

Reigniting the Flame: Perseverance **Revelation 1:4-20**

I. Introduction

Today's sermon is the last one of what has been an eight-week series on "Reigniting the Flame." Throughout this series, we have explored in depth each week one of the seven letters found in the beginning of Revelation.

Today's sermon focuses on the one attribute that Christ praised in every church that received praise. It's also the one attribute we need most if we are to achieve our personal and cooperate goals as we seek to reignite the flame again in 2010. That attribute is perseverance.

Thomas Edison is an often used example of persistence. Throughout his career, Edison obtained 1,093 patents. And while many of these inventions -- such as the light bulb, stock printer, phonograph and alkaline battery -- were groundbreaking, most of his inventions were unsuccessful.

Great success requires great failure!

As to the light bulb.... It was Sir Joseph Swan in Britain that actually invented the light bulb. But Thomas Edison and Louis Lattimer perfected the U.S. version of the light bulb together. Actually what Edison perfected was a filament for the light bulb that was affordable, clean burning, durable, and marketable, and he helped invent the power system to bring light into homes and business.

No one knows the exact number of failed attempts Edison made before finding the right filament. It is certain that is numbered in the thousands. Edison is reported to have said *"If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is just one more step forward...."*

Edison is also famous for saying that genius is "1% inspiration and 99% perspiration."

Persistence is to ability to redeem every mistake and failure as a learning and growing opportunity.

Let's explore more what the Bible has to say about perseverance.

II. Scripture

We are going to use many Bible passages on the topic of perseverance as we explore God's call to persevere, and we'll examine five requirements of perseverance.

III. The Call to Persevere

Let's review Christ's praise of perseverance from our Revelation letters...

In **Rev 2:2-3**, Christ praises the church in Ephesus declaring, *"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance....³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary."*

In **Rev 2:10**, Christ assures the church in Smyrna, *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

In **Rev 2:19**, Christ praises the church in Thyatira exclaiming, *"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first."*

In **Rev 3:10**, Christ promises the church in Philadelphia, *"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."*

Clearly, our God is delighted when we persevere through trial. This is the supremacy and necessity of being people who persevere. Perseverance is a mandatory character trait in order to please God, in order to become more like Christ, and in order to make it into God's eternal kingdom of heaven.

So how then does one acquire this character trait of perseverance?

Like all Christlikeness, perseverance is given to us as an act of God's grace. Christians through the ages who persevered through trials, even as severe as persecution and martyrdom, could do so because our faithful and gracious God granted them the divine gift of perseverance.

In this truth we take great comfort and assurance, that to whatever goal God calls us to now, and to the ultimate goal of Christlikeness and eternal life, God will also empower us with whatever measure of perseverance is needed to achieve God's goals for our life.

As **Phil 1:6** promises, the God who *"began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Perseverance requires grace. Now having that as a foundation, we can also examine five attributes that empower perseverance.

Now I'm not big on using acronyms in sermons, especially cutesy ones that spell Biblical words. But in this case, without a whole lot of effort these five attributes just happen to spell the word "Grace."

Let's explore these five attributes that foster perseverance...

IV. Perseverance Requires Goals

Firstly, perseverance requires goals. Perseverance means to endure hardship in order to achieve a goal. The catch here is to have a goal that is worthy of the cost it will require to achieve that goal. Perseverance requires a goal worthy of the cost of achievement.

For example, if your goal is to lose weight, what is your goal and purpose for doing so? To look better, feel better? Unless you place an extremely high value on just looking or feeling better, that probably won't be enough motivation. Now if your doctor warns you, "lose 30 pounds or it is guaranteed you will die," now you have a worthy goal, "staying alive."

In setting personal goals that require extraordinary effort, find as high of a purpose as possible for achieving those goals, and you'll discover a greater measure of perseverance. This truth applies to personal goals, to corporate goals of family, business, or church, and it certainly applies to life's ultimate goal of growing in Christlikeness, and being granted eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Of course, the highest purpose of any goal is to glorify God.

Jesus Christ is of course our ultimate role model for perseverance. Perseverance is the ability to achieve a goal despite all obstacles. No one ever faced and overcame as formidable obstacles as Christ.

Hebrews 12:1-3 declares this truth, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

We can derive from this passage much about what is needed to persevere. Christ was able to endure the shame and pain of the cross because he had a goal worthy of the cost. Christ clung to the goal of returning to intimacy and glory with Father God first and foremost. Secondly, Christ clung to the goal of providing a way of salvation for fallen humanity.

We likewise are encouraged in this passage to do the same, to "fix our eyes upon Christ" as an example of perseverance, and to also fix our hope upon the joy of one day sitting on the throne with Christ.

Perseverance requires pursuing goals worthy of the cost of achieving that goal.

V. Perseverance Requires Responsibility

Secondly, perseverance requires responsibility. The word “responsibility,” means “having the ability to respond.” Perseverance is ultimately a verb, an action, not just a character trait. To persevere means to set a goal and then to engage in the hard work it takes to achieve that goal.

Perseverance is Edison trying thousands of different filaments. Perseverance is the concert musician practicing six hours a day. Perseverance is the athlete working through the excruciating pain to perfect her skills. Perseverance is disabled vet going through years of rehabilitation to walk again with artificial legs.

Perseverance is the young girl born prematurely, and who at age 4 years old contracted double pneumonia and scarlet fever, which left her with a paralyzed left leg. At age 9, she removed the metal leg brace she had been dependent on and began to walk without it. By 13, she had developed a rhythmic walk, which doctors said was a miracle.

That same year she decided to become a runner. She entered a race and came in last. For the next few years every race she entered, she came in last. Everyone told her to quit, but she kept on running.

One day she actually won a race. And then another. From then on she won every race she entered. Eventually this little girl, whose name was Wilma Rudolph, who was told she would never walk again, went on to win three Olympic gold medals!

Perseverance requires a goal worthy of the cost. Perseverance requires the responsibility of hard work to pursue that goal. But is also requires aspiration to stay motivated.

VI. Perseverance Requires Aspiration

Perseverance Requires Aspiration. Indeed, without aspiration there is no perseverance, there is no achieving of goals.

I am a trained addictions counselor. They have discovered that the number one factor of success regardless of the model of treatment used is the degree of personal motivation. In fact, the rate of addicts becoming free without any treatment who discover a strong source of personal motivation is as high as most treatment centers, around 5%.

Perseverance requires strong motivation. This is where Christian “Hope” comes into play. Charles Spurgeon once quipped, “By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”

Hope is the power to endure the harshest of trials, and to resist the most seductive of temptations. Hope is the unshakable belief that someday we will indeed be like Christ, and will reign with Christ for all eternity. It is such hope that empowers us to live as if this present world is not our home.

So in setting personal goals, you must discover what will be your source of motivation. Let's take for example again the common goal of losing weight. Some people are motivated by watching really obese people successfully losing weight, like on the show "Biggest Loser." This is motivation by, "if they can do it so can I."

Some are more motivated by posting up pictures of those who have already arrived at their preferred state. This is motivation by, "I want to be just like that." In personal goals, find what motivates you.

Here is one model of empowering personal change called motivational interviewing. In one quadrant, you list all the pros of changing, in another all the cons of changing, in another all the pros of not changing, and in the last, all the cons of not changing. When the pros of changing and the cons of not changing outweigh the cons of changing and pros of not changing, your motivation dramatically increases.

Advantages of Changing	Disadvantages of Changing
Disadvantages of Not Changing	Advantages of Not Changing

When it comes to the motivation to deny sin and pursue godliness, our strongest motivation is to glorify God by loving God and others, by our faith in God's provision, and by our hope of eternal reward.

The purifying, motivational, power of faith, hope, and love is revealed throughout God's Word...

1 John 3:1-3 is one powerful example, *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."*

Hope motivates us to deny sin or overindulgence in good things, and choose instead obedience to Christ.

In **2 Cor 5:14-15**, we discover what can motivates us to embody and proclaim the gospel, the Apostle Paul declares, *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."*

Love drives us to share the gospel. If we aren't sharing the gospel than we lack adequate love of God and others.

In **2 Tim 4:7-8**, discover that it is ok for us to be motivated by eternal rewards, even as the Apostle Paul was so motivated, Paul declared as he was about to die, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

Like all those is the great “hall of faith” in Hebrews chapter 11, faith in God’s promise of eternal reward is our most powerful source of perseverance. Indeed, each of the letters in Revelation that we just studied, ends with Christ granting great and magnificent promises to those who persevere and overcome.

Rev 2:7

“To those who overcome, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

Rev 2:11

“Those who overcome will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

Rev 2:17

“To those who overcome, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give them a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to those who receive it.”

Rev 2:26-28

“To those who overcome and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-They will rule them with an iron scepter; they will dash them to pieces like pottery’-just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give them the morning star.”

Rev 3:5

“Those who overcome will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out their names from the book of life, but will acknowledge their names before my Father and his angels.”

Rev 3:12-13

“Those who overcome I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.”

Rev 3:21

“To those who overcome, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

How’s that for some motivation?!

VII. Perseverance Requires Confidence

So perseverance requires worthy goals, hard work to pursue those goals, and aspiration to keep trying no matter how hard. Perseverance also requires confidence, confidence that the goal can indeed be achieved. Confidence is like faith, it is built upon past success. That’s the power of practice. You perform well in practice, so you build confidence you can do it for real. That’s also the power of experience. You’ve done well in the past, so you’re confident you can do well again.

But what about is an area where we have not success, or cannot practice? How do we discover the confidence it takes to persevere? There are three sources of confidence, self-confidence, inspired confidence, and confidence in the one who has made you a promise.

If you don't have inherent self-confidence that you can achieve a particular goal, that is where you really need to rely upon the other two sources of confidence. Inspired confidence is through the encouragement of others either directly made to you, or through inspirational examples. We'll take more about this in the next section.

The third source of confidence is confidence in the one making the promise to you. Since all the promises about our salvation and sanctification are made to us by God, we can have absolute confidence that we will succeed, because God remains faithful, even when we are not! God's grace perseveres even when we give up! We can have unshakable confidence that those of us who are adopted children of God will persevere to the end and so be eternally saved!

We are promised that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!

This church stands within what is called the "Reformed Theological Heritage." That means we embrace the doctrines of the Bible as explained by theologians like John Calvin, and Confessions such as the Westminster Confession.

One major hallmark of this heritage is that we embrace what is called "the perseverance of the saints." This is the Biblical truth that all those whom Christ has called to be adopted children of God will indeed be saved and will indeed persevere to the end, and that no power in heaven, hell, or earth, no amount of sin or struggle, can ever take away our salvation.

VIII. Perseverance Requires Encouragement

The last required attribute of perseverance we are going to explore is encouragement. It is the very rare person who perseveres without at least one person by their side who believes in them, who encourages them, who cheers them on!

We all need at least one cheerleader in our life! We all need at least one raving fan in our life!

If you are having a struggle persevering through to a goal, find someone who will encourage you. Another source of encouragement is the inspiration of others who had to overcome enormous obstacles to achieve great things. Find such examples, especially in the areas of your personal goals, and let their stories inspire you.

We've already shared one about Edison. Here's a few more in this video clip...

◆ Famous Failures clip

Here are a few more famous failures for your inspiration...

John Grisham who has over 80 million books in print was turned down by 35 publishers. He had worked on that novel his first novel, A Time to Kill, for three years, and it was rejected by 16 literary agents before a small publisher.

Albert Einstein did not speak until he was 4-years-old and did not read until he was 7. His parents thought he was "sub-normal," and one of his teachers described him as "mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in foolish dreams." He was expelled from school and was refused admittance to the Zurich Polytechnic School.

To her book, "Atlas Shrugged, Ayn Rand received this from a publisher, "the book is much too long. There are too many long speeches... I regret to say that the book is unsaleable and unpublishable."

Babe Ruth is famous for his past home run record, but for decades he also held the record for strikeouts. He hit 714 home runs and struck out 1,330 times in his career (about which he said, "Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.").

Troy Aikman threw twice as many interceptions as touchdowns in his first year, and he didn't win a single game. And all us Brett Favre fans are well aware of his interception record!

Charles Schultz had every cartoon he submitted rejected by his high school yearbook staff, and Walt Disney wouldn't hire him.

27 publishers rejected Dr. Seuss's first book, To Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street.

Beethoven handled the violin awkwardly and preferred playing his own compositions instead of improving his technique. His teacher called him "hopeless as a composer." And, of course, you know that he wrote five of his greatest symphonies while completely deaf

The first time Jerry Seinfeld walked on-stage at a comedy club as a professional comic, he looked out at the audience, froze, and forgot the English language. He stumbled through "a minute-and a half" of material and was jeered offstage

As for inspirational heroes for our faith, Hebrews 11 give us a "great cloud of witnesses" that are cheering us on.

You can find great inspiration in reading the biographies of great missionaries like Jim Elliot, or reading accounts of the martyrs like in Foxes Book of Martyrs, or more modern accounts like Jesus Freaks or Extreme Devotion.

And of course, our most inspiring example of perseverance is Christ Jesus, who for the joy set before Him of retuning to the Father, endured the pain and shame of the cross so that you and I could be guaranteed that we will persevere unto eternal life!

IX. God's Promise of Perseverance

I invite you to now stand, and let's declare together one of the strongest affirmations of Christ's perseverance granted to us from **Rom 8:35-39...**

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us!

For we are convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.