

## QUESTION #1: “IS ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED?” (I John 5:9-13)

5.12.19

### INTRODUCTION

Did you hear those words that Kenzie read just a couple of minutes ago, the last words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm? *I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever — David, Psalm 23:6b*. David didn't write, “I hope I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” or “That would be great to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” No! Instead, an absolute confidence and conviction: *I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever — David, Psalm 23:6b*. No doubts, no second thoughts. “I will dwell; I know that this will happen.” How could he say that; how could he know?

Our first message in our summer series, “The Big Questions,” is one of the classics, but extremely important: If I am saved, am I always saved? In other words, if I am saved, is it possible to lose that salvation? In the context of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, how can I ever have the confidence that David knew? What is that confidence based on?

### TEXT — I JOHN 5:9-13

Some context: Sometime after the writing of John's gospel account of the life of Christ (around 80-85 AD), some difficulties arose in the region of Ephesus (the west coast of modern-day Turkey) due to new teachings that came on the scene that disputed:

- 1) That Jesus was actually the Son of God, divinity who came into the world in the flesh, and
- 2) That his death on the cross was necessary to provide forgiveness of sin.

Now the people who held those particular beliefs wound up leaving the church but, unfortunately, they didn't keep their beliefs to themselves; some of them became traveling preachers and teachers, impacting other churches and believers. Doubts were beginning to creep into the believers' hearts about whether they truly knew God, whether they were really on the right path to eternal life, and whether they were even in the truth. John wrote his first epistle to counter these false beliefs and also to shore up the beliefs of those continuing to live based on the gospel truth of Jesus Christ. And, because these false teachers began traveling to other churches, I John was designed to be a circular letter — in other words, to be read in one church and then sent on to another church in the region, who was also having to deal with this confusion.

John addressed these issues in his first letter as he wrote: *We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given 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. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life — I John 5:9-13.*

So, what is John telling those believers and, by extension, us? Three really cool things about the eternal life, sometimes called “eternal security,” that God has promised his children:

- 1) We don't have to wait for God's eternal life because eternal life begins the moment we believe.
- 2) We don't have to work for God's eternal life, nor is there a process involved to eventually be granted eternal life because, once surrendered to Christ, eternal life is already ours.

3) We don't have to worry about God's eternal life because it is a gift promised by God himself — and it is guaranteed.

We may hear somebody say, “I hope I wind up in heaven” or “I think I'm going to heaven.” What does John say? He says we can KNOW that we have eternal life. We can have that certainty because eternal life is based on God's promise that he has given eternal life through his Son. So this is true whether you are feeling close to God or more distant. Eternal life is not based on feelings, but on facts. We can know we have eternal life if we believe God's truth — ***God had given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son — I John 5:11b.***

The Bible teaches that God is the source of salvation, and the eternal life that results from that salvation. As the OT prophet Jonah said: ***“Salvation comes from the Lord” — Jonah 2:9b.*** But not only is God the source of salvation but the dispenser as well; as Paul shared with the church at Rome: ***[T]he wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord — Paul, Romans 6:23.*** Since the Bible calls salvation a “gift” of God, this tells us that it is not something we earn on our own; it never could be. Paul told the Galatian church: ***[We] know that a person is not justified (declared “not guilty” by God) by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ . . . because by the works of the law no one will be justified — Paul, Galatians 2:16.*** And to the church at Ephesus he famously said: ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast — Paul, Ephesians 2:8-9.*** And to call salvation a “gift” does not lessen the weight or strength of its promise; as Paul said to the Romans: ***God's gifts and his call are irrevocable — Paul, Romans 11:29.*** In other words, he will not take back what he has given, nor will he change his mind.

When Jesus was on the earth, he addressed the assurance we can know when claiming the gift that God's promises have offered: ***“My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand” — Jesus Christ, John 10:27-29.*** God is faithful to what he has promised to those he has redeemed.

When anybody is saved, that is, when anybody has surrendered their life to God through the work on the cross of Jesus Christ — acknowledging and confessing their sins, repenting of their sins and realizing that Christ is their only means of salvation — at that moment that person become a part of the body of Christ, and is “marked” by the depositing by God of his Holy Spirit into that person's life. As Paul wrote in his second letter to the church at Corinth: ***Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, [he] set his seal of ownership on us, and [he] put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come — Paul, II Corinthians 1:21-22.*** Did you hear that? Securing our eternity is not on us. That's not our job. We are secure because of who it is that works salvation in us: God, through his Son, Jesus Christ. And notice that Paul said that God owns us. We are now his, which means that we belong to an incredibly, perfectly loving Father in whom we are sealed. His power, his strength have accomplished this. That should be an enormous relief in which we can rest. As Jesus said: ***“[M]y Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” — Jesus Christ, John 6:40.*** When that happens, as Paul said to the Roman church, ***we belong to the Lord — Paul, Romans 14:8b.*** As a result, absolutely nothing ***in all creation,***

***will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord — Paul, Romans 8:39b.***

Yet this concern about being sure of our eternal destination seemed to be a frequently-expressed issue because Paul addressed it again in his letter to the Ephesian church; he comforted them with these words: ***When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession — to the praise of his glory — Paul, Ephesians 1:13b-14.*** As a result, as Paul said in his final letter to Timothy: ***God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his” — Paul, II Timothy 2:19.*** Or, as Jesus told some Pharisees who were listening to him: ***“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” — Jesus Christ, John 10:14.***

And there we find the cornerstone of why David could express such confidence in his future. If we go back to the beginning of that famous Psalm, what does David say? ***The Lord is my shepherd — David, Psalm 23:1a.*** He identifies himself as a member of a flock that is led by the Lord. But, even more than that, he identifies the Lord as “my shepherd.” It’s personal, and it shows itself in relationship. David had a personal relationship with God, and it was as a result of that relationship that he could be completely confident where and with Whom he would spend eternity. David echoed what Christ tried to explain to the Pharisees a thousand years later in his ongoing role as a shepherd: ***“The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listens to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice” — Jesus Christ, John 10:2-5.*** David had a relationship with God; David knew his “shepherd’s” voice and followed him.

And as the ultimate statement of assurance of our salvation, Jesus himself presented this promise to John in the book of Revelation where he said: ***“I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life (the heavenly register listing the names of true believers), but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels” — Jesus Christ, Revelation 3:5b.*** This promise ties back to something John would have heard Jesus tell his disciples: ***“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:32.***

So does that mean that eternal security gives us the freedom to sin, to live how we want, since we have been “saved?” Absolutely not! Our relationship with God is a love story, and our lives in him are in response to him — my love for him because of his love for me. As a result, my loving God is the basis for having the same attitude towards sin that he does: I hate it! And because pleasing him is the goal for my life, I don’t want to sin. John said it this way in his first letter: ***No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God — I John 3:9.*** And, in fact, the longer we live with God, the more the indwelling Holy Spirit molds God’s view of sin to our lives. The more we love him, the more we want to be removed from anything that would make our lives displeasing to him.

Yet what is also undeniable is that we still do sin. I am reminded of a prayer that Dr. David Jeremiah found on the internet: ***“Dear Lord, so far today I am doing all right. I have not***

*gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or self-indulgent. I have not whined, complained, cursed, or eaten any chocolate. I have charged nothing on my credit card. But Lord, I'll be getting out of bed in a minute and I'm going to really need your help.*" John references sin at the very beginning of his first letter: ***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us — I John 1:8.*** Paul famously struggled with this reality — loving his Savior and yet spiritually face-planting at the same time. Here is how he explained it: ***I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. . . . What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! — Paul, Romans 7:15, 18b-19, 24-25.***

That's the beauty of what Jesus Christ did for us. He "delivered" us from an incredibly wretched and unwinnable situation by doing what we could not do: He lived a perfect, sinless life, matching God's every perfection item for item, and then offering to substitute his perfect holiness for our sinful nature. Absolutely "thanks be to God!"

But the question remains: Is there a contradiction — on the one hand, no one born of God continues to sin and, at the same time, if we claim to have no sin, we're lying, and, God is faithful to forgive our sins. So what's the explanation?

A key to the answer may be found earlier in I John 3, where John writes: ***Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness — I John 3:4.*** The Greek word for lawlessness is *anomia*, which does not point to breaking the law but rather to rebelling against God — in much the same way that Satan rebelled against God. And that idea is supported by the way John phrases the word "sin" earlier in the verse: "Everyone who sins." In the Greek grammatical sense, that word is a present active infinitive, which means that it is describing a *continuous, ongoing* action. If somebody is sinning in this way, they are showing that, in fact, they are not living to please God but rather are living in line with Satan. This is not the "old nature" sinning that Paul mentioned and that all Christians struggle with, but rather the outright rebellion that characterizes the followers of Satan — a lifestyle versus an individual act. In other words, it is a rejection of the will of God in favor of the will of self; it is the flagrant defiance of the known will of God. It is continuing to sin, to maintain an ongoing life of unchanging, unconfessed and unrepentant sin where the person doing the sinning knows better. It is not sin done in the heat of a moment or in ignorance of what God desires. It is deliberate sin, unapologetically done with forethought and intent — and with no thought of giving it up.

That is a huge "red flag" for anybody living that way — particularly for anybody who claims Christ as their Lord and Savior. What it is saying is that I am finding more joy in the momentary pleasures of sin than in eternal pleasures of God, that how I want to live is more important than how God wants me to live. Jesus said a couple of things that may illustrate God's view of that opinion:

***"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" — Jesus Christ, Luke 6:46.***

***"[T]here is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:26.***

Teacher and author Norman Geisler gives a wonderful illustration of this point. He says: "If you put a pig and a lamb in a mud puddle, the pig will want to stay there and the lamb will want to get

out. Those who continually practice sin are like the pigs, not the lambs.” If that, is you, in any way, shape or form, STOP! Stop your sin immediately, confess it all to God, and absolutely remove yourself from that sin and the situation that keeps you there. Awkward? Maybe. Necessary? Absolutely! Do it . . . now!

OK, but hold on — another question: What about what the author of Hebrews wrote in chapter 6 of his letter? Isn't he saying that salvation can be lost? He wrote: ***It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace — Hebrews 6:4-7.*** So what is he talking about?

These verses are speaking to somebody who has had a superficial connection to Christianity — who has been close enough to have seen it working in people's lives, have seen prayers answered, have seen the Holy Spirit change lives, have seen the validity and power of God's word — but have never been anything more than front-row spectators. They may have had the best seats in the house, but they have never become part of the production. The Jewish leadership of Jesus' day is a perfect example of this:

- 1) They had received biblical truth through God's word that “enlightened” them at an intellectual level but understanding God's word intellectually is not the equivalent of being “made new” by the life of Christ.
- 2) They had “tasted the heavenly gift,” which means to have consciously experienced something. Now all men experience the goodness of God: “[Y]our Father in heaven . . . causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” — ***Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:45.*** But that does not mean that all men are saved. Certainly, during Christ's earthly ministry, thousands experienced the heavenly gifts he brought — healings, deliverance from demons, even eating the food miraculously brought from his hands — but experiencing those things is not the equivalent of being saved.
- 3) They had “shared in the Holy Spirit” in the sense of being witnesses (and perhaps even beneficiaries) of the miraculous ministries of Jesus who was empowered in all he did by the Holy Spirit, or maybe even were brought into conviction by the Spirit himself but resisted without experiencing salvation.
- 4) They had “tasted” so much with all they had seen and heard and had still not believed. As a result, their lives reflected a completely conscious rejection of everything Jesus is and everything he did for them. People in this place, having come to that conclusion, have chosen to live beyond the reach of redemption. They are making Christ's sacrifice, of which they would have a relatively clear understanding, meaningless. Once seeing Christ for who he is and what he did, to walk away at that point is to walk away permanently. Only God can judge that, but it is a judgment he will make.

## **SATAN'S LIES**

False beliefs come from accepting the lies that Satan throws at us. So here's something to remember that can help keep that from happening:

When the Bible teaches that God has “sealed” us, that means that Satan cannot take away our salvation. Now he will certainly continue to tempt, to do everything he can to make our lives

miserable. But the truth is, the only outlet he has for impacting a Christian's life is lies — trying to impact us with things that are not true. As Jesus said so well: ***“[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies — Jesus Christ, John 8:44b.*** Everything Satan has ever said, from the Garden of Eden to now, is a lie. Don't let his lies become facts in your life. God is the source of our facts; His Word is the source of our facts. Period. Don't be distracted by Satan's lies. Focus instead on God's Word. That's where the truth we need is found.

## **CONCLUSION**

God's love, forgiveness and salvation are greater than any sin or doubt — and that's no lie. As the book of Jude concludes: ***To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen — Jude 24-25.*** So on the authority of the Scripture, because salvation is done in us by God through the work of Jesus Christ, we can be eternally secure. I cannot lose the salvation with which God has saved me. I can rest in his justifying, merciful, amazingly gracious work of redemption. Once we have been saved, it is God who claims us and marks us, sealing us as his own. He does that. His power accomplishes it. His promises maintain it. I — and my salvation — are secure in God. That's why the hymn writer could so joyfully write: *“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand — all other ground is sinking sand.* Let's pray!