

TULIP - Perseverance of The Saints

10/12/25

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Philippians 1:3-11

Good morning First Presbyterian Church! The Scripture text this morning comes to us from Philippians 1:3-11, read from the English Standard Version. Let us pray that the eyes of our hearts would be open to the message God has for us this morning.

Prayer for Illumination

(Pray)

We have a word filled with joy for you this morning! See if you can see the joy jumping off the page from today's reading. I want us to experience this joy on the deepest level together today.

Philippians 1:3-11

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my

imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Intro

Good morning First Presbyterian Church! This morning we come to the end of our sermon series through TULIP. As we've said, TULIP is an acronym given to us through the tradition of John Calvin to help us wrap our minds around the sovereign grace of God. Pastor Small and I hope that you can see that while reformed theology is not essential to salvation, we believe that its unique expression reveals Biblical, deep layers of God's heart and our secure and complete salvation in Jesus Christ. Today we will unpack the final letter in our TULIP acronym - P for *perseverance of the saints*. I'd like to demonstrate from today's passage that 1.) God finishes what He starts, 2.) He wants to assure us of what He started, and 3.) He wants us to blossom in His great love for us.

God Finishes What He Starts

I want to define the perseverance of the saints after using this short illustration. Many of you know my dear grandfather Peter Christ, and my beloved late grandmother

Carolyn Christ who passed away last May. They were married 68 years! Their beautiful marriage tremendously blessed so many of us. In the closing days of my grandma's life, she made a wish known to my grandpa. She wanted me to have her engagement ring, a gift my grandfather purchased for her in Jerusalem in the year 2000 while they were touring the holy land. This ring has a beautiful oval diamond in a lovely gold setting.

This ring has tremendous, even priceless value to me. So you can imagine when it was time for me to travel with this ring for an important occasion, how seriously I took transporting it. It was in a ring box, within another zipped closed container, within a fanny pack that I wrapped around my torso so as to have the ring basically against my chest the whole time I was traveling with it. I felt anxiety just letting my fanny pack pass through the X-Ray conveyor belt at the airport! To me, getting this ring to its destination was critical, and I was determined to protect it and keep track of it until it got there.

I want to suggest to us this morning that this is how God views those who He has elected and predestined for glory. You see, if God has chosen someone, He desires to bring them home and He is sovereign enough to do this. This is the emphasis of perseverance of the saints. This doctrine articulates that believers in Jesus cannot be permanently lost or lose their salvation. Paul says *["I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."](#)* While the language of perseverance of the saints seems to emphasize our work, R. C. Sproul suggests a better rendering may be "preservation of the saints" because we believe God is the primary actor in bringing us home. He preserves us and the result is that we persevere. We can certainly affect *how*

the process of making it to life eternal with Jesus goes for us, but we cannot ultimately change *that* we will make it home to Jesus.

There are an overwhelming number of Biblical texts and illustrations that stand behind this doctrine. Let's look at a couple together, and please, if you find this doctrine hard to believe and you want to talk about it, Pastor and I would love nothing more than to meet with you and continue the conversation this week.

Here is what Peter has to say about our security in his first letter.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Look at the language here. He has "caused" you to be born again, to an inheritance that is "kept" in heaven for you, and by God's power you are being "guarded" through faith for salvation. Whose work is being emphasized here? It's not yours or mine! Peter knew where to put his confidence through lived experience. Remember that he denied Christ three times in Jesus' most vulnerable moment. Peter remembered Jesus' words when he said:

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to

prison and to death.” 34 Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

Before Peter denied Jesus, he put great confidence in himself to stick with Jesus till the end. Peter learned the hard way that Jesus is the one who keeps us. Jesus prayed that his faith would not ultimately fail and, notice this, Jesus says “When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Jesus doesn’t say “if you turn again,” he says “when!” Listen church family, we can really backslide and sin against Christ and one another, but Jesus prays for us, that our faith won’t fail, with the guarantee that we will turn back from those sins and times of wandering. Think about king David, a man after God’s own heart! His list of sins were scandalous, but God kept him. How many other examples could I list this morning! Do you see what God is trying to reveal to us in His word?

Someone might object, “Well, if my salvation is sure, then what is my motivation to follow Jesus faithfully?” There is so much to say here, but I want to make two brief points. One is that a truly converted believer has had something supernatural happen to them when they believed. They now have the Holy Spirit within them, and therefore God’s law is “*written on their heart*” (Jeremiah 31:33), and therefore a complete and final rebellion against God is not possible, though I want to be clear, short-term backsliding is possible and we should seek to avoid that with our new softened hearts at all costs. The other point I want to make is that this question reveals that we might have the idea that we believe that fear of punishment is the best or only motivator. John tells us in his first letter that *18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do*

with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (1 John 4:18) And so if we are mature in love, we will recognize that while grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort! I want to make the argument that living the Christian life *out of* acceptance rather than *for* acceptance is not only the best way to be motivated to live righteously, but it is the *only* way to be changed at the deepest level! And it is from this foundation of security and acceptance that Paul encourages the Philippians to: *“approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.” (Philippians 1:10-11)*

I want to give one more key text and we'll move on to our next point. Let's hear what Jesus has to say about eternal security in John 10.

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

This text really speaks for itself. Jesus is saying that God is greater than everything else in this process of “keeping” us. This leads us to an essential view of reformed theology, that if we can't lose our salvation, then we must be assured that we have it in the first place. Jesus talks about his sheep. They know him and follow him. So we must discern if we are truly his sheep, and this is an assurance that God wants us to have. Let's look at the second point here.

God Wants to Assure Us of What He Started

So if we know God will finish what He started, we must know that He started it in the first place. We know from Jesus' parable of the sower that there are those who appear to have real faith but in the end fall away because the soil was never right. We also know about Jesus turning away those who associated with him when he told us this:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. (Matthew 7:21-23)

Notice Jesus doesn't say, "I knew you once, but you wandered." He says "I never knew you." So Jesus is also showing that there are those who associate with him who never really believed in or loved him. John talks about the same phenomenon. In his first letter, he talks about those who deny Jesus who once were in community with the church. He says this:

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19)

John also says that those who fall away are not "of us" because if they were, they would have "continued" with us. So we see this language all over the New Testament. So how do we know we are those whom Jesus knows and who are among the true fellowship of believers?

The answer is actually pretty simple and is revealed in today's main text. We must have a love that *"abounds more and more"* and be *"partakers of grace."* Jesus says *"all who come to me, I will no wise cast out."* So here's the question this morning. As you behold Jesus Christ revealed in the Scriptures and by the Holy Spirit, do you love who you see? Do you want to come to him? I'm not asking if you love him perfectly, I'm asking do you love him at all? This seems like a simple question but it's easy to do the Christian walk without ever even asking it. Do you want Jesus?

And here's the beauty about this reality. If you find even the tiniest amount of love for Jesus in your heart, this means you are a partaker of grace, because, as we've said before when addressing "total depravity," that this love is not natural to the human heart. It is a love that must be planted there by the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to be a partaker of grace: that God has made your heart a heart of flesh rather than stone and therefore one that loves God. This love for Christ always leads us to loving our neighbor, another key indicator that we have been born again. Paul is experiencing this love from the Philippians because of their prayerful and financial support of him in and out of prison. It is this love that assures Paul that he is in fellowship with those sealed by the Holy Spirit.

And can I just say, that here are First Pres, we have major reason to be overjoyed by assurance. I can speak with the joy of Paul, because I have been loved so deeply by you all. When I think about the love I have experienced from you all literally since I was born, I want us to rejoice in the confidence that He who began a good work in us will be

faithful to bring it to completion! We have great reason to be assured here at First Pres because there is fruit!

There are more signs by which we can be assured. Let's look at the assurance John gives us in the fourth chapter of his first letter:

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit... 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:13, 15-17, 19, 20)

We are meant to have confidence for the day of judgement! That is assurance. Theologians classically view John's first letter as a letter for helping assure Christians of their salvation. So if you wrestle with this assurance, I encourage you to spend time with this letter this week and let's talk through it. God wants you to know you are secure in His love!

Maybe you find this point alarming. Maybe you aren't sure if you love Jesus or abide in him. That may be the Spirit prompting you. Jesus wants you, I can promise you that. The best way to grow love in your heart is not to try to muster it up, but to look at Jesus loving you. Look at the great lengths he went to show his love for you on the cross. Continue to behold him, and you will find, as John Wesley did, that your heart is

“strangely warmed.” The Bible teaches that we should seek to be assured of our eternal security and that this security is the lifeblood of our flourishing as God’s children. There are many more texts pointing to this truth, but we need to move on to our final point.

God Wants Us to Blossom in His Great Love for Us

So why does this all matter? Why get into the theological weeds with John Calvin? Not because we want to be egghead Presbyterians, but because we want to be aware that we are children of God with our hearts on fire! We want to become *“wise unto salvation.”* God wants us to so inhabit the Scriptures that He gets through to us just how much He loves us. We blossom when we take in God’s love for us.

Let me summarize TULIP for you. This is the salvation God has accomplished for you: Our sinful state was so great that we were dead in sin, set on rebellion against God. God made us alive by the Holy Spirit according to His electing grace, justifying us by faith in Christ who paid our penalty on the cross. He atoned for our sins in this amazing act of love, grace, and sacrifice. We were born again by the Holy Spirit who supernaturally seals us for redemption and changes us from the inside out, drawing us more deeply into the father’s heart. And the result is that we will dwell with Him in eternity when we are raised with Christ bodily through the power of God’s Spirit to the glory of the Father! In Paul’s language—writing 1500 years before John Calvin—*“30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)*

Do you see how thoroughly Biblical this all is? I don't think that's why we doubt Calvinism. Here's why I think we find Calvinism hard to believe. I think we think it's too good to be true. Could God really love us this much? Would He do THAT much on our behalf? Could God's grace be *sheer* grace? We've done so much to sin against Him. Any other human relationship that saw all of our sin and flaws would surely give up on us, or at least not commit to us the way God seems to be doing here. Let me share one of my favorite Old Testament passages. In this context God is experiencing Israel as an unfaithful spouse. A partner who has decided to give their love to anyone else besides God. At the absolute height of Israel's disobedience this is what God has to say:

8

How can I give you up, O Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, O Israel?

How can I make you like Admah?

How can I treat you like Zeboiim?

My heart recoils within me;

my compassion grows warm and tender.

9

I will not execute my burning anger;

I will not again destroy Ephraim;

for I am God and not a man,

the Holy One in your midst,

and I will not come in wrath. (Hosea 11:8-9)

God's grace is boundless friends. Let it sink in. It will transform your experience from being one of God's employees to one of God's beloved children. Tim Keller points out what TULIP is trying to help us understand. He says "the central basis of Christian assurance is not how much our hearts are set on God, but how unshakably his heart is set on us."

The whole point of this series is to remind us through the Bible, God loves you with an overwhelming, overflowing love. Karl Barth the great swiss, reformed theologian, was asked after giving a lecture at the University of Chicago how he would summarize his whole life's work. His answer? "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This is the point. And this is why Paul's overwhelming emotion in Philippians—despite him literally being in chains—is joy! Paul is so deeply drinking of the well of God's love in the fellowship of believers that he is more than persevering, he is thriving. This is our invitation this morning. Let us enter the joy of our master by experiencing His love, knowing He will hold us and keep us, all the way home.

In Jesus' name, amen.