

December 31, 2023 by Steve Brandon



## A Call for Endurance

### Revelation 13:10

It is New Year's Eve, and that means that another year is behind us and another year is ahead of us. It means that now is a good time to reflect on what last year was like, and a good time to reflect upon what the new year might bring. This sort of reflection and anticipation is natural. Many in the world look at their life last year, and resolve to do differently this year. Many think about writing out "New Year's Resolutions."

So, this morning, in the spirit of the New Year, I want to preach a topical message to you and challenge you to live for Christ this next year. Now for a text to start with, I want for us to turn back again into the book of Revelation. We have been going through the book of Revelation, but have paused a few weeks for Christmas.

I want to return there, because it gives us a good message for us for the New Year. Of course, if you have been with us for the past few months, you know that the theme that we have identified for the book of Revelation is this phrase, "Come, Lord Jesus." That's because the book of Revelation is about the coming of the Lord Jesus.

In chapter 1, we see his appearance. In chapters 2-3, he speaks with the churches about his coming. In chapters 4-18, we see signs of future events. In chapters 19-22, we see the return of Jesus, and the establishment of his kingdom.

This theme of Revelation comes in the final prayer of the book. John writes in chapter 22, verse 20, "Come, Lord Jesus!" It's what Revelation ought to stir us to pray. That through all the wrongs, there is a day when Jesus will come and make it all right. The book of Revelation is a call for us to long for the day when Jesus returns.

Is that a prayer you pray? Do you say, "Come, Lord Jesus!"? If you are anything like me, the distractions and the joys of the world are great. Christmas was great in our house. All of our children were home, and their spouses, and our grandchildren. I couldn't have asked for anything more. Certainly there are difficulties in life, but there are joys in life as well. When things are good, it's often difficult to long for Jesus to come and take it all away. It's difficult to remember the point of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

I want for you to think about others in this world. Christians right now in Ukraine can easily pray the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" as their homeland has been invaded, and life has been upended. The few Christians who live in the Gaza Strip right now can easily pray the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" as they have been displaced from their homes and have had family members killed in the bombings, as they are living right now in unsanitary conditions and feverish and sick: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Likewise, those to whom the book of Revelation was written could easily pray the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" because, circumstances in their life were very difficult. John was a political prisoner when he wrote these words. He was exiled to Patmos (Revelation 1:9), a prison island, not too much unlike Alcatraz. The people he was writing to were facing hard times as well. They were hated by the Jews. They were persecuted by the Romans.

All of the disciples, except for John, were martyred for their faith in Christ. Christians during the days of John were faring no better. Nero, the Roman emperor (54-68AD), hated the Christians. He burned Rome in 64AD and blamed it on the Christians. So he arrested many of them. Tacitus, the historian, wrote this about Nero's cruelty toward Christians. "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."<sup>1</sup>

Persecution of Christians like this went on for more than 200 years. When you are facing unjust persecution like this, longing for the return of Jesus is an easy thing. The original readers of the book of Revelation would constantly pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" "Come and deal with the injustice that taking place toward us." When it comes to interpreting the book of Revelation, you must remember this context. That John was writing to a persecuted people, facing intense persecution.

That's why John writes in the first chapter of the book, "John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus" (Revelation 1:9). John knew the hardships that his readers were facing, because he was facing them too.

Thus, the heart of Revelation is wrapped up in the final prayer of the book, "Come, Lord Jesus!" But with this heart, there also comes the main application from the book of Revelation. It is this: Remain faithful to Christ. Or, you might say it this way: Endure until the end. Or, you might say it this way: "Overcome"

The idea is this: when he comes, be found faithful. This application is most clearly seen in chapter 13:10. It is from this text that I will base my message this morning. So, if you haven't done so already, please open your Bibles to Revelation 13. The last half of the verse says this:

Revelation 13:10

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

This is the great application of the book of Revelation: Endure in your faith! Keep the faith until the end. This morning, I am calling you to

endurance. I am calling you to faith!

By the way, my message this morning, isn't going to be a specific exposition of a single passage of Scripture. We will return to that next week as we pick up on Revelation 16 and the bowl judgments. But this morning, this New Year's Eve morning, I want to bring us back into the book of Revelation, by emphasizing the most basic application in the book of Revelation: enduring.

This is the one, single application to the book of Revelation. It is the title of my message this morning: "A Call for Endurance." This same application is given in chapter 14. Look at verse 12: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints" (Revelation 14:12). The second half of verse 12 gives an explanation of what this means: those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:12). The endurance of the saints comes through obedience and faith, obedience to the commandments of God, and faith in the work of Jesus.

This is a great application for us on this New Year's Eve, as we think about the next year; as we think about 2024. It is a great application for us as we think about our priorities in 2024. Are there things that need to change in your life? Are there things that need to stay the same? Are there things in your life that need increasing? Are there things in your life that need decreasing?

Regarding your faith, this is the big application for you all: Endure in 2024. Endure in your faith in 2024. A theological term for this is "perseverance." "Persevere in your faith in 2024." This application is not unique to Revelation. If you read through the New Testament, you will find it again and again. It's said in different ways and with different words, but it all gets back to the same idea: "Endure in your faith."

This is often the final exhortation that Paul gives in his letters. At the end of the book of Ephesians, Paul calls us to "stand firm" in the Lord. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ...Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. This is the same application of the book of Revelation. This is the same application for us this New Year's Eve: "Stand firm," endure, persevere in the faith" (Ephesians 6:10,13).

Paul gives same application is given in at the end of Philippians. "Therefore, my brothers, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved" (Philippians 4:1). At the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). This is the same idea: be steadfast. don't move in your faith. It won't be in vain, because Jesus is returning!

Peter said it this way at the end of his second epistle: "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Don't be carried away by error! Don't lose your stability in Jesus" (2 Peter 3:17-18).

We live in a day and age, when many are being "carried away" and "losing their stability in Jesus." We live in a day and age, when many are not "standing firm in the Lord." We live in a day and age, when many are "deconstructing" their faith. That's the modern term for "falling away." It describes those who walk through the process of rethinking their faith, and come to dis-believe many of the things that they used to believe, and thereby "deconstruct" their faith. "Tear it down" if you will.

There are times when this comes very systematically, as they work through the key doctrines of the Christian faith and come to reject them. Often there comes with this "deconstruction" an intellectual pride, because now, those who deconstruct are often enlightened now to the better reality. They feel like they once were duped by Christianity and by the church community. They feel like they were forced into certain behaviors, so that they would conform to the group. But now, they have seen the light, and have come out and away from those things.

Often, those who deconstruct will be quite willing to give their "testimony" of how they once believed in Jesus, but now, they no longer do. This is the opposite of what the book of Revelation is calling us to do. Rather than tearing down our faith, Revelation calls us to stand upon our faith. Revelation calls us to continue in our faith. As the original context of the original readers teaches us, even through difficult times!

My application for you this morning is simple: Believe that Jesus is coming back! Believe that all that is written in the book of Revelation is true. You may not fully know and understand all of the details, but you know enough that the message of Revelation is this: Jesus is coming. Long for his coming. Pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." This belief that Jesus is coming will have a purifying effect upon your life.

John, the same author of Revelation, says this in 1 John 3:2-3, "We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hope in him purifies himself as he is pure." Belief and hope in the return of Jesus will have a purifying effect upon your lives because you know he is coming back. This knowledge of the future will change your behavior today.

Do you remember the parable that Jesus told of the faithful and wise servant? "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions" (Matthew 24:45-47).

This is my exhortation to you this morning. In 2024, be like the faithful servant who is doing the Lord's will when he comes because, with it, will bring a blessing! I'm not exhorting you to something that's bad this morning. I'm exhorting you to endure, so that you receive a blessing! The consequences of not enduring are death.

Jesus continued in his parable: "But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:48-51).

We see this reality worked out in Revelation. We will especially see this next week in Revelation 16, with the pouring out of God's wrath upon those who refused to believe in Jesus! They will meet a terrible end. So, endure in your faith in 2024! The consequences are eternal!

Jesus said it this way, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But **the one who endures to the end will be saved**" (Mark 13:13). The

corollary is equally true: The one who fails to endure to the end will not be saved. You aren't saved by praying some prayer in the past, while living for yourself today. Salvation comes through endurance! Now, it's not that your endurance will earn your salvation, but endurance will be the verification of your salvation.

The writer to the Hebrews says it like this: "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:14). In other words, our endurance until the end shows that we share in Christ today!

Using the terminology of Jesus, enduring until the end, shows that our soul is good soil. I'm pulling that from the parable that Jesus told of the sower. Do you remember that story? It's told for us in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. I want to read it for you from Mark chapter 4.

#### Mark 4:3

Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The story is simple enough, the seed falls on four types of soil. There is the path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and the good soil. Because of the types of soil, some seed grows well and some seed doesn't. The seed on the path doesn't grow at all. It can't penetrate the ground. The seed on the rocky soil starts to grow, but the plant withers because it can't develop any roots. The seed on the thorny soil starts to grow as well, but the plant is choked out by the thorns. The seed on the good soil grows and grows and grows and produces fruit, because the condition of the soil is good for growth.

After telling the parable, the disciples came and asked him about the meaning of the parable. And Jesus said to them, "...Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables" (Mark 4:13)? In other words, this parable stands front and center and most important to understanding every parable that Jesus ever told. It has to do with the word of God. It has to do with how it works in people. Jesus said this:

#### Mark 4:14-20

The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

Jesus said that the seed is the word of God. Jesus said that the soils are the souls of people. There are some who hear the word, but reject it straight away. This is akin to the seed on the path. It doesn't penetrate into the soul and cannot grow. There are others who hear the word with joy (Mark 4:16), but they aren't rooted and grounded. This is like the seed on the rocky soil. You can see this in others, when tribulation or persecution comes (Mark 4:17) because they fall away. They don't endure.

Now, I want for you to think about this in light of the message of Revelation. The original readers were facing tribulation and persecution, and John was telling them to endure and not fall away. Those who fell away faced the wrath of God. They didn't endure until the end. They were not saved.

There are others who hear the word, and begin to grow. But they are ensnared by "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things." These things come in and "choke out the word," just like thorns do. They suck the moisture from the soil. They dominate the light from the sun so that there is nothing left to nourish the seed on the soil. They wither and die. Again, seed on the thorny ground doesn't endure to the end. They were not saved.

But then, there are those who hear the word and bear fruit thirty, sixty, a hundred fold! This is the good soil. The soul that grows and brings fruit to maturity. These are the saved in the parable. The fruit that is being talked about here is the working of God's word in your life. It is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

It is the love of the saints. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). It is obedience to God's word. John wrote, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:2-4).

Fruit is obedience to God. This is true of everyone who has been born of God. They overcome the world. They are not choked out by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. They are not without deep roots that will stand strong in tribulation.

Again, let me repeat the words of Jesus about this parable: "And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables' (Mark 4:13)? The word of God goes out, some reject it. Others accept it. It's only the good soil that will bring forth fruit. The other souls are lost and are overcome by the world."

A few weeks ago, I spent a weekend in the Winnebago County Jail ministering to the inmates and this parable came up. Someone said to the inmates, "You are good soil" because, they were all into the weekend, singing and joyful, enjoying the word and fellowship." I told them, "We don't know if you are good soil. But you can know. You know if you are good soil by what takes place over time. So, when you get out, take

out a whiteboard, and write a date on the whiteboard. Write down the date that it will be one year from now. Then, when that date rolls around, look at your life. If you are bearing fruit in your life, you are good soil. If you are not, then you are not good soil."

So church family, let us press on! Let us press on to know the Lord! You might say, what does this look like for me? It will look a bit differently for every one of you. There are those in this congregation who are sick, for you, enduring means clinging to the old truths that you have learned, trusting in Christ to hold you fast.

Revelation chapters 2 and 3 give us some great pictures of what endure might look like in your life. We went through these seven churches of Revelation in the Spring. They are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergemum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicia. They all have different characteristics. All these churches had specific problems, and in every single one of them he speaks about the one who endures. For you to endure, it might mean that you follow the counsel that Jesus gives to one (or more of these churches). It may be that you can identify with one (or more) of these churches, and that the application to you becomes clear to you.

In each of these churches, there is a call to "conquer." That word is from the Greek word we get Nike, which is victory. This is the way that Jesus spoke about "enduring." The one who conquers is the one who overcomes, who endures.

To Ephesus, Jesus writes, "To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat the tree of life which is in the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). This is the promise to the one who returns to his first love (see Revelation 2:5). The promise isn't to the one who only once had a love. Rather it's to the one who returns to this first love and continues in it. That is, he endure. Also, by implication, the one who doesn't overcome, the one who doesn't endure, who doesn't conquer, won't get to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

How important it is to conquer? Look at Revelation 2:11. "The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death." The one who conquers is the one faithful unto death! That is the promise in Revelation 2:10. "Ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." If you are faithful unto death, you will not experience the second death. That's what it means for them to overcome. For those in Smyrna, to overcome meant to be a martyr. To endure, God called them to be faithful unto death.

Look next at the church in Pergemum. He says in Revelation 2:17, "To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." There again is the promise of blessing to the one who conquers, who endures.

Now consider to the church in Thyatira. We read in Revelation 2:26, "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations." Endure until the end! Keep his words until the end. That is conquering!

Similarly, to the church in Sardis, Jesus says, "The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life" (Revelation 3:5). The one who conquers receives the white garments. The one who conquers will have his name in the book of life. The implication there is that perhaps your name will be blotted out. It may not be there. But if you overcome and conquer, "I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels" (Revelation 3:5).

To the church in Philadelphia we read, "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God" (Revelation 3:12). All these blessing come to the one who conquers and endures. It does not come to the one who doesn't conquer or endure.

The same sort of promise comes to the church in Laodicea, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Revelation 3:21). You don't conquer and endure, there is no throne access for you. Church family, let's be faithful. Endure until the end!

Let's consider these churches by way of personal application.

What was the problem for the church in Ephesus? Their love had grown cold. At one time they followed after Jesus, and then they grew cold. John is telling them to go back to where they were and to repent. It's not okay to have a love that is fiery for God and then to grow cold. He tells them to return to their first love. Perhaps you need to return to your first love.

The church in Smyrna was facing hard trials and being reminded to be faithful unto death. Perhaps you too are facing some difficult times. God is calling you to be faithful through them.

Pergemum was filled with false teachers and they were following their way. Perhaps you need to forsake some false teaching that you are following.

The church in Thyatira were committing sexual sin. Maybe you're involved in sexual sin. Percentages are not good for sexual sin in the church. Turn away from these. Conquer!

The church in Sardis was a happening place of lots of activity. "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:2). Maybe you have a reputation in the church for being alive, but perhaps you're actually dead. Turn and repent! That's your application.

Philadelphia is a small but faithful church. Nothing bad is said about this church. Maybe that's you, small and insignificant. I consider myself to be small and insignificant, like George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*. I'm ministering to a small church. Small and insignificant, but I'm blessed like George Bailey was. However insignificant you are, just keep the word. Maybe you need to say "I'm like Philadelphia, and I need to keep on his word."

Maybe you're like Laodicea, who was lukewarm. Those in Laodicea were actually rich, just like the American church. They said "I have prospered, and I need nothing!" (Revelation 3:17). Maybe you need to realize that you "are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." Maybe you need to repent and trust in Christ and Christ Alone and not your own riches.

Maybe one of those churches stirred an application for you. Let's think further about enduring.

In our congregation, there are some that are sick. For you, enduring until the end means clinging to the old truths you have learned and trusting Christ through the illness. There are those in this congregation who are busy, life and work has so engulfed you, that you have found little time for the Lord or others in recent days. For you, enduring in the Lord might mean that you change some of your priorities, that God's word and prayer might have a central part of your faith.

There are those in this congregation with whom all is well with you and your household! For you, and enduring means remembering the kindness of the Lord to you. For you, enduring means preparing for the day when the trials do come, that you might respond well then! There are some of you who have grown cold in your faith. Where once you were lively in your faith, sharing your faith, growing in your faith. But now, what was once exciting, no longer is exciting. For you, enduring may mean repentance, and rekindling your faith. For you, I can only urge you to look deep into your soul. Return to God's word and prayer and your first priority.

There are some of you who are old in your faith, and you have become bored in your faith. Perhaps this is the year that you join one of those Bible reading groups that I have talked about for the past few years. There's nothing quite like reading through the Scriptures fresh and talking about what you learned this week from the Scriptures. It keeps the Bible fresh and not boring.

There are some of you who are new in your faith. Again, these Bible reading groups could be a helpful for you to grasp the message of the entire Bible. You will find the stories of Abraham and Moses and David encouraging. You will see the discouragement that comes in the fall of Solomon and Judas, who failed to endure to the end. You will be given reason to endure and you see the Lord being faithful to his covenants he makes with people. You will see the glories of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and how central his life is to our faith. All of these things will help you endure in 2024.

Those are some of my applications for you all who are in different stages of life. To all of you I'm simply calling you to endure in 2024.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 29, 2023 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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[1] Tacitus, *The Complete Works of Tacitus* (New York: Random House, 1942), 381 or Annals, XV, 44. You can read the entire work here: <https://archive.org/details/completeworksof00taci/page/n3/mode/2up>.