

# Persevere to the end

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Date: 24 November 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning once again.

I believe that there are actually quite a number of guests with us today. And if you don't know me, my name is Brian. I serve as the pastor of this church. And I just want to give you a warm welcome again to our gathering this morning.

And if you are joining us, today we're actually at the tail end of a sermon series in 2 Timothy. And so you've come for the very last sermon, 2 Timothy 4, verse 9 to 22.

Before starting next week, as Elder Hong Park has already pointed out, we will be starting a Christmas series where we'll consider some common questions and what the Bible has to say about them.

So if you've got anybody with those kind of questions or just questions in general, do invite them along to hear how the Christian faith answers those questions.

[ 1 : 05 ] But this morning, make sure that you have the Bible open in front of you, 2 Timothy 4.

There's also a sermon outline here. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to pray.

But just before I pray for us to have soft hearts to receive God's Word today, I think I'll also pray for some of the events that are happening in our bulletin, especially the evangelistic outreach.

So let's do that. I will lead us in prayer for some of these items, and then we'll open up God's Word. Heavenly Father, we thank you that this Christmas time we can remember that you have not left yourself silent, but you have chosen in the person of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come to this earth so that we might know salvation, so that we might be restored to a relationship with you. And so, Father, that is a message that we want to bring to people in Kuching and beyond Kuching, Lord. And so we just want to commit some of these programs into your hands.

We want to commit the rural outreach happening in Kampung Sagah in Singai next Saturday. We just pray indeed that there will be many people who will come to that particular outreach event, especially as there's an opportunity to read children's books that tell the story of Christmas.

[ 2 : 33 ] We pray that that would really help some of the kids to become familiar with the story of Jesus. And we pray that the adults listening in would know the Lord Jesus and what he has done through that as well.

We think also of the outreach to Uluskang. Father, we just pray once again that you will be at work in that particular area. We pray that many, Lord, would put their faith in you, that they will repent from their sins to know who you are and what you have done for them.

And again, similarly, we pray also for the Social Conscience Ministry Christmas program. We pray, Lord, that as our team brings them gifts, they will not just think about those physical gifts, but also hear about the greatest gift of all, the gift of our Lord Jesus.

And so we just commit all these various outreach events into your hands, Lord. We trust that you'll be at work in them, that you'll be using those events so that more and more will come to know you. Father, we pray now that as we come ready to receive your word, please give us attentive ears, give us humble ears to receive what you have to say to us.

[ 3 : 56 ] Help us to take to heart what you have to say through 2 Timothy 4, verse 9 to 22. And indeed, that you would help us to persevere to the end.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, you've probably never heard of this film called Seeking a Friend for the End of the World. It came out in 2012, and it's got a couple of big names in it.

Steve Carroll's the main actor, and Keira Knightley's the main actress. But it didn't really do well at the box office, and I'm not sure if it actually made it to Malaysian cinemas. But basically, this is how the story goes.

It's just been announced that an asteroid is heading for Earth. It'll hit our planet in three weeks, and there's nothing we can do to stop it. A space shuttle mission to try to stop the asteroid has failed. And so all humankind will just have to wait in the knowledge that the world is going to end soon. So what do you do when you know your end is coming?

[ 5 : 01 ] Some people go rioting and looting in the streets, trying to get their hands on that big screen TV to enjoy in their final days. As for the main character, Dodge, he's just been abandoned by his wife.

He's got no one with him. So all he can do is go out and search for an old, long-lost girlfriend. And he does so with his similarly lonely neighbour, Penny, in tow.

And so the movie follows them all around, and by the end of it, Dodge and Penny discover that they actually love one another. As the end is coming, they find friendship and romance.

In fact, as they lie next to each other in bed, Penny says, I thought somehow we could save each other. And Dodge replies, We did.

But then the asteroid hits the Earth, and the movie screen fades out. Well, that's the best they could hope for. A friend at the end of the world.

[ 6 : 13 ] That was the essence of their salvation. It's a bittersweet ending. Poe knows his end is coming. As we read the closing remarks of his final letter, we begin to feel a sense of urgency as he rattles off name after name, update after update, and even instruction after instruction.

It's as if he's in a hurry to settle all his business before it's time to go. But as we read through, it can feel as if what he's really doing is seeking a friend for the end of the world.

After all, reading through this final section, we realize that Paul faces abandonment. He's lonely. He tells Timothy, verse 9, Do your best to come to me quickly.

And then in verse 21, Do your best to get here before winter. But we're not sure if Timothy arrives in time. Even if he did, we know, of course, that after 2 Timothy, no more letters will come from the pen of Poe.

If the scholars are right in their dating of this letter, it appears as if Poe met his end under Emperor Nero, who ordered his execution.

[ 7 : 37 ] It would be a bittersweet ending. And so the whole section has an air of melancholy about it. And that means it's very easy to write this section off as simply the final personal remarks of Poe, as the NIV heading puts it.

It's sad, but there's nothing really here for us. There's nothing relevant. But if all scripture is God-brief, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, then there must be stuff in here that can either teach or rebuke us as well.

And indeed, there is. You see, in this final section, Poe is writing very personally, but he hasn't stopped encouraging.

Remember, that's what he's been doing all throughout this letter. In chapter 1, verse 8, he encourages Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to join with him in suffering for it.

In 1, verse 13 to 14, he encourages Timothy to keep the pattern of sound words and to guard the good deposit. In 2, verse 8 to 13, he encourages Timothy to remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, so that he can endure.

[ 9 : 01 ] In 2, verse 14 to 26, he encourages Timothy to present himself as a worker unashamed to correctly handle the word of truth, to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, not to be quarrelsome, but gently instruct his opponents.

And in the last two weeks, in chapters 3 and 4, Poe encourages Timothy to hold on to the sufficiency of scripture and to preach the word.

For Poe knows the end is near. Back in 4, verse 7 last week, he tells Timothy, I fought the good fight. I finished the race. I have kept the faith.

And now he's asking, what about you, Timothy? What about all those who will come with you and after you? After all, have a look at all my ministry associates who didn't all persevere.

Have a look so that you know what challenges are going to come your way and have a look so that you will be encouraged to persevere to the end, even in the midst of those challenges.

[ 10 : 22 ] So let's have a look. Keep your Bibles open to 2 Timothy chapter 4 and we're going to dive in. And we're going to see that Poe says, firstly, persevere to the end even when there's unfaithfulness.

Poe begins on a sobering note by talking about Demas, verse 10. Let me read from verse 9. Do your best to come to me quickly for Demas because he loved this world, has deserted me, and has gone to Thessalonica.

Now, Demas is only mentioned three times in the Bible, including here. But in those brief mentions, we get a revealing snapshot of his life.

Now, in Philemon 23 to 24, I'm hoping it will be on the screen. Yeah, we read this. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus sends you greetings.

And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. His other mention is in Colossians 4, verse 14. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas sends greetings.

[ 11 : 32 ] And so here is a man who has laboured alongside Paul in the work of ministry for years. His friends with Paul and Luke, who combined together, have written over half of the New Testament.

He shared meals with his fellow Christian workers, discussed the scriptures with them, did life together with them. But somewhere along the way, something happened.

He was still hard at work, labouring for the cause of the gospel. But his love for Christ, little by little, was beginning to cool. And by the time we get to 2 Timothy 4, at the end of Paul's life, a tragedy has occurred.

He has deserted the apostle. You see, a good start is not a guarantee of a good finish. Just this month, I've begun noticing that a friend of mine, my Bible study mate during university days, has begun quoting the Buddha as an authority.

I understand that he hasn't been seeking Christian fellowship for a while now, but now it appears that he has fully switched loyalties. I've watched with great sadness, of course, as Joshua Harris, the popular pastor and Christian author of my teenage years, whose book, not even a hint, still sits on my shelf and which I still find pastorally useful.

[ 13 : 13 ] He has decided to abandon Jesus in a very frank interview. He says that he is holding on to some unrepentant sin, which he doesn't specify, and knowing that he would be disciplined if discovered, he decided to excommunicate himself.

That's the exact phrase he used. And so, for the moment, he's decided to desert the apostle and the apostolic teachings that point to Jesus.

A good start is no guarantee of a good finish. This morning, we're going to witness some baptisms for the happy occasion.

But for our candidates today, remember, that's not the end of your journey. A good start is no guarantee of a good finish. Finish well.

But why did Demas ultimately abandon Paul? If you were to ask him, he would probably come up with a number of reasons and excuses. Maybe he would have said that he was beginning to have some doubts about some aspects of the Bible's teaching.

[ 14 : 30 ] Or maybe he would have said that he wanted to become broader-minded and explore his own spiritual journey. But Paul tells us, frankly, the real reason why.

because he loved this world. What does that mean? Verse 8 gives us a clue.

In verse 8, Paul tells us that those who receive the crown are those who have longed for his appearing. But actually, the phrase is more literally translated, those who have loved his appearing as the ESV here translates it.

And so basically, if you're someone who sticks with Jesus, you will love and long for his second coming in the future. You long for the day of perfect justice and the renewal of the entire world. But now, verse 10 brings out the contrast. If you're no longer sticking with Jesus and his truth, like Demas, it's because your eyes are no longer fixed on the future.

[ 15 : 46 ] It's fixed on this present age. That's what Demas is doing. He loved this life more and so he wanted the glories of this present age.

Now, perhaps it was wealth he wanted, perhaps it was status, perhaps it was simply the path of least resistance which would guarantee him the least pain and suffering.

But whatever it was, he loved this world which meant that he was no longer loving Jesus. And so, my friends, here's a question for us.

Are we in danger of being like Demas? If we reject the apostles' teaching, then we are becoming like Demas.

Perhaps we've been listening over the past few weeks into Timothy, hearing Paul asking us to join with him in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[16:54] Jesus. And we thought, hmm, I don't really like that. Or perhaps we've encountered other words of Paul that we're not overly fawn of, and we've quietly cut them out of our hearts and our minds.

well, that's us becoming like Demas. And are we in danger of loving this world? Are we in danger of being so consumed by our present that we've forgotten our future?

Remember, that's what loving the world here is all about. You know, it can be easy to think that a worldly person is someone who is rich or has many possessions.

Or a worldly person is someone who is always enjoying the gifts of good food and travel and so on. And so we say, oh, I'm not rich, I don't have a lot of things, so that must be proof I'm not worldly. But that's not the point Paul is making. Being worldly is not about the things you have or don't have. It's about where your heart is.

[18:06] You can be a poor person, without many possessions, even have a lot of religion, but still be in love with this present world.

When you're losing interest in Christ, when the applause of human beings become bigger to you, when what you're chasing is simply good exam results, or a successful career, or a model family, well, those are all signs that the world is getting into your heart, and when we want glory and victory, but we don't want the suffering and the shame associated with the cross, and we want all that right now, well, that's a sign that our love is beginning to shift from Jesus to the world.

And one of the most interesting things is that we're not sure if Demas actually renounced being a Christian. You see, it's quite possible he still considered himself a Christian.

In fact, it's even possible he was still in ministry. But he could have thought that Paul's message was too radical and too extreme for him. What's with all this suffering now, glory later talk?

Shouldn't Christianity be all glory now? And so he left. He might even have begun preaching a different message. But my friends, that is not the way of Jesus.

[19:39] Listen to these words from Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 to 3. It should be on the screen. For the joy set before him, and so that's Jesus looking forward to the cross, to the future, sorry, not to the cross.

He endured the cross, scorning its shame. And so that's Jesus' present experience as he experiences the shame of the cross.

And so he sat down at the right hand of God. That's the future. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

So persevere to the end, even when there's unfaithfulness. Just make sure it's not ours. So that's one lesson we can draw from one of Paul's associates.

But what else? Well, as we keep moving through this section, Paul also says to us, persevere to the end, even in the midst of opposition.

[20:47] Verse 14, Alexander, the metal worker, did me a great deal of harm. the Lord will repay him for what he has done.

Now, back in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 20, and Alexander, who has deserted the faith, is mentioned. And so it's quite likely it's the same person. What kind of harm has he done to Paul?

Well, given no specifics, perhaps he brought false accusations against Paul, the kind that has now landed him in prison. But whatever it is, notice that this is not actually Paul's chief concern.

Verse 15, you too should be on your guard against him because he strongly opposed our message. Notice why Paul wants Timothy to be on guard against people like Alexander.

It's not so much because he could bring personal harm, although that's certainly true, but because he opposed Paul's message.

[22:01] And all throughout this letter, it is the heretical challenger, not the pagan persecutor, that Paul is most worried about. It is not the Roman guards, but people like Philetus and Hermogenes who departed from the truth, whom Paul has been warning against.

It is those who enter the homes of gullible women and who capture their minds, not those who enter those same homes and capture them physically, which has Paul most distressed.

And so when it comes to Alexander, and yes, he did great harm to Paul personally, but that's not why you should be on guard. It is because he opposed Paul's message.

And so what can we learn from Paul's encounter with Alexander about how to persevere? Well, there are two things we can do in the midst of opposition. Number one, we persevere by leaving judgment to the Lord.

The Lord will repay him for what he has done. He is the king. He is the judge. And so there is no need for Timothy to get even on behalf of Paul.

[ 23 : 23 ] You know, sometimes when we are unfairly treated, perhaps we are even slandered and abused because we have chosen to stick with Jesus' teaching about being honest and not cut corners.

Or perhaps because we have chosen to stick with his message of grace and not create unbiblical rules to burden people's consciences. Or sometimes we get opposed and unfairly treated because of that.

And it's so easy to want to retaliate. But Paul says let God be the judge. Rather, concentrate instead on number two, we persevere by guarding against people like Alexander.

We don't take revenge, but we're mindful of such people. And remember what Paul is most concerned about is their message. And so we don't open our pulpits for such people to preach or our home groups for such people to share.

We persevere by not giving their teachings airtime on our Facebook pages or over WhatsApp. For the more allowance we give Alexander, the more demesis we will have.

[ 24 : 41 ] The more we tolerate Alexander, the less we will persevere or help others to persevere. And so be on our guard.

Don't be naive. Don't be foolish. How else does Paul want to encourage us? Here's another one. Paul also wants us to persevere to the end even when there's disappointment and isolation. We know already that Demas isn't with him.

But neither are his friends. Look again at verse 10. Crescent has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Now these aren't people who have abandoned him like Demas.

They are simply his ministry associates who have been called away by ministry to other places. Timothy himself is not present precisely because Paul has specially requested that he be present in Ephesus to help out with the church.

[ 25 : 48 ] There, and again if you look at verse 13, you can see that he sent another guy, Tychicus, to Ephesus. And so only Luke is with him as Paul lays in a miserable Roman cell, cold and shivering.

And given that winter is coming, it's only going to get worse. And so he makes a practical request, verse 13, when you come, bring a cloak. And so Paul is feeling all isolated.

And actually, he must have felt pretty disappointed too in some of his friends. Look at verse 16. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.

Now, this defense might have been a pre-trial hearing, perhaps to establish whether there was actually a case to be heard against Paul. But sadly, as he stood in the dark in Rome, no one showed up in the viewing gallery, no one turned up for moral support.

There was a local church in Rome, but none of the Christians there appeared to have decided to stand with Paul in this way. They seem to have forgotten what Paul taught them in Romans 1, verse 16, not to be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God.

[ 27 : 22 ] But Paul doesn't grumble or rage against them. Instead, he finds comfort in the Lord himself, verse 17. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

Paul is able to persevere because he knows that there is always one person whom he can always count on. There is one person he knows will never let him down.

And his rock, his redeemer, his God didn't just show up to lend moral support but strengthen him for the trial ahead. Even in a Roman doc, it appears that Paul was able to testify to Jesus somehow.

And so my friends, have you ever been disappointed or even hurt by your brothers and sisters in Christ? perhaps they were your partners in the gospel and you expected them to labor alongside you.

Perhaps you were counting on your support when you stood against a popular false teaching.

Perhaps you thought that as you tried to exercise a ministry centered on the gospel and driven by the word, that they would at least get behind you, especially if they profess to share similar convictions.

[ 28 : 57 ] But they didn't. It wasn't that they were actively against you, it was that they were not actively for you. And of course, perhaps sometimes it is us who have disappointed and hurt others.

We are the church in Rome. We failed to support others in their ministry as we should have by appreciating and thanking them or by lending a helping hand.

But watch the grace of God at work. May it not be held against them, Paul says in verse 16. For that is exactly what Jesus said, is it not?

Father, forgive them, he said at the cross. And that's what Paul himself celebrates in Romans chapter 4, echoing the psalmist. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against them.

He's applying the very same gospel he preached to his own situation. After all, Christ didn't die for good people.

[ 30 : 13 ] Christ died for disappointing people. and he died so that sinful people would no longer have their sins counted against them.

That's the gospel both Paul and his friends believe. And now Paul doesn't leave that gospel in the theoretical realm, but he applies the grace of God to this real life situation.

When he says, may it not be held against them, he's really saying, that we can all find forgiveness and restoration at the foot of the cross.

And as he does so, he can persevere. And so we persevere to the end, even when there's disappointment, even when there's isolation, when we allow the gospel to shape our outlook and our attitude.

And so we need the gospel to constantly stay at the forefront. And perhaps that's why verse 13, Paul asked Timothy to bring the parchment, bring the scrolls, bring the books.

[ 31 : 30 ] As the great Baptist preacher Spurgeon famously remarked on this verse, the apostle has been preaching for 30 years, and he wants books.

He has seen the Lord, and he wants books. He has been caught up in the third heaven, and he wants books. And Spurgeon's point is this, the apostle greatly values the books, and so should we. For we cannot be sure, but these parchments and books could very well have been portions of scripture itself, and Paul's own personal notes on it.

And so here is the apostle, at the very end of his life, in a Roman cell, and he still wants to meditate on Jesus, his words, his life, his atoning death.

He wants to taste and see that the Lord is good. so that he can persevere to the end. And so in these final remarks of Paul, we discover unfaithfulness, opposition, isolation, and disappointment.

[ 32 : 54 ] but we also discover the Lord who will graciously judge, who will stand by our side, who will graciously strengthen us, and help us forgive.

But that's not all that God has given us, because more than that, we can persevere to the end because of faithful gospel partners. it is not all gloom and doom in these verses.

Yes, there are people like Demas and Alexander on the loose, but take heart, there are also people like Luke. He's still serving Paul in prison.

One commentator suggests that there may be a Roman custom where a citizen being taken to Rome for trial could take a slave or two with him, and perhaps in order to stay close to Paul, Luke volunteered to be his slave.

But even if this custom turns out to be untrue, well, it's obvious that Luke has stayed devoted with Paul. He's right there with him. And it isn't just Luke.

[ 34 : 11 ] You know, sometimes we might get the impression that Paul is a bit of a lone ranger apostle. charging around the Mediterranean area on his own. But nothing can be further from the truth.

Even just the list of names in verses 19 and 20 will tell you that. There's Priscilla and Aquila and Onesiphorus. There's Erestus and Trophimus, Eubilus and Pudence and Linus and Claudia. Well, we know almost nothing about them apart from the fact that they're with Paul. in spirit if not physically. They're still partnering with him. And of course if we turn to somewhere else like Romans 16 for example, we can add even more names.

Eponetus, the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Ampliatus, whom he calls his dear friend in the Lord. Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord and lots more.

Paul is no lone ranger. He was part of a great network of faithful gospel partners and indeed some of them were people whom he had invested in.

[ 35 : 30 ] And even amongst here this morning, I know that we have some gospel partners here with us, some people whose ministry I appreciate very much. They've not reviewed themselves, but I greatly appreciate their ministry.

And so we can be encouraged by the faithfulness of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ around us. But I've saved the best story for last.

Come with me to verse 12. Let me just read the end of verse 12. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

Now you see in the book of Acts, Mark had joined with Paul in his first missionary journey. But somewhere along the line, he had deserted Paul. And when one of Paul's partners, Barnabas, wanted to give Mark a second chance, well Paul disagreed with Barnabas so strongly that Paul and Barnabas had to go their separate ways.

Barnabas took Mark with him. But now, here, at the end of Paul's life, we discover that unlike Demas, Mark gets a happy ending.

[ 36 : 49 ] Somewhere along the way, he and Paul have clearly reconciled. And more than that, Paul could even say that Mark is very useful to him in his ministry.

Perhaps you've been reading the end of Paul's letter with a very heavy heart. You felt that you've been closer to Edemas or the people in verse 16 who didn't stand with Paul.

But here is hope. You can be restored. The Lord changes people. He matures them. And if you are the one who has been disappointed before, here again is good news of God's grace.

The gospel can reconcile people. for in the end, we can persevere because we don't just have a friend for the end of the world.

We have a faithful God. And unlike the movie characters I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, our salvation is not reduced to simply finding friendship and romance before we die.

[ 37 : 59 ] The end is drawing near for Paul. His time has come. But he can persevere all the way to the end because God is powerful enough to bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom.

His ending is going to be completely sweet, not just bittersweet, because that's our God. And that's the salvation we can look forward to.

And so the words of verse 18 are appropriate indeed to him, be glory forever and ever. And my friends, the end will one day come for us.

But what do you do when you know your end is coming? You keep running the race. You finish it. You persevere to the end. God will go to the end of this letter to Timothy, we'll hear his very final words of encouragement to help us persevere.

[ 39 : 12 ] the Lord be with your spirit, grace be with you all. Let's pray. Let's pray.