



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 20, 2013

Pentecost 22

Sermon Text: [1 John 5:13-15](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 32:22-30](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 40](#)

Second Lesson: [1 John 5:13-15](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 18:1-8a](#)

### **The Believer Grows in Christian Character Christians Are Persistent in Prayer**

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

The character trait our God has us talk about today is persistence. Persistence in prayer. Did you ever notice that when it comes to persistence, there's kind of a fine line between being persistent and being annoying? Have you ever been in a grocery store when a child is being very persistent that they want that candy bar at the checkout? Did you ever see that child there throwing a fit? I've actually seen them laying on the floor, kicking and screaming, because they are very persistent. They need their parent to buy that candy bar or their life as they know it will come to an end immediately. They are persistent, you'll give them that, but it's as annoying as all get out, isn't it? Don't you just feel for that parent? Doesn't your heart just go out to that parent because they are there just feeling terrible because it's annoying everyone that is within earshot, which is pretty much everyone, even in a Walmart, right?

Did you also ever notice that there is a fine line between persistence and rebellion? Did you ever think about that? A teenager has asked their parent for something. The parent has given them the answer and explained why, and they've done it again and again, but that teenager and that certainty of youth keeps coming back. They are persistent in asking, but it's kind of crossed over into "I know more than you do, and I know better than you do, so I'm going to keep asking that until you open your eyes and see the light of my brilliance in saying this is what should happen for me." Persistent, yes, but could it cross over into rebellion? Sure.

As we look at persistence in prayer, which is the parable that Jesus told, we see Jacob being persistent in our First Lesson. I don't think God, in his patient love, is necessarily annoyed with us when we hold our breath at times. That's why he sent Jesus to take away those times we've sinned like that. But I think the question we've got to ask ourselves is, does our persistence in prayer ever cross over into rebellion against God? That might be an interesting thing for us to think about.

If we are going to look at these words from 1 John 5, they don't really encourage us to be persistent, but they give us the answer why as Christians we can be persistent in prayer. There are three sentences in those verses. I think each sentence gives us a reason why we can be persistent.

Look at the first sentence... “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Prayer is not mentioned once, right? He is really giving us this thesis for this letter that he wrote. John is the elder statesman of the apostles. He has lived longer than all the others. We believe he writes this towards the end of his life. He is writing to people that he considers children in the faith. Thinking about this letter is kind of like thinking about what a grandfather desperately wants the grandchildren to know and he’s trying to impart some wisdom to them because, in the case of this letter that John was writing, they were under attack by some people that had a funny name. They were called Gnostics. They claimed to have hidden knowledge. That’s why throughout the book he emphasizes “know” so much. You can even see it in these three sentences. “I want you to know that you have eternal life.”

These Gnostics, that comes from a Greek word for knowledge, they claim they had special hidden knowledge that God didn’t just give to everybody. They’d say, “The apostles might teach you about Jesus and what he did for you, but anybody could know that. We’ve got something better. Something hidden.”

Have you ever read in the Old Testament those long genealogies where you can’t pronounce any of the names, so you kind of just skip over it? Do you know the ones I am talking about in the Old Testament? These guys would take those and they would make up stories that went with some of the names and say, “This is what this guy did, and this is what it teaches us.” Guess where all that information came from. From within their own head, right? So then they could say whatever they wanted and claim this was a message God gave them. Instead of pointing people to the certainty of Scripture, which is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, they pointed people to the imaginations of their mind. That worried John.

So grandpa wanted the grandchildren to know, “I’m writing this to you so you know for a certainty that you have life because you believe in the name of the Son of God, that you have eternal life.” Notice what he says... “you **have** eternal life.” Not... you might have. Not... someday you will have. He says, “you **have** eternal life.” “This is what I want you to know. Jesus came and lived in your place and died in your place. You are a filthy rotten sinner who should go to hell because that’s what sin deserves. But God loved you so much he sent Jesus and took that away. He’s given you the gift of faith through Word and Sacrament. This is why I am writing to you. This is why God writes all Scripture, because he wants you to know that you are saved.” I don’t care if there are days we don’t feel as though we are saved. That’s an “us” problem. God’s objective truth in Scripture says Jesus lived and died in your place. God says whoever believes **has** everlasting life. You need to know this so you aren’t sucked up into some of these false teachings that will surround you in the world. That’s kind of what John is saying.

That’s his point, but he applies it in another way in the next couple sentences. He applies it to prayer. You and I can be persistent in prayer because we know God loves us. If he loved us enough to send his Son, that glorious truth, he loved us that much,

we know he is going to love to hear our prayers. And he'll be patient with us because he was patient enough with us to send his Son to take away our sins. He'll be patient with us to hear us as we are persistent. In fact, he's going to tell us he might even have some reasons why he wants you to be persistent that are a blessing to you. Be persistent because you know you have eternal life.

That has an affect on your prayer life is what the next sentence says. He says, "Now this is the confidence we have before Him: Whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Be persistent in prayer because you are absolutely guaranteed that God hears you. That sounds simple enough, right? But sometimes that's an easy one to forget. Prayer, in this respect, is like the pastoral ministry.

When I go to South Dakota from time to time and I work on the house we've got out there, when we start to when we finish, I see the difference. I see the new siding. When we leave, I see what the new siding looks like. When I don't go and they go out there and it goes from white to gray because they painted it, I see the results of what they did. Whereas in the pastoral ministry or in our prayer life, we don't always see immediate results, do we? I preach God's Word. I can't tell if you're listening or not. Some of you listen really intently with your eyes closed and nod a lot as I talk it seems. So I don't know. I trust the Spirit will make that Word come home to prosper, but I can't see the results right away, can I?

Isn't that how our prayer life is at times? We've got something on our heart and we pour it out to God's throne of grace, and we open up our souls and we pour out all these emotions that at times are joy, at times are pain, at times are uncertainty, at times are worry, at times are all these things, we pour it out to God... and we don't get an immediate answer, do we? So don't you kind of wonder at times, is there some prayer answering machine in heaven that God hasn't gotten to yet?

We are sinners, so we will doubt God's glorious promises at times. We will doubt his good intentions because we are sinners. So God has to come to us and meet us where we are and say, "Be confident. I hear your prayer." Now we are going to find out why we don't always get immediate results.

God can answer those prayers in a number of ways. He can say yes. Maybe he gives us immediate results. Maybe he blesses us with that gift. But not always. Maybe he says to keep praying. Maybe he says to be persistent. We heard him say that in our Gospel today. Maybe sometimes he just says no. Three times Paul pleaded, "Lord, take away this thorn in my flesh so I can be a better missionary." God said, "No. My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness. So guess what, Paul. You are going to have to rely on me, not on you. You are going to keep that thorn in the flesh so you remember to lean on God, not on your own ability." God can do that. So, be persistent in prayer because you have eternal life. Be persistent in prayer because God says, "I hear every single one of your prayers."

But now this last one, the last sentence that's in what I read to you today, on a casual reading of this one you and I just might goof this one all up. If you just read it casually and you don't read it in its context and you don't think about what it is saying in its context, I think you'll mess it up, because I think quite often people do. Here's what he said, "And if we know that He hears whatever we ask," (which we do), "we know that we have what we have asked Him for." So now, today, while that offering is going by and you sign the Friendship Register, I can see it already, you are going to start saying "red Lamborghini Lord, and I'd like some big wheels on it, okay? God said whatever I ask, I've already got it, right?"

Can you see where people mess that up? Name it and claim it kind of theology... if you name this blessing from God and you claim it from God and you pray for it, see, right there, God says you are going to get it. Not so fast, as Lee Corso would say.

You have to read it in its context. What did the verse before say? What did that last sentence say that we just talked about? Do you remember? Do you remember there is one little phrase? One little phrase, just a few words. Did you catch it? Did you understand how it applies to this promise as well? Go back and look at it again. "Now this is the confidence we have before Him: Whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." What is the key phrase? "According to His will." When I pray according to his will, I have the guarantee that I have the answer of what I'm praying for. If I'm praying according to His will, he is always going to do what is best according to His will.

We pray that in the Lord's prayer, don't we? "Your kingdom come." We don't pray "God, my kingdom come." But in your prayer life, do you ever find yourself slipping into "Lord, I want my kingdom to come. I want you to do this, this and this. And this is what you should do because you said you love me." Are we getting a little close to that line of rebellion I talked about earlier if we start approaching God with "I know best"?

God is God. He is divine. He made this world. He made this universe. He sent His Son to save us. His love for us is unquestionable. His wisdom is unquestionable. You and I are sinners. Our wisdom is questionable, isn't it? Our love isn't always perfect for God and for each other, the people we can even see. Who are we to tell God this is how things should be? When we cross that line into rebellion and getting upset with our God, we aren't praying the way he has taught us to.

God has told us to pray according to his will... Jesus in the garden. "Lord, take this cup of suffering away." To endure the agony of hell even though he had never sinned but because you and I sinned, he said, "Lord, if it's your will, take this cup away. Not my will, but your will be done." Then he went and drank the cup of God's wrath to the bitter end, to the last drop, when he hung on the cross for you and for me.

When you and I pray according to his will, we can have this confidence... His will centers always on God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It centers on our eternal good. It doesn't center on our earthly immediate

happiness, which is what we often focus on, right? We don't see the big picture God does. So when we pray according to His will, we can have every confidence he'll always do what is best for us. Sometimes what is best for you and for me is when God says, no. Isn't that the case? Isn't that why God refers to himself as Father and tells us to think of ourselves as his dearly loved children?

Humanly speaking, as a parent, if you are a parent, you know that you've got to say no to your kids at times. "I'm sorry, a diet of ice cream and chocolate syrup all day, every day isn't going to be good for you." "No, you can't do it." "No, Junior, it's not a good idea to play with matches in the living room. Please don't." If we were to say yes to everything our kids would ask of us, that would be awful, wouldn't it? God is way beyond us compared to us and our kids. So sometimes God says no because he knows what is for our eternal good.

We pray humbly, because he saved us. We pray persistently, because he tells us to do so. We pray confident that he hears us. And we pray confident that he'll always answer us in the best possible way. When I don't understand that way is the best possible way, it's a me problem, not a God problem. Then I need to say, "Lord, give me patience to understand your will. Lord, open my eyes to see your will. But Lord, help me never to doubt that you love me, because Jesus shows me that."

So sometime we have to readjust our prayer life to pray for his kingdom, not ours. Sometimes we have to readjust our prayer life to say, "Lord, you know what is best. Help me to see it."

Again, like all these other Christian characteristics we've been looking at, that isn't always easy. When you are praying for someone who is hurting and in pain and suffering and someone whose heart is broken by relationships or other things, and you're saying, "Lord, help me" or "Lord, help them," you want it done now and you can't see how God could have a good purpose in saying not just yet. That's why it's a matter of faith. You and I just have to trust God, who loved us enough to save us, loves us enough to answer in the best possible way. And for every time that you have doubted that truth, just go back to the cross, and he forgives you again. Then you have all the more reason to pray according to His will. Amen.