



3. Stick in there! (Rev 2:8-11)

One successful prospector in Leadville, Colorado, in 1877 bought the Robert E. Lee mine for \$16,000, hired a crew and sank a shaft more than a hundred feet deep without finding any ore. When a syndicate offered him \$30,000 for his mine he sent word down the shaft for his crew to pick up its tools and quit. The men down below were in the process of drilling a hole and putting the dynamite in; they asked the boss if they couldn't shoot just this once more. "No, come up!" replied Dexter. "I won't put another cent into this hole."

The new owners "shot" Dexter's last hole. When the smoke cleared they found they had exposed a vein of silver so pure that in 24 hours they had mined ninety-five tons of ore worth \$118,500. The cost of bringing this fortune to the surface was exactly \$60.

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Those of you who attend the church regularly know that as part of our explorations of God's word on a Sunday, we tend to find dominant themes in the New Testament relating to how we walk as believers. One of them is how we walk in life. A second we found in our studies of James was perseverance – sticking in there even when the going is very difficult. Not surprisingly, we find that these are the themes also writ large in the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia.

Perseverance is not a popular idea in our modern society and you won't find it surprising that it is not particularly popular in the modern church either. It's a world of have without commitment. We live in a world where we are able to achieve a lot with very little effort. And what happens when we find situations in life which are difficult. Do we persevere and deal with them? Of course not! We complain – a lot. And then we do something else. "If at first you don't succeed – give up!"

We do know that there are many situations in life where nothing is achieved without perseverance. Whether that is work in school or college, succeeding in sport, or dance or music, we know that to be the best, or sometimes even to be competent, hard work and perseverance is needed.

"Runner's World" told the story of Beth Anne DeCiantis's attempt to qualify for the 1992 Olympic Trials marathon. A female runner must complete the 26-mile, 385-yard race in less than two hours, forty-five minutes to compete at the Olympic Trials.

Beth started strong but began having trouble around mile 23. She reached the final straight at 2:43, with just two minutes left to qualify. Two hundred yards from the finish, she stumbled and fell. Dazed, she stayed down for twenty seconds. The crowd yelled, "Get up!" The clock was ticking -- 2:44, less than a minute to go.

Beth Anne staggered to her feet and began walking. Five yards short of the finish, with ten seconds to go, she fell again. She began to crawl, the crowd cheering her on, and crossed the finish line on her hands and knees. Her time? Two hours, 44 minutes, 57 seconds.

Now that's perseverance! How good it is isn't it when we've persevered with something and won?

I know as a parent that we've had to battle with our teenagers to persevere and stick in there. Some things they have given up, others they have started to understand the message of perseverance.

Before we sneer at teenagers and say they have no perseverance, what about us? When faced with difficult situations, do we respond with perseverance or do we walk. Christians do it regularly with churches. They come across a church like ours and see a work in progress. It's an opportunity to grow, to develop personal gifting, to see God doing new things and in doing so start to trust God and get near to Him. But we know from our ups and downs that it requires perseverance. But what do some do? They see a work in progress and go somewhere else where they can have all they want and be a spectator. That's not what we're called to be or do

The only thing I can say is my experience. If you want to know more about God, become closer to Him and grow as a Christian, then this is one of the best environments to do so, because you HAVE to trust Him. And in doing so, you see the blessings, and you see what God can do and you discover things about yourself. But sometimes we have to persevere through more difficult times to get there.

The letter to the church in Smyrna is a simple one – stick in there! Here were people that felt like giving up. They were in the second largest city in the Roman province of Asia. It was and still is a major port. But it was the centre of the worship of Greek gods and also Roman Emperor worship. We know from what Jesus is saying to them, and what their subsequent history was as a church is that they were persecuted off and on until the fourth century AD with severe periods where many Christians were killed in the lard amphitheatre. No wonder they felt like giving up!

And Jesus speaks to them through John - *I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* For them, persecution was a triple whamee.

1. They were persecuted by the Romans and the local population.
2. They were probably poor because of persecution which caused them to have their goods confiscated and being discriminated against
3. And on top of that the Jews who slandered and undermined them. And it was going to get worse!

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

They had suffered, and now they were going to suffer some more. Whether the 10 days referred to are literal or symbolic. So on top of persecution and poverty and lies, some of them were going to get put in prison and possibly die. Who'd be a Christian?

Perhaps that's how you feel sometimes. You've tried to live as a Christian. You've tried to faithfully serve, but it seems as though things seem to go from bad to worse. Where is God in all this? I believe that whether it is in persecution, or whether we have problems in life or are attacked by Satan; problems come with the territory as a Christian. In fact if you've never had problems as a Christian, then you need to ask what you're doing wrong! The devil doesn't like seeing the work of God succeed – but God has His purposes and they always work out. Here are the words of encouragement Jesus gives:

10b Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

We have a different perspective to the world. The aim of the world is to get as much as possible with the minimum possible pain. “Buy now and let your next of kin pay later”. What about perseverance? We don’t persevere because we only have one shot at life. That’s the world talking. What about Jesus? ***Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*** We have a glorious hope. Why did the Smyrnans persevere? Because of what was to come.

What sort of faith do we have? Its it worth dying for? I’d suggest to you that if your faith is not worth dying for, then it probably isn’t worth living for. And if it isn’t worth living for, then it isn’t worth committing to. And that is at the core of why many believers have a problem with commitment today.

Jesus said this: ***Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*** (Luke 12:33-34)

Where is our heart this morning? Is it fixed on Jesus? Is it fixed on eternal things? Or something else?

If it is fixed on what you can get out of this life – then enjoy it as much as you can for as long as you can, because it is only of value in this life. The majority of people in this world live for that. James 4: 14 ***Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*** – but what of eternity?

If it is fixed on eternity and involves that crown of life – that winner’s garland as you cross the line – then persevere, because it is tough but God rewards those who persevere. ***11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.***

What’s the message for us as a church in Swaffham as we move forward in faith and as we seek to bring good news. We need to persevere. Satan will oppose us. Men and women will be stirred up against us. Maybe things won’t go quite as planned. But if we believe that God has led us into this then we persevere and do His purposes. Why? Because our actions have eternal outcomes as the harvest of those trusting Christ is brought in – and it will be. And it will be. But we need to persevere – for the glory of Jesus.

*Preached by Mark Reid
Swaffham Baptist Church
February 26th 2006
©Mark Reid 2006*

8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. 10b Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Service Outline

Pre-service Graham & Helen
Call to Worship Mark
Song 1 Graham & Helen
Prayer item Mark
Songs 2 & 3 Graham & Helen
Intro item - Mark
Notices – Heather
Offertory
Children go to SC
Prayer – Margaret
Hymn – In Christ alone
Reading Rev 2:8-11 – Reader
Sermon – Mark
Hymn 473 – My hope is built
Benediction