are protected by trials. God sustains our faith. Here's a way to understand it. God sustains our faith not by keeping it away from trials, not by making sure it's never tested. God doesn't protect us, hold on to us, keep us enduring continually, holding fast by making life easy. He does the opposite. God sustains our true faith by putting it through hard times. He sustains our faith by means of trials.

You have a trial and you come through the trial trusting the Lord. And you say, "This faith is the real thing." The phrase, "you greatly rejoice," might catch you by surprise. You know, we get it backwards and, of course, we're not helped at all by these ridiculous prosperity preachers that are all over the place giving people false hope and telling them lies, preaching prosperity instead of preaching suffering, trials.

And so the phrase, "you greatly rejoice in trials," may catch you a little bit by surprise. But remember, these people are facing life-threatening persecutions. Fear is a human response. And Peter says, "Yet you greatly rejoice." Why? You rejoice because these tests prove the character of your faith. Human faith would disappear.

We know that if you go back to the parable of the soils. Some of the seed, you remember, went into ground where there was rock underneath, remember that? Rocky ground. And it sprung up for a little while, and when persecution came, what happened? It withered and died. It's always a test of the reality of spiritual life. Always a test.

Trials strengthen faith and they reveal true faith. Look at James chapter 1, James 1:2 says essentially the same thing. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." You know, I guess there's something wonderful about getting to the age I'm at. People ask me, "Do you question your salvation?" Sometimes young people ask me that. Somebody even asked me that this morning. "I'm struggling with whether I'm really a Christian or not. Do you struggle with that?" And my answer honestly is no.

When I was very young, you know, the devil would hammer me with doubts. But the truth of the matter is I don't question the true character of my saving faith because it's withstood so many trials. Every time you go through a trial, you see the nature of your faith. The trials don't help God find out what kind of faith you have. He gave it to you. It's not that he needs information about your faith. But

they become a joy to you “when you encounter various trials - ” verse 3, “ - knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and endurance has a perfecting result.”

I mean, what is more wonderful? What is a greater gift than to have the assurance of salvation? Anything better than that? If you ever live with doubts and fears and all of that, it's wonderful to know you've got the real thing. It's wonderful to see its capability to survive disaster. In fact, I have found in my life that the more severe the trial, the stronger my faith is, the more my confidence in God rises.

Second Timothy is another text that's helpful on this, 2 Timothy 1:8. Paul says, “Join me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.” Verse 9. “God who saved us, called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” There is that doctrine of election, predestination which is foundational to our security.

But he says in verse 10. “Now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer, but I am not ashamed.” He's saying, “I survive, amazingly. In fact, I rise to the occasion.” The greater the suffering, it seems as though the brighter the shining testimony. And now Paul can say from personal testimony, middle of verse 12, “I know whom I have believed.”

How do you know him? Because he's manifested himself. He's manifested himself in all my suffering, in all my trials, and I know whom I have believed. I know that I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

What is that day? Redemption day, the day of Christ, the day you see him face-to-face. I know whom I have believed. I know that I have believed. I know he is able, that is *dunatos*. He is powerful to guard what I have entrusted to him. By the way, that's *parathk*, that's “deposit,” what I've deposited with him. My life, my soul, my eternity. I know he's able to guard it. I know he can guard it through my faith, because no matter what the trial, my faith never fails. He has given me a faith that survives it all. Real faith emerges from trials stronger than ever.

You know, back to Romans 8 again. You just can't stay away from that chapter talking about this. But in Romans 8, Paul says in verse 35, “Who's going to separate us from the love of Christ?” Is there anything that can happen that can cause Christ to stop loving us? Or you could flip it over. Either way in the Greek. Is there anything that could happen that could cause us to stop loving Christ? “Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword?” You think he just sort of grabbed those words out of the air? No, that's autobiographical. Been there.

Tribulation? Daily plots against my life. Distress, without food, without clothing, cold, in the sea, persecution constant, famine often, nakedness as a prisoner, beaten with whips, rods, in peril of robbers and peril of my own countrymen, and peril of the Gentiles. He gives a whole list in 2 Corinthians 11. Sword, been there, seen that waved at me, and I'm telling you in it all, "though we are put literally on the brink of death all day long, we were considered sheep to be slaughtered - " verse 37 " - but in all these things we overwhelmingly - " what? " - conquer." That's where the word "Nike" comes from, *nik*, the conqueror. You see, this kind of faith that God gives us rises in the trial. It rises.

Now I've never faced persecution. I've faced some pretty hostile environments. You have to put your faith on the line in some environments. I find a level of energy, and a level of commitment, and a level of conviction, and a level of boldness in those environments that perhaps is even greater than others. And there is that work of the Holy Spirit so that that trial becomes for me the affirmation that the faith, not mine, but that he's given me is the real thing.

Trials do - back to our text - produce distress for a little while. They come like fire to burn off the dross. And that's the point. Not only do they reveal your faith, but they purify it. And what emerges, 1 Peter 1, is a faith that is more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire. When you get your faith tested, it comes out purer, more precious. And I will tell you, with that in your mind, you - instead of asking for God to protect you from trials, you - should ask him to make sure he puts you through all the trials necessary to give you the confidence that your faith is real.

I love what it says in Acts 5:41. "They went on their way from the presence of the Council." you know, the Council "called the apostles and flogged them." That's what the Sanhedrin did, "and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus." You know what their reaction was? "They went on their way from the presence of the Council rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name." You know why they came out of there so happy, bleeding, bruised, battered, embarrassed, humiliated, full of joy? Why? Because they knew they had a faith that was real. They knew they had the real thing. And all it did was make them bolder. Verse 42 - I love this. "Every day in the temple, from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Of course, the worst they could do to them was haul them in and do it all over again and that would strengthen their faith more.

Even Jesus Christ himself was strengthened through suffering. It says in 1 Peter that "he did not revile when he was reviled, while suffering uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to him who righteously judges." And the writer of Hebrews says he was "made perfect through suffering."

So we're protected. We're protected because God has given us a living hope. That is to say it's a hope built into our faith that cannot die. God has given us a faith that is energized by divine power that cannot be assaulted. No force is its equal. And God also protects us through a faith that is tested and tried.

There's something else here that I must mention to you in 1 Peter, number four in my little list, we are protected by eternal purpose. We've been all around this, so I don't need to belabor the point. But we are protected by eternal purpose, by a living hope, divine power, trials and eternal purpose. Look at verse 7.

We are headed for something, the end of verse 7, to be found "in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Our faith is designed to survive to the end. This is an amazing promise. We have a faith that hopes, a faith that is unassailable, protected by divine power, a strength of faith that is only made stronger through trial. We have a proven, tested faith that finds its fulfillment in the purpose and plan of God in a union with the Lord Jesus Christ at his appearing. At which time we receive glory, praise and honor from God. That goes right back to the reason we were saved in the beginning, we were chosen so that we would be brought to eternal glory.

You know what the Bible teaches about this, we will be like him, we'll have a body like unto his body. We have a heavenly home. He's preparing a place for us. We're just passing through this world. We're not citizens here. This momentary light affliction that we suffer is not to be compared with that glorious weight of glory that awaits us in his presence. We cry out for the redemption of our body because we know what God has prepared for those that love him. You know all those verses. We are already, as it were, heavenly citizens. Our Father is there, our home is there, our life is there. The pledge of God is to bring us to eternal glory. And by the way, that was his pledge not at the time of our hearing the gospel and believing it. That was his pledge to us in eternity past, long before we ever or anybody ever was even created. God predetermined then that we would be brought to eternal glory.

That is to say you don't understand salvation at all if you don't understand its three dimensions. There is the point at which you believe. There is the process by which you are kept. And there is the final salvation in which you are glorified. And when God predetermined to save you, he predetermined that all three would take place, not some part of them. That's why in Romans 8:18 Paul says, "I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that's to be revealed to us." Whatever we might suffer here, we rejoice because it shows us we have a real faith and strengthens that faith and none of that suffering is to be compared with the glory that God has predetermined for us.

So we are protected by a living hope, divine power, trials, and the promise of eternal glory. Can I just give you one more, number five? We're protected by undying love. We are protected by undying love. Verse 8. "Though you have not seen him, you love him." Though you have not seen him, you love him. That's the bottom line. We have a love for Jesus Christ. "If anybody doesn't love the Lord Jesus Christ - " 1 Corinthians 16:22 " - let him be accursed." This is a profound statement about the nature of true salvation. It is characterized not only by faith in Christ, believing in him, but loving him.

You heard somebody in baptism say, "Just because I believed the facts I assumed I was a Christian." You can believe the facts and not be saved. The devil believes the facts. The demons believe the facts. They know them to be true. The issue here is loving the Lord Jesus Christ. "And you love me if you keep my - " what? " - my commandments. You love me if you desire my glory and my honor." Though you have not seen him, you love him.

If you were to define Christianity in its purest sense, you would have to use that word "love." You could talk about believing in Christ, but you really wouldn't get there because so many people say they believe in Jesus Christ. In fact, I read a foolish article today in which a man said there are three billion Christians in the world. Well there are probably three billion people who believe in Jesus, but I'm quite sure there aren't that many who love him, who love him sacrificially, who love him totally, who love him obediently, who love him worshipfully, who love him righteously. "And because we love him, though we do not see him now - " verse 8 says, " - but believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

You can tell a Christian because they love Christ so much it comes out in joy. It comes out in joy. Do you know the only religion in the world that sings is Christianity? Do you know that? A few others chant in a minor key, sort of non-biblical rap. And you know what? True Christianity sings in a major key. We sing. Why do we sing? We sing because we're filled with joy. About whom do we sing? We sing about Christ.

I like praise choruses, you know, but I guess 90 percent of the praise choruses are sort of drawn out of the Old Testament. I like to sing about Jesus Christ. I don't mind singing about the Old Testament, but I like to get to the good part, and that's Christ. We love him. What did Jesus say to Peter in John 21 when he wanted to restore him? At the Sea of Galilee he said, "Peter do you - " what? " - do you love me?" That's the way he defined his relationship. "Do you love me?" And Peter says, "I love you." He said, "Well then, do what I tell you, feed my sheep."

He said to him a second time, "Do you love me?" Peter said, "Yes, I love you." "Feed my lambs." He said to him a third time, "Peter, do you love me?" And the reason he asked him three times, of course, was paralleling Peter's three denials. The Lord knew Peter knew that love was demonstrated in obedience, and he said a third time, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter knew he couldn't call on his obedience, because there wasn't any. So I love what he said. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you." Boy, I really like that. He said, "You're omniscient. You know what's in here. You know I love you." "Feed my sheep."

And he knows if we love him. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love him because he first loved us." You know a true human relationship requires love and trust. Love and trust. So does our relationship with Christ. That's how it's really defined. And there's no such thing as a Christian who doesn't love Christ. In all

your life long as a believer you grow in your love for Christ. You grow in your affection for him.

That's why the Apostle Paul says, "That I may know him." Because the more you love someone, the more you want to know them. Paul knew that he was loved and - back to Romans 8 again - he knew nothing could separate him from Christ's love for him, but he also knew that nothing could separate him from his love for Christ. I mean, isn't that the idea? You can hit me with whatever you want. You can hit me with tribulation, distress, persecution, nakedness, famine, sword, and nothing will change my love for Christ. Nothing. I love him with a love that he gave me. Romans 5:5. "The love of Christ shed abroad in your heart." It's a gift from God, just like faith. You've been given a supernatural faith. You've been given a supernatural love which never changes.

And so, it is that undying love that holds on to us. It's a component of our faith. So we are kept through faith, verse 5, and now verse 9, finally. What is the end? "Obtaining - listen to this - as the outcome of your - " what? " - your faith, the salvation of your soul." That's why we say this, folks, that this doctrine should be called the perseverance of the saints, or better yet, the perseverance of faith.

You have been given a faith that never perishes. You have been given a faith that is protected by the power of God, a faith that has a hope that never dies, a faith sustained by a divine power that can't be overthrown, a faith that is proven, tested, strengthened through trials, a faith that is designed for the fulfillment of eternal glory, which was promised before the world began, a faith that contains within it an undying love for Christ. And the outcome of that faith will be the obtaining of the final salvation of your souls.

Simply, folks, there is no escape from this reality. No escape. The result of this saving faith is your final salvation. The present salvation which you now experience is a result of this faith. The initial salvation was a result of this faith. And the final salvation will be yours because this faith will persevere and endure to the very end. That is the nature of this faith. It is nothing less than a permanent gift from God.

To even consider the possibility that you could lose your salvation is a misrepresentation of God's grace. It's a misrepresentation of the nature of faith, the gift of his love, the work of his Spirit. It's a misrepresentation of his power and his purpose. It's a misrepresentation of his eternal decree in the lives of his elect. And it is true. And it's probably a good place to end, if there ever is such a thing. Philippians 1:6, as I said earlier, "I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Does that not end the argument? If he started it, he'll what? You got it.

Lord, thank you for a wonderful time in these truths, so greatly enriching to us. Thank you for this gift, so undeserved. Thank you for the joy that comes because we know it's forever. Fill our hearts with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Help us to greatly rejoice in the permanence of this gift of grace.

Thank you for an enduring faith, and enduring love, and enduring hope. Thank you that all of this began before time, and shall be consummated in eternity yet to come, and all of it will redound to your glory, in your praise, which is our highest joy. We thank you for the testimonies that we heard tonight of those whom you chose who have now come to faith, and are on the path to final salvation.

And, Lord, we know, as Paul said, that our salvation now, our final salvation is nearer than when we believed, and soon we know Jesus Christ will split the skies and gather us to himself. And that day, that day of redemption, that day of Christ will be reality, and that glorious eternity to which our persevering faith takes us will be beyond anything we can ever imagine. Thank you for this grace and this salvation in the name of Christ. Amen.

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