

A Spirit of Perseverance

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[0 : 00] All right, Alex, that was fast. Well, good morning. I'd like to add my word of welcome to those already expressed this morning, and it's a great honor to be back in New Bern.

It's been a while since I had a chance to come back. I blame that on Elliot, because I can. I just blame it on Elliot. It's all his fault. But it is great to be here with you this morning, and for those who don't know me, my name's Andrew.

I'm one of the marketplace elders down in Moorhead, and so, and I get a chance this morning to close the series out of Nehemiah. And so, it's been a very good series for, I think, in my life. It's challenged me in a lot of different ways. And before I even get to the closing, I kind of want to look back just a little bit, just to see where we have been, just to remind you, to stir you up by way of reminder.

The first thing that we really talked about, and this goes all the way back to the very beginning of the series, that the church is really needing a renewal. I'm not sure if Jesse told you this, or if you've heard this, but churches are closing their doors quicker than they're opening up.

[1 : 13] And so, we are having more churches just say, that's it, we're done, than we are planting new churches. Young people are fleeing the church. They see no reason for it.

They want something different. And so, there is a need for the church to renew itself, and it's because the church is beginning to dwindle. Now, this is not just in the States. My wife and I went to Croatia for two weeks back in May, and we visited, it's a beautiful country. And on every high hill in Croatia, there's a church. And I mean churches, big churches, ornate churches.

They're huge. But there is no spiritualness to the country. There is no desire to know who God is. And really, what they use these churches for is simply a tourist attraction.

That's what they're there for. And so, churches are dying, not just in the States. It's around the world. We are becoming more and more and more post-Christian. We also looked at what it means to build something together.

[2 : 20] Nehemiah is about Jerusalem rebuilding the walls around it. And just so you understand this, God has brought all of you here. If you're followers of Jesus, He has gifted you so that you can use your gifts in building up a work.

That's what it's all about. It's about you being together in unity and using your gifts in building up the church. We also consider what it means to be resilient under pressure.

Now, Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies on all sides. The church of Jesus Christ is surrounded by enemies on all sides.

The world does not agree with the church. It does not agree with the centrality of who Christ is. It does not agree with the blood atonement. It does not agree with any of those things that are core to what the church stands for.

And so, like Jerusalem was surrounded by their enemies, we are surrounded by our enemies. And we are not well-liked. And we are getting to be more and more less well-liked.

[3 : 25] I mean, the world looks at us very harshly now. And so, we have to be resilient. We also consider generosity, what it means to give of your finances to the work of the church, maybe even outside of the church.

How to be generous, how to look at your money and say, it's not mine, it doesn't belong to me, I'm going to give it as God gives me direction or gives me opportunity.

So, there is a sense where you have to be generous with what God has given you. And finally, we looked at what true repentance is, what it means to truly repent of sin, and also covenant faithfulness.

So, there's a lot. And that's just scratching the surface of what this series has talked about over the last few weeks. And so, if you're new here, and you haven't had a chance to listen to all the sermons, I would encourage you to go online on the One Harbor app, hit New Bern, hit sermons, and you can hear the sermons as they were preached.

I think it would be very good for you to hear those. This morning, we're going to end our series on what the church needs to do, which is to live with a spirit of perseverance.

[4 : 36] Now, the word perseverance does come with just a little bit of baggage. It does have some baggage because it really is one of the focal points of reform thought.

The reformers looked at perseverance as being a mark of what a true believer was. It kind of flies in the face of easy believism, where someone would look at you and say, I walked forward when I was a child, and I've lived my life as I've wanted to the rest of my life, but I'm okay.

And really, perseverance is one of those things that the reformers said, no, it's the one who perseveres to the very end who are truly saved. And so, this faith and salvation, that's how they viewed it.

Now, we also look at perseverance as being, you know, when somebody speaks, you have to persevere. It's almost like, okay, that means I'm getting ready to go through a bad time or a time of great testing, a time of great struggle.

And so, I have to, you know, tighten up a little bit, and I have to go through these things. And so, in a lot of ways, we view perseverance as simply being the backside of a bunch of trials.

[5 : 50] A very good example of this is the movie Papillon. Has anybody ever seen the movie Papillon in here? Okay, one or two. Very good movie.

All right, Steve McQueen was a star. Dustin Hoffman was in the movie. Papillon is a true story about a French thief who was wrongly accused of murder. And so, the French authorities sent him to French Guiana and to the penal colonies there.

And the movie is based on his attempts over and over to break out, to escape, how they tried to break him as a human being. They put him in solitary for years, not just months.

They put him in solitary for years. And at the very end of the movie, they finally put him on an island, in a hut with no doors, no bars on the windows, and they just look at him and they say, Look, you can live out the rest of your life here.

You cannot escape. It's an island, shark-infested water, jagged rocks. You can't get away. And so, he sits on a wall and he's watching the waves break in a bay.

[6 : 57] And all of a sudden, he realizes that at certain times during the cycle, the waves breaking up against the rock would let something go back out. Instead of just keeping it pinned, it would allow stuff to go back out.

So, he decides that he's going to jump off into the water with two bags of coconuts in burlap sacks tied together. And at the very end of the movie, he is laying on his back in the ocean, nothing around him, holding on to those coconuts saying, I am still here.

And so, he's telling the people, you haven't broke me yet. And so, that is how we tend to look at perseverance. I'm going through stuff and I am still standing.

And so, sometimes when we consider those kind of things, we lose the beauty of what perseverance really is. The definition of perseverance is this.

It is to be steadfast. It is to be intensive or strong. And so, that's what it means to persevere. This idea that you're going to be intense, you're going to be steadfast, you're going to stand strong.

[8 : 09] And so, in a lot of ways, the call to be a persevering church really is calling us to action. Now, when we sometimes we feel pressure to act, we do lose the beauty of what it means to persevere in the faith.

Paul in Romans 15 says that perseverance brings us hope. So, that's one of the things that perseverance will do. It brings you a sense of hope.

Now, I think hope is generated when we fight the good fight of faith. If you're going through a time of great troubles, if you're going through a time of great struggles, and you see yourself to the other side, it gives you a sense of hope.

Why? Because you're still standing. You're still there. And you haven't fallen away from the faith.

And you haven't quit following Jesus. And so, there is a little bit of hope that is set up in you by that. He also says that perseverance is not man-made, okay? So that I, you, we, do not persevere because we do it.

[9 : 16] It is God-given. And so, it is God's power in us, the power to work in us, that gives us the ability to persevere.

And so, we can't generate it. We have to live in it as God does it through us. And so, it is God-given to us. And so, this morning, we're going to look at Nehemiah 13.

And we're just going to consider some of the hindrances to perseverance and what that means for us today. And so, we're going to look back, and we're going to say, okay, what were their hindrances to perseverance?

And we're going to try to apply this to us today. And so, our text this morning is from Nehemiah 13. It is verses 1 through 31. And I will read the text for us.

On that day, they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should enter the assembly of God.

[10 : 17] For they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. Yet, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent. Now, before this, Eliashib, the priest who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priest.

While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem. For in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I went to the king. And after some time, I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem. And I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, prepared for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And I was very angry.

And I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers. And I brought back the vessels of the house of God with the grain offering and the frankincense.

[11 : 42] I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them so that the Levites and the singers who did the work had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, Why is the house of God forsaken?

And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all of Judah brought the tithe of grain. Wine and oil into the storehouses.

And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses, Shelamiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, Padaiah the Levites, and as their assistant, Hanan the son of Zucur, son of Mataniah.

Excuse me. Turn the page. Thank you. Because they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out the good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service. In those days I saw in Judah people treading the wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them up on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

[13 : 00] And I warned them on that day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah.

In Jerusalem itself. Then I confronted the nobles of Judah, and I said to them, What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in the same way?

And did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem, before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath.

And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. Then the merchants and the sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside of Jerusalem once or twice.

But I warned them, and I said to them, Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on, they did not come on the Sabbath.

[14 : 14] Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

In those days, as I saw, the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people.

And I confronted them, and cursed them, and beat some of them, and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves.

Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin on account of such women? Among the many nations, there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made him even to sin. Shall we then listen to you, and do all this great evil, and act treacherously against our God, by marrying foreign women?

[15:29] And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Elisha, the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sambalat the Hornite. Therefore, I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood, and the covenant, and the priesthood, and the Levites.

Thus, I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priest, and Levites, each in his work. And I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits.

Remember me, O my God, for my good. Very long passage. I want to give you the 5,000-foot look at the passage. I can't explain it all, so I want to give you the 5,000-foot view.

First of all, Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for about 12 years. The very first chapter, it says in the year of King Artaxerxes, but 12 years later, he goes back to the king, because he's a cupbearer to the king.

Now, the cupbearer had a very good job. He got a chance to drink a lot of nice wine. The problem was, if it was poisoned, he died. But he did have the king's ear, and so the cupbearer had a very good relationship with the king, because he was close to him all the time.

[16:45] And so he goes back to the king after 12 years in Jerusalem. After some time, and we do not know how long it took, my view is that it took a while, because I think that losing your spiritual strength and beginning to fall away, happens over a period of time, not very quickly.

He had already established a lot of things in Jerusalem, and so for them to all of a sudden start backing up and going the other direction, I think it took some time to do that, but we don't really know how long it took.

But after some time, he went back, and it does not say that he knew that anything bad was going on. Maybe he just wanted to visit, but it took some time before he did this.

Upon his return, he sees that Israel is disobeying God's laws. All those things that he had established, they had turned away from them.

And this took place even though the people in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas had made a covenant promise to God to be obedient. So they had made a covenant promise, oh Lord, we will do these things, but now they have turned back from following God.

[17:56] And their sin was not just in one area. It was across the broad spectrum of everything that they used for worship. It was in their temple worship and the tithes that were brought in.

It was in marriage. It was in their offerings, giving the first fruits of what they had. And then it was also on the Sabbath, they were profaning the Sabbath. And so it wasn't just immorality that sprung up.

It was across the broad spectrum of what it meant to be a child of Israel. It was in every area that they had gone back and started to slide back.

And so a time that should have been a time of great renewal, okay, this renewal of the city walls and the renewal of Jerusalem becomes a rampant, a time of rampant disobedience.

And so Nehemiah confronts what they're doing. So, what does this mean for us today? I mean, we live in 2024. This was written many years ago.

[18:56] This has something to do with an ancient culture that is not like it was in years past. And so what does this have to do with us? Well, the first thing I would say is this. It speaks to the matters of our heart.

Because in our human condition, in our condition as humans, our hearts tend toward compromise. And compromise in our hearts happens even though you may be going through a revival, even though you may be going through a time of great encouragement.

Our hearts tend to fall back and we tend to compromise in our hearts. Donnie Griggs, and most of you probably know him, has a tattoo on his wrist, on his right hand.

Now, he's got a lot of tattoos. This is just one of them. But he's got a tattoo on his wrist that says, prone to wander. And so he, now why does he have that on his wrist? Well, for one reason, it's a song.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Take my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above. That is an old hymn. But it reminds Donnie, and it should remind us, that our hearts are prone to wander.

[20 : 08] And it's not just the modern church that struggles with this falling back, this compromising. Even the early church, from Christ's ascension onward, has struggled with following Jesus in a way of perseverance.

We see this in John's Revelation, the last book of the Bible, in the seven letters to the seven churches. You know, God's, Jesus speaks to the churches, and he says, look, you are doing so well here.

You are really knocking it out of the park here. You are on fire here. But over here, you're sinning. And he always ends the letters, overcome, overcome, persevere, overcome.

You see, it's not just the church of the day that struggles with perseverance. The early church struggled with much the same thing. And so he commends them on one side for killing it and doing well, but then he says, you are sinning against me.

Repent and turn. And so this is something that goes on with us all the time. And what I mean to say to you this morning is simply this. Perseverance is not normative in our lives as people, okay?

[21 : 25] It is not normative for me or you to persevere and is not normative in most churches. And the reason it's not is because our hearts tend to turn away.

Our hearts will turn away. Now, the temptation sometimes comes from the outside, okay? The temptation will often come from those on the outside.

But a lot of times, the temptation is internal. It's internal to who we are. Billy Graham says it this way, sometimes I wonder who is going to win the battle first.

The barbarians beating at our gates from without, okay, those on the outside or the termites of immorality from within. Now, that is a very powerful quote in regards to the battle that we are up against.

And what it says to us is that we have to be very vigilant as people of God to, at our heart, with our hearts, our actions, okay, and our habits.

[22 : 32] We have to stand vigilant over those areas of our lives because temptation will sometimes come outside, but a lot of times it's internal. And it comes from inside.

And that is why God speaking to Cain in Genesis chapter 4 says something very important to the church. If you know what happened in Genesis 4, Cain and Abel are brothers.

They both bring sacrifices to God. Cain brings the first fruits of the ground because he was a farmer. Abel brings the first fruits of the flock because he is a shepherd.

He deals with the sheep. God had regard for Abel's sacrifice, but he did not have regard for Cain's. And Cain was angry with God.

But listen to what God says to Cain. Then the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen? The New American Standard says, Why has your countenance fallen?

[23 : 32] Why has it changed? If you do well, will you not be accepted? Cain, if you do what is right, I will accept you. And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at your door.

Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it. See that? You must rule over it. The Hebrew in this verse speaks of a demon crouching outside of your door and just waiting for you.

It's like, I mean, that's what God is saying to Cain. Cain's sin is crouching outside like a demon and its desire is for you. You must rule over it.

Now, do not hear what I am not saying. I am not saying to you that we sin because of demonic oppression. I am not saying that.

We do wrestle against the forces in the heavenly and wickedness in the heavenly places. Paul says that. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but we wrestle against the spiritual forces of witnesses in the heavenly places.

[24 : 48] We do that. But I don't sin and you don't sin because of demonic oppression. We sin because we are sinful, born into sin, and we don't need anybody's help.

We really don't. We will sin because that is our nature. That is our nature. Remember, our hearts lean toward compromise. Why? Because we're sinful.

And we have to master those impulses. And that is why in the garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus is getting ready to go to the cross and die for his people, he looks at his disciples and he says this, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing. So our spirit inside of us is willing, but the flesh is what? It's weak. Our spirit is willing, our flesh is weak.

The apostle Paul in Romans 7 echoes this greatly because he says in Romans 7, the things that I want to do, I do not do. Those things that I really want to do, I don't do them.

[26 : 04] The things that I don't want to do, I do. You see the battle? The battle is there. My flesh is willing, my spirit inside of me is willing, my flesh is so weak and the two are battling against each other.

And therefore Paul in chapter 7 says, O wretched man that I am, who is going to save me from this body of death? There is a battle going on inside of us and so our hearts want to lean away.

And so how are we going to persevere if our hearts lean that direction? How do we do this? Well the next point would be this, and simply I want to remind you of this, that renewal and reform are a constant in the life of faith.

In other words, in your walk of faith, in your life, you're going to go through periods of struggle and then you're going to go through a valley and then you're going to pop up on the other side, you're going to go to reform and then you're going to go through a valley and then you're going to go up. And life is going to be that way. Your spiritual life is going to be constantly reform and sin, backsliding, all those kind of things, and then going back.

[27 : 16] And that's the way it is. I went out of Beaufort Inlet on Friday morning and it was rough. I mean it was blowing about 35 out to southeast. Southeast winds, Beaufort Inlet, it's a bad day.

It took about 50 minutes to get to a ship that I was bringing in. And so I'm going offshore and we're on the boat and we're up here one minute, down here the next. And it's the way it was the whole time, up and down, up and down, up and down.

That is our life. Now when I talk to you like this, the natural tendency is for you to think, okay, what he's saying to me this morning is I have to try better, work harder, I've got to strive, I've got to do all these things.

That is our natural way of thinking. When somebody challenges us in our faith or what we're doing with our time, normally we would say, okay, I've got to tighten up, I've got to do better, I've got to work against my sin.

But there is something else that is in view here. And I think this is very important for all of us this morning. We need, as followers of Jesus, to evaluate ourselves from time to time.

[28 : 23] We have to evaluate who we are. Now, for those of us like myself, who are very introspective, it's easy to do. When you're an introspective person by nature, you normally will beat yourself up or look at yourself rather harshly because that's the way that you do things.

I mean, you're looking at yourself and you're going, oh, I'm such a sinner, oh, I failed so much. We normally do that. I do that very well. But Scripture does tell us that we need to challenge ourselves. We need to look at ourselves all right. 2 Corinthians 13, 5 says it this way, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.

Examine yourselves. Okay, see that? Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you unless you indeed fail the test?

And so Paul looks at us and he says, you need to examine yourselves. We need to be honest with ourselves. In other words, we cannot look at ourselves with rose colored glasses.

[29 : 35] We have to be very honest about where we are. Many years ago, my wife and Sally and myself went to Denver, Colorado. We were going to ski in Steamboat. And so we got to Steamboat and my wife took a personality test.

It wasn't Myers-Briggs but it was something kind of like that. To see what, I knew her personality, type A all the way. I knew it. I'd been married to her for about eight or nine years. I said, baby, you are type A all the way.

And so she took the test and she looks at the results and Sally goes, I don't agree with that. And I just looked at her and said, baby, that's you. And she goes, I do not agree with that.

That is not me. I said, honey, that is you to the T. And she looked at me and she goes, well, that's just not how I see myself. You see?

How do you see yourself this morning? Do you see yourself right? Are you judging yourselves correctly? You see, life is going to be high and it's going to be low.

[30 : 35] Are you looking at yourselves as you should be? I will tell you this, and this is a confession and I'm going to be very honest to you this morning.

I had been struggling with what I was looking at on my phone. I had Instagram on my phone. Instagram reads my mind. It reads the lust of my heart.

It read it. Every time I would open it up, it was there. My youngest daughter, Rachel, looked at me one day and she said, Dad, I cannot believe that you have Instagram on your phone.

And I looked at her and I said, well, you do. So what's the point? And she said, Dad, there's some bad stuff on there. And I finally had to come to grips with something about myself.

My daughter can handle Instagram because she doesn't look. Her dad cannot handle it. And I took it off my phone. It's the hardest thing I ever did because I am a visually stimulated man.

[31 : 37] And I want to see things and I want to look at things. And I had to be true to myself and say, this is not what I'm supposed to do. And so I took it off.

You see, Sally didn't want to be true about herself. I have to be true about what I am. I am a weak man who stumbles if I don't watch out, if I'm not battling against those tendencies in my life.

Now, sometimes when we are looking at ourselves and we're testing ourselves and we're doing all these things, what we normally will do is we will compare ourselves to other people.

Well, I'm bad, but Otis, now that's bad. That's bad. See, that's how we normally do it. We will normally look at somebody and we will say, I am terrible, but I ain't as bad as you know who down the street.

And we normally will do this, which is being very dishonest with ourselves. You know, the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 says it this way, for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.

[32 : 48] Do you see that? Think about yourself. Test yourselves how? With sober judgment. Look at where you are and say, that is me. And be sober in your judgment.

Do not think more highly of yourself than you should. So how do we do this well if our hearts compromise? If life is up and down like this all the time, how are we to do this well?

Well, one encouragement to you is this. Perseverance is a learned trait. As you go through trials, even if you're a young believer and you're following Jesus and you're finding this a lot harder than you always thought, you can learn to persevere.

It is a learned trait because as you go through struggles, as you go through trials, you begin to mature as a believer. Okay? And so it is a learned trait.

And it does happen as we experience testing and failure. We don't always succeed. I don't always succeed. You don't always succeed. And so there is something to be learned by it.

[33 : 55] But it does come with this caveat. Perseverance does have this one caveat. That faithful perseverance will only grow, will only grow when sin is confronted and dealt with.

It cannot be lost on you that in every area of disobedience Nehemiah calls the people out and he deals with their sin. Even to the point of punching them, throwing furniture, grabbing their beards, slapping them, yelling at them.

Do you see the picture here? Nehemiah goes off like a Roman candle and he challenges them where they are. And so we have to deal with sin in much the same way.

Now this kind of reaction to sin is not normative in our day and age. I mean I don't think that Elliot's going to walk up to you and grab you by the beard. I hope he doesn't grab mine this morning anyway.

Because I have my granddaughter Nora did this about two weeks ago and she grabbed me with both hands and she twisted her hands like this and I'm saying Nora baby please let go.

[35 : 06] Let go of me. I hope this is not normative for us in our day and age. church but in all seriousness sin is like leaven and bread and you have to deal with sin personally and you have to deal with sin corporately as a body.

You have to do this. Perseverance will only grow when you deal with the sin in your life. You have to do it. And so if the church is unwilling to look at itself and to judge itself and to say okay this is me this is us we have weaknesses here then we won't grow in perseverance.

We won't do it. Why? Because it spreads to the body. Sin spreads. It is not a firecracker it is a bomb and it goes off in the body of Christ and so we have to deal with it.

And so I do think that this is where we want to land this morning as far as just perseverance. Listen the church has to be pure in a sense.

You have to strive for purity in the body corporate and individually. And the only way to do this well the only way for us to deal with our sin and to be pure in our thoughts and in our hearts is to have undistracted attention to what our lives are.

[36 : 31] We have to pay undistracted attention to where we are. And we do this when we do this it is we're really we're being like Jesus.

It's like we're mimicking Jesus in this. Jesus had a zeal to be obedient. He had a zeal to do whatever the Father told him to do.

He never turned left right or indifferent. We need to develop such a zeal. we need a zeal just like him. We need to be zealous for doing good work.

Scripture tells us that the church is to be zealous for these types of things. Isaiah 59 describing Jesus says this he Jesus put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and he wrapped himself with zeal as a cloak. Do you see the picture? Are you willing to wrap yourselves with zeal in order to persevere as a saint of God?

[37 : 38] Are you doing this? Remember Israel started off good and then they went back. How easy it is for us to go back. We all know what it feels like to be around somebody who is truly committed.

You know I think the zeal of Christ probably unnerved people more than anything else because Jesus never struggled with sin. He always did what was right.

And we know what it's like to be around somebody like that because it always shows us our weaknesses. When you get around somebody that is really striving hard to follow Jesus and you know that they are and you know that you've been in sin, it just unnerves you.

Why? Because it shows you who you are. Jesus had a zeal to do what was right and I believe that's truly what unnerved his enemies is that this guy never does what we do.

And so there is that sense. And so how is the church going to persevere? How is the church going to truly persevere in this area, Newburn, in Moorhead, in Swansboro, in Beaufort, wherever else we plant?

[38 : 56] How are we going to persevere? Well, I'll leave it like this. We must strive in our hearts against the compromise that lies there. It is there.

It is always there. It never goes away. And you must understand that we never get to a point as Christians where we have it all together. You will never be able to say, I got this, because you don't got this.

I don't have this. And so, strive in your hearts to persevere. That tendency to go back to those things which pull at you, strive against it.

Secondly, live in the tension of the high and the low. It's always going to be that way. Life will never be like this. It can't because we live in a fallen world.

Strive in that tension of the high and low. Understand that there's going to be days that you're going to struggle. And there's going to be days that you're going to succeed. But just live in the motion of that.

[40 : 01] And finally, when temptation comes, and it will come, it will come. It is standing outside your door.

It is standing outside of my door. If you sin, if you fail, confess it, repent, turn to Christ, live for Him. You see? It's going to come. It's going to happen. Perseverance means that we take each day one step further. One step further. No matter what goes on in our lives.

Now, as we close and as the band comes up, I'm sure that not everybody in here this morning is a Christian. Hopefully you are, but maybe there's not. Maybe there's some that do not follow Christ yet.

I need to speak to you because, you know, I told you this morning that you have to be truthful about who you are. I had to be truthful about me. My wife has to be truthful about who she is.

[40 : 57] But, you know, even if you're not following Jesus, you need to be truthful with who you are. Just like the church, you have to be honest with yourself. And what you know to be true is that you need a Savior.

And that is because God has shown you that he does exist. He has shown you and what we do as unbelievers is we tamp down the conviction.

What we do, we press it down and we say we're not going to believe this. And so you have to be honest with yourself that you truly need a Savior this morning.

Your sin is great. Everybody in this room, our sin is great. Romans 3 tells us there's none righteous. No, not one. There's none that seeketh after God. There's none that doeth good. None. None. That's what it means. None. You know that your sin is great.

[42 : 02] Be honest with yourselves, but understand this. Even though your sins are as high as the heaven, Jesus is a greater Savior. Savior. And he can draw you into his covenant community.

He can save you, and he can build you up. He can forgive you, and he will see you one day in glory where you will worship him. That is far better than living in the knowledge that there is no God.

And so if that is you this morning, I'd love a chance to talk to you about what faith is. You might have great sin, but Jesus is a greater Savior. He truly is. For those of you who are followers of Jesus this morning, I would simply ask you this.

How are you doing today in your life of perseverance? How are you doing? You know, I can't answer that question for you.

I can answer my own. But I'm asking you, how are you doing in this life of perseverance? Are you persevering in your faith? Are you obedient?

[43 : 07] Are you striving for holiness? Do you have a zeal to follow Christ? Are you living in that moment this morning? It may be time for you to do business with the Lord and just simply say, Lord, I'm struggling here.

I'm struggling. Maybe it's time this morning to do business with him and just say, I have not been persevering in the faith. I have not been obedient. I am living in sin. Lord, forgive.

Maybe do some business with him. You know, in Hebrews it says this about Jesus, that he is our great high priest. He is our great high priest. As a follower of Jesus, he is your high priest.

And he offers grace to help in the time of need. You come to him this morning. As you prepare your hearts for communion, you come to him and you confess sin and you live in the grace that he offers you and the total forgiveness of what you've done.

You live there. All right? Sound good? Let me pray for us. Lord God, we love you much. You are the Holy One. You are the One who had zeal to follow the Father.

[44 : 19] You never, Lord Jesus, were tempted. Yet you know what it's like to be tempted in all ways. And Lord, that is such a mystery to us because our lives are full of temptation each and every day.

We live in a culture, Lord Jesus, that tempts us in our hearts, in our minds, in our thoughts, in what we look at everywhere, Lord, it is there. We come to you because in our weakness you make us strong, Lord God.

And so I do pray for all those here this morning that you would just draw near to them, that you would love them where they are, that you would pull them into your arms, Lord God, that you would hold on to us.

Prone to wander, Lord, we are so prone to wander. Save us, Lord Jesus, for the praise of your glorious grace we ask these things. Amen.