

Signed, Sealed, and Delivered

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sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Sunday, October 8, 2017

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The content, the material that was just referenced is actually found in the Gospel of John 15 in what we know as the farewell discourse, but in that farewell discourse, Jesus has his disciples and he is just hours away from his crucifixion and he makes this very profound statement, he says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Today, I want to encourage you to open to John 10 and we are going to find ourselves just a few months before this famous statement, a few months before this famous time in the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ, and here in John 10, Jesus once again finds himself surrounded by, in the presence of those, who are frustrated with him. In fact, they disagree with him so much that they are willing to pick up rocks and attempt to take his life.

So as we come to this passage in John 10 today, we're not only going to see what this discussion was about, but we are also going to discover a nugget of truth in verses 28 and 29. We're going to study today what I call Question 1. You may be think to yourself, "What is Question 1?" Over the last 20 years, I have had the privilege, in fact, allow me to share with you, it is an honor for me to have the opportunity to be in environments where I answer people's questions. Oftentimes it's questions about the Bible, Christianity, theology, philosophy, life in general, but for about 20 years whether it's at a student camp, a college retreat, an old-fashioned church revival, are every Wednesday night here at First Baptist, Opelika, I have the privilege of answering people's questions. Over the years, there have been a few questions that have only been asked once or twice and there are many that have been asked numerous times, but there is one question that has been asked more than any other question and it is in this passage of Scripture that Jesus directly deals with this issue. It is the issue of eternal security. In Baptist lingo, we might call it the once saved, always saved question. Allow me to phrase it as it is often phrased. Here is how the question typically is worded. For example, if a person has come to an understanding in their life that they were a sinner and they have asked Jesus Christ to forgive them and save them, is there anything that can happen or a situation that can arise that can void out that relationship and cause them to lose their salvation? Today in John 10, not only does Jesus speak very clearly to those who are opposed to him, but in verses 20 and 29, I believe he is going to help us answer the most frequently asked question among believers.

Beginning in verse 22 of John 10,

22 And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.
23 And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. 24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long do you make us to doubt? If you are Christ, tell us plainly.

Now, can I push pause just for a moment? Are you serious? That's the question they're asking him? For over three years he has made it as plain as it could be. The problem we discover in John 10 isn't that Jesus is communicating poorly, it's that they are listening very poorly. So Jesus picks it up in verse 25,

25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and you believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26 But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I have told you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. 29 My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and my Father are one. 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me? 33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone you not; but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself God. 34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? 35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; 36 Say you of him, when the Father has sanctified, and sent into the world, You blaspheme because I said, I am the Son of God? 37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. 38 But if I do, though you believe not me, believe the works: that you may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. 39 Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, 40 And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. 41 And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spoke of this man were true. 42 And many believed on him there.

So we find in the midst of this dialogue those who, once again, are opposed to what Jesus is teaching, proclaiming and claiming to be, but in the midst of this passage in verses 28 and 29, Jesus makes this profound statement. He says those that believe in him shall never perish, no one is able to pluck them out of his hand. Then he even says, "And my Father who gave them unto me who is above all things, no one is able to pluck them out of his hand." So on this issue that is often referred to as the issue of eternal security, I think there are three subject matters that we must address: the nature of man; the nature of sin; and the nature of God, and it kind of has subpoints there within each of those natures we have to discuss, what is the position and the power of each.

Now, behind me and in front of you and for those of you that are listening by way of radio or podcast, you're just going to have to visualize this with us, but on the screen you

will see that there is a vertical line. Oftentimes I refer to this as line theology. What this picture represents is this: on the left-hand side is lostness, on the right-hand side is being saved. On the left-hand side man in sin, on the right-hand side man in a right and proper relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, you will notice that under the nature of man, our position is on the left-hand side and that's where we start. That's where we begin. The Bible makes it very clear that you and I are depraved at our core. We came out and we are disposed to sin. In fact, the Bible makes it clear in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned." The Bible says that even our best works are as filthy rags and so when we talk about this line, when we talk about the desire, the want to be saved, the want to be forgiven, we must come to the understanding that our natural position is on the left-hand side of the line. So the question becomes this: what does it take to cross the line? What does it take to go from lostness to salvation? What does it take to go from darkness to light? What does it take to be headed toward a place the Bible calls hell versus a place the Bible calls heaven?

Well, Ephesians 2:8 and 9 I believe summarizes this. It says, "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Now, let me unpack that for just a moment. "For by grace," do you know what grace is? Grace is that which you don't deserve but God is willing to offer anyway. "For by grace are you saved," in other words, it is the grace of God alone that allows you to cross across the line. Notice what that verse says, it is not of your own, it is not by your works, it is by God alone. In summary, what we discover biblically is that the only way that humanity can be saved and forgiven is not by our good deeds, not by our own righteousness, not by our religiosity, but by the blood of Jesus Christ alone. So when we look at the nature of man, understand this: the only way to forgiveness, the only way to salvation, the only way to cross the line, has nothing to do with you and everything to do with Jesus.

Now that being said, let's talk about the power of man because there are many people, in fact even very dear friends of mine, who would debate me on this subject matter and claim that there can be an event or there can be a situation and we will discuss this more in just a moment, that can cause you to "lose your salvation." The problem with that understanding is it misunderstands the power of man. Notice what Jesus said here in John 10:28 and 29, Jesus said, "no one can pluck them out of my hand." Then he said in verse 29, "My Father who is over all, nobody can pluck them out of his hand." So if you believe that you can somehow do something, or shall I say, not do something, that would allow you to go back over the line, you're saying that you are more powerful than God. You're saying you're stronger than God. You are saying that you are bigger than God because it just takes simple logic to realize this: that whatever got you across the line is the only thing that can put you back on the other side. So if you couldn't save yourself and if you couldn't be good enough to be saved, then what makes you think you can be "bad enough" to be unsaved?

Now, my friends who have an opposite opinion of mine, they use a little illustration and it goes a little something like this. They agree with what Jesus says that nobody can pluck

you out and nobody else can "remove your salvation from you," but the illustration they oftentimes use is the illustration of an airplane, that you board an airplane say in Atlanta, Georgia. You get on the airplane, you present your ticket, the door is closed, you get in the air, you arrive in Dallas, Texas. You got on, you arrived, the flight is good, everything is good. But the illustration they use is that nobody can take you off that airplane, that nobody can remove you from that airplane, but here's the illustration: but if you want to, you can decide to jump out on your own. Notice what Jesus said, "no one can pluck them out of my hand." Can I ask you a question? Are you someone? So if no one can take you out, that no one is also you. Not only does it negate the power of God but one of the things that it does, one of the things that it shares with us, is it makes it as if it is in our hands and it was in our doing to begin with when it had nothing to do with us. It had everything to do with him.

Now, my friends will oftentimes use that illustration and then they will run to the book of Hebrews. They love Hebrews 6. Hebrews 6, there is this statement there, it said, "If any should fall away," and they say, "Ah-ha, there it is!" Here's the problem with going to that passage: in context, you've got to go back to Hebrews 5, it's dealing with believers who have not matured appropriately in their faith and beginning in chapter 6, he says, "Let us not return unto doctrines of repentance and baptism and the work of the saints and sanctification, but let us move on." Then notice what it says, "And if any should fall away, they should put to shame Jesus and he should be crucified again." Here's the thing I want to share with you about that very famous passage in regards to this subject matter: that you hear this phrase, "once saved, always saved," if Hebrews 6 is saying what some people who I know and love say, that you can go across the line and somehow void out that relationship, then if it's once saved, always saved, it's twice lost, always lost. I want you to think about this for just a moment. It says if we should fall away, he, Jesus, would have to be crucified again. The last time I checked it has been 2,000 years and he hasn't gone to Calvary for a second trip. So what we need to understand today is that you don't have the power, you don't possess the ability to get across the line in the first place, so how could you possess the power to go back again?

That's the nature of man, now let's deal with the nature of sin. Now, you'll notice on this picture that both of the words are on the right side of the equation. Why? Because we are dealing with a believer. We are dealing with someone who has professed Jesus Christ and the issue is about eternal security and so both of these words are going to be on the "salvation side" of the equation.

Let's talk about the position of sin in our lives. I wish, I wish as a believer in Jesus Christ, I wish on that day where I hit my knees, on that day where I professed, I wish I could tell you I have never sinned since but I have and so have you. You have fallen into temptation. I have fallen into temptation. And even though Romans 6 says, "What? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin continue any longer?" I agree with that but I struggle, you struggle, and the issue comes about losing one's salvation, people say, "Well, what if you continually struggle with a specific sin? What if it goes on for years and years and years and it is quantitative?" I got a letter from a man in prison several years ago. He said, "Jeff, I believe that three weeks

ago that I asked Jesus to save me so why does my body still crave cocaine?" He was struggling three weeks later and this is a question, is there something, is there a certain amount of "sin" that can somehow make our salvation void?

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to have a continuous dialogue with some friends. Now, when I use the word "friends," I'm being very generous here. In fact it was two young men that were regularly in our neighborhood. They wore white shirts, black ties, had a little placard and they loved to show up on bicycles. But they were friends of mine and they would come up on a regular basis and we would just dialogue. You understand that in that faith system that they represented, they believe that it was works that gets you across the line. They believe that, yes, you have to believe that Jesus is the Son of God but you also have to be baptized and you have to maintain your works or you can go back across the line.

Well, obviously I was telling them what I believe the Bible said very contrary to, and one day I don't know what happened, if it was just my spiritual gift of sarcasm coming out, I don't know what it was, I said, "All right, guys, let's just suppose that you're right." Woo, you would have thought I said, "Sic 'em," to a bulldog. I'm going to tell you, boy, they got on the edge of their seat and they said, "What do you mean you think we're right?" I said, "I didn't say I thought you were right, I said let's presume that you're right. If you're right, what's the next thing that I have to do to 'be saved' in your economy?" They said, "Well, you have to be baptized." I said, "Well, I've already been baptized." They said, "Well, you haven't been baptized by one of us." I said, "Well, can you do it?" They said, "Sure." I said, "How about my bathtub?" They said, "Can it hold you?" I said, "Look at my height, brother. I've got this. This is easy." They said, "Yeah, we can do it in your bathtub." I said, "You're telling me right now that if we went back in my bathtub and you 'baptized' me, that I would be on my way to where I need to be?" Boy, they started licking their chops. They said, "You've got it." I said, "Let me ask you a follow-up question: let's suppose in all of my excitement and all of my energy of what has just happened that I'm running back into the living room, I stump my toe and I let out a good old string of cuss words? What happens then?" They said, "Oh, you're in trouble." I said, "Do we have to go back to the bathtub?" They said, "No." I said, "Then why did I have to have it done in the first place?"

Do you understand that whatever takes you across the line must necessarily be that which can remove you from it? And one of the things I shared with them that day and I want to share with you today is James 2:10. It says if we have broken one of the laws, it's as if we have broken all of them. You see, one of the struggles that we have is we say it's not that big a deal if I commit this sin, but if I commit that one, boy, that's not good. Or if I only do it a few times versus hundreds of times. And what we need to understand about the position of sin in our life even as a believer, that there is no amount of quantity of sin even post-regeneration that can somehow null and void. Why? Because Jesus paid the price for your sins on Calvary irregardless of the number of them. Some people say you can lose your salvation because you have continued with that sin for who knows how many years. The question I have for them is how many years does it take and how many sins must I commit?

Then there is the power of sin. There are those who would say, "Do you know what? It's not about quantity, it's not about years struggling with temptation or even addiction, but you know there is that one sin." I say, "Which sin are you talking about?" They say, "Well, the sin that Jesus talks about in Mark 3, the unpardonable sin." Now here is where it gets a little irritating because I love to ask people what do you think the unpardonable sin is? Did you know I cannot get a consensus answer there? Do you know what most people believe it is? Most people believe the unpardonable sin is the sin that is being committed against them that they are struggling forgiving somebody for. I've heard all kinds of answers for what it might be but in Mark 3 and in Matthew 12, Jesus responds to the Pharisees, to the religious folks, with the response of what we call the unpardonable sin.

Now, let me give you the setting. A group of people much like John 10, they are upset with Jesus, they are just not stoning him yet. They are mad at him. They are frustrated with him but they can't discount what is doing. They know that he's healing people that used to be blind, now they can see. There is a basket of food and now it is feeding the whole city. They can't discount what he's doing so they begin to question how he's doing it. So what do they do? They don't deny he did it, they say, "Well, the only way you are doing this is according to the power of Beelzebul." Jesus has this great response, in fact it has become very popular in our historical culture here in America, he says, "A house divided cannot stand. If Satan casts out Satan, then how would he have any power?" Then he goes on to begin to talk about that all types of blaspheme against the Son will be forgiven but he who blasphemes against the Spirit risks or there is a chance that he may not be forgiven in this life or in the life to come. It's a famous passage on the unpardonable sin.

Now, we could go an entire hour just on that passage but for the sake of today's discussion, I want you to understand something: when someone on the right side of the line, when somebody who has come to a point where they believe on Jesus Christ alone for their salvation, begins to think, "Have I committed the unpardonable sin? Have I done that thing which somehow, some way voids it all out?" Please hear me: the context of Jesus' messages in Mark 3 were lost people. It wasn't saved people. It wasn't Christians. Nobody was part of the body of Christ. He was telling a group of people who rejected him, a group of people who denied him, "Hey guys, you're on thin ice believing and thinking as you are. You'd better be careful or there may come a point where there is a point of no return." So even though the Bible speaks of an unpardonable sin, in the context of eternal security, it's not a valid argument.

So when we talk about the nature of sin, sometimes it's the position or the quantity of sin, sometimes it's the power of that one specific sin, but what we have to discuss is the nature of God. We discussed the nature of man, we are incapable of our own salvation, therefore, we are incapable of voiding it out. We discussed the nature of sin, that even as believers it is present in our lives, it should be repented of in our lives, but it does not based on quantity or quality negate our relationship with the Lord. So let's talk about the nature of God. Let's talk about his position for just a moment, and I think this is where a

lot of times we look back at that time where we were "saved," and we have a bad image in our mind or maybe a poor illustration. Now, I don't know about in some of your contexts because just of age but does anybody here remember that when you were growing up in school and you went to PE class, you had to climb the rope? Does anyone remember that in PE? A few of you who have got snow on the top like I do, you remember that. There was this horrible thing they used to make us do. You'd go to PE class and there would be a rope dangling from the rafters and they would ask you to climb as high as you could and hold on as long as you could. Now, there were some guys, I mean, they thought they could do this and they were strong and they were agile and they were athletic, you know, it doesn't matter how athletic you are, at some point what's going to happen? You're going to slip, you're going to slide and you're going to fall off that rope.

I think that is the image that some of us have about our salvation. We realize that we have sinned, we realize we have messed up, we realize Jesus is the answer and so what do we do? We think somehow we jumped up and grabbed a hold of the rope of salvation. Do you realize the first slide said there is nothing you could do so you couldn't jump up and grab anything. In fact, the image we have is perfectly given to us by Jesus. What did he say? "No one is able to pluck them out of my hand." Look at the image. The idea is a hand out plucking out of a hand, not pulling down. So the illustration that Jesus is giving, the thing that we need to grasp today when it comes to the position of God in our salvation, salvation doesn't happen by you jumping up and grabbing a hold of God, salvation occurs when he reaches down and he scoops you up. You see, we need to understand our position here. We are not just dangling on, hoping somehow, some way we can hold on for dear life until we get to the bitter end, but much the contrary, in our sin, in our rebellion, in our depravity, God has reached down and he has scooped us up. You see, we are in his hand. We are in his grasp. It's not about can we hold ourselves up, the question must be asked, is there anything that can keep him from holding us and the answer, of course, is no.

Which leads to the power of God. Notice what it says there in verse 29, it says, "and my Father who gave these unto me," those who are saved, he says, "who is over all things." Now a little English test there, what does the word "all" mean? It means all. So the power of God is that he is able, he is over all things, and the image that I like to utilize or the illustration is found in the book of Ephesians 1:18. In Ephesians 1 it says that upon our salvation we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, and the illustration that is being given there in Ephesians 1 that we need to apply to John 10 is this: the illustration is that the Lord himself when we cried out to him, he wrote his name on the tablet of the hearts of our life. Then what did he do with his Holy Spirit? He has sealed us. He has placed us in an envelope and one day we will be delivered to a place the Bible calls heaven. We have been – listen – we have been signed, we have been sealed, we have been delivered. However, when you look at that illustration and you think about the power of God, the problem or the struggle that we have is that we look at the letters and we look at the letter of our life and we say, "But you don't understand, pastor, my letter, my envelope has gotten pretty dirty. I've got some tears. In fact, I got a little tape on it. It's not looking pretty." And I think what we need to grasp as we close today is that, yes, we struggle,

yes, we fall into sin, but just because our fellowship is strained does not mean our relationship has been voided.

Allow me to illustrate. I have three young men in my home. They are my sons. And there is nothing that can be done to void that relationship. Now, there have been some things that have strained our fellowship, for example, in the last two weeks, three of my windows have been broken in my house. It's true. It seems like that every day there is a toilet that gets clogged up in my house. It's just part of life. And there are times when they don't take care of business or they break business or whatever it may be, that I'm not a happy camper as a dad. But they haven't voided our relationship, they have strained the fellowship. So what has to happen? They have to come to me and say, "Do you know what, dad? Messed up. Should have never done it. It was a bad decision, horrible decision. I repent. Forgive me for what I have done." Do you realize they have not made our relationship any better than it already was but what they have done is they have enhanced, they have repaired the fellowship.

Years ago, I had a man give me some advice, I thought this was great, work with me and put a big grain of salt here. He said, "Believe that you can't lose your salvation but live like you can." Now, think about that for just a moment. Understand that there is nothing you can do to void out your relationship with Jesus Christ, there is nothing you can do to somehow break that covenant with the blood of Jesus, but everything that you do and everything that your hand is put upon, act as if it is dependent upon it. In other words, do everything you can unto the Lord.

You know, what happens for most of us at a time like this, is we realize, "Do you know what? I know I'm saved, I just haven't been living it." And just like my kids with broken windows or whatever it may be, it's not that a relationship has ended and needs to begin again, it's that fellowship has been broken and a repair needs to take place not on an eternal level but as far as a fellowship level. And maybe that's where you are today. Maybe you've had feelings, emotions, questions, whatever it may be and maybe things have popped into your head and said, well, is there any way? Let me give you a suggestion: do exactly what 1 John 1:9 says, it says, "If we have sinned," if we have committed sin, which we all have, "if we confess it to him," being the Lord, "he is faithful and just to forgive us." You know, in just a moment we're going to have an opportunity to respond, to have a dialogue, to have a conversation with one another about these matters. You know, maybe today is not one of those days that we "need to walk up and talk to somebody," maybe today is one of those days where when we leave our campus, we need to live what we claim to believe.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person today, maybe you're that individual who after reading the word of God and hearing the word of God, has come to an understanding that you thought it was all about what you could do, your religious activities, your ability to somehow perform, and maybe today is the day you realize that you have been doing everything you know how to get across the line yourself when the answer is only Jesus Christ has the ability and the power to take your cross unto salvation. Maybe that's where you are today and maybe you're

desiring to be on the right side of the line, maybe you're desiring that relationship with Jesus Christ. Boy, do I have some great news for you. There is nothing you have to do because he has done it for you.

So maybe today is the day that you would have a very sincere conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have this conversation out loud, in fact you don't even have to say the same words that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to confess I've tried to do it on my own. I've created my own religiosity, I've created my own standard of righteousness and, God, I thought if I did certain things or stopped certain things, somehow, in some way that made me right with you. But I understand today that there is nothing I could ever start doing or stop doing that would allow that to take place. Lord, I believe today, I understand today, that Jesus Christ is the only one who can forgive me and he's the only one who can save me. So God, right now I just want you to know I believe that. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he came on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he was willing to take the price and the punishment of the cross for my sins. And that Jesus loved me so much, three days later he rose again so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the world's problems, but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me and I just want to turn my life over to you."

In just a moment, I'm going to have a time of praying over us and maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with God. We would love to have a conversation with you. We would love to know how the Lord is moving and working in your lives. We just want to celebrate with you. But maybe that conversation has already taken place and maybe like the illustration today, you know you are saved, you know you are a child of God, but you know that you are involved in stuff you have no business being involved in, you are seeing things you have no business seeing, saying things you have no business saying, and places you have no business being. Maybe today the relationship has been established but the fellowship needs to be repaired. Maybe today it's not about coming and dialoguing with one of us, maybe it's about just you and the Lord right now having a dialogue of repairing that fellowship within the relationship. Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time, Lord, thank you, thank you that you are more powerful than we are, thank you that you are stronger than we are, thank you that your love and your ability and your grace and your mercy far exceeds any amount of activity that we could somehow compare to. Lord, thank you that you are willing to forgive. Thank you that you are willing to save. Thank you that you are willing to move and act in our lives no matter where we've been or what we've done or whom we have been with. Lord, I do pray that we would take advantage of your grace, take advantage of your mercy, and wherever we find ourselves today, we would just respond in the affirmative. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.