

Persevere in Your Work for Christ

Psalm 119:97-104 & 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Rev. James Ramsey, October 20, 2013, **View From the Ancient Pew** Series# 6



Sometimes life is hard.

Things don't go well and then they get worse. It seems like gravity is working against you, pushing you down.

You might say a prayer something like, "O Lord, get me away from this place, get me off this planet!" And you find yourself at a loss – wondering how you are going to move forward – how will you feel free again?

God wants us to be free, to move forward, to persevere as we grow and work for Christ.

Last weekend Jo and I saw this incredible movie called GRAVITY – we're still talking about it. Has anyone seen it?



The movie stars Sandra Bullock and George Clooney and that's it. There are no other actors. We've never seen anything like it. The title seems rather ironic, since the whole movie takes place in space – where there is no gravity. But the title makes more and more sense as the film progresses – since a grave situation becomes more and more, well, grave. And then you realize, there's gravity alright! I recommend the movie.

Far removed from that Hollywood blockbuster story is the story of Timothy and the early Christian churches he served. Through his letters, we get a sort of “View of the Ancient Pew.” Life and ministry must not have been easy for him. We have been focusing on his challenges and the advice of a mentor – delivered in a couple of pastoral letters, part of the New Testament. The Letters of Paul the Apostle to Timothy.



The Apostle Paul wrote out of concern for Timothy and the early Christians in his churches. They faced detractors, hardships, adversity...you name it. Last week we noted the word *endurance* as part of a pep-talk to the young church leader. The Apostle, himself, endured a lot for the sake of the Gospel. He knew Timothy and his colleagues must do the

same. So he shared a few lines of a hymn, perhaps reminding Timothy of a familiar song, “if we endure with Christ, we shall also reign with him.” That theme of endurance carries over in this morning’s reading. The idea is that Timothy should *persevere* in his work for Christ.

PERSEVERE – I wonder if such advice was well received by Timothy.

I worry it doesn't preach well today, probably didn't in ancient times either. Timothy would have rather wanted some secret strategy, quick fixes, or some seasoned approach from the Apostle – not simply this idea of perseverance. Hang in there. Keep taking it. No matter how hard it is, endure, persist, continue preaching, even in the face of derision, failing support, undermining and false accusations.



The call to persevere can be a dreary one. It might not be a welcomed one. But that's the Apostle's message.

Here are some epigrams on perseverance:

- "There aren't any hard-and-fast rules for getting ahead in the world – just hard ones."
- "You don't have to lie awake nights to succeed. Just stay awake days."
- A Japanese proverb says, "There is no poverty that can overtake diligence."
- The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once quipped, "By perseverance the snail reached the Ark."
- And my favorite, "Triumph is just "umph" added to try."



PERSEVERE – before you stop listening, consider this -- it rhymes with all sorts of interesting words. PERSEVERE = try this,

Paul Revere, Guinevere, scuba gear and reappear...

Cape Fear, auctioneer, leap year and West Deer...

Frontier, gondolier, belvedere and engineer ...

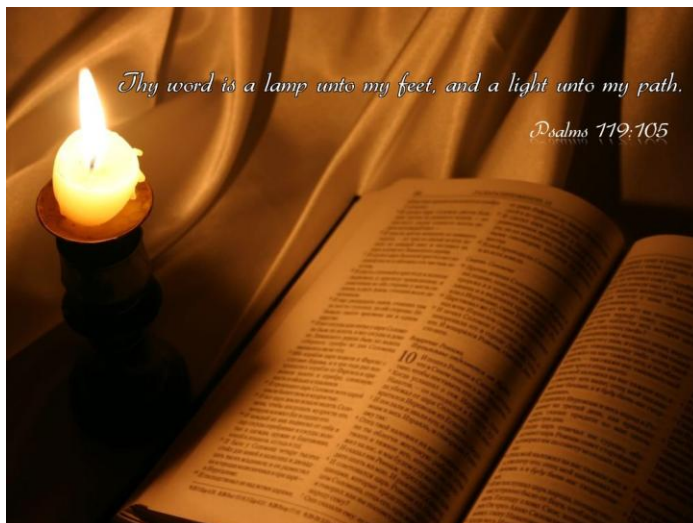
Pioneer, Elephant ear, financier and Iron City Beer!

I could go on!

PERSEVERE – Keep on Keeping on

Persevere in God's Word, don't ever be too far from scripture. You've learned it, firmly believed it, received it from the people who most adore you, it reminds you of your salvation in Christ and keeps you on the right path – read it, teach it, live it, be corrected by it, for it is training in the right way to act before God –

This is the whole inspiration behind the morning psalm, Psalm 119 - the longest



psalm in the Bible. Scholars call it an alphabetic acrostic, a special kind of poem, in which each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. All of Psalm 119, every stanza, celebrates the beauty of God's Word, just the brief section we read this morning suggests you can – meditate on it all day long, because God's commands make you wiser, give you understanding, hold back your feet from evil, the very words of scripture are sweet to your mouth!

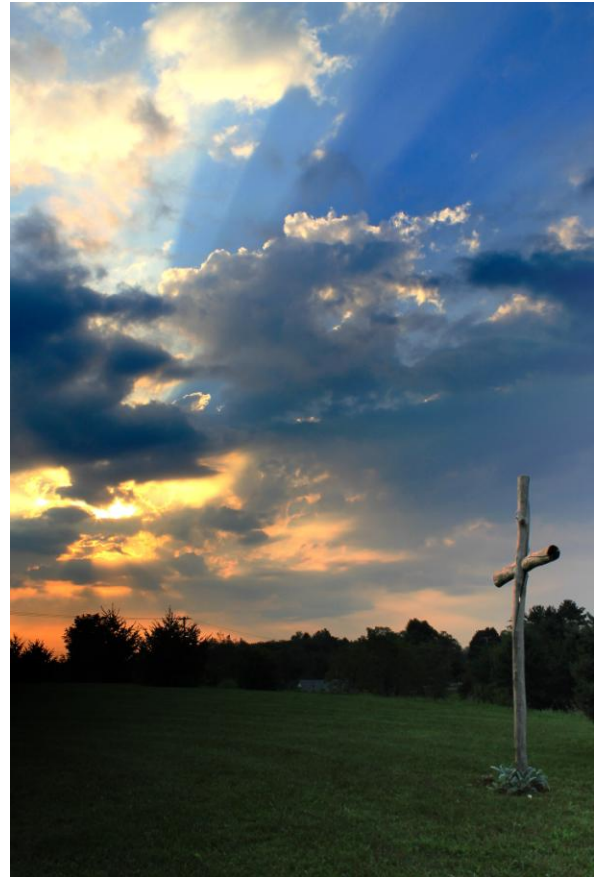
I've found a new scripture, which I have come across at Space for Grace – and it is now my newest memory verse and a text I have been reciting every morning for several weeks now. It is a text, as the Psalm says, that is sweet to my mouth!

It comes from, of all places, the Book of Lamentations in the Old Testament, chapter 3, verse 22 and 23.

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy never cease – fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise.

Oddly enough, just saying those words helps me persevere – helps me, as the Apostle writes, “be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable.”

Every day we get up and face a new day – a day the Lord has made – we can choose to rejoice and be glad in it – regardless of the conditions we might face, in spite of the noise around us, the decidedly “unsound doctrine.”



You have been given gifts – you are a unique person – God has equipped you for the work you have in Christ! Carry out your ministry fully!

PERSEVERE

Since we started with GRAVITY – let me say that it is an extraordinary story of persistence. You think life is hard here on earth – there's some serious challenges in space.

PERSEVERE

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. The satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons,

and beam back data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.



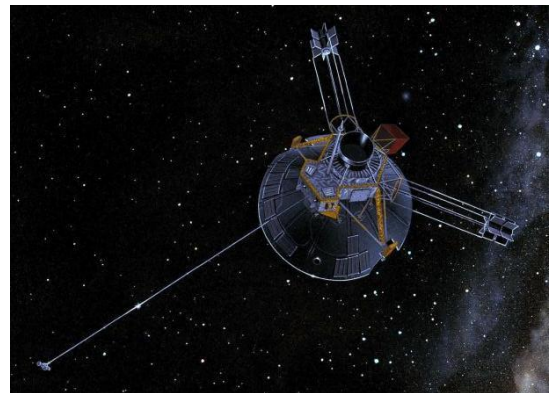
But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more.

Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles;

Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun.

And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth. Perhaps most remarkable, those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light. The signals take more than nine hours to reach Earth.

Astronomers dubbed Pioneer 10 "**The Little Satellite That Could.**" The tiny space ship was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.



So it is when we offer ourselves in service to God and persevere in our work for Christ! God delights in using people with 8-watt abilities.

As we do the humble work to which God calls us, Christ continues to work in us, transforming our days, surprising us with grace!