**Endure**

John 15:18-27

Let’s remember how Jesus started his public ministry, with the sermon on the mount:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven… Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:3,10

There is a promise of ***“the kingdom of heaven”*** that opens and closes the beatitudes. First, the kingdom is for those who are humble - poor in spirit. But also, it is for those who suffer; who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matt. 5:11-12

Then the sermon builds toward the command to ***“seek first the kingdom and his righteousness”*** trusting God for everything else like food and clothes and shelter. So as we live for the kingdom of heaven and seek His kingdom and build his kingdom, we expect to face opposition, as Jesus did. And this is exactly what he kept telling his disciples to expect.

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” John 15:18

Here at the end of John 15 Jesus gives a little pep talk on how to persevere through great tribulation. ***Three KEYS to endure and continue to bear fruit*** even when things get hard; because they will get difficult. On that we can all count. But Jesus told us there is BLESSING in the persecution, because it reminds us that our true home is the kingdom of heaven, not this dark and broken world.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Prepare** to be hated by the world because it is not your home

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” John 15:18

The first key to persevering through tribulation and persecution is to ***EXPECT IT***. We should not be surprised when we are hated, attacked, ridiculed and eventually thrown in jail and killed. It’s coming people. And maybe in the not too distant future.

Jesus talks about **“the world”** here – the contrast to His Kingdom. The people of the world always come into conflict with the people of God. You cannot remain neutral. Everyone has to pick a side. That’s the story of the Old Testament.

***God placed Israel right in the center of the world*** - the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, smack dab in the heart of the middle east. The most contested 8,000 square miles on the planet. It’s about the size of New Jersey. So imagine Newark getting conquered and re-conquered over 40 times, like Jerusalem.

For Israel even to exist, ***Abraham and his family had to survive*** the volatile area around modern day Israel. The fact that Abe’s nephew, Lot, got captured and his whole family kidnapped shows it was a dangerous place. Then they were slaves in Egypt, the ancient power brokers of the world, and God had to deliver them through 10 dramatic plagues. Then they had to conquer seven nations that were in the promised land, to drive them out. And that wasn’t the end of the conflict. The remnant of those nations kept fighting them and other nations were always hovering on their borders, waiting to pounce.

***“The world” was never a friendly place for Israel***, the people of God. They were always under attack. The prophets especially did not get a friendly welcome, even from within the people of God. And Jesus came as the ultimate prophet - the final spokesman of God’s Word. He knew that his journey ended at the cross. And he was preparing his disciples for that reality that he would suffer and die, but on the third day he would rise from the dead. But that pattern of death and resurrection would apply to each of them, and each of us, as well.

***In this world, we have to die***, so we can rise with Christ into His eternal kingdom. The world did not accept Jesus. Rome was the “world” of Jesus’ day. Rome conspired with the Jewish religious leaders to have Jesus crucified. In the name of “peace,” and harmony – they determined it was better that one person die than that the whole nation of Israel be crushed by the Roman army.

If the world hated Jesus, why should we expect any different treatment? V. 19

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Prepare** to be hated by the world because it is not your home

“If you were of the world the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” John 15:19

Persecution, opposition and suffering are part of following Jesus. When Jesus calls you he invites you to ***“take up YOUR cross.”*** He doesn’t say, “Here’s your comfy spot on the couch.” As Bonhoeffer said, before he was killed by the Nazis, “When Jesus calls a man he bids him come and die.” Our symbol is a cross, not a couch. An instrument of death, not comfort.

Yet the cross is ***a comforting symbol*** because it is an EMPTY CROSS - reminding us that Jesus not only died, he rose again in victory. And if we die with him we will also rise with him on that last day. So the cross represents our doorway into the kingdom that will last forever.

**This world is not our home**. We were made to live with Jesus in a place without sin or suffering or opposition or sadness or persecution or death.

Think of it this way. ***If you HAVE your best life NOW, what does that mean for eternity?*** It’s all downhill? In this world we will have trouble. Tribulation. But Jesus has overcome the world and is preparing us to be with Him in a new world without trouble.

And don’t miss that line that ***Jesus CHOSE US out of the world***. He looked through time and chose you to belong to Him. He called your name and you came.

So we should not get too comfortable in this world or with the people of this world. We should prepare to be hated and rejected and eventually imprisoned and killed. It’s coming. Real persecution and tribulation is coming, and maybe sooner than later. We need to be prepared for it.

**Whatever your suffering now**, whatever your pain and loss – all of it is a reminder that this world is not our home. Jesus is pruning us and shaping us, preparing us for His kingdom. That’s our second key to persevering through tribulation.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’” John 15:20

Jesus just said this to the disciples in John 13, a few minutes before this after he had washed their feet. He took the most menial task for himself – to wash their filthy feet after a long day of walking in sandals.

Micah is playing soccer now on the high school team, and after a practice or game – after two hours of running around in the Florida heat – **those cleats, shin guards and socks** are something out of a horror movie. They almost become a living thing. You have to seal them up in a vacuum bag or they’ll crawl from the trunk and eat you.

That level of grossness is what the disciples felt about washing feet. No one wanted that job. But Jesus took that job – ***he washed the soccer socks of the whole band of disciples.*** He peeled them off and washed the feet that had been inside them.

Then he said: “a servant is not greater than his master.” **You’ve seen my example**, now do for each other what I have just done for you.

Our job as followers of Jesus is to become more and more like the One we call Lord. He is our Master, we are His servants. ***We are apprenticed to Him*** - and the goal of an apprentice is to become like his Master in every way, in order to continue the Master’s work.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” John 15:20

Jesus was unjustly persecuted, attacked, and eventually crucified. ***We follow in His footsteps***. We are devoted to His example. He has washed all of us completely – not just our feet, but our very souls – so we owe Him everything. And His calling is, “Do as I have done for you.” “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

Jesus showed us what love looks like – then commanded us to **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**. Sam outlined that very nicely for us last week: love sacrifices, love encourages and love exhorts. All supported by prayer. The way Jesus loved is how we are called to love.

It’s costly. It’s humbling. It’s sacrificial. ***It’s messy. It involves serving.*** It forces us to pray as Jesus did, “Not my will but yours be done.”

But it’s not all persecution and hardship. ***Some people did listen to Jesus***. And as we share about Jesus some people will listen to us as well. Be encouraged! As we abide in Christ, the fruit will come – both internally as we become more loving like Jesus and externally as we love others in tangible, practical ways. That love is very powerful and attractive. And it is ***rooted in the love of our Triune God***. v. 21

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” John 15:21

Jesus did everything in perfect communion with the Father and in total dependence on the Holy Spirit’s power. He said in John 5, “The Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing.” Everyone who responded to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles after him were those **GIVEN TO HIM by the Father**, according to John 17. Jesus called out and the ones who responded were the one ordained by God to hear and respond because they are His sheep.

But the people of the world do not know the voice of the Father or the will of the Father. They do not accept Jesus as the One sent by the Father. If they reject Jesus as Messiah, they will reject us as we share about Jesus as Messiah.

But that rejection is part of our Lord’s plan to make us more like Him.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” John 15:22

Jesus’ ministry was necessary to create **a SEPARATION among all people**. In the person of Jesus God drew a dividing line in history and everyone has to choose to be either for Him or against Him.

Yes, before Jesus there were prophets and the Old Testament and the nation of Israel. ***But in Jesus God spoke clearly and definitively*** and the whole world has not been the same ever since.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin…” John 15:23-24

Jesus not only spoke, He acted – He did many loving works and many miraculous signs to confirm His identity as the Son of God and Messiah of Israel.

This is what God has always done in history. **He not only ACTED, He also SPOKE** to explain His actions. Both are essential to knowing who God is and what He is like.

* God created and showed us in Genesis one the power and beauty of how He created.
* God called a nation into being through Abraham and documented the miracles that made that possible along with the covenant relationship that was foundational for Israel.
* God rescued Israel from Egypt, explaining before, during and after what that deliverance meant for them as His unique, chosen people.
* God spoke through prophets and acted through prophets.
* God sent judges and leaders and later kings and continued to guide them and rescue them when they had the humility to call for His help.
* Finally, God sent His own Son to not only speak but also to act in a life of perfect love and righteousness and ultimately in the full and final sacrifice for sin.

Our God is a God who speaks and acts. Who acts and speaks.

And because God has acted and spoken, all people are without excuse.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“They would not be guilty of sin but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.” John 15:23-24

Because of Jesus’ words and actions, clearly documented in the four gospels and explained even further in the New Testament, ***the world has SEEN who God is*** and what God is like – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

***Our lives and our testimonies continue this ministry of Jesus*** – helping more people to see and know what God is like. Some will see and reject Him. But others will see and receive Him; bowing the knee to King Jesus. V. 25

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” John 15:25

***Jesus did everything in fulfillment of the Father’s plan.*** It was all foretold. His life was the fulfillment of all of God’s work to that point in history. Everything was building to and pointing to the arrival of Messiah.

And part of that **large batch of prophecies** was the fact that Israel would almost entirely REJECT the Messiah. They would harden their hearts and close their ears. They would hate him without a cause.

This specific reference is to **Psalm 69**. I’d encourage you to read and reflect on Psalm 69 this week. Here are some samples:

“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold… My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies.” Psalm 69:1,3-4

This is ***a Psalm of David***, one of his many cries for help and deliverance. This must have been one of his more desperate times, on the run for his life; hiding from enemies all around.

“For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom you have struck down, and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.” 7,9, 25-26

David experienced deep personal betrayal, even from one of his own sons who performed a successful coup and took the throne for a little while, chasing David out of Jerusalem. But he sought to honor the Name of the Lord, even when he was on the run. So Psalm 69 ends with a note of hope:

“For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; the offspring of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it.” Psalm 69:35-36

We are not alone as those who are called to suffer for the sake of righteousness and for the name of Jesus. ***God’s people throughout history have been called to suffer.*** And even now, all over the world, believers are being persecuted and killed – more intensely than at any other time in history.

This is not a mistake, or failing by God. ***It is part of His plan to shape all believers more into the image of Christ***, and to show a lost and dying world what strong, resilient faith looks like.

When a follower of Jesus faces persecution and can end her suffering just by denying Jesus, by renouncing her faith in him, ***do you see the message it sends when she refuses to do so?*** When she stands firm in her faith and commitment to Jesus even if it means the death of her children? Even if it means her own pain and suffering? Even if her house is burned down. Even if she and her husband are killed?

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted

“But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” John 15:25

God’s plan is being fulfilled. They hated Jesus without cause, we should not be surprised that they hate and oppose us as well.

**Pastor Andrew Brunson in Turkey VOM PODCAST**



**Andrew Brunson** was a missionary in Turkey for 23 years and was arrested, along with his wife Norine, in 2016. He was held for a full year without a trial and then was accused of all kinds of absurd things – from spreading Mormonism to being a CIA agent fomenting revolution in the country. Brunson’s wife was thankfully only held for 13 days – but she bravely stayed in the country for the whole two years of Andrew’s imprisonment, advocating for his release and visiting him every week when possible to help keep his spirits up.

Andrew shared his story in two excellent episodes of the VOM podcast and also wrote a book called God’s Hostage. When he was arrested he initially expected a special, supernatural experience of God, as he had read in biographies of other persecuted believers. He thought he would feel God’s presence in a special way; that he would have a deep and abiding peace and even joy in whatever suffering came.

That was not his experience. He plunged into a deep depression, eventually struggling with suicidal thoughts and even his own sanity. The combination of isolation, sleep deprivation and uncertainty proved a brutal combination for this faithful pastor who had done nothing wrong.

He was prepared to be arrested and beaten for his faith. But he found himself unprepared for the feelings – ***or LACK of feelings*** – that came with that. Andrew’s greatest struggle, off and on in solitary confinement, accused of crazy things and unable to really defend himself – was holding onto his faith.

So at one point **he made a resolution to just keep believing**. He had no feeling of hope or faith to support this decision, it was entirely an act of the will. He refused to let go of his faith in Jesus.

It came to a crisis moment when he wanted to shout out his despair and even anger at God. But the words that came out, after over a year in prison, were ***“Jesus, I love you.”*** Jesus, I love you. He didn’t feel that love. He didn’t feel loved by Jesus. But those words came out of the overflow of his heart and as a result of his personal resolution to hold onto his faith.

To persevere through tribulation we need to first prepare to be hated as Jesus was hated; we need to plan to become more like Jesus as our agenda for this life; and one more key to persevere:

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Proclaim** the worthiness of Jesus as the Spirit enables you

“But when the Holy Spirit comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” John 15:26

***This is the Holy Spirit’s primary job: to bear witness about Jesus.*** The Holy Spirit is considered “the shy” member of the Trinity because He always directs glory to Jesus, just as Jesus directs glory to God the Father.

And our job, filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is also to glorify Jesus as the One who is **worthy of any sacrifice**, any suffering. Jesus is better. He is worth it.

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Proclaim** the worthiness of Jesus as the Spirit enables you

“And you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning.” John 15:27

The word “bear witness” here is MARTUREO, from which we get the word MARTYR. At this point it just ***meant testify***, not yet “testify to the death,” but it would come to mean that over the next couple of centuries as followers of Jesus did bear witness about Jesus and were killed for it.

***The eleven apostles would all suffer for their faith and 10 would be killed as martyrs*** – all except John who wrote this, who would die in exile.

They did bear witness. They did testify. Even when it got dangerous. Even when it cost them their lives. They preached that Jesus died and rose again. **They proclaimed JESUS as LORD** in a time when everyone had to say “Caesar is Lord.”

The apostles were with Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry. ***How long have YOU been with Jesus?*** For some of us it’s been most of our lives. For some here you’ve gotten to know Jesus more recently.

**But all of us can testify** about what we have seen and experienced with Jesus. All of us can bear witness as the Holy Spirit guides us and enables us. And He has promised to give us words when we are brought before kings and governors. Jesus overtly told his disciples not to worry about what to say when that time came, the words would be given when they were needed. We can trust that promise still applies whether we are witnessing before senators and presidents or before family, friends and co-workers.

At an emotional low point in his suffering, after a year in prison – away from his wife and children – Andrew cried out to God in desperation, and out of his heart came a song. He is not a singer or song writer or particularly poetic - so this was a special gift from God to him.

**You are worthy, worthy of my all**

**My tears and pain I lift up as an offering**

**Teach me to share in the fellowship of Your suffering**

**Lamb of God You are worthy of my all.**

* **Andrew Brunson**

***Andrew was reading Richard Wurmbrand*** who suffered in prison for 14 years. He was learning from other persecuted saints who endured far worse treatment than he had. One of Wurmbrand’s principles that Andrew embraced was an application of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5 to “REJOICE and be glad when you are persecuted because great is your reward in heaven.” Wurmbrand made it a habit, every day, to DANCE in his cell. To overtly and physically celebrate in obedience to that teaching of Jesus.

Andrew Brunson was no more a dancer than he was a songwriter, but he resolved in obedience to embrace the habit of every day jumping and moving and dancing in joy, because Jesus told his followers to rejoice in our sufferings.

***He committed to keep proclaiming the worthiness of Jesus*** even when his heart did not feel like it. And this was Norine’s ministry to him through those never-ending two years – to keep reminding him of what was true; that God is good; that Jesus is loving; that there is hope. Here is another line from Andrew’s song:

**You are worthy, worthy of my all**

**This is my declaration in the darkest hour**

**Jesus, the Faithful One who loves me, always good and true**

**You made me Yours, You are worthy of my all.**

* **Andrew Brunson**

https://derechavraham.org/you-are-worthy-by-andrew-brunson/

Jesus is worthy.

Here is our summary for today:

How to **Persevere** through Great Tribulation:

1. **Prepare** to be hated by the world because it is not your home
2. **Plan** to become more like your Master, who was unjustly persecuted
3. **Proclaim** the worthiness of Jesus as the Spirit enables you

Jesus told his followers to expect opposition, persecution and suffering. All of us should prepare to be hated because this world is not our home. We are citizens of the Kingdom of heaven and the people of this world will resent and oppose us. Our PLAN should be to become more and more like Jesus – in character, word and deed. He spoke with love and boldness. He served and sacrificed. He was perfectly patient and wise. Yet He was still opposed, persecuted and eventually killed. You and I are not perfectly patient or wise. But we are trying to be more like Jesus, and since he was hated without cause we should expect the same treatment. And we must ***continue to bear witness about Jesus*** - how He loves us and has changed our lives. We have the privilege to proclaim the WORTHINESS of Jesus even when it costs us.

***The book of Revelation*** describes the end of the world. The wrath of man and the wrath of God converge in the Great Tribulation. Many followers of Jesus will be martyred in this seven year period of suffering and purifying. But notice how we will overcome:

“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” Revelation 12:11

Two ways to conquer: the blood of the Lamb, of course, gives us confidence in our own salvation and place in God’s kingdom. And the word of our testimony - proclaiming the glory of Jesus and His worthiness even if it costs us our lives, is our great victory; proving that we love not our own lives more than Jesus. We love Him above all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJqhimgcoxg>

**Play the video / song from Andrew Brunson?**