

Perseverance in a Lawless Age

by Albert N. Martin

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Now may I encourage all of you who have brought your Bibles to turn with me to the portion of God's Word read in your hearing, the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 24. Now having the written Word open before us, let us again cry to God that the author of that Word, the Holy Spirit Himself, will be present in His special activity promised to preachers when they preach, and to the people of God when they sit under that preaching, that we may plead for that operation of the Spirit together. And in the expectation of faith, look to God to grant it to us. Let us pray.

Holy Father, we come again into Your presence, not as a matter of ritual or form, but because many of us have been brought to the place where we truly believe that unless there is in the coming minutes together a distinct, special, immediate activity of the Holy Spirit upon preacher and listener alike, our time will be in vain. And surely Lord, You have not brought us together, filled us with yearnings to know Your presence, filled many with expectation of Your blessings only to send us away disappointed and grieved. O God, for Your glory, for the praise of Your beloved Son, fulfill Your promise to us in this very place tonight, that You would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. We are asking. It is Your work to give. O Lord, give us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen!

Many of you know that Matthew 24 is commonly designated as our Lord's Olivet Discourse. As Matthew 5-7 is known as The Sermon on the Mount, this chapter is known as the Olivet Discourse because our Lord spoke these words on the Mount of Olives according to verse 3. It begins with our Lord's prediction concerning the destruction of the magnificent temple and its adjoining buildings in the city of Jerusalem. And in response to that prediction, the disciples asked the questions recorded in verse 3: "And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" And the rest of the discourse from verse 4 onward, we have Jesus' response to these questions. Whether we regard them as two questions or three, it is evident that our Lord is responding to the questions of the disciples: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" And without attempting to unravel some of the exegetical complexities of this chapter, I am assuming that you are at least mildly persuaded that what is described for us, particularly between verses 9 and 13, are those things that will be present throughout the entire interadvental period; that is, the period between the first and second coming of our Lord Jesus, between the day in which our Lord spoke to the disciples and prior to the end concerning which He speaks in verse 14 with the words "then shall the end come."

Tonight we're going to focus our attention in the midst of that discourse on verses 12 and 13: "And because iniquity [lawlessness] shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (ASV). With

this passage open before us, I want to speak of the necessity for personal perseverance in an age of pervasive lawlessness. And we will look at our text under three heads which lie on the very surface of the text. First of all, we will note a prevailing condition predicted: "And because iniquity [lawlessness] shall be multiplied...." Then a tragic consequence anticipated: "...the love of the many shall wax cold." And thirdly, a personal implication articulated: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

First of all, then, note with me a prevailing condition predicted: "And because iniquity [lawlessness] shall be multiplied...." The Scriptures unmistakably assert that lawlessness is the constant and universal disposition and character of unregenerate men and women in every age, in every nation, in every culture, and in every society from the fall of our first parents Adam and Eve. However, the Scripture teaches us that there are periods, there are seasons in societies and nations in which the baseline disposition of lawlessness and its manifestations are exponentially increased.

The Bible tells us in 1 John 4:4 that sin is lawlessness. And the disposition of lawlessness is very succinctly described in a text such as Romans 8:7-8: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." That's the baseline disposition of everyone who is a stranger to the regenerating work of God the Holy Spirit. However, as I've indicated, that baseline lawlessness is the common denominator in every society in every age. There are seasons according to the statement by our blessed Lord in which that spirit of lawlessness is exponentially increased. "And because iniquity shall be multiplied [not just mildly increased]...." This is the term that is used to describe that exponential increase of the church in the early days of its apostolic blessing in Jerusalem. Acts 6:1 speaks of the fact when the number of the disciples was multiplied (and again in Acts 6:7). And when we read the history from 120 to 3000, 3000 to 5000. And then we read that many more, including a great number of priests become obedient to the faith. And so our Lord is speaking of seasons within the interadvental period when it can be said that lawlessness shall be exponentially increased. I believe this is precisely what the Apostle Paul is referring to in what are well known words to many of us in 2 Timothy 3:1-2:

"This know also, that in the last days [the days between the first and second coming of our Lord Jesus] perilous times [grievous seasons] shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent...."

There will be seasons of the exponential increase of the spirit and manifestations of lawlessness. And surely, brethren, one need not be a prophet to discern that such a season is upon us in our own beloved country and in the vast majority of what we would call western society at large. I will not weary you with the statistics on the specific manifestations of the spirit of lawlessness. But wherever we turn, from the highest echelons of elected office a few years ago, into corporate headquarters, into every facet of the business world, the sporting world, into our universities, in our offices, the media, there is not merely baseline ordinary lawlessness, but there is abounding, exponentially increased lawlessness.

Some of us who are of the older generation have witnessed this with our own eyes. I remember as a boy when all of my hormones were churning within me. And

everything in my unregenerate heart would have delighted to drink in the wretched filth of pornography. I could go to the local store and there was no pornography on the shelves--none whatsoever! And when television first began to come on in the early 50s and ordinary middle class people could purchase a little 6 or 8 inch screen, there was nothing that spoke of the lecherous, the unclean, the sordid, and the base--nothing, nothing! We're living in a period of abounding lawlessness. I say, I will not pause to give you more than those broad stroke reminders of that reality, because I want to come very quickly to our second head.

Our Lord not only sets before us that this prevailing condition will be a reality, but He tells us, then, a tragic consequence anticipated. "And because iniquity [lawlessness] shall be multiplied...." And for you Greek students, you have "dei" with the infinitive, so it's a cause and effect relationship. "Because" (in the light of this abounding lawlessness), this tragic consequence is anticipated by our Lord. And what is it? It is this: that "the love of the many shall wax cold."

Now what has fascinated me as I've meditated upon this text is, why does the Lord say "the love of the many shall wax cold"? In a period of abounding lawlessness, is it not accurate to say that faith is dampened and even abandoned; that holiness is jettisoned? Yes, it is, but our Lord focuses upon the grace of love. And why does He in setting before us this tragic consequence anticipated as a result of this abounding lawlessness focus upon love? Well, I would not be prepared to propose and answer for which I'd die, but it is one that I will give in some measure of confidence enough to preach it, and it is this: the essence of the law demanded and directed is what? Supreme love to God and selfless love to one's neighbor. What is the first and greatest commandment in the law? This is the question purposed to our Lord, and He answers. It is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Well, if the essence of the law's demand is whole soul love to God and selfless love to one's neighbor, then what will be the most critical manifestation of abounding, exponentially increased lawlessness? It will be the absence, the dampening of whole soul love to God and the eradication of selfless love to one's fellow man.

Then note what our Lord says about the extent of this tragic consequence. He says not merely that the love of many, but the love of the many shall wax cold. He had indicated in verses 9 and 10 that hostility and opposition to the people of God manifested in murder, hatred, and betrayal will cause many to apostatize. Do you see that in verses 9 and 10? "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." Furthermore, our Lord indicates that false prophets will lead many astray. Verse 11: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." Many will be in the horrible train of apostasy from opposition, betrayal, and false teaching. But it is the many whose love shall wax cold as a result of a climate of abounding lawlessness. Moffit suggests that this little phrase "the many" should be understood as the majority. Many apostatize from persecution and opposition. Many apostatize from the influence of false teachers. But "the many" shall apostatize from the influence of abounding lawlessness. The climate of lawlessness will take a greater toll upon professing Christians than the combined opposition of fierce persecution and the devious ways of false prophets. That ought to strike fear to your hearts and fear to mine.

Well, from the prevailing condition predicted ("because lawlessness shall be multiplied") and the tragic consequence anticipated ("the love of the many shall wax cold"), consider with me thirdly, a personal implication articulated. Verse 13: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." And I have said this is a personal implication articulated because our Lord uses not a plural participle and a plural demonstrative pronoun, but a singular. If we were to give a wooden translation, it would sound something like this: "But he or the one enduring to the end, that particular one shall be saved." So by the singular participle and the singular demonstrative pronoun, our Lord is underscoring how personal is the implication of these words. It is a personal implication articulated amidst the many whose love will grow cold; amidst the many who are sucked into the vortex of the whirlpool of the influence of abounding lawlessness. To change the imagery: lawlessness that hangs in the air like a thick penetrating fog.

Amidst the many whose love will grow cold, there will be this one and that one who will endure in spite of that climate, and endure to the very end. And as a result, our Lord says such ones shall be saved. Such ones shall experience the blessed fulfillment of what our theological friends call full eschatological salvation. That's just fancy language for telling us that they shall be saved; that is, they shall come into possession of a perfected soul inhabiting a deathless body in the new heavens and the new earth in the company with a host of redeemed ones with perfected souls in their deathless bodies in the immediate presence of God and the Lamb. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "He [that particular one] that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." That one shall experience in his or her own person all of the wonder and glory of a completed salvation, that salvation purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ and secured for all of His true people; applied by the power of the Holy Spirit. They, such ones, shall be saved.

Now in the light of this brief exposition of the text with its prevailing condition predicted, its tragic consequence anticipated, and the personal anticipation articulated, I want to lay before you three, what to me are crucial burdens of application. Number one is this: you and I (each one of us) must realistically reckon with the peculiar dangers of living and, my fellow pastors, ministering in an age of abounding lawlessness. Jesus spoke these words that His followers might realistically reckon with the peculiar dangers of living and ministering in an age of abounding lawlessness. He wants them to recognize that in such seasons, there are peculiar dangers, particularly to dampen the ardor of our professed love to God and to our fellow man.

Let me illustrate it this way: those of us who have gone to so-called third world countries, we are warned, duly warned, especially by those who didn't take someone else's warning, that before we go, we ought to take certain shots. And there are certain medications that we ought to take in our suitcases and in our shaving kits (for you ladies, whatever you call the kit in which you keep your face and all the other things). We are told that in these third world situations, one's gastrointestinal system is peculiarly vulnerable to little microscopic things that will make you sick, I mean really sick. And you've got to have your track shoes on if you're going to get through the night. I know. Trying to find a little slit in a piece of concrete two inches wide by eight inches in the middle of the night in the back yard of a missionary's home in Pakistan, I realized I was a fool for not taking the warning. You've got to know, and knowing, you must take the particular precautions essential to that place of unusual

vulnerability and danger. And one who ignores it is a fool, and he generally pays for it.

The Lord Jesus here says, "And because [lawlessness] shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. [I am warning you, that warning you, you will realistically reckon with the peculiar dangers of living and ministering in such an age.]" Let him who thinks he can go to Pakistan with no shots and no pills take heed lest he gets the Pakistani trots. Now that's a crass very earthy illustration, but it carries the message.

You and I did not choose to be born when we were born, to live in this period of the history of western culture in which common grace has well nigh been swept away by the tidal flood of lawlessness in which things that 20 years ago would have shocked any decent person, even non-Christian, is now part of the thinking and the language and the whole social fabric of our society. My brothers and sisters, you and I must realistically reckon that we are not impervious to all of this. It is a thick fog that is around us and is seeking continually to seep into the very fabric of our souls. It is not neutral in its influence upon you or upon me. And I am utterly surprised at how many Christians act as though they can go to Pakistan with no shots and no Imodium and come away with no gastrointestinal sickness, no sense of our peculiar danger when all the while God says, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." We must realistically reckon with the peculiar dangers of living and ministering in an age of abounding lawlessness.

Secondly, and this is the central burden of my message tonight--and listen to me carefully--you and I must be persuaded concerning the absolute necessity of our persevering in spiritual life and vigor if we are to be saved. Now that's going to set some of you on the back of your pew, but that's what Jesus is saying. In spite of the fact that the love of the many shall wax cold, the one enduring, that particular one enduring to the end, he, that one shall be saved. Now I am not suggesting that we are able to do this apart from the continuous supplies of grace that come to us within God's covenantal commitment to His people, secured by the indwelling of the Spirit by whom we are sealed to the day of redemption, the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ which secures that all for whom He intercedes shall be saved to the uttermost. I am not denying, I am not bypassing, nor am I ignorant. But my text says if you don't endure to the end, you're presumptuous to think you're going to be saved. And I'm convinced there are many sitting here who really don't believe it. You really don't believe that unless you persevere you'll be damned. And I am here to preach tonight, and I trust with the blessing of God, to persuade you that you must believe it because Jesus said it. "He [and only he] that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

God never saved anyone because he persevered in the mere profession of attachment to Christ while abounding lawlessness sucked away his love to Christ, his love to man. Nor did He save anyone because he persevered in the ministry and continued to preach orthodox sermons and lead God-centered worship. His saves them by His grace in a way of persevering in the graces of the Spirit in love to the end. It is only this unshakable persuasion that will produce three things that are essential to our perseverance. These are not peripheral. They are essential to our perseverance. And I'm suggesting that it's only a conviction of the absolute necessity of our perseverance that will drive the wheels of our commitment to these three things. What are they?

Number one: perpetual, ruthless mortification of our own peculiar sins. The Lord who spoke the words of Matthew 24 spoke these words in Matthew 5:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her [it doesn't say every one who looks upon a woman and has a legitimate appreciation of her beauty, but who looks with a view to lusting, who looks and kindles desire to have] hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (vv. 27-28).

"But Lord Jesus, that's an unrealistic standard. We've got eyes, and there are beautiful women. What can we do?" He says, "I'll tell you what you can do. You can go to gouging out your eyes." Look at the next verse: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." It's pluck or be cast. Jesus said it and Jesus meant it. Did He mean a literal plucking out of the eye. Of course not. If you're given to lust, blind men can lust as much as sighted men. But He's saying there must be this commitment to perpetual, ruthless mortification of sin. He repeats the words in a totally different context in Matthew 18:7-9.

Paul in Romans 8:13 says, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." And it's interesting that in the Matthew 5 passage, our Lord does indeed focus upon sexual sin. And part of the aggravated manifestation of lawlessness is in that area in which we have such a God-like capacity. If some of you have wondered why, with this abounding lawlessness, so much of it manifests itself in the sexual dimension, it's because in that dimension we've been endowed with such God-like capacity to create, to enter into an intimacy with another that is reflective of the intimacy within the triune God. So the devil does his best to pervert that which in many ways makes us most like God. And it's in that area that, unless we are committed to perpetual ruthless mortification, we're going to be sucked down into the vortex because of the abounding lawlessness in that area. The shameful stuff that pours over primetime network television. I'm not talking about cable television, the videos available at the local corner--and here I'm going to speak very pointedly--the wretched, demonic use of the computer and the Internet.

One of my pastor friends was telling me the other day. He's not on the Internet. He's just got an email service, and up on the email pops up addresses for pornographic sites. And I would be very surprised if there are not sitting in this room tonight, men who in the secrecy of their studies when wife is gone to bed; no one else is there, you've fallen prey to this vile, wretched, hellish form of impurity. And you're hooked. You've repented, you've prayed, you've cried, you've fasted, but you're hooked. And nothing short of perpetual, ruthless mortification is going to deliver you. And that may mean for you getting rid of your stinking computer. If the filter services do not work, and you find yourself unable to resist when an address and a picture pops up in front of you and you don't have the will to delete, my friend, cut off the right hand. There's nothing in the Bible that says you won't get to heaven without a computer. But my Bible says if you don't mortify the sin of lust, you'll go to hell. And you don't believe it. That's why you dabble and you pray and you cry and you confess, and you go right back to the stinking, rotten, vile, hellish cesspool. You don't believe it's a matter of heaven and hell. And may God help you tonight to say, "Lord, I believe you. I must endure to the end. Therefore, I must in Your strength and in Your power pluck and cut and cast." I tell you that's vigorous language.

There's another thing essential to our perseverance, which you won't engage in unless you're persuaded concerning the absolute necessity of your persevering in spiritual life and vigor. And it is this: continuous Spartan, self-discipline of your bodily appetites. Here I turn you again to one pivotal passage: 1 Corinthians 9. The Apostle has been dealing with the subject of Christian liberty and how he cheerfully relinquishes many of his liberties, things that are not sin in themselves. But he relinquishes them for the sake of others and the progress of the Gospel. And he says in verse 23,

"And this I do for the Gospel's sake, [now notice the switch of emphasis] that I might be partaker thereof with you. [I'm doing what I'm doing, not only that others may be saved and partake of Gospel blessings, but I do what I do in the relinquishment of my liberties that I also may be a partaker of Gospel blessings.]"

And then he launches into this imagery drawn from the Grecian games:

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it [that is, exercise self-control. Their whole life is under a regimen of self control to win the prize. From morning till night, the thing that is before them--I must win the prize. Everything I do, the things I don't do are all determined by my passionate commitment to win the prize] to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore [here's the personal implication] so run, not as uncertainly [not like a guy whose out for a leisurely jog on a lovely fall afternoon with no focus]; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air [not like Rocky taking his run in Philadelphia streets shadow boxing]: but I keep under my body [a vigorous Greek word: beat it under the eye], and bring it into subjection [bondage]: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [not put on a shelf. That's ridiculous philology and rotten theology]" (vv. 24-26).

He says the issue at stake is being tested and disapproved--reprobate. He says, "For me, the only way I will be a joint partaker of this Gospel that I preach in a pattern of self-denial for the good of others is if I exercise Spartan, self-discipline over my own bodily appetites and passions."

Now lest some of you think this is some bizarre Al Martin interpretation, I hope J. Alexander has a little credibility. He writes,

"In the present day out of opposition to the aesthetic life, we all probably act too much as if we were children of the bride chamber [quoting from the Scripture those who are rejoicing--no self-discipline] and too much neglect the subjugation of the body. That a man as a minister is no token that he shall not be cast into hell fire. The instances of apostasy within our own knowledge stare at us like the skeletons of lost travelers among the sands of our desert way. [That's one of the saddest statements I've read in a long time.] No temptation has befallen them but that which is common to man. The apparitions of clerical drunkards and the like should forewarn us: let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he perish. Paul expresses his view of this in terms of which the force cannot be fully brought out by the translation. 'But I keep under my body (I strike under the eye so as to make it black and blue, a boxing phrase indicative of strenuous efforts at mortification, as who should say, 'I subdue the flesh by violent and reiterated blows and bring it into subjection. I lead it along as a slave having subjugated it by assault and beating, I treat it as a bondman, as

boxers in the Palestra used to drag off their conquered opponents.')

And the reason for this mortification of the flesh, I would use here not so much the concept of mortification, but the disciplined subjugation is, 'lest I by any reason or means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' Dreadful words, but needed to deter us from more dreadful destruction. The Tophet, the hell of apostate ministers must be doubly severe. It is the deceitfulness of sin which hardens so many of us into carelessness about so great a danger. Pride goes before destruction till suddenly, like Saul, the careless minister finds himself inveigled into some great sin. This may never be known to the world, yet it may lead to his ruin."

It may never come to open, shameful knowledge among our churches. But there is One who walks amidst the churches with eyes as a flame of fire. What does He see? Is it fun to live a life of continuous Spartan self-discipline of our bodily appetites and passions at anytime? No, but in a society that worships at the shrine of self-indulgence, it is all the more difficult. Everything around us says, "Take it easy. Indulge yourself. Enjoy yourself."

Now Paul is the same man who says in Romans 8:35, he was persuaded that nothing would separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. But he was equally persuaded he would go to hell if he didn't go to heaven in a way of Spartan, self-discipline of his bodily appetites. How do you put those together? I don't put them together. I just live with them. As Spurgeon said, "When people ask us to reconcile truths that seem contradictory, I don't try to. You only reconcile enemies. I don't spend anytime reconciling friends."

At times, my friends, it's the truth, that in spite of all of the pressure, and all the internal tendency that operates within my own soul like positive polarity to the negative polarity of sin around me, and I say, "O God, how can I ever make it in the way of maintaining the grace of love for You and for Your people, and for holiness and truth?" It is then that we throw ourselves on the wonderful cushion of God's promises to keep us, the efficacious nature of the intercession of Jesus: "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." We feed our souls upon His high priestly prayer: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me..." We feed ourselves upon His words: "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which he hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." I say, "Lord's that's me. You're not going to lose me, but raise me at the last day." In the appropriate settings feed your soul upon the promises of the indefectible nature of grace. But in other settings, you feed your soul upon the absolute necessity of your persevering in the way of holiness and love and truth.

But you see, we're not going to do that. We're not going to be prepared for the perpetual, ruthless mortification of sin, the continuous, Spartan self-discipline of our bodily appetites and passions. And there's another thing we're not being prepared for, and it is this: relentless, rigorous, principled use of all the means of grace. Just as in the conversion of a sinner, the God who has elected a sinner and decreed his salvation, has decreed that he shall come to possess that salvation by means of hearing and by believing the Gospel. And I trust that there's no debate about that among us.

In the same way, the God who has decreed that the believer in Christ shall persevere to the end and be saved by Christ has ordained the means to that end. And just as it is high presumption to expect men to be saved without the means of the Gospel and without their believing the Gospel, it is high presumption to think we will be kept and ultimately persevered if we are indifferent to the means decreed by God for our preservation. Those personal means: reading our Bibles, praying, meditating. The corporate means: confessing our sins one to another, praying one for another, exhorting one another while it is called today lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, provoking one another to love and to good works, not forsaking ourselves the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. And that which combines all of these personal and corporate means in their most wonderful collation is a principled sanctifying of the Lord's Day Sabbath, the great market day of the soul when we have the approval of heaven one day a week to set aside our ordinary employments and recreations, and to spend the whole day in the public and private worship of God. As one businessman said to me some years ago, "Pastor Martin, I can't understand all this flap about the Lord's Day. If God didn't mandate it, I think I'd be ready to go out and make it just to keep my sanity."

My brothers and sisters, it's a hectic age. Part of it is the fruit of the lawlessness. I won't go into how, but it is. And with that, there will be increasing pressure upon us to cut off the Sunday night service. "I mean let's be reasonable." Then it will be "Cut out that afternoon service that was put in to replace the Sunday night service." And then it will be, "Well, you know, our lengthy services need to be trimmed back a bit." And in 25 years, we'll be nothing but a mausoleum of empty religion because of our lack of relentless, rigorous, principled use of all the means of grace. And this isn't a novice talking. 40 years in one place, and the pressures to cave in sort of come in different waves periodically. You're going to feel them, brethren. You give in and encourage your people to give in, and before long, what was unthinkable in church after church in this area 100 years ago will be our experience.

There are times I come over to this building to pick up my correspondence and other things in the office, and I come up in this auditorium and walk through it, and I say, "Lord, what sounds will reverberate from this roof 25 years from now? What will be said in this pulpit 25 years from now?" Only God knows. But I know one thing, the devil knows far better than to try to attack the central nerve centers of the life of the people of God. He starts with the outer bulwarks, the disciplined use of the ordinary means of grace, the sanctifying of a whole Day unto God. And when he has torn down the outer bulwarks, it's only a matter of time when he's in the citadel and drives his knife into the soul of true and vital religion, and it's dead. Somebody got unpersuaded concerning the necessity of perseverance. You see, the very concept of "hupomeno" is "bearing up under." The indication is perseverance isn't walking through the tulips. Perseverance is not something we like. Perseverance is not native to us. "But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved."

Well, I've laid before you my first two applications. We must be aware of the peculiar dangers of living in an age of abounding lawlessness. Secondly, we must be persuaded of the absolute necessity of perseverance in spiritual grace and vigor if we're going to be saved. But thirdly, you and I must be convinced of the absolute certainty of the keeping power of God that ensures that we shall be saved in spite of the climate of abounding lawlessness all around us. Isn't that in the text? "And because lawlessness shall abound, the love of the many shall wax cold." But in the midst of that, some will persevere and be saved. Why? Because the Holy Spirit

indwells them; because the Lord Jesus intercedes for them at the right hand of the Father, and He is committed to the salvation of His people.

As the text says, "He that endures to the end shall be saved," the analogy of Scripture allows us to say, "But he that is truly saved shall endure to the end and be saved." You see, the teaching of the Bible is not, "I'm saved regardless of what I do." The teaching of the Bible is, "I am saved, and what I do is the ongoing manifestation that I am saved. And because I am truly being saved, I shall be saved." Peter rejoices that those harassed believers in Asia Minor are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5). Romans 8:30: "Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them [without exception] He also justified: and whom He justified, them [without exception] He also glorified." All of His elect are called. All of His called are justified. All of the justified are glorified without one exception. And when we feel the horrific pressures of the abounding lawlessness around us, that's our call to look beyond and through that thick fog of lawlessness; behold at the right hand of the Father One who has carried into heaven the reminders of His sacrifice for sinners. "They shall look on Him whom they pierced" (some indication that He may yet bear in His glorified exalted state the marks of His suffering). And of Him Isaiah said, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." He'll be satisfied because not one for whom He shed His blood will at last be lost. And you and I need to be convinced of the absolute certainty of the keeping power of God that ensures we shall be saved in spite of the abounding lawlessness.

In recent days, in an area where I have faced some fierce assaults of the enemy, there have been times when morning after morning, I have read through the first 14 verses of Romans 6, and I have affirmed out loud in the presence of God, "O God, I do believe in Christ. I died. I was buried. I've been raised. I am in Him. And in Him, and because of my union with Him, sins' claims have been exhausted. And You have said it shall not lord it over me. And in that confidence, I reckon it to be so. I present my members afresh to you." And then I said to that sin, "You will not conquer me. I am in Christ." And a sense of triumph comes. Though it may seem to press in upon me, I can look it in the eye and say, "You're not going to get me and pin me. I'm in Christ; Christ is in me. I'm united to Him in the virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection. What a wonderful sense of triumph. Yea, I to the end shall endure. As sure as the earnest is given, more happy but not more secure than glorified spirits in heaven.

Ah, dear people of God, this is what nerves us. What a horrible thing to think you fight all your life and at the end lose. Why fight? But in the end, we're going to be found to win. And knowing we're going to win, we're ready to fight. We're ready to war in the confidence that we shall be found overcomers in the last day by the grace of our Savior.

Now, no doubt, there are some sitting here tonight who have never fled to Christ. You know nothing of what it is to be in the midst of this conscious warfare with the climate of lawlessness. You're a part of it. My friend, you need to get extricated, or you'll be carried with it down to hell. And the way of extrication is in a crucified Savior. He gave Himself for us to deliver us from this present evil world. Christ died to redeem a people from ungodliness and from lawlessness unto a life of sober, evangelical law keeping in the power of the Spirit. You need to go to Christ to get delivered from the

horrible, oppressive, captivating power of this present evil age. And whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

And dear people of God, I trust, before you pillow your head tonight, you will pray back to God the truth of this passage: "O God, forgive me when I've carelessly trotted along, not recognizing the peculiar dangers of this age of abounding lawlessness. O God, more deeply persuade me that I must persevere if I am to be saved. O God, convince me afresh that I shall persevere in the grace and in the strength of Your beloved Son."

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