

**Sermon Notes**  
**Hebrews 6:13-20; John 6:35-40; Romans 8:15-17**  
 How can I be sure I'll make it to heaven?  
 All Nations Presbyterian Church  
 14 June 2020

**Introduction: Longing for Assurance**

- I can vividly remember growing up in the church, but wrestling with the question of whether I was really a Christian
  - You see, I understood the message of the gospel
    - I even believed it was true
      - I really did
  - But as a child, as a teenager, I kept wondering, “Is my faith really strong enough?”
    - “Have I prayed the right words in the right order with the right emotion?”
      - “How can I be really sure that I'll make it to heaven?”
- Friends, have you ever wrestled with questions like those?
  - Maybe those questions to us come on days when our faith feels weak
    - On days when we struggle with questions and doubts
    - Days when we feel the constant pressure to give in
    - Days when we aren't quite sure how to reconcile science with our faith
  - And on those days, we might even begin to worry:
    - Can someone like me—someone with all my questions and doubts and fears really be saved?
- Of course, other days, it's not our weak faith
  - It's our past sins that comes rushing back to mind
    - Sins like porn and greed and anger
  - And as the guilt and the shame of our past sin comes flooding back
    - As it hits us again like a ton of bricks
    - As we continue to struggle with the lingering presence of sin in our lives
      - We can start to ask:
        - “How can a holy God ever forgive a wretched sinner like me?”
- And on top of our doubts and questions and sin, sometimes suffering strikes
  - A loved one dies
    - A relationship fails
      - A visa just won't come
  - And faced with pain and loss and heartache
    - Sometimes in the bitterness and anguish of our souls
      - We start to wonder if God has somehow forgotten us
- Brothers and sisters, sooner or later, all of us will likely ask:
  - How can I be sure that I'm really saved—a wretched sinner like me?
    - How can I be sure that God won't forget me in the end?
      - How can I be sure that I'll make it to heaven when my faith feels so weak?

**New Sermon Series: Big Questions**

- This morning, we're starting a new sermon series

- And over the next 7 weeks, we'll be looking at big questions together
- Big questions like: Are we really born evil?
  - Why is the world so full of suffering?
  - How can I know God's will for my life?
- And today, we begin with this big question:
  - How can I be sure that I'll get to heaven?
  - If you like big words, this is the question of "assurance"
    - Assurance just means knowing, being sure, being convinced that we really are saved, we really are Christians
  - And because these are *BIG* questions
    - Today and in the weeks to come, we can only start to answer them
  - All we can do is just lay a foundation
    - A foundation, a framework that helps us wrestle more Biblically with some big questions in life
- So, this morning, as we start to answer this question:
  - How can I *know* that I'm saved?
  - I want to suggest that our assurance, our confidence of salvation, our hope for the future
    - Rests *not* in ourselves
      - *Not* in our circumstances
        - *Not* even in the strength of our faith
      - No, our hope of heaven is grounded in the Trinitarian work of God
    - And our assurance grows when we look away from ourselves
      - When we look to God
  - This morning, I want to look three simple points to help grow our assurance
    - Three interconnected truths for those days we struggle with questions and doubts
      - First: The *Word* of the Father
      - Second: The *Work* of the Son
      - Third: The *Witness* of the Spirit

### **I. The Word of the Father (Hebrews 6:13-18)**

- Turn back to Hebrews 6
- Hebrews 6 addresses this big question of assurance
  - First negatively with a warning in vv1-8
    - But then positively with an encouragement from v9
  - And starting in v13, the author addresses assurance by focusing *not* on us
    - But on the promises of God
- I suspect all of us have made many promises in life
  - Husbands—maybe you promised your wife a special date night
    - Youth—maybe you promised to finish your homework before playing online
  - But the truth is, most of us aren't all that great at keeping our promises
    - Even the best of us are guilty of breaking our word
- But what's so amazing here in Hebrews 6 is that we have a promise
  - A promise not from sinful, forgetful, faltering humans
  - We have a promise from a perfect, an unchangeable God
    - V13: "God made a promise to Abraham."

- And the content of God's promise is v14:
  - "Surely I will bless you and [surely I will] multiply you."
- In other words, God promises Abraham many children
  - Abraham will be the father of a great nation
- But God's promise to Abraham is not just about physical children
  - No, v17 suggests that as Christians, we are "heirs of the promise."
  - And Galatians 3 tells us that everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ is a child of Abraham
- God's promise to Abraham is also a promise to us
- And notice the strength of God's promise here
  - V14: "Surely I will bless you."
    - "[Surely I will] multiply you."
  - Literally, "blessing, I will bless you; multiplying, I will multiply you."
  - It's like when we say, "I'll definitely, absolutely, positively do it."
    - It's almost straining for language to somehow adequately convey the certainty of God's promise
      - The security of His word
  - And just in we missed it, v18 tells us, it is impossible to God to lie
    - The mountains may pass away, but God's word will not fail
- So, how can I be sure that I'll make it to heaven?
  - Well, part of the answer Hebrews 6 gives is that God Himself has promised
    - God has promised that everyone who trusts in Jesus is a child of Abraham
      - Everyone who trusts in Jesus will be saved
- But really it's even better than that
  - Because in a world where you and I break our word
    - Sometimes what we really want is *not* just a promise
      - We want confirmation, some kind of added guarantee we can trust
  - When I was a kid, we used to have a "pinky swear"
    - And when you made a pinky swear, that ended all debate
  - As adults, at least in the pre-covid world, we might shake hands to guarantee our word
    - We might sign contracts
    - Or most solemnly of all
      - Witnesses swear an oath to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."
  - And the handshake, the signature, the oath gives us some confidence
    - Some added assurance that we can trust the promise
  - That's the point in v16
    - "People swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation."
- But then look at v17
  - "So when God desired to show [even] more convincingly to the heirs of the promise [that's us!] the unchangeable character of his purpose, [God] guaranteed it with an oath."
    - And v13 tells us: God swore by the most solemn, the most weighty thing of all
      - God took an oath in His own name
  - Kids, this is so much better than a pinky swear

- This is so much better than handshake
  - Because God Himself—the God who cannot lie—has sworn an oath
    - An oath that God will fulfill His promises
  - And just like His promised to Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus
    - So all of God’s promises through the centuries are yes and amen in Jesus Christ
- When I was wrestling with assurance, what I really wanted was some special word from God
  - Maybe some audible voice to speak from heaven and say, “Tim, don’t worry, you really are a Christian.”
  - But instead of that audible voice, what God gives us is the promises of His written word
    - Promises like Acts 16:31: “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”
    - Promises like Philippians 1:6: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion at the day of Christ.”
  - And if we really want to grow in our assurance, in our confidence of salvation
  - Then one of the very best things we can do
    - Is simply get to know the promises God gives us in His Word
  - Because as we read and study the Bible
    - By ourselves, with our families, in small groups, one-to-one
  - As we hear the truths of God’s Word week by week in our hymns and our prayers, in our fellowship and our sermons
    - God’s word takes root in our lives
      - And assurance begins to grow
- But maybe you’re still thinking: “Okay, Tim, I understand the strength of God’s promise.”
  - “But I still wrestle with questions and doubts.”
    - “Some days I don’t really *feel* like a Christian.”
- Well, here I think a common illustration can help us
  - Imagine I jump into a lifeboat to escape from a sinking ship
    - I may look out of the lifeboat and see the crashing waves
      - I may not always feel super confident
  - But in the end, what makes the difference is not the strength of my faith in the lifeboat
    - No, what makes the difference is the strength of lifeboat itself
- And brothers and sisters, the hope of the gospel
  - The glorious truth that begins to grow assurance in our hearts
  - Listen very carefully, make sure you get this:
    - Our salvation depends not on the strength of our faith
    - But the strength of God’s promise and oath
- So, how can I be sure that I’ll make it to heaven with such weak faith?
  - How can I be sure that I’m saved when all I see is crashing waves and stormy seas?
    - When I struggle with suffering and doubts and lingering sin?
  - Friends, our confidence, our hope, our assurance rests not in ourselves
    - But in the unbreakable word of the Father
      - The promise of the Father that everyone who flees to Christ for refuge will be saved
  - And even the weakest faith in God’s strong promise is enough to save

- But what about those days when it's not just the questions and doubts
  - What about those days we feel overwhelmed by the guilt of our sin
    - How can possibly we have assurance then?
      - How can we be sure that a holy God will ever forgive sinners like us?
- Well, that brings us to our second point this morning
  - Because our assurance rests not just on the word of the Father
    - But also on the work of the Son

## II. The Work of the Son (John 6:35-40)

- Turn with me to John 6
- John 6 is Jesus' famous teaching on the bread of the life
  - And in this chapter, Jesus gives us strong reasons for assurance
- Look, for example, at v37:
  - Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me, *I will never cast out.*"
- Jesus confirms God's promises in Hebrews 6
  - And he does it with the strongest possible negation in Greek
  - He's saying the very idea that Jesus would cast out anyone who comes to Him
    - It's not even in the realm of possibility
      - It is unthinkable
  - As we might say in Mississippi, "There ain't no way it's gonna happen."
- And I want you to feel not just the strength of Jesus' promise
  - But also the beauty of the free offer of the gospel here
  - Did you hear the words "whoever" and "everyone" repeated over and over and over again?
    - They're in v35, v37, v40
- And dear friends, this means that the offer of forgiveness, the offer of eternal life is an offer for you
  - Yes, you
    - Whoever you are
      - Whatever you've done
        - No matter how bad your past
  - Listen to the words of Jesus Christ: "*Whoever* comes to me shall not hunger"
    - "*Whoever* believe in me shall never thirst."
    - "*Whoever* comes to me, I will never cast out."
    - "*Everyone* who looks on the Son shall have eternal life."
  - Brothers and sisters, this is the free offer of the gospel
    - The offer of the gospel to you
- But how can Jesus make such incredible promises?
  - How can a holy God really forgive wretched sinners like us?
  - Well, it's simply because Jesus has fully accomplished salvation for His people.
    - Jesus has fully paid for our sins
      - Jesus saves sinners
- You see, the same Jesus who spoke these words in John 6 went to the cross
  - And on the cross, Jesus paid the final sacrifice for the sins of His people
  - On the cross, the final judgment of God was brought forward and placed on Jesus
    - And as He drew His last breath, Jesus cried out, "It is finished."

- Finished
  - For God's people
    - For everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him
      - The sacrifice is finished
        - There is nothing left to pay
- So, how can we be sure that a holy God will forgive wretched sinners like us?
  - We can know because the sacrifice of Jesus is finished
  - And no matter how bad your sin
    - No matter how hard the guilt and the shame of your past may hit you
      - Even though we still stumble and fall
  - If we confess our sins to God
    - If we flee to Christ for refuge
      - If we come to the Son and believe in Him
  - Then finished work of Jesus assures us
    - That whoever comes to Him in faith—even with the weakest faith—He will never, ever, ever cast out
- So the next time we feel overwhelmed with the weight of our sin
  - Rather than looking in on ourselves
    - Rather than beating ourselves over the back
    - Rather than just promising to do better on our own
  - We can look to Jesus the Son
    - Because hidden in Him, we are fully forgiven
      - And there is not one single drop of God's wrath left for us to take
- To paraphrase our Confession
  - "There is no sin too small to deserve God's wrath"
    - "But [because of Jesus] there is no sin too big for God to forgive if we truly repent" (WCF 15.4)
- Or as the hymn puts it:
  - "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."
- Friends, how can we have assurance?
  - Because of the unbreakable word of the Father
    - Because of the finished sacrifice, the work of Jesus the Son
  - But now briefly, one final reason for confidence
    - The witness of the Holy Spirit

### III. The Witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:15-17)

- Romans 8 is one of the most loved chapters in the Bible
  - But today, I want to focus in just on vv15-17.
  - In v16, Paul says that "the Spirit Himself [that's the Holy Spirit] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."
  - In other words, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers assures us that we are God's children
- But the obvious question is *how* does the Spirit testify that we are God's children?
  - Well, look at v15.
    - "You have received the Spirit of adoption as [children], by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"
- I can still remember times as a child when I fell down and scraped my knee

- Or when I woke up scared from a nightmare
- And kids, what do you do when that happens?
  - What I did is I just ran to my parents for comfort.
    - In my pain, I cried out, “Mommy! Daddy!”
- And I think that’s the image that Paul is using here
  - Because as Christians, when we face hardship and difficulty, trial and pain
  - When we face with temptation
    - When we are filled with thanksgiving
  - Over time, we increasingly learn to just run to our Heavenly Father in prayer
    - Not with some generic prayer to a generic “god”
      - But crying out as children to our Father in heaven
  - And I think Paul’s point is when we cry out to God our Father in prayer
    - That is a work of the Spirit
      - That gives us confidence that we truly are children of God
- Several years ago now, I knew a man who was interested in Christianity
  - He had been studying the Bible for months, asking questions about Jesus
    - And watching from the outside, I could tell he was really interested
      - But I couldn’t quite tell whether he truly believed
  - But do you know the moment when he had assurance?
    - Do you know what convinced him of his own salvation?
  - It was the moment his son was born
    - Because in his worry for his son’s health
    - In his desperation to make sure that his newborn son was okay
  - He instinctively cried out to God His Father in prayer
    - Just like I ran to my parents with a bruised knee
    - And in that moment, he knew he was a child of God
  - And when you and I find ourselves crying out “Abba! Father!”
    - Then the Spirit witnesses to us that we are children of God
- And as Paul tells us in v17, “if [we are] children, then [we are] heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”
  - We have a heavenly inheritance
  - And Paul even says in Ephesians 1:14, that the presence of the Spirit in our lives is God’s down payment to us
    - The down payment of heaven
- So, how can we have assurance?
  - If we trust in Jesus Christ, we are indwelt by the Spirit
    - The Spirit witnesses to us that we are children of God
      - The Spirit teaches us to pray
- How can we know that we’ll make it to heaven?
  - Because the Spirit is God’s down payment to us
    - God never defaults on His down payment
- The word of the Father
  - The work of the Son
    - And the witness of the Spirit

## Conclusion

- Christian, do you struggle with assurance?
  - Do you want to know more deeply the conviction of our salvation, the assurance of our hope?

- Then, stop looking only at yourself.
  - Stop focusing on your questions and your doubts and your fears.
    - And turn your eyes instead to our Triune God
- Listen: our growth of assurance is more of a marathon than a sprint
  - And assurance comes to us
    - Not through an extraordinary vision or dream
  - But as we quietly, faithfully, regularly participate in worship week after week, month by month, year after year
    - As we read God's Word day by day
    - As we learn to prayerfully battle sin
    - As we fellowship with other believers
- Because as we faithfully use the normal, ordinary tools God has given us
  - God turns our focus to Himself
- And if you're looking for something practical to do, here it is
  - Spend time reading God's Word today
  - Read through John 6 or Romans 8
    - Maybe make a list of the promises you find
  - Talk them over with friends
    - Put them on your phone to look at when doubts come
      - Ask the Spirit to engrave them on your heart
- Yes, we will stumble along the way
  - But we can be confident that God has begun a good work in us
    - And He will carry it on to completion
  - God Himself will bring us safely to heaven on the day of Christ