

Pastor Jacob Hanson
"Perseverance"
10/28/2018

Opening Prayer

Good morning, and welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners United Methodist Church. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a blessing and honor to be here with you today. If you are new, or haven't been around lately, or are visiting from out of town, a special welcome to you. We hope to meet you and converse after the service, we would love to get to know you. Today is a special day for us at our church, as today is the ThankOffering Dinner at KUMC, and all are welcome to attend! It will be held at 11:30 following the Service and Sunday School, out in the fellowship hall. We hope you will join us. For our service, we are continuing today with our month long study of the book of Job and the book of Hebrews in tandem. This is the last day we are looking at these two books together, and in particular we will be looking at the end of the book of Job. The theme for today will wrap up everything we have looked at this month regarding these two books. We have talked about how we don't yet see God's full plan, about how we are called to come freely before the Lord with what is on our hearts, and about how God is big enough and great enough to take on whatever we have that ails us. Today's topic of perseverance is a fitting end to the story of Job, and the conclusion to our four part look at these two books. Persevering in our faith is a marathon.

First of all, what is perseverance? Perseverance is sticking with something with the expectation of good results in the midst of hardship. A good example would be in long distance running. It takes a lot of heart to continue to run for an extended period of time. After a couple of miles even an in shape individual's heart rate will go up, their

knees may start aching, and their body will start telling them to quit running. But a good runner who perseveres through the race runs with an expectation to finish it. As Christians our faith life is a marathon, it takes a lot of perseverance to finish well. Another great practical example of perseverance that many of you can probably understand and appreciate is in completing your school studies. Whether you went to medical school or just barely graduated high school with your GED, anyone who has completed their level of schooling likely knows what it is like to persevere through a tough class and a tough schedule. My mom, when she had me as a toddler and was pregnant with my sister, went through her nurses training through Eau Claire's technical college. She persevered through it, she stuck with it and got through. Why? Because she knew that if she was able to graduate, if she was able to complete her classes and get through, she would have a much better job opportunity afterwards, a job that would better provide for her and her family. She persevered through those tough nursing classes while having two babies so that the prize of having a good job might be hers, so that she would better be able to support us. That is the heart behind perseverance. This idea of perseverance, which we can easily attribute to the runner or the student, is also an essential quality in a Christian's life. Persevering in faith is at the heart of us being Christians.

Stating in our reading from Job today we see the final fruits of Job's perseverance. Over the last three weeks we have seen Job get kicked around an awful lot. He loses everything, he lies in anguish being bereted by his wife and friends, and he genuinely wishes he had never been born. Yet, in the midst of all of this suffering, all of this anguish, Job perseveres that the Lord is good, even though he doesn't understand what the Lord is doing. So what was Job's response? To cry out for an answer from the Lord, to cry out for understanding. Last

week we read that finally the Lord comes and shows Job His omnipotence, and now today we get the final chapter in the life of Job. We read that “The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold.” We also read “The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.” We see that, in many ways, Job’s perseverance pays off. We see that Job does finally receive some true comfort from the Lord. Job clings to the Lord all the way through the most difficult trials imaginable, and the Lord honors Job with a double portion compared to what he had before. Thousands of animals (which denotes great wealth), thousands of articles of gold and silver, many wonderful children, and an exceptionally long life that is “full of days.” That is what Job receives after he has lost everything. That is quite the turnaround for someone who has had an extremely difficult life up to this point. That is quite the reward for someone who has persevered through such an awful and terrible time in his life. But this happy end to Job’s life is only a small comparison to that which is promised to us by Christ. If you think that Job’s reward for persevering, for holding true to the Lord in the midst of his hardships, was really great, understand that as Christians we are promised so much more. Truthfully, while Job’s reward is great for his perseverance, if we persevere in our faith to the Lord, we receive something much greater: eternal life with the Lord in heaven. This is why the writer of Hebrews calls us to persevere, this is why we as Christians are called to run towards the prize. It is worth it.

Our reading from Hebrews explains what is promised to us through Christ if we but cling to our Creator. It reads in 7:25 “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Christianity 101 is

that it is Christ who takes our sins to the cross with Him and that it is Christ who rises from the dead to prevail just as we will over death. Christ died for us, raised Himself from the dead, and will take us home to heaven when the end comes. This may be something many of you have heard since childhood and have become accustomed to hearing, but it is a great thing! The crux of why we would believe in a Savior like Christ in the first place is because of this salvation that we have in Him. All we have to do is persevere. Of course we are called to do many things in our lives to honor the Lord, but at the heart of it is that we are called to cling to the Lord in faith, no matter what may befall us.

Right now the world over Christians are being persecuted at an all time high. Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Turkey, Iran, Syria, China, Mexico, Colombia, Yemen, and many other countries are filled with Christians who hold to their faith in the midst of enormous persecutions. For no other reason than their faith in Christ, these people are being killed and tortured in untold numbers. Why would someone who is being tortured hold to a faith in Christ? Why would they persevere in their faith? Because they don't look just to a reward here on earth, they have faith that the Lord will bring them home to eternal salvation. This isn't to say that we should be uncaring about what happens here, but it does mean that even in the worst of times we should be holding onto our Lord and trust that great things are in store. We have a reason to persevere. We have a great prize waiting for us at the end of the race.

But how do we persevere, and what does it mean to hold to our faith? It is easy for us to say those kinds of things as Christians, and Christian leaders are especially guilty of using Christian jargon instead of speaking plainly. What it means to persevere in our faith is for us to not give up on Christ when things get tough. A good example would be

the parable that Jesus uses about the sower. This is a common parable that gets talked about a lot in church, but it is an extremely good example here. To sum up the whole parable (found in Matthew 13:1-23) Jesus talks about how faith takes root in different people. Some hear God's call for salvation and reject it, some hear it and like it but end up caring about the things of this world more, and some hear it and commit to it. There is one other type of faith that Jesus talks about though, and it is the type that takes root, grows good, but the roots are bad and it withers under adversity. They don't see the long view in being a Christian, they treat their faith like a sprint instead of a marathon.

Many Christians unfortunately leave the faith when adversity comes their way. Job overcomes huge adversity and clings to his faith in the Lord. Some of the people in Hebrews that the author is writing to continue to cling to Christ while others fall away under the threat of persecution. Here in America, many people will outright leave the faith (or at least the church) when adversity comes. When they lose a job, when they hear something they don't like from the pulpit, when somebody who is imperfect but is part of the church wrongs them, etc., they will leave behind this faith. They won't persevere. Truthfully it is in those times of adversity when our Christian faith matters most. It is in those times that the Lord will provide peace that surpasses all understanding and hope to those who seem to have no hope, if we but will acknowledge Him. If we will but pray to Him who is in charge, if we will but continue to give credence to the Lord and trust that He will see us through, then we can expect good things on the other side of whatever adversity life throws at us. In other words, don't give up when it gets hard to be a Christian, but expect that the Lord will see you through.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the Lord doesn't exist or that He doesn't care or that He isn't powerful enough to see you through. That is one of the major lessons we should take away from the book of Job: the Lord is still in control even when life sucks, and that He still has good things in store for you if you cling to Him. If you persevere, the Lord will strengthen your faith, give you peace that surpasses all understanding in the midst of huge struggles, and walk with you. Job had the assurance of God's greatness to guide him through. The people out of the book of Hebrews were reminded that the reason they came to believe in Christ in the first place is because Christ was their hope in salvation. We should understand that if we persevere by holding onto Christ in prayer and hope, then we too can expect God in His greatness to see us through, and we too can expect to see the glory that is an eternity in heaven when this life is through. That is the beauty of a Christian life, there is always hope. Take the long view, know that this faith is not a sprint, but a marathon. Things will not always be wonderful and bubbly and happy, but the Lord is always in control, and we can always expect His greatness to see us through until we get to join Him at home in heaven.

Seeing as how today is our ThankOffering Dinner following service, and how we are called to perseverance in our darkest times, it helps to remind ourselves what we have to be thankful for. I don't know what has been on your hearts this month, whether it be family struggles, health, financial concerns, a persistent sin you have been struggling over, or one of a myriad of other things, it is good for us to remember the things we do have to be thankful for. They help us to persevere in faith in our darkest times. Job ultimately had the Lord's power to cling to, while the Hebrews had their hope in salvation to fall back upon in

dark times. We have both. In reality we have much to be thankful for. With that being said, I would encourage you to take a moment in silence to write on your bulletin note sheet a couple of things that you are thankful for. There are many things which a lot of us take for granted that we should be thankful for in this season. My wife and I practice this exercise occasionally, to remind us that we are blessed. We talk about being thankful for good families, for having good health, and for a warm bed. Those are just a couple of examples. Take a moment here to reminisce or write about what you have to be thankful for, then we will close in prayer.

Know that even when your life seems the darkest the Lord is still in control, that we still have salvation to look forward to, and that He will see you through. The Christian life isn't a sprint, but a marathon, with a great reward in store for us.

Closing Prayer