

Week 1

Perserverance/endurance, being faithful

- a. Jesus needs to keep reminding us to preserver, endure and be faithful. So, we must not continue do these things. They are important, or Jesus would not keep telling us over and over that we need to continue in them. He knows that we must be inclined at times to be impatient or faithless. He tells us to be faithful because He is faithful! He commands us to be faithful, in trial, tribulation, even unto death! When we are, He will reward us! He has called us, He has chosen us, therefore, we should be faithful to Him! He wants us to hold fast to Him, cling to Him. This is a choice that we have to make. If we did not have a tendency to let go or give up, He would not remind us of this action, or act of faith. When He reminds us to hold fast, to me it implies that someone or something will try to take away what we have in Jesus. Strength, faith, peace, whatever we have we must actively keep, maintain and care for. **Good insights!**

Perserverance and endurance require patience. There will be times that we will tend to grow weary, get impatient or be tempted to give up. But God reminds us to hang in there! Be patient! God sees and knows, and He is in control! Even or especially during times of hardship and tribulation for the sake of the Word and the testimony of Jesus. **What does the pairing of the Word and testimony of Jesus mean to you? It is an interesting question to try and answer.** We have to preserver in our work to further the gospel and not grow weary in love, service or faith. Again, Jesus commands us, this time to preserver, and He promises to deliver us. Patience is key. We must remain patient and know that God will take care of everything we need as we keep our focus on Him. We must have the patience of the saints and to keep God's commandments and faith in Jesus.

- b. Both remind us that we will endure hardships, but Romans explains that despite this it cannot compare to the glory that will one day be revealed in us. Therefore, we are to have patience, be faithful and hold fast to the hope we have in Jesus! The revealing of who we are to ourselves and all creation. Together how we groan and labor awaiting the revealing and our redemption, but we are to eagerly await our hope with perserverance, never letting go but pushing on to the prize. Despite our weakness, the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us according to the will of God. Praise Him!! Have patience, hold fast! God's word promises your redemption and He says that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose!
- c. Heavenly Father, I thank You that You are goodness and love! I thank You that You have a plan for me! Thank You Father for calling me according to Your purpose and that I have been redeemed in Your Son Jesus! Thank You Lord, that it has not been revealed yet in me Your glory

and all that I am in You, but You give me that hope that one day You will reveal who I am in You. Right now though, I ask you Father to help me in my weakness. I know I fall short, I know I need You Jesus. Forgive me Lord for sinning in Your sight. Forgive me for allowing distractions to take the place of time spent with you. Forgive me for allowing myself to grow weary in Your work. Reveal to me my heart. Such a prayer will always be answered, and you will always find the support you need to overcome. Show me what you want to prune away, and allow your fruitfulness to come forth through me! Your word says that You are my strength, so I thank You for strengthening me as you reveal these things to me. Give me the patience to persevere in the works that you have given me to do. Help me to hold fast to your promises and to the hope in Your Son Jesus and not grow weary. I pray that Your will be done in me, and through me all the days of my life, and that I remain faithful to You, as You are always faithful to me! All praises, glory and honor be unto You forever and always! In Jesus Name I pray, Amen. Absolutely beautiful prayer and heart for God.

Week 2

Revelation 14:13 Blessed = fortunate, happy

The 3 Angels announcement, God's judgment has come. People have accepted the mark of the beast and are worshipping him. They are to receive the same torment and judgment as the beast. It will not be an easy time for Christians who refuse to worship the beast. The blessing comes when they are in Christ they are truly fortunate. There is a promise of their reward. Jesus said that their works for Him will follow them. After this comes the harvest judgment and it will be terrible.

Revelation 16:15 Blessed = fortunate, happy

The bowl judgments.

The Angels are pouring out the bowl judgments and horrible things are happening to men and to the earth. Those who keep their eyes on Jesus and are watching, waiting and staying clean are happy, fortunate, relieved at His coming. Then comes armageddon.

Revelation 19:9 Blessed = privileged, favored

Heaven rejoices at Babel's destruction. Marriage supper of the Lamb.

Babylon is destroyed and all of Heaven rejoices. Then His people praise and rejoice. Jesus and His church are united. Therefore His people are happy, fortunate, privileged. After this is the second coming of Jesus. We are fortunate that we are with Him and not realizing the huge error of rejecting Him! We are fortunate to not receive His destruction!

Revelation 20:6 Blessed = fortunate, happy, privileged

Satan bound 1000 years. Saints reign with Jesus 1000 years.

God's people have been made priests of God to rule and reign with Him for 1000 years. The second death has no power over them. After this Satan is released on the earth to deceive those who can be deceived.

Revelation 22:7 Blessed = fortunate, happy privileged

New Jerusalem described.

We are given a description of the new Jerusalem and a glimpse into what God has prepared for us. He gave us a glimpse into what will happen so that we will be prepared and know that He has wonderful things planned for our future. So when we see things happen that were foretold to us in His word, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus and know that by seeking Him and staying obedient to Him and His word we will be prepared to endure whatever comes our way. Knowing that our future is secure and very bright in Him. Happy, privileged, fortunate and well off are we!

The surrounding context gives us insight into what is meant by being blessed. Sometimes it is a description of the blessings themselves, what we can expect from God in our future. A glimpse into what He has prepared for us and what our future with Him and in Him holds. Other times, the verse is surrounded by the terrible things that will happen. Most times to others. Sometimes to God's people, but for us always bearing a promise of what will be in store if we hold fast and endure with patience and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

The context shows us if the blessing is to us from God, in us because we are in God, or who we are in God. **Good job!**

Week 3

1. I see the following similarities.

Political. The first century Christians were confronted with having a mixture of church and state. While we don't allow that in the US per se, we do see many Christians struggle with separating God from politics. We see them on tv, and in videos, at rallies and on news platforms. While we want to make a difference in our culture, I think it is a dangerous step to take to try to put any religion into the government. In Rome, it led to compelled worship of the Emperors and their gods and the persecution in some places of Christians who refused to worship them. **The danger is that someone is making the decision to tell others who and what to worship, and even if they use the name God or Jesus, it will be an image in their own likeness, a God or Jesus who is strangely familiar to power and oppression, but one that has all the overtones of idolatry.**

Culturally and socially. The first century Roman empire was a pagan culture. They worshipped idols, they participated in ceremonial practices that were to the Christian sinful. It's not too different from what our society celebrates today. Some sociologists have seen our culture as a return to a kind of neopaganism. We could learn so much from how the early Christians confronted such ideas and practices. And if a Christian stands up against it then or now, they can suffer difficult consequences socially and monetarily. I think it has always been difficult for some, probably most, Christians to separate themselves culturally and socially. We all tend to want whatever is comfortable or easy. We want to be liked and to fit in. No one WANTS to suffer consequences. But being a Christian will sometimes bring you scorn or difficulties because our values and morals may not line up with the current culture or societal norms (which are always changing). It is hard to lose relationships because your values no longer line up with your friends and neighbors. Harder still when you are ridiculed for your beliefs. This has been an experience that many Christians have had. Christians throughout the centuries have had to make choices between what and who they will allow in their lives in order to live according to God's will. It is even harder when the ridicule comes from other Christians who demean your position as ignorant, elitist, or some such label when you simply disagree with their conclusions.

Another likeness I see is the silent witness. First century Christians were encouraged to live their Christianity in secret to keep their place in society and not rock the boat. Actually, no one was encouraged to live their life in secret. That was considered by Rome as seditious. In fact, Paul, knowing this view, makes it very clear that nothing Jesus did or that He and the other apostles and believers did took place in secret: "Acts 26:26 And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak boldly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner (or in other words, in secret)!" I know I have heard this preached. That we can convert others by the way we live our lives. This is true, but how will they know why we are different if we don't share the gospel? Jesus is why we are different, and He can make them different too. We are to live quiet lives, not contentious lives. Paul says:

¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. (Rom. 12:16-21 NLT)

Paul also said, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor. 9:22 NIV)

In addition, I think that most Christians throughout the centuries have had to beware of idols, or anything that can take the place of God in our hearts. The idols we face today might be more insidious. We are bombarded day and night with advertisements and peoples social media that shows us how if we have this or do that we will be happier, more successful or have a better life. It can be difficult to recognize them. I think it is wise to ask ourselves what is taking the place of God in my life? Very good question!

2. I think the imagery is one of **power, supremacy**. He has charge over the Angels and the Church. **He is letting them know that even though He is Lord, He is still among them. He is their Lord, their Savior and He is what their Christianity is all about. He is there, among them, with them, and is their First Love.** Therefore, they must live their lives considering Him first, and what that means. To witness, to share the gospel, to make disciples.

3. Lord, I **praise and worship you for all of who you are! I thank you for your ever present goodness and mercy! Forgive me for sometimes forgetting that YOU are my first love! When I fall into putting other things in front of you, or I live as a silent Christian so I don't rock the boat reveal it to me so that I can repent and share the good news of Your gospel. It is all about you Lord and bringing others into Your Kingdom! Thank You Jesus for saving me. I love you, and I ask for your guidance, revelation and direction in Jesus Name. Amen Beautiful.**

Week 4

1. Jesus warned Smyrna that they were about to suffer persecution and difficult times. **We haven't suffered this type of persecution in the US, but like these early Christians, there are pockets of the Church around the world who are suffering persecution – unto death. I am generally not a negative person, but we are looking at the message that Jesus had to the seven churches as well as to Christians throughout the church age. That being said, we can see changes culturally and socially that may cause some persecution to Christians in the future. It may not be unto death, but perhaps people will lose their lively hoods based on their convictions.**
 In Pergamum satan **had begun to mix and dilute Christianity with government, cultural and social acceptance. I think that this is something that the modern Church struggles with. We all want to be prosperous, comfortable and accepted socially. The church can fall into these teachings to draw in more people, but as a result drift away from its first love. An anything goes type of attitude toward the Christian walk because we are forgiven is another thing that the Church is being warned to avoid. How will the world know that we are different and want what we have if we act like the world? I think we need to stay close to our Savior. Pray, seek Him, stay in the Word. God is so good. If we ask, He will reveal to us the things that we need to change.**

2. I cannot speak for the Church at large, but can only make my own observations. I think that the Church has become apathetic towards the things of God and of truly loving people. The only thing that we are going to have to answer for when we stand before Jesus is **what we did with the people that He gave us to love or serve.** I think many times we **are running toward prosperity, fame, adoration of others and doing this in the name of Jesus. We are haughty and prideful. Uncaring and judgmental. Selfish and self-serving.** We give the 4 steps to this and the 3 steps to that like it's a self help book but **fail to reach out a hand to the hurting.** We feel good, like we've made it, hanging out with the leaders of our church or our clique of church friends but fail to invite new people in, or worse yet, look down on them. **We are Jesus hands extended on this earth. What are we doing with them? Now that I have said all of that, I do**

believe that Jesus is doing a great work in us now. I am seeing change. I am seeing that he is speaking to and through Church leaders and it is making a difference in the Church. I love the imagery that we are Christ's hands. I often think of Mother Theresa when asked how she could stand ministering among such disease, filth, and decay in bodies and in the neighborhoods she served. She said simply, "In every broken and diseased body, I see my Lord in need of a loving hand. I treat them all as if they were Christ himself." I have never forgotten that sentiment even though I am not even Catholic. It resonated with how I have understood God's call on all of us.

3. The Spirit redirects us in many ways. He speaks to us through God's Word. As we read and receive His Word, His Spirit speaks truth to us that as we meditate and make it a part of us, changes and transforms us! He uses our Pastors and teachers. As they pray and study His Word and allow themselves to be used as vessels, He speaks to us through them. Yielding to their teaching and direction, spending time in study, this changes us. His Spirit redirects us through prayer, personal and corporate. As we yield to what He is saying to us and allow Him to speak. He redirects us through interactions with other believers and other people. Allowing us to get out of ourselves and communicate and serve others changes us. Dreams and visions. The Spirit speaks to some of us through vivid dreams and visions, some subtle and others life changing.

I think we all have places where we tend to resist the Spirit. I find that sometimes one area that I resist Him is stopping and spending enough time with Him. There is always something I have to do, or someplace I have to be. He is really the most important thing in my life, so why do I resist? I always feel better when I have spent time with Him! Sometimes there are things in my life that I enjoy that He may want me to put down for a time, I have resisted that too. Ultimately I find that putting them down and replacing them with time spent with Him make me happier and I am more fulfilled and energized.

4. Remembering that our first love is Jesus. Asking Him to reveal our hearts to us. What do I have in my life that I need to remove, or what do I have to add to be closer to Him and more faithful? I also think a well-rounded teaching of the Bible is what is needed. Christians need to be taught how to live a Christian life. We need to know its not all about me. Its not all about prosperity or comfort, but it is about Jesus. Knowing Him, serving Him. We need teaching like what we are receiving by this course. What does Jesus think about how we act and what we do or don't do? We need to learn how to pray. How to study His Word. How to pray with others. I have said for a long time that churches should have 'mentors' to help newer Christians. Not everyone can figure it out on their own. I have seen in my own church that those who have been taken under someone's wing have learned a lot and appear to be faithful. Isn't mentoring what making disciples is all about? It looks like that is what Jesus did. Discipleship is faithfulness.

I am so thankful for God's love, that it is so great for me, that He sent His Son Jesus to save me. I am so grateful that God has allowed me to have access to Him, to have His Word, His promises, the wonderful teaching that is available to me so that I can learn and grow in the knowledge of Him! His Word is deep and dimensional and the more I study, the more need it, the more I want of it, and the more I love Him! I am so thankful for this teaching, that is causing me to look at things in the world and my life, that Jesus is speaking to me and that I am being changed.

Kelly, this was a very thoughtful assignment and showed great compassion and a heart to do God's will. Thank you for your hard work! It was a beautiful journal.