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Persevering in Faith

I decided against continuing with the lie this week, although what I want to talk about today can certainly be tied in with it. I suppose I could call this the Lie part five because we're going to discuss some things having to do with how the natural mind is deceived and led astray. But I've decided to title this "continuing in the faith", because that is a more accurate title.

I want to spend this morning talking about what it means to continue or persevere in the faith. There are a number of Scriptures that speak of some experience of Christ or some gaining of Christ, and then follow up with a statement like "if you continue in the faith", or "if you persevere in the faith". That sort of statement is found several times in the book of Hebrews, but also throughout other letters of the New Testament. What does it mean to continue in the faith? What does it mean to discontinue in the faith?

Over the past several years, something that Jesus said seems to grow more and more real to my heart. I'm more and more convinced of the reality of it. Its when He said "narrow is the gate that leads to life and few are they that find it. Wide is the way that leads to destruction and many are they who walk it". We've already discussed here at some length that I don't believe the path of destruction is necessarily speaking of hell here. Certainly hell, or eternal separation of God would be included. But there are a number of Scriptures in the New Testament where the term "destruction" seems to be used to describe the outcome of everything that we do, build, think, live, etc. that is not the reality and increase of Christ.

Take for example, 1st Corinthians chapter 3 where we find a plant that must be the increase of the seed, a building that must be the increase of the foundation, and a temple that must be the house of God's glory, otherwise it they are destroyed. Destroyed by fire. Whatever else we add from ourselves to these things, Paul tells us, will be destroyed and yet we will be saved as ones passing through fire. Even though such souls are saved, all that has been lived for, built, learned, attained, accomplished is destroyed because it is not the "growth that comes from God". It is, on the contrary, the growth of human ambition, self-promotion, the kingdom of man. Our own tower of Babel.

I think Jesus speaks of the same thing in John 15 where he talks about branches on His tree that are not abiding in Him. They are pruned. Cut down and cast into the fire. It is possible that He is speaking of individuals who have not found life, but it seems more likely to me that He is speaking with reference to the things that we do, think, give life to, that are not the increase of the vine. These things are destroyed.

At any rate, the fact of the matter is that all that is not "Christ all and in all" is already destroyed in the mind of God, and will eventually be manifestly so even if we choose to make it our path. Everything that is not part of the living is part of the dead. In the new creation of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is One New Man. A head, joined to a body. All else is put away from God by the cross

and, again, it will be manifestly put away, manifestly destroyed even if we choose to make it the path that we walk in. The path of ignorance. The path of destruction.

The path of Life is not just "being a Christian" or believing in Jesus of Nazareth. The path of Life is the path where what you think you are is lost in order to gain what He is. What you thought life was is traded in for Life. It is the path where you face your end, accept your judgment, recognize your death in the body of the Lord Jesus and by faith grow in the reality that it is not I, but Christ that lives in me. That path of life is learning to live in and by Christ. To know Him as your life.

I'll leave that alone for now. My point this morning is just to mention that in the last several years I have seen time and time again both the fact **that** so few find the path of life, and **why** so few find this path. It seems to me that so few find it because so few want it. There are so many paths of less resistance. They don't go anywhere...but there are shiny things, and soul candy, and religious blue ribbons along the way. Some of these things are the things of the world that appeal to us. Some of those things are the things of the church that we have created in place of Christ. Regardless, it seems there are so many things to chase, so many things to live for, so many things to busy yourself with. Things to enjoy, learn, experience, read, whatever.

I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, trying to evaluate or criticize any of these things. I am simply trying to gather our hearts together this morning and remind us that there is only **one purpose of God. That purpose is realized by faith. And therefore the most central and critical thing we must concern ourselves with is continuing in faith.** Persevering in faith. Fight the good fight of faith. But what does that mean? What does it mean to persevere in the faith?

- **1Co 16:13** Watch, stand fast in the faith,
- **Col 1:23** if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast
- **Col 2:5** For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.
- **1Th 3:5** For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.
- **2Ti 4:7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
- **Jud 1:3** ... contend earnestly for the faith

For most of my Christian life I thought steadfastness in the faith was a continued radical adherence to Christianity. I thought it meant to do whatever is necessary not to lose sight of the tenets of the faith, the facts that God had revealed. To hold on to believing in them and living my life by them. To be ready to give an intellectual defense for all that I believed. To make choices that bore witness of my convictions. To faithfully attend and serve a local fellowship. Sounds pretty noble, doesn't it? Well, I was doing all of those things for years before I even knew what faith was.

I know that I remind us quite often of what faith is. And sooner or later when we hear the word faith it will be the first thing that comes to mind. But until then, let me just say again that, faith is not what you and I believe about something. Faith is not a belief system. It is not trust. It is not hope. Somebody says "I have faith that God can cure my gingivitis". That's not faith, that's your belief. It may be true, but it's something you believe He can do. Somebody says "I have faith that God will

save the whales". That's nice, but that's not faith, that is hope. That's a wish, something you'd like to see happen. Somebody says "I have faith that God won't let me crash my new Lexus". That's nice too, but that is trust. That is not faith.

Faith is not belief. Faith is not trust. Faith is not hope. Faith is faith. Faith is the mind of Christ working in your soul. Faith is the view of spiritual reality that is present to the eyes of your heart subsequent to the Light of Life shining there. Faith is a spiritual seeing, beholding, that is given to you by the Spirit. More than that, it is actually the Spirit's beholding, His view working in your soul. It is not your understanding of a spiritual thing. It is the Spirit's understanding of all things being wrought in your heart. And so faith is when His mind that is in you by new birth begins to bring you to His view according to Light.

And, of course, faith then necessarily brings forth the reality and substance of what sight cannot see. And you will live according to whatever view of spiritual reality is working in you. You become an expression of whatever view of Truth is being written on your heart by the finger of God. In other words, you will live by faith...whatever measure of faith is really there. And what comes out from faith is always the fragrance of what faith sees. The aroma of Christ.

That being said, without question, the most essential thing for a heart to have is an ever increasing faith. An ever increasing view of reality as God knows it to be. Why? Because that is how all things spiritual are known, learned, experienced, worked into your soul, and expressed through you. Without faith you are just you. Without faith you see only by sight, and exhibit nothing but the natural man. Without faith you live in the flesh, comprehend with the darkened carnal mind, and act out from your own soul. Peter and Jude and Paul say we are like "natural brute beasts". Without faith that causes the life and purpose of God to work in your soul... the scientists are right...we're not a whole lot more than an intelligent primate.

Growing in faith is the means by which all of God's purposes are realized in man. It is the mind of the Lord, the Light of His Life shining in the soul that brings us into an active participation in what God has done in Christ. A finished work realized by faith. A new creation lived in by faith. Grace accessed by faith. Righteousness exhibited by faith. Love working by faith. All of this is explicitly stated in your New Testament. And this faith, again, is the mind of the Lord working in you.

You cannot live by your life, your mind, and think that you will ever know or do the will of God. The will of God isn't even something that you do, it is something that He is. And it works in you by faith.

And I'm saying all of this because **apart from faith, growing in faith, continuing in faith, (and I mean true faith) we have wasted our life.** We may be born again, we may be moral Americans with conservative family values and a Bible on every bookshelf, but unless we grow in faith, persevere in faith, fight the fight of faith...then we have wasted our life. Some people never slow down enough to think about this. For whatever reason I can't stop thinking about it. God has created me for purpose. I don't get to decide that purpose, and yet I am allowed by grace, by Christ to find it. I am allowed by the cross to fully enter into it. I can't create it, I can't define it...but I can realize it. Or...I can ignore it. Purpose doesn't change just because I ignore it. It stands true, even if I stand cross purposes with God.

Even before I saw the cross, for some reason this never was far from my mind. I saw that if I had created myself, maybe I could also create my own purpose. However, if I am the creation of another, it would be only logical that I must find purpose in Him. And how kind....how incredibly kind for Him to provide a way into that purpose. And more than that, kinder even than that...He provides that way through offering me a death that I couldn't die, and a life that I couldn't live. What an incredibly kind thing to do. Our God creates with purpose, and then gives us access to that purpose through the death, burial, and resurrection of His own Son. And then...as though that weren't good enough...this God continually draws us by His very Spirit unto that purpose.

And if we weren't so utterly self-consumed and occupied with creating our own purpose, we might actually stop and consider how unthinkable this is. How this must be the definition of love. The full and unhindered giving of life according to truth.

Our God is a God who created. But creating wasn't His purpose. He created with purpose. All things were created with a purpose in mind. The purpose wasn't in the creation. The creation was for the purpose. And then He grants access to this purpose. And then He draws us unto that purpose. And then he gives us something even greater than all of this. He gives us the unfathomable gift of faith. **And its only because we don't realize what faith is that we don't drop our jaw every time we think of it. Faith is the gift of God whereby what He is, what He has done, what He sees, what He has always known begins to operate in our soul.** Truth working, as it says in Psalm 51, in the inner-most man. Faith is the means by which His purpose comes to fruition in us.

And so, again...how could there be anything as necessary as continuing in the faith.? How could there be anything as basic and vital as steadfastly growing up in the faith?

Now most people that are listening to me today, or are listening on a recording, have come to some measure of faith. I'm aware of that. You would probably find my teaching unbearably boring if you hadn't. So I'm not really trying to convince people to come to faith. That's evangelism. That's necessary, but that's not what I'm doing. I'm addressing people who have received the truth by faith and have already started the journey of growing in the knowledge of God. And what I want to say is both something of a warning and an encouragement.

It is so easy slide away. Not slide away from calling yourself a Christian. Not slide away in church attendance. But slide away from growing up in faith. All you have to do is stop looking to Him in the way that He can be known. We are so often like those plants that Jesus described. You know, the ones that shoot up quickly and with joy, but quickly wither in the sun, or who find themselves tangled in weeds and thorns. I have seen many go the way of the withered plant.

Here's what I've noticed. Before we see the cross, we are frustrated with ourselves, or frustrated with religion. We have tried to be a good Christian and failed times without number. We have tried to live for God and ended with nothing but shame, condemnation, or, on the other side of that coin, spiritual pride and ambition. We have been hurt by the church, by its leaders, by its hypocrisy, by its people. Whatever. We know there must be more. So...the Lord drops in your lap a book that accurately preaches the message of the cross. The truth of the Lord. Or maybe you stumble into our church here, or any church that preaches Christ crucified. You

hear something, you turn your heart, and you see. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the living Word of God.

And suddenly there are answers. There are answers to why you couldn't live the way you knew you should. Answers to why the church didn't look the way you knew it ought to. Answers to why people hurt you, or why you hurt people. Suddenly things begin to make sense. The truth starts to fill in the places where you knew there was something wrong. And man, you're excited. This is it. This is different. This is what I've been looking for.

Time passes and maybe some more of the blanks are filled in. You're quite confident that what you've seen is the true gospel. You're glad you've seen what you've seen. You're glad you have answers to what have been questions for so long. But then something begins to happen. Your primary issues have been resolved. Your main questions have been answered. The things that drove you to question, to wonder, to know that there was more...these things don't motivate you any more.

The excitement wears away. The newness gets old. What was a view in the Light becomes a memory in the mind. What was a beholding by faith becomes an answered question. A solved problem. An explanation. "Man, I'm glad I know that in the flesh dwells no good thing. That explains a lot". "Boy, I'm happy I learned that the church is supposed the corporate expression of Jesus Christ, that explains why we act like morons". "I'm thrilled that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ". Whatever. These things that you have seen in the light become memories in the darkness. Like when the sun sets and you can remember where you saw a mountain or a cloud or a tree. Its not something you're seeing. It's something you once saw.

Well, right here is when we begin to stop looking. And we stop looking because we didn't understand that there was so much more to God's solution. We don't understand the solution, the salvation, because we had a very limited understanding of the problem. We only looked to him for the things we wanted to see, the things we needed to see, the things that we knew had to be wrong. But there was so much more that was wrong than what we thought. This is hard to describe. We only knew that righteousness was impossible. We only knew that our church was a joke. We only knew that people weren't nice. Whatever. So we look. We look to Him in those ways. We look to Him to be the answer to those questions. But when our questions are answered, and the problems make sense...that's where we stop looking.

You looked to Him to be the explanation for what you knew was wrong, but the problem wasn't just with the things that you thought were wrong, the problem was also with the things that you thought were right. God's salvation doesn't just destroy man's understanding of righteousness and church...it destroys man's understanding period. You see, we will not face this. I loved it when JW Luman was here and he said "why is it that the hardest thing for a Christian to say is 'God, I don't know' 'God, I don't know you'".

If you and I are going to continue in the faith we're going to have to realize that its all wrong. Not just the areas that we already didn't like. Not just the places where we perceived religion or where you can identify our failures. Its **all** wrong. How wrong are **you** willing to be? Are you willing to let me stand up here and tell you that you know nothing spiritual apart from what God has revealed in the Light of His

Son? You say "who are you to tell me that?". I answer "I am one of the ones who knows nothing and helped create the problem".

What I'm attempting to say is that so many people fail to continue in the faith because, whether we will admit it or not, whether we're aware of it or not, we have arrived at a place where **we've seen all that we will let Him show us**. He's shown you what you wanted to see. He's shown you what makes sense. Now what about what won't make sense? You see, we come to a place where the obvious problems with Christianity aren't what God is trying to show you. The conspicuous faults of dead religion are not really what He is trying to convince you of. God is trying to show you something much deeper. After you have seen what you've wanted to see, after you have seen what you were looking for, do you still want to see just how far this rabbit hole goes? You've seen what you've wanted to see, but will you let Him show you what you don't necessarily want to see.

Here's what I'm saying: **beyond it ministering to your felt need, are you still interested in knowing the truth?** Beyond Him blowing your mind with something more real than religion, do you want to see the real problem? Do you want to come to the fullness of His purpose? I am not saying that the truth of God's salvation in Christ doesn't minister to your needs. It absolutely does. But there is something far bigger than your problem, and that is God's purpose. Do you want to know it? If you do, you have to continue in faith. You have to grow in the true knowledge of God. You have to come to walk in the Light as He is in the Light.

I wrote an email this week that I thought I'd read this morning. It was written to one person, but after I wrote it I felt that I needed to hear it myself. I read it a few times and knew that it was for me as much as it was for them...and I figured it might be helpful this morning as well. The email was in response to a question about how and when the Lord teaches our heart...and I've added a few things for clarity.

I wrote:

"Its easy to think that we're ready and willing for the Lord to reveal truth to us when we're actually not. Just because we say "Lord teach me. Lord I surrender. Lord I just want to know the truth"...that doesn't necessarily mean anything at all. Words are just words. The Lord doesn't respond to our words, he responds to the condition of the heart. If we are of the mind that we are ready, and that we're now just waiting on Him...that is a pretty good indication that we are NOT, in fact, in a place where He can teach us. The reason for that is because when we begin to assume that we have a heart that is ready to know His Word, we forget that our heart and our thoughts are by nature contrary to Him. We forget that we don't see the truth except by a confrontation with the Lie. We forget that its not our words that are resisting him, its our heart that really only wants Him to appear according to our expectation and our felt need. We ask for Him to reveal Himself, but we don't really want nor let Him do it."

"The fact is that He has already unveiled His Son. He's not hiding anything from us, we're the ones hiding from Him. We're just like Adam and Eve in the garden. We're the ones running off and insisting that salvation be something different than what it is. We want it to minister to our desires, emotions, understanding. We want it to be along the lines of what we think we need, and what we think we understand, and what we think fits our concept of God,

etc....and when we do that we're putting God in our box, making Him fit in to our understanding where He can be easily comprehended and controlled. We may not know we're doing that, but we are. We're saying "God show yourself to me!"...but behind our words our heart secretly screams "oh, please let it be this way, that way, meet this need, fix this problem, help this situation, heal this emotion, change this circumstance, be in line with this experience, this book, this thing I love, etc"

"You see, **we're never really waiting on Him, he's ALWAYS waiting on us.** He's waiting on us to let His Son be what He is, and not what we demand him to be, or be in line with what we think we've already learned. He's waiting on us to lay down our presuppositions, our demands, our concepts, ourselves...and really have a heart to hear the Truth. The truth will confront and cut you every time. It doesn't let two men remain standing. He's waiting on us to humble our hearts, not just our words...and let Him show us the Truth of the cross."

Somebody told me recently that they feel like there are some people in our fellowship that feel stuck right now. I understand and empathize. I really do. I know stuck. I know its frustrating and confusing and hard. And what I say to you is the same thing I say to myself. This wont sound like the most pleasant pastoral thing to say, but neither did a lot of what Jesus said. And I say this because I know what can happen if we won't face this.

Here it is. Realize that you are the problem, realize yours is the blindness, you are the veil, and turn to Him to continue in faith. Turn to Him to grow in faith. Face the fact that you are not waiting for God, God is waiting for you. He is not hiding from you, you are hiding from Him. "He has unveiled His salvation in the sight of all the nations", but we are hiding behind a fig tree asking him why the Serpent is so mean.

If you and I won't continually come back to this realization and turn to Him like a child to continue in the faith, then look out. Look out, because there's only one thing that will happen. You think that you can just stay where you are with the Lord and not keep growing, but that's not true. You can't just call for a cease-fire in this thing. Somebody stops feeling the urgency of knowing the Lord, the urgency of steadfastness in the faith and before long, completely unaware, our turning signal goes on and we're taking an exit ramp. **Again, I'm not talking about losing your salvation. I'm talking about faith turning into doctrines. Life turning back into religion. As soon as Truth becomes a memory, a fact, and not a person...it has lost its power.**

I'm not saying this to scare you. This isn't my version of a hell-fire and brimstone speech. I'm not warning you about judgment, I'm warning you about blindness. And encouraging you to always turn from it. Turn to Him. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher **of faith.**"

If we were just dealing with doctrines and facts and truisms, then you could possibly push "pause" and not be effected. If this was like learning math, you could just stop learning and you could maintain what you learned. But we're dealing with a person here. We're dealing with your union with the Lord Jesus Christ. We're dealing with Christ dwelling in your soul. You can't just cease growing in your awareness and experience and view of the reality of that relationship and think you will stay where you are. You will be effected.

Our relatedness to the Truth is our relatedness to a Person, not to a book. Not to an organization. If I were to push "pause" on my relationship with Jessie for several months, and cease to share and relate and grow in that relationship, I can guarantee that it would neither improve or stay the same. It would worsen. A relationship is not a fact, it is an experience of a person. A relationship is not a memory, it is a present experience.

Maybe another way to say the same thing is by comparing it to a stream. The old man and his world, and his lie, are like a river. You are in that river. It is going where it goes. You can't stop the river. You are either escaping that river through the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, or you are flowing with it. **I guarantee you are not just staying in the same place.** Apart from the faith that grants you an exodus, you are flowing along with it. You are part of it. You are going where it goes. There isn't a third option.

I want to close here. Again, I'm not saying all of this to be heavy. I'm saying all of this because I really want all of us continue steadfast in the faith. My least favorite thing in the world is probably watching faith morph into words, and life drift back into religious ideas. Or as Paul says...

Col 2:5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. **6** As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, **7** rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. **8** Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

I want to encourage you this morning to fight the good fight of faith. Not the old works-driven version of what that used to mean to us, but the reality of contending for God's view of all things. As Jude says... contending earnestly for the faith which was for all time given to God's saints. I want to encourage you to do all that you can to position yourself in such a way that growing in faith is your primary purpose. I want to warn you about the danger of lowering your gaze. The danger of assumption.

And I want to encourage you by promising you that if you will only look to Him, He who began this good work in you will bring it to completion. He is able to do exceedingly more than you ask or think according to the power that works within us. He is able to establish you according to faith, and supply all of the riches of grace in Christ Jesus.

And I want to say one more thing. You all know that I never mandate anything in this church. There is nothing I want to compel you to do because if it is not the Lord than it is nothing at all. But, with that said, I want to give you my yearly shot in the arm encouragement to attend one of our small groups or Bible studies. We have a Tuesday and Friday night group that meet at the Henderson house. A Saturday morning Hebrews Bible study at the Ledley's. A 9:00 AM Sunday class here at the church on the book of Colossians. And a Sunday evening young adult meeting.

Here is what Paul says about the necessity and joy of fellowshiping together in the faith.

Rom 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established **12** that is, that I may be encouraged together with you , through the faith working in one another, both yours and mine.

Phm 1:6 I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.