

“The assurance of salvation” / Gospel #7 / 1 John 5:10–13

We’re coming toward the end of our series on the Gospel, the revolutionary power of the Christian life, and I want to look at something that runs all through John 14–17, and that is the subject of assurance, knowing that you are God’s child and that you belong to God; knowing that if you died you go to heaven.

It always amazes me how many people struggle with this. Whenever I speak at a conference....

I say I’m amazed at how many people struggle with this, but I shouldn’t be amazed. One of the worst struggles of my life was over this.

- Between the time I was 13 years old and 20 years old I probably prayed the sinner’s prayer at least 7-8000 times.
- Every time a speaker... I’d pray in my seat. Or, I grew up in 1 of those churches where you went forward... pastor would kind of shake his head.
- I got baptized 4 times, no joke. I’ve been saved at youth camps all over the world. I have been saved in every denomination.
- If there were a Guinness book world record for amount of times prayed the sinner’s prayer, I’d win.

So I understand this struggle. I really do. And here’s what I know. You will never really take off spiritually until you are assured of God’s love. My life didn’t.

- Ever done a high ropes course? Sitting back to get confidence.
- There are things you’ll never do spiritually because you are not confident in His love and commitment toward you:

sacrifices you’ll never make. Prayers you’ll never pray.
Risks you’ll never take.

- For some of you, the reason you are so weak in your ability to say no to sin is because you’re unsure of God’s presence in your life; Or think of it like this: **the reason you are weak in your ability to say no to sin is that you are weak in your understanding of Jesus’ “yes” toward you.**

I have good news for you. That theme of assurance dominates the final teaching session Jesus gave to His Apostles before He died. Remember, John 14–17 is the final session He gave to them before He went to the cross; given on the night before He died. Just a few hours after He said these things Judas would betray Him and the next morning He’d be crucified.

One thing is clear: Jesus does not want us to be unclear about our status before Him. Lot of different ways He said this, I’ll just highlight 3 images real quick.

- So do you have a Bible? Take it out... or if you were skinny jeans and have an Ipad, take that out....
- **John 15:9, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in My love.”**
 - The same love the Father has for the Son...
 - Does the Son sit around wondering about God’s love for Him?
 - Do we do that with our kids? Do I want my kids doubting my love for them? Maybe daddy will come home from this trip. Or maybe he won’t. Maybe you’re not my child.
 - Luke 11:9 says that in comparison to God’s love for His children, our love for our children is like “evil.” For most of us, the purest and most committed, selfless love we have is for our children. Right? Is there any one you love more? If you’d die for anyone it would be your children. But even in that strongest of all emotions, the love we feel for our children is like “evil” compared to God’s love for us.

- Would God want us to be unsure?
- John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you."
 - Trevor's adoption. I know the baby didn't understand... but if he did, Trevor would not want him to be unclear.
- At the beginning of John 14, Jesus has told them that He's about to leave them, and He knows that they are going to be afraid and they are going to go through a lot of trouble on his behalf and he says, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:1-3 ESV)
 - There is some imagery there you may not pick up: In those days, when a boy asked a girl to marry him, he would go back to his father's house and build a room or a set of rooms for his new wife. This exact statement Jesus made was found in the Jewish literature of the day as what a man said to his fiancée:
 - Did he want her doubting?
 - When Veronica and I got married she was a student at UVA... I hated leaving. The last thing I wanted her to think was I was down in NC with her out of sight and out of mind. Me messing around with other girls. I wanted her to know I was committed. I even bought her a really expensive ring to remind her.
 - John 15:16, He said something I think is pretty meaningful. He said, "You didn't choose me; I chose you."
 - My plaque to Veronica.
 - You start to doubt, "Hey, maybe God doesn't really accept me." He reminds you, "I didn't accept you. I chose you."

John 15:13. You're friends.

- I don't want my friends doubting my commitment. We can hang out tonight, but I might be your enemy.

Do you get the point? Jesus wants you to be without doubt as to your status as His child. He wants you to abide in it; only when you abide in it will you really begin to grow.

As I've shown you, the Apostle John clarifies, or takes deeper, certain things in his epistles. (It's been amazing to me how as we've studied John 15 for the last several weeks how the book of 1 John is really just an explanation and a furthering of John 15.)

1 John 5, the Apostle John says,

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13) Why did John write all these things? That you may know.

Go back. He summarizes for you how you are to know: *Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:10-12).*

The path to assurance is two-fold. First,

1. There is a testimony to be believed

- What is that testimony? (vs. 11) "that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (v. 11)
 - You acknowledge that eternal life is a gift God had to give us; it was something we did not have in ourselves.
 - "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10) If we have this illusion that we're good

enough for God, that we have eternal life in ourselves, we don't have God or His word. If we do acknowledge our sin, though, **if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...(1:9)**

- If you admit you're worthy before God, you'll be rejected. If you acknowledge that you're unworthy, but that He is gracious, you'll be accepted.
- If you put your hope in your righteousness, you'll fail. If you put your hope in His grace, you'll find acceptance.
- **...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)**
 - Advocate: Legal term. Someone who argues on your behalf. What does our advocate argue? No, we acknowledged that. What's he arguing?
 - The secret is in that word **propitiation**: means something that takes the wrath or the penalty for someone else. If you wreck my car and do several thousand dollars worth of damage to it, then your insurance pays me what it costs to get it fixed. Then I am propitiated. I don't have a claim against you any more because they paid it on your behalf.
- The OT prophet Zechariah gives you a great picture of all of this: Zechariah 3, Zechariah has a vision of the high priest standing before God. Extremely important moment. Temple had 4 parts: outer court; inner court; holy place; holy of holies. Holy of Holies was separated by a thick veil. Inside was the ark of the covenant, where God's shekinah glory rested, the very *panim* (the face, or the presence) of God. On one day a year, Yom Kippur, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies by Himself to offer a

sacrifice for the sins of the people. God had told the high priests in Leviticus 16 to take great precautions in preparing for this moment, because if they came into the presence of God with defilement on them, they 'd immediately die. They put a bell on their robe and a rope around their ankle.

- One scholar describes in detail the events leading up to this moment: *"A week beforehand, the high priest was put into seclusion – taken away from his home and into a place where he was completely alone. Why? So he wouldn't accidentally touch or eat anything unclean. Clean food was brought to him, and he'd wash his body and prepare his heart. The night before the Day of Atonement he didn't go to bed; he stayed up all night praying and reading God's Word to purify his soul. Then on Yom Kippur he bathed head to toe and dressed in pure, unstained white linen. Then he went into the holy of holies and offered an animal sacrifice to God to atone, or pay the penalty for, his own sins. After that he came out and bathed completely again, and new white linen was put on him, and he went in again, this time sacrificing for the sins of the priests. But that's not all. He would come out a third time, and he bathed again from head to toe and they dressed him in brand new pure linen, and he went into the holy of holies and atoned for the sins of all the people...."*

... this was all done in public. The temple was crowded, and those in attendance watched closely. There was a thin screen, and he bathed behind it. But the people were present: They saw him bathe, dress, go in, come back out. He was their representative before God, and they were there cheering him on. They were very

concerned to make sure that everything was done properly and with purity, because he represented them before God.”¹

- One man, the high priest—as clean as He could be; one day a year (Yom Kippur); to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people in the presence of God.
- What Zechariah says (3:3) next is shocking. He sees a high priest named Joshua preparing to walk into the Holy of Holies, but his garments were covered in excrement!
- But Just as Zechariah despaired (4, 8–9), the Lord said to Joshua: “Take off your filthy clothes. See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.... (vs. 9) I will send my servant and remove the sin of this land on a single day.”²
- This is the gospel. You acknowledge that.
- *“Centuries later another Joshua showed up, another Yeshua. Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua – it’s the same name in Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew. Another Joshua showed up, and he staged his own Day of Atonement. One week beforehand, Jesus began to prepare. And the night before, he didn’t go to sleep—but what happened to Jesus was exactly the reverse of what happened to Joshua the high priest, because instead of cheering him on, nearly everyone he loved betrayed, abandoned, or denied him. And when he stood before God, instead of receiving words of encouragement, the Father forsook him. Instead of being clothed in rich garments, he was stripped of the only garment he had, he*

was beaten, and he was killed naked. He was bathed... in human spit.”

- That’s propitiation. Jesus in my place.
- **When you believe that unbelievable testimony about what God has given you, God gives you eternal life.**
- It’s hard really to believe that... because it is humbling. It’s hard to admit that you could be that wicked and God could be that gracious.
 - We always want to do something to add to it; contribute; trust Jesus and then live a good life
 - Why our sin is not that bad...
 - Purgatory
- **But all the Bible writers say the same thing:** *“But to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,” (Romans 4:5)*
 - Another OT image. You believe it! You rest in it.
- Eternal life is yours simply by believing the testimony God has given about His Son. Just acknowledging that God told the truth.
 - **Not a ceremony you go through; not a prayer to pray...**
 - That’s what we have turned it into; a ceremony; a prayer... and we’re reliving that and basing our salvation on how well we did that, rather than what Christ has done.
 - That’s what I did; I was always saying: Did I do it right? Did I repent enough? Did I believe strong enough?
 - The answer to “When were you saved?” ought to be not “In the back of the church with my grandmother,” but “On a hill about a 20 minutes’ walk from downtown Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago.”
 - That is where I rest.

¹ From Tim Keller, *King’s Cross*, 79–80. Keller is working off of the research of Ray Dillard.

² From Tim Keller, *King’s Cross*, 81.

- It's not the quality of our repentance or strength of our faith that saves us. Repentance and faith are not our Savior; Jesus is our Savior.
- Your decision for Christ is a posture that began at a certain time but just continues on!
 - **Illustration: Like a chair**
 - The focus of your rest is always what He did back then. And the way you know you are depending on that is you are resting there now!
 - Me with Martin Luther: commentary on Romans: It is just believing that God is true. That He told the truth; that He did what He said He'd do.

Some of you think "knowing" is presumptuous. Surely, you, say, you can talk about hope, but knowing?

- Scripture says you can know. It is just believing what God has said. I think it is more presumptuous to doubt His word! To doubt the testimony He gave about His son. His testimony is sure so your security can be sure.

2. A manifestation of that testimony in our lives

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself... Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:10-12)

- You have life in yourself! You start to manifest the signs of life.
- The 5 things we have been going over!
- **Wheel**

Again, let's listen to John: *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know*

that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:3-6 ESV)

- **Cheesy illustration:** stick out everywhere.

So what do you do if you don't have these signs?

- You have these "oh no, I may not be saved moments." Sometimes I look at myself and I see how little progress I have made. Pride. Temper. True, I am getting control of my physical lusts, but sometimes I wonder if that's just because my body is getting older.

There's only one treatment for the disease of sin. Believe the testimony; abide in God's love.

- **Do you know the difference between diagnosis of a disease and the prescribed treatment for the disease?** Diagnose tells you what is wrong; prescription tells you what to do about it. God's prescription is always faith in the gospel.

God never tells you to abide in how fruitful you've been. You are to drive the roots of your soul are to be driven into the gospel of God's love and free grace. A lot of us are sitting around trying to find assurance from our fruitfulness. But God never told us to abide there.

If you see a lack of fruit in your life, confess that to God... but let that drive you to rest in the testimony of what God has given you in the Son. Rest in it. And then the fruits will grow.

The answer to fruitlessness is not to focus on fruit production. The answer to fruitlessness is abiding in Jesus. Your focus is always to be on the work of the Son, resting in the Son. Whenever you're not looking at Jesus and what He's done, doubts will arise.

"My peace would be in and out, sometimes 20 times a day! Comfort one moment; doubt the next." (paraphrase).

Always wondering if he'd been sorry enough for sin; achieved true repentance. Robust enough faith.

But one day, as I was passing through a field, suddenly I thought of a sentence, and that sentence was, "Your righteousness is in heaven," and with the eyes of faith I saw Christ sitting at God's right hand, and suddenly I realized, there is my righteousness, and wherever I was, or whatever I was a-doing, God could not never say to me, "Your righteousness is insufficient," for it was always before Him. I saw that my good frame of heart could not make my righteousness better, nor a bad frame make my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.

And now did my chains fall off indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and my irons; my doubts fled away... now I also went home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God."³

Whatever your situation right now, no matter how discouraged you are, the prescription is the same. It's always the same. Rest in the finished work of Jesus. Put your eyes on Him!

People say, "Well, I don't *feel* saved."

- Don't base your assurance on your feelings, base your assurance on his finished work. Period.
- Watchman Nee: Faith, faith, feeling.
- The feeling that you are saved and close to God is the fruit of the gospel. But they are not the basis of your assurance. The finished work of Christ is the basis of your assurance.

You can have the full assurance right now, at this moment, that you are saved, by resting in the testimony God has given about His Son. Right now by just believing it! By planting your roots in it.

³ Adapted from Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame* (book on the Reformation, p. 175).

- Got time for one more illustration? **In Jesus' arms**
- How do you know you are in Jesus' arms? You're there now! Resting in what happened 2000 years ago.
- **Assurance is only the present possession of those who currently have faith in Jesus.** If backslidden, you might be saved, but you can't know it!

Bulpen:

- "But knowing is **presumptuous...** surely you can talk about hope, but knowing? But scripture says that we should know. It is more presumptuous to doubt his word. His word and therefore eternal life is certain."
- Vs. Purgatory/Bunyan, Sibbes
- Gift righteousness of 15:9: God's love for His Son given to us, purchased by Christ!
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- "Jesus as our advocate" doesn't mean that Jesus is up there begging God to give us another chance. He is up there holding before God the fact that He has paid our sin debt forever and there is nothing left that remains for us.
- My favorite word in vs. 9 is the word "just." **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)**
- God's forgiveness of us is not mercy anymore, it is justice. Jesus paid our sin debt, and God can't hold us responsible for it any longer.
 - I always thought of God forgiving me mercifully. "God, I screwed up again. Please forgive me." But I had this problem... I was always wondering when God's mercy would run out? When God would say,

“Yeah, I’ve forgiven you enough about this and it’s not getting any better. Time for wrath.”

- I had this idea of Jesus up in heaven as my advocate going, “God, please forgive J.D. Just give Him one more chance. Come on, God, be merciful.” But that’s not how it works. Almost sounds blasphemous, but Jesus says, “You have to forgive Him, because I already paid it and in justice you have to forgive Him for what I’ve paid for.” “This sin cannot be laid to his charge.”
- God has given you His full, absolute, never-giving-up, never-faltering love as a gift, purchased by Christ.
 - John 15:9: In the same way that the Father loves the Son, you are loved by God. His love for you is as secure as the relationships in the Trinity are secure.
 - You cannot be separated from God’s love any more than Christ can be separated from God.
- By the way, this cuts out all the ideas of purgatory. Some people think that Christ paid the majority of our sin but we might have to go to purgatory to suffer a little bit for our bad decisions and be purified from our sin, kind of like and after-life chemotherapy to remove the remainders of sin left in us. *What greater insult could there be to the death of Christ?* Jesus paid it all! “Sorry, X-Ray shows Jesus didn’t quite get it all; we’re going to have to do another treatment!”
- Jesus paid it all, forever! He is the propitiation for our sins!

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10 ESV)

It is a theme running through John 14–17

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I think that at our church we have some people who are not saved who think they are; and others who are saved but aren’t sure of it.

The enemy is at work in both: Some of you (and I say this with fear and trembling) are on your way to hell, and the enemy is keeping you deluded into thinking because you went through a ritual you are ok.

The enemy is also at work keeping some of you that are genuinely saved in the midst of doubt. Your life will never take off, spiritually, until you are sure. I wouldn’t want my kids doubting my love for them, God doesn’t want you doubting His love for you.