

Persevering Love

Evan Lature



2 Corinthians 4: 7-12; 16-18

Introduction

There's a song back in late 1970-s by Bee Gees called *How Deep Is Your Love*. It's about a guy asking the depth of his lover's love after she left him. The lyrics go like this:

*I know your eyes in the morning sun, I feel you touch me in the pouring rain
And the moment that you wander far from me, I wanna feel you in my arms again
And you came to me on a summer breeze, keep me warm in your love then you softly leave
And it's me you need to show
How deep is your love? How deep is your love?*

Note that the guy questions the girl's love after she left. We don't know why the girl has to leave. But in our human experience, we can understand when abandonment happens to us, it's very proper to question the depth of someone's love.

Persecuted But Not Abandoned

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote that he was *hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed* (2 Cor 4:8).

In contrast to the human that's either self-absorbed or blaming others, Paul views trials and tribulations as a way to carry around in his body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in his body (v.10).

In 2 Cor. 11, Paul mentions tribulations he experienced:

1. He was imprisoned many times
2. Five times he was beaten by the Jews with 39 stripes.
3. Three times he was beaten with rods.
4. Once he was stoned.
5. Three times he was on ships that sunk.
6. He spent a night and a day floating in the open sea.
7. He was constantly on the move

8. He has been in danger from rivers, bandits, fellow Jews, Gentiles, city, country, sea, false believers
9. He has labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep
10. He has known hunger and thirst and gone without food
11. He has been cold and naked

Nevertheless, for Christ's sake he *delights in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecution, difficulties. For to him, when he is weak then he is strong* (2 Cor. 12:10).

Victorious Christian Living

I came across the phrase "victorious Christian living" when I was in college. A friend of mine would quote this term when encouraging us as Christian minority in campus. He told us that we were more than conquerors. This line motivated me to be bold and courageous even though we were insignificant in number. Some of my friends yet went further by claiming God would graciously give us multiple blessings to establish God's name on our campus. This is the verse they referred to, *"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* (Romans 8:31-32; 37)

For a while, these bible verses soothed me and my friends as a minority group on campus. But it was getting nastier when my friends started to believe that God would give victory after victory, blessing after blessing to the point where it's compulsory for God to bless His people in abundance.

I believe there's a victory in Christ, because that's what the Bible says (*But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* → 1 Cor 15: 57). But the way we interpret *victory* is very problematic. We associate the word with some values that are not really necessary, such as wealth, prosperity, fame, triumph, dominion & political power, rigorous health. Because of that, we overstretch "victory" to the point of living in an abundance. From this perspective blessings (mainly physical blessings) are the indicators of victory.

Perseverance & Victory

But, let's go back to Paul. He wrote, *"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthians 12:10). He too wrote, *"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor 15:57).

It is very clear from these two verses victory is not equal to controlling power, fame, big name, nor comfort. Jesus said, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 15:33). Though Jesus said He has overcome the world, it doesn't

mean that we His followers will have no trouble in this world. Paul, whose letter we read today, has testified that to us. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, he experienced this all-surpassing power. Only when we persevere, we know the real victory. Take a look again at Paul's words, "*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body*"(2 Cor 4:7-10).

How big is our love so that we will persevere and endure every circumstance in life?

In our human experience, it's our tendency to abandon/leave/run from situations that weigh us down. It is good to have boundaries and understand our limits. Nevertheless, there are moments in our life when we are called to persevere. They are good opportunities to exercise love that *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*(1 Cor. 13:7). It's easy to love God when everything seems fine. But what happens when things turn ugly, filled with uncertainties, and depression, will we find ourselves loving God? It's not in good happy circumstances to see if someone really loves you or not. It's in hardships and bad times; they are the litmus test for love.

God has been so good to me these past two years. He gave me a job, ministry, and community at New Hope Bible Fellowship. God knows how thankful I am for all these blessings.

Last week was a milestone for some of us to finish the school year. I got a chance to come to commencement and intentionally came late. I was nervous; that was the fact that I couldn't deny. I was nervous because the event I was about to witness was the same thing I had had two years ago, and I felt like getting into some evaluation that I wasn't prepared for. I sneaked into the last row and sat down while my heart started to feel blue trying to figure out what actually I was longing for.

As I was sitting in Edman Chapel watching friends I know walking, I remembered a sermon I wrote last November about Daniel. The Bible pictures God's people as sojourners in the world; people in between -foreigners and strangers on earth- who are *longing for a better country – a heavenly one* (Hebrews 11:13-15). Daniel was given an opportunity to exercise that longing as an exile in Babylon. Personally, I see that my experience living outside home as a cross-cultural minister has a spiritual dimension which connects me deeper with a profound biblical truth as a sojourner: in the world but not of the world.

That afternoon in Edman Chapel got me ponder on the road I've chosen.

*"I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference"* (The Road Not Taken, Robert Frost)

My ministry was nothing compared to the persecution and sufferings Paul had to endure. I learn from his perseverance in living out what he sees as a heavenly calling (Acts 26:19). He followed the example of the Lord he honors and loves – the King of King who did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, *He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross.* (Phil 2:6-8)

In another part of his letters that he wrote for Corinthians, Paul beautifully captured the meaning of love: *love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (1 Cor 13:7, NET). If God himself bears with him, believes in him, hopes in him, and endures for him, why he wouldn't do the same?

Conclusion

Perseverance is the only way to experience God's victory in our life as we continue to live out the heavenly vision God has called us to. When Paul was closer to his demise, he wrote this, *"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"* (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

The King of Kings whom Paul served is the ultimate reason for his perseverance. The voice he heard once on the way to Damascus never faded away even in the midst of the trials & tribulations he went through. He bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things, and endured all things.

Evan Lature, New Hope Bible Fellowship, Wheaton, Sunday 19 2019

Song: Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken

Jesus, I my cross have taken
 All to leave and follow Thee
 Destitute, despised, forsaken
 Thou from hence my all shall be
 Perish every fond ambition
 All I've sought or hoped or known
 Yet how rich is my condition
 God and heaven are still my own

Let the world despise and leave me
 They have left my Saviour, too
 Human hearts and looks deceive me
 Thou art not like them, untrue
 Oh, while thou dost smile upon me
 God of wisdom, love and might
 Foes may hate and friends disown me
 Show thy face and all is bright

Man may trouble and distress
 'Twill but drive me to thy breast
 Life with trials hard may press me
 Heaven will bring me sweeter rest
 Oh, 'tis not in grief to harm me
 While thy love is left to me
 Oh, 'twere not in joy to charm me
 Were that joy unmixed with thee

Go, then, earthly fame and treasure
 Come, disaster, scorn and pain
 In thy service, pain is pleasure
 With thy favour, loss is gain
 I have called thee, 'Abba, Father'
 I have stayed my heart on thee
 Storms may howl and clouds may gather
 All must work for good to me

Soul, then know thy full salvation
 Rise over sin and fear and care
 Joy to find in every station
 Something still to do or bear
 Think what Spirit dwells within thee
 Think what Father's smiles are thine
 Think that Jesus died to win thee
 Child of heaven, canst thou repine?

Haste thee on from grace to glory
 Armed by faith and winged by prayer
 Heaven's eternal days before thee
 God's own hand shall guide thee there
 Soon shall close thy earthly mission
 Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days
 Hope shall change to glad fruition
 Faith to sight, and prayer to praise