



Sermon – January 24, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 2:6 - 7

Well, as you grab your seat, let's open our Bibles. We're going to be in the book of Colossians chapter 2, verses 6 and 7 this morning. Colossians 2:6 and 7. If you're a first time guest with us, whether in the room or online, welcome home. We come to God's word every week trusting that He will meet us here. And as we do this, we are finishing off our men's retreat from this weekend. Do I have any of our guys in here this morning? Let me hear you? Alright. And we've been spending the weekend thinking about the four battles every man faces. We've talked about purpose, perspective, and purity, and this morning we're going to finish as a congregation by thinking about the subject of perseverance. What does it look like to press on in the faith? And if you remember, if you were here last week, we saw the way that Paul called us to be ready for the battle. That we are to be firm and faithful. And what we'll notice as we turn our attention to the text today is that he is giving us the secret to perseverance.

Now before we turn to the text, I want you to know during our response time this morning, I want to invite you to come to these steps and to pray. Especially you men that have been a part of the retreat. We want to take some time to respond to God's word praying corporately together asking Him to work in our lives as we surrender to Him and press on towards this perseverance. So even now being ready in your hearts as we hear God's word. Here's what he says in Colossians 2, verse 6.

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Let's pray together.

Father, we're asking You now that You would center our mind's attention and our heart's affection on You. Holy Spirit, we are praying right now that You will have Your way among us. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, I know it may be surprising to some of us that we're hitting the 70's today when just two weeks ago we had an Aggieland Snow Day. You remember that? It feels like a century ago.

But we were here on Sunday morning. We all went home. We were expecting some snow, but we never knew what was going to happen; that 3 to 5 inches that came down. One of those measurable snows that for you that are children, this may be the one shot you get during your childhood right here in Bryan/College Station. And for us, we love to see the pictures people were taking. Our boys were out building snowmen. We even came up here to the church, and don't tell Chuck, but I took my boys and we did donuts in the parking lot before they plowed it all off. We had an amazing time. But one of the things I learned about Aggieland during the snow is we're not ready for it. You know, I think about the lack of preparation we had. Most of us don't know how to drive well in the snow. We don't have the clothes that you need to wear to keep you warm. There's that lack of preparation. But then there's also this sense of a lack of permanence. It's here for a short time and then it melts. Your kids bundle up in all those warm clothes, they go out for a short time, and they come back in. It feels like it took them longer to get ready than they were actually outside. But the thing that perhaps stood out to me the most was the lack of perseverance. I don't know about your yard, but in mine, we had tree limbs down all over it. Anybody else in the room relate to that? There was plenty of them to clean up and to pick up. And how did that happen? These limbs that are used to these nice balmy days, these breezy winds, these no difficulty, instead were suffocated by the snow. And it didn't happen in an instant. It was a progressive growth on those limbs, added weight after added weight, rested upon them until finally under the weight of this outside force, it was too much to bear and they snapped. They collapsed. When the storm arrived, they weren't ready. And when we think about this call to perseverance this morning, we need to recognize that we all face that same reality. We know what it's like to feel the weight of the world upon us. Like that heavy snow, it is steady and it's suffocating. It's silent. It just builds upon us until we don't know if we can make it anymore. We're not sure we can take it. We don't know where to turn. But Paul tells us where to turn this morning. He shows us today that if we want to persevere, we need to walk with Christ.

Now I want you to think about what's happening in this text right here in Colossians. Paul has just finished his introduction and now he is entering into instruction. He's going to give the Colossians all of these instructions about how to live the Christian life. And it begins right here with this call to walk with Christ. And what we're going to notice this morning is that Paul unlocks the secret to endurance in the Christian life by giving us three foundational principles for perseverance. But before we get there, I want you to look back with me in verse 6. Because before he shows us how to endure, he's going to show us why we should endure. You'll notice as the text begins that Paul says we must persevere because we have received the gift of the gospel. Notice how he says it there.

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,

Paul is building on what he has said before and now focusing it on the gift that has come to us. That word received in the original language is like the taking of a gift that one hands to you. Or in the athletic games, the passing of a baton from one relay runner to the next. It is the sense of what was not yours now becoming yours. And he reminds us of the gift that we've received. And what is this gift? Look back at verse 6 there. He says it's Christ Jesus the Lord. Now think of all the ways that Paul has already described Jesus so far in this amazing letter that exalts Christ. He's talked about Jesus as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the one whom, through whom all things were created, all things are

reconciled, He is the head of the body, the church. But perhaps in the greatest description of Jesus that he offers in this text is right here when he says He is Christ Jesus the Lord. Nowhere else in the New Testament will you find this phrase. And it brings all of these threads together in a way that helps him to counter the false teaching that was coming among the Colossians. He speaks there of Jesus as the Christ. He is the one who is sent. He speaks of Jesus as Jesus, the one who saves. He speaks of Him as the Lord, the one who sustains. What Paul is reminding us of this morning is that if we want to persevere, the reason we do it is because we've been given the gift of the gospel. Our men had the opportunity yesterday to hear a husband, a father and son right here on the stage who came down from Oklahoma to share their story. Jeremy and Caleb Freeman. Just a few years ago, Caleb was a sixteen-year-old travelling down the roads near Oklahoma City in the rain. He hydroplaned and was t-boned by an 18-wheeler. Such significant impact and no one on the scene expected him to live. He had significant internal injuries including trauma to his brain that 90% of people don't make it through the first 48 hours. The doctors told him, "Even if we can save him, he'll probably never talk again, never walk again, never be able to run again like he used to as a cross country and basketball player." It seemed as if their whole world was upside down. As a matter of fact, he spent over 2 months in a coma. But in God's kindness, He spared Caleb's life. And not only did He spare his life, he sat here on the stage yesterday being able to walk up here on his own when they told him he was never going to be able to walk. To be able to speak his own words even though they said he was never going to be able to talk again. One of the questions that his dad asked him was, "In a sense, Caleb, if you could do it all over again, knowing what you went through, would you still want to have experienced that wreck?" Now imagine if you're like me. The easy and obvious answer to that would be, no, right? Like, your whole world has been turned upside down. You had everything going for you and it's now gone. You're going to spend the rest of your life struggling to endure. But you know what he said? He said, "Yes, I'd do it all over again." And when his dad asked him why, the reason that he gave is that when he looked back on his life, before this wreck, he told us he had taken his eyes off Jesus. And in the aftermath of his recovery, he came to the realization that even though he had professed faith as a kid, he didn't actually know Christ in a saving way. And what he told us is that, "Had I not gone through that wreck, I might have gotten everything I was hoping for in this world, but I would have missed it in the next." And God used that to give him the gift of the gospel. And when Paul speaks here of the way that we are called to persevere, the foundational reason that we are able to press on in the faith is because we've been given the gift of the gospel. But notice the way that this text goes on. Because the reason we persevere is not just because we've been given the gift of the gospel, but also we've been given then grit of the gospel. And that's what he says there when he goes on at the end of verse 6 and commands them:

So walk in Him.

This idea of walk brings with it this concept of live or continue or operate. It's a path that you go on. And in the original language, it's in the present tense symbolizing that it is an ongoing action. It is something that you continue to do. Maybe you were up here yesterday with Central Sports basketball or other things going on. And if you were, at certain times of the day you would have seen dozens of the men that were here for our retreat out and about all over the property walking around. We were having one on one conversations with each other. Many of them hit the road to do them. Walked side by side. And if you think about it, maybe that was some of you in the room. It was safe. It was easy. It was comfortable. There was no risk of

threat. And when we hear the word walk, we hear it through 21st century American eyes and ears. We think that when Paul speaks of walking here, it's this simple, safe, comfortable thing that we do on a regular basis. But in fact, what's happening here in the text is that in that day and age, this was your greatest exertion and your greatest danger. That you might be finding yourself travelling on difficult roads, surrounded by dangerous people in disastrous circumstances. But regardless of what's around you, you have to press on in your walk in order to make it to where you're going to go. That's the kind of grit that Paul is speaking of here. This idea of pressing on in the faith. And the way that we do it is by walking in Him. Do you see that phrase there? Paul centers the command on Christ. In fact, that phrase, in Him, is going to show up ten different times in the next ten verses. Paul is reminding us that the center of our lives should be Jesus. That the focus of our walk is on our Messiah. He is the one that enables us to press on in the faith. We lost one of baseball's greatest players this week when Hank Aaron passed away. I don't need to rehearse the statistics. He hit 755 home runs. He spent 25 years playing in All-Star games. And he did it as an African-American man helping major league to break the color barrier. And the stats are even more impressive when you know that some of his best seasons were played in the '60's when scoring was particularly low in major league baseball. And he did it often in a pitcher friendly park that was difficult to hit home runs in. But how was it that a man like Hank Aaron had that much success at the plate? Well one of the well-known quotes that he said is this, "My motto was always to keep swinging whether I was in a slump or feeling badly or having trouble off the field. The only thing to do was to keep swinging." And what Paul speaks here of walking in Him, he's giving this idea of to keep walking, to keep swinging, to keep pressing on, to keep pushing ahead, to keep persevering regardless of the circumstances that's around us.

So as we look at this reality, Paul is showing us why we must press on in the faith. And you may be sitting there saying, "Well that sounds great, pastor. But how do I do it?" And what we're going to find in verse 7 is that Paul unlocks the three keys to pressing on in the faith. And I want you to see the way they begin right here back in verse 7 when he tells us that we are to be rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. So you'll notice to begin with here the first way that we press on in the faith is to recognize that you won't press on in the faith unless you are grounded. Unless you're grounded. He uses that imagery there of being rooted. It's this idea of being planted, fixed, anchored, firmly established. He's picking up on imagery he's just used in verses 4 and 5 that we saw last week of being firm and faithful, stable and steadfast. He's using this agricultural imagery to speak of the way that we need to be grounded in the gospel. And he's picking up on language that we see through, across the story of Scripture. From the very beginning we see a tree planted in the garden; that tree of life in the Garden of Eden. And then it goes on and in the prophecy of the Old Testament they speak of a coming Messiah who will be a root, who will be a stump, who will be a cornerstone for the people of God. And then that Messiah takes on flesh and He dwells among us. And as He teaches His people, He speaks of Himself as a vine and as we are the branches. And what Paul is showing us here is that if you want to press on in the faith, the way it happens is by being grounded in the gospel.

A couple of years ago, Cami and I had the chance to go up to New York City to visit some friends. And while we were there, we had the chance to check out the Museum of Natural History. And one of the displays that they have there is a slice from a giant sequoia tree trunk. Now maybe you know about the sequoia. They are the largest trees in the world. They can grow

hundreds of years. In fact, they get so big out in California that some of them have been hollowed out in a way that a car can pass right through the trunk. Well this particular piece of the tree that was on display there was from a tree chopped down in 1891 after it had been 1300 years old. To put it in perspective, that's older than the English language. It had been growing there all of this time. They had cut out this slice, they had put it on display and the question is, how could it be possible that a tree could live that long? How can it endure for that period of time? Well, what's unique about sequoias is their resistance. Their bark has a special feature to it that makes it fire resistant. So when those California fires rage around them, they are protected from those external threats. But in addition to that, the interior of the tree has preservatives in it that help it to withstand the danger of disease. It's not just resistant to external threats, but internal ones as well. But that resistance isn't the only reason the sequoia can live so long. It's not just its resistance, but its roots. Yes, sequoias grow big in ways we can see, but underneath the surface, that root system is gigantic. In fact, a fully mature sequoia can consume nearly 100 gallons of water a day. Those roots provide stability in the storms that might affect it. They provide sustenance for the tree to feed it. And through that reality of both resistance and rootedness, the sequoia can stand in no matter what situation it finds itself. When Paul speaks here of being rooted, he's calling us to the reality that we are to be sequoias for our Savior. Rooted and grounded in Him, pressing on in the faith. And that raises the question this morning, have you been grounded in the gospel? Every one of us is trying to anchor our life to withstand the storms of difficulties around us. But Paul is showing us that only one foundation will stand. But he doesn't just pick up on this agricultural imagery to talk about how we must be grounded in the gospel. If you look later on in verse 7, he picks up this imagery of where he says that we are to be established in the faith. You see that right there? When he speaks of being established, he's talking about being secured or strengthened, to be stabilized. And in that culture, this particular idea would be used in the legal realm. That when a contract was made between two parties, it was established. That was the language that they would use. That it was fixed. That it was stable. It was a done deal. And when Paul speaks here of this truth, he's talking about how we have been established through the covenant of Christ. We have been made new. One of the things I was excited for us about in the life of our church is in just a few weeks, we're going to kick off our Merge Pre-Marital Counseling. And if any of you are headed towards marriage, we want to invite you to join us in that opportunity. And part of what the training will include is helping those soon to be married couples know what does it look like to establish yourself as a family. To leave and to cleave. To make your family your own. To not depend on someone else for your foundation. And the picture that Paul is laying out for us when he speaks of being established in the faith is that if you want to stand in perseverance, you need to make your faith your own. You can't live off the fact that you grew up in a home that went to church. Your faith will not sustain you if it's built upon the faith of your parents. You stand before God on the merits of your own reality of whether or not you are established in the faith. To put it like this, it's as if, it's be the equivalent of trying to borrow someone else's Netflix account. You get all the benefit of Netflix. You can watch all the shows you want to watch without the commitment. And sometimes we think of our relationship with God as if it can be that. Lord, I want You to provide everything that I need without the commitment." But what Paul is showing us here this morning is that unless and until you make your faith your own, you'll never be able to stand. The most dangerous place to be spiritually is to be familiar with Jesus, but not surrendered to Jesus. Paul gives us that warning. He says, "Be established in your faith." And I can imagine in this room as we're welcoming our college students back, there may be some of you who are second semester freshmen and you grew up going to church all your life and then you had a

rough Fall. You pulled away, you walked in sin, and you're back this semester thinking, "The main thing I need to do to fix my life is to get back in church." Well that may be true. But what Paul is showing us here is that the way to see your life change is not just to double-down on your religious practice, but to surrender your life to God. To be established in your faith. To put your hope in the blood of Jesus to wash away all of your sins. That's the image that Paul is using there. That the only path to perseverance is to be grounded in the gospel.

But notice next he gives us a second key to the endurance that we're called to have in Christians. When we look back in verse 7 and he tells us, "You won't persevere in your walk unless you are growing." It's not just that we're grounded, but that we're growing. So look at this language that he speaks of there when he says that we are to be built up in Jesus. Paul is picking up on constructional language. This idea is one where you are building upon a foundation. Things are being raised up. And what's interesting in the original language, is that the word rooted is in the past tense. It's something that already happened to you that's shaping you today. But this term, built up, is in the present tense. It's signaling an ongoing action that God is carrying out a new creation construction project in your heart. We are to be built up in Him. We are to be growing. That is the sign of spiritual health and the mark of spiritual endurance. And I know I'm speaking to a room in which some of you feel stuck today. That your past has paralyzed you. Or your future fuels your fear. You feel like what you're experiencing now is never going to change. I am who I am. My circumstances are what they are. There's no hope, so why even bother trying to grow? But Paul gives us a different picture here. He calls us to a growth mindset. That those who stand for the entirety of their lives spiritually are those who are committed to growth in the gospel. To being built up in Jesus. And just to frame it up, think about the course of this last nearly a year since the pandemic has hit. Would you say that you are stuck or growing? Do you see evidence of God working in your life to make you more like Jesus in this time? You know, I have a friend that came through A&M about the same time as me who lives in Austin. And he's a part of a company many of you are familiar with: 3D Printing. It's new technology that will allow you to manufacture onsite all sorts of different things. And his particular company is trying to corner the market on building gigantic 3D printers that can print homes. So what they do in 3D printing is you imbed a code into the printer to give the exact specifications of what you want to build. So in this case, maybe it's a 2 bedroom, 1 ½ bathroom home and it tells you what you want it to build, and then with this giant construction printer it takes this specialized material and according to the exact specifications of the guidelines for that building project, it produces a new home in under 24 hours with no waste, no mess, no mistakes. That sounds pretty good, right? Remember how long it took them to get your house done? When we hear Paul speaking to this idea that we need to be built up in Christ, isn't that so often the way we want it to happen? We want it to be according to exact specifications. To know where things are going before the project begins. To be assured that there will be no mess, no waste, no problems that come along. But that is not the promise that we have here from Paul. It's much more messy than that. Think of it not as the 3D printing of a home, but instead maybe something more like the construction of an ant hill. You see those fire ants all around us in Texas in the summer. How much toil and labor goes into that. How much danger it faces of being washed away. Or if you're at my home, stomped on by a young kid who wants to see all of them pop out in anger. There are threats all around you that seek to undermine the growth that's happening. But the way that those anthills are constructed, step-by-step, day-by-day, side-by-side, grain-by-grain. That's the picture of growth that we see in the Scripture. That God is going to do whatever it takes to make us more like Jesus. But as we follow along in the text, what we see is that Paul speaks of this call to be

growing, not just by using construction imagery, but he moves out of the construction site and later on in verse 7 into the classroom. If you see how he says it there, he speaks of how we need to grow just as we were taught. He says, “You have heard and received the truth of the gospel. You know what God has done in His Son. That He took on flesh to pay the penalty that we deserved. Because in this broken world, all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We cannot make our own way of salvation. But God has provided it for us in Jesus. And if we want to see growth, if we want to see perseverance, we need to remember what we’ve been taught. To become what we believe. That’s the language Paul is using there. We can tell that that would have been important in the life of the Colossians when so often around them they are hearing the words of these false teachers that seek to lead them astray from God’s call on their life. And that’s one of the reasons why as a church we’re deeply committed to discipleship. Wednesday nights this semester I’m teaching our Wednesday night Equip Class on Foundations for Christian Discipleship. If you come back tonight for our Awana, you’re going to see kids hiding the word of God in their hearts through Scripture memory. Or you can go upstairs to our youth wing and see in Zeal they are planting seeds of the Scripture by learning how to study it on their own. We are committed to growth as Paul speaks of it here. Just as you have learned. Because what we recognize as a church is that if we want to make it, if we want to run the race, if we want to fight the good fight of the faith, the only way that endurance will happen is if we’re not just grounded in the gospel, but growing in the gospel. And as we looked at the end of this text, we see Paul unlock the third key to perseverance.

You’re going to notice it right there in the last phrase where what Paul is going to show us is that you won’t persevere in your walk unless you are grateful. We need to be grounded. We need to be growing. But he shows us last that we need to be grateful. You see the language there. He speaks about abounding in thanksgiving. Being overwhelmed by gratitude. And this isn’t just something localized in this one verse in Colossians. We see Paul talking over and over again in this letter to this church about the need to have grateful hearts. But what you can’t help but notice, if you look at this text in the original language is that some of the earlier phrases, to be rooted, to be built up, to be established, those are all in the passive voice. They are things God does to you. They are the things that He works in your life. But if you look at the way this is phrased at the end of this letter, when Paul calls us to gratitude, it’s in the active voice. It’s something that we do in response to what God has done for us. That when we are rooted, when we are built up, when we are established, when we are grounded, when we are growing, the response of the one that perseveres is the response of gratitude. We don’t have to look very far in Scripture to see the way that the people of God have often struggled with gratitude. You remember when Israel was brought out of Egypt through the Exodus and they entered into the wilderness. And during that 40-year phase, you have example after example of them grumbling against God. “Why have you brought us out here to die? All we have to eat is this worthless food that you’ve provided. It would be better for us to be slaves in Egypt, to be sons in the wilderness.” And that same grumbling heart can grip us today. I wonder how many of you, if you’re being honest this morning, can recognize those seeds of grumbling in your own life. As a matter of fact, there might be some of you men that come off this retreat and you feel as if you’re on this spiritual high and you’re going to go back home and realize that not everybody around you, your spouse and your kids, have had the same spiritual experience and you’re going to immediately feel that tension and it may provoke you to the kind of grumbling that Paul is warning us about here. But what this passage is making clear to us this morning is that it is the grateful heart, not the grumbling heart, that perseveres in the faith. The one that stands the test,

the one that withstands the storm is the one that can look and no matter what you encounter, can put your hope and trust in Jesus that He will sustain you and do it with grateful hearts.

It's not often that we get snowstorms here in Texas. The last one we had with measureable snow was back in 2017 and who knows when the next one will come. We don't get a lot of snowstorms in Texas, but you know what we do get on a regular basis? Tornadoes. I remember a tornado outbreak that happened back in 2015. There was a cluster of tornadoes that ripped their way through Dallas/Fort Worth. Maybe some of you, or family, or even you yourself were affected by these storms. Well, one of them passed through a rural town just to the northeast of the Metroplex called Farmersville. Happens to be that one of my friends is a pastor in Farmersville and many of his church members were ravaged by this storm. You know the way a tornado works. It comes in an instant and brings total destruction. Everything in its path is destroyed. And that's exactly why I was so struck by an image that this pastor shared. You'll see it right here on the screen. There was a home in Farmersville that just like the ones around it, was destroyed by that storm. Look at it. Everything you can see has been levelled and toppled with one exception. You see it right there in the middle? This safe that was right there in the middle of this home, this thing that was constructed for the sake of protection, withstood the storm when everything else around it faded. How was it able to do that? It's because it was built to withstand the greatest of storms. It was grounded. It was established. It was built up in order to endure. I don't know what trials you're facing this morning, maybe it's that tornado of the type that will level your spiritual life in a moment. Or more likely, maybe it's that slow, steady, silent drop of snow after snow of the weight of the world resting upon you. You wonder, will the branches of your spiritual life be able to sustain. And what Paul reminds us of this morning is that we are called to press on in the faith. And the way that that happens, the one who perseveres is the one who is grounded, growing, and grateful.

Let's pray together.

Father, I'm coming to You now on behalf of those in this room or watching online who are at the end of themselves, they're not sure if they can keep pressing on, they don't know what perseverance looks like in the long term because they're not even confident they will make it through this week. And I pray in this moment, that You would meet them in their discouragement. That You would fill them with a sense of hope. And I lift up each one of us, Lord, that You would continue to prepare us now. You are working for our good. You are helping us to grow in the gospel when we don't even know what's ahead. But you're preparing us to withstand those storm whenever they come. And I'm pleading with you to make us the type of church where we might surround one another to help us keep pressing on no matter what we experience in this life. Knowing that You are good. Filling our hearts with gratefulness for all that You've done for us in Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.