

Assurance of Salvation

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It's Easter week as you know, coming up on Easter next Sunday, and today we have the privilege as we come to God's word to focus on the very purpose just in our systematic exposition of the book of 1 John, to come to the very point of it all, to come to the very point of it all of why Christ came, of why we sing his praises, of why we have joy in the midst of a hostile world, why it is that we are confident even as we see the world crumbling around us either personally or in the pillars of society that once seemed to support everything that we counted on.

Turn in your Bibles to 1 John 5:13 for our message this morning. It's just such a fitting message to launch us into the week where we remember the death and resurrection of Christ. 1 John 5:13, we're just going to look at one verse this morning. 1 John 5:13,

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

I've said it often and I'll probably say it a whole lot more, I tend to repeat myself in my old age, I think often about as I step into this pulpit, I step into this pulpit mindful of the fact that it's not always going to be possible to plead with you for the state of your soul. I step into the pulpit mindful of the fact that there is a coming day of judgment for each one of us. For those who don't know Christ, that day of judgment will be one of unspeakable terror, of unspeakable loss, of unspeakable ruin as the Lord sends you away into eternal damnation because of the necessity of punishing you for your sins, and sins against the eternal law of an eternal God require an eternal punishment and the Bible says that the punishment there will never be quenched. So I'm mindful, even in the midst of the joy of having such great music with us here this morning, I'm mindful of that. I'm mindful of the fact that we stand once more on the precipice of this life and the life to come. Every time you open the Bible, every time you that you hear the word of God explained and preached to you, there is a bridge taking place between this life and the life to come and I can't emphasize enough to those of you that do not know Christ that this coming certain day of judgment is the only thing that matters to occupy your thinking and to settle and to come to grips with the claims of our Lord Jesus Christ on your life. Nothing else matters in life. Nothing else matters. Nothing else is going to matter on that day when each one of us stand before the Lord. Nothing else is going to matter. All of the stuff of this world, all of the entertainment and the things that occupy us in this world,

none of it is going to matter on that day when you stand face-to-face with a holy God and he, as it were, assigns to you your eternal place.

I think about that when I step into this pulpit. I'm mindful of the fact that I can't assume that I'm going to have one more time to speak with you about the state of your soul. As much as I would love to be a really suave and funny guy in the pulpit, I can't. It's too serious. The import of what we're talking about is too monumental. At the bottom of it all, at the bottom of the message of the Gospel, of the plea of Christ with your soul and as it comes through the human messenger as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5, "We beg you as ambassadors of Christ to be reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ," because when that day comes for you, I want that day for you to go well. It's an unspeakable thought to think that we would share in the things of Christ together on a superficial way, a superficial basis, only to part ways at the end and to see some of you go into the damnation that you are flirting with because of the way that you trifle with the things of Christ. Of course I'm passionate about that. Of course I care about your soul. How could we treat it any other way?

For those of you that are Christians, where your sins are forgiven and there is no threat of eternal damnation, we all still will stand before Christ and give an account of our lives before him. He will reward us based on the deeds in our body, not that our deeds have earned our forgiveness but he will reward the level and the consistency and the depth of our faithfulness to him. And for those of you that are in Christ, I want that day for you to go well. I want you to be blessed by Christ and enter into the joy of your Master with the full assurance that all is well and all is settled with your soul and that the Lord is just eager to welcome you into his presence.

Beloved, do you see? Do you understand that that day that is certainly coming because the Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed for a man to die once and after that comes judgment"; this is certain for each one of us. We have just a short parenthesis of time together as we join together and love the Lord and worship together. We have such a short parenthesis of time before we will, as it were, say our earthly goodbyes and then the eternal realities of all of these things that we discuss week after week will be of utmost import to you. Who could not be passionate when souls, eternal souls are in front of him? Who could not care about the magnitude of the things that we discuss? We can't take this in a trivial manner.

You know, I want you before we go to 1 John, I want you to turn over to Luke 14. I want you to see the significance of what Christ says and the significance of the demands that he makes on our soul. Christ in the call of the Gospel and when he said, "Come to me," we read that as our call to worship earlier, he said, "Come to me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give rest to your souls." He means that and he will and he does. There is not a sinner who has truly come to Christ who has found him to fail in that promise. There is no sinner in the world anywhere who has truly come to Christ who has found that Christ blessed him more than he ever expected to be blessed in his spiritual life when he came to Christ and laid his life down before him. But, beloved, what I want you to see, what I want you to see is that the call of Christ on your life, the call of the Gospel,

the claim of the Master, is not for you to simply add him on to the other things that you do in life. The call of Christ is not for you to wedge in a place for him in the midst of your earthly pursuits and then to just continue on and then add a little bit of Jesus to the other stuff that you do. Jesus calls for a complete surrender of the fullness of your affections to him and if he is not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all.

Oh, listen in Luke 14. I've been working through this passage on my own and the Gospel of Luke is probably in our future someplace at Truth Community Fellowship because there is so much that you need to hear out of it. But look at Luke 14:26 and understand with everything that I say here this morning and I trust that everything that flows out of the future of our church, I want you to understand that it is for the well-being of your soul. That's the only thing that we care about second to the glory of Christ. There is no other agenda than to see things go well for you in judgment. That's the only thing we care about here and I want you to see what Jesus says.

Look at chapter 14, verse 25 of Luke where he says, "Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them," so this is a statement that he makes to all of the multitudes; this is a presentation of the Gospel according to Jesus in what he says, and I want you to see how broad and comprehensive it is at what he says. He says, "If anyone comes to Me," someone comes to me wanting the benefit of my person, someone comes to me wanting salvation, somebody wanting relief for their burdened conscience or someone coming to me troubled in the midst of life and not knowing where else to turn, what is the call, what is the price of coming to Christ? Verse 26, he says, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." The Lord Jesus Christ when he calls you to salvation is not making a superficial appeal to you. He is not making a modest request. He is claiming the absolute allegiance of your heart in every area of your life and if there is something that you want to withhold from him, you cannot have him at all. Do you understand that? The Lord Jesus Christ, forgive the harshness of this word but I want you to understand it and I want it to ring on your ears, the Lord Jesus Christ does not prostitute his Lordship to people who are not serious about following after him. He doesn't treat this lightly. He left the glory of heaven. He left the glory of heaven in order to become a man, in order to walk to the cross, in order to lay down his life on behalf of sinners. This was a great massive sacrifice for the sinless Son of God to undertake and it is a tragedy of immense proportions that it has been reduced to something, "Pray this little prayer. Add Jesus to your life and things will go well and he'll give you what you want." Oh please, please, that is not what Christ said at all. You've got to understand that Christ is claiming upon your affections your absolute allegiance to him with absolutely no competitors anywhere in the sphere of your vision. That's the price of salvation. It's your allegiance. You lay down your allegiance and your love for yourself and your stuff and the things that you like to do; you sacrifice all of that to his most holy and blessed name in an act of personal, irreversible commitment to him that says, "If this costs me my life, Lord, I don't care. I just want you."

Look at what he says again in verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his

own life, he cannot be My disciple." Verse 27, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Verse 33, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." He's not talking about a literal garage sale of your stuff and turning yourself into a destitute beggar. It's not external like that at all, beloved, it's much more significant than that. It's much more significant than that. You could sell all of your stuff and still love your sin and think you're the greatest thing on earth and that would be the absolute antithesis of being a disciple of Christ.

Oh, beloved, oh, beloved, what Christ calls upon you, what he calls from you is an absolute surrender of your allegiance to his person and he says if that cost is too high, if there is too much, if you've got stuff that you want to keep, you have other loves, you love this sin or that sin and you don't want to let go of it, he says, you can't be my disciple. And in one sense, I suppose, you could look at it from an earthly human perspective and say that's your prerogative if you want to dismiss Christ for the sake of your love of the things of the world. If that's what you want, you can do that. Just understand that in that act of selfish rebellion against the call of Christ upon your life, that you are sacrificing any hope that you have at the day of judgment. That's the point. It's not about living out this life and finding happiness in this life or whatever. We have to process everything through that filter of that day when we stand before the holy Son of God and everything is called to an account.

These words of Christ are very unsettling and I understand when we read things, you know, and Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother," listen, listen, I've heard a thousand times and so have you the efforts to diminish that and qualify it and knock it down so that it's not as stark a demand as it seems to be. "Well, you know, it's just, you know, he didn't really mean that. He just means, you know, something else." And he is stating his point strongly. We are to honor our father and mother but, beloved, each one of you, what you have to see and what you have to understand and what you've got to come to grips with because it's so urgent is to ask yourself whether the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is the preeminent, sole object of your soul's allegiance, of your preeminent affections or not. It's not a complicated question. Ah, it's searching. It's searching as all get out. I understand it's very, very searching but the question is simple: is he your supreme love or not? Because he won't take second place. Why should he? Why should he? As the Lord of heaven, as the one who laid down his life for sinners, the only way, truth and life to the Father, the only one, why would he accept the leftovers of your affections as if something else were more important than him?

Beloved, there is nothing more important than the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no one more important and when he makes this astonishing claim to be preeminent over all of your family affections, over all of your possessions, to be preeminent even over your love of your own life, he does so from a position of authority and, beloved, understand it's from a position of grace. This is his offer of grace, to come to him for salvation, to come to him and to give him the totality of your life. And beloved, do you see, do you understand that this love of life is not a one day in seven wedge? This is not an addition and then you just go and live the way everybody else lives throughout the rest of the

week. Do you understand that? Because this is the terms of salvation as Jesus gave them. All of the affections are surrendered to him. A willingness to let go of everything that displeases him. A preference for that which most glorifies him over that which might be marginally debatable. You prefer, you want, you hunger after his glory more than you want your own privileges in life.

That's the call of Christ and, beloved, I hope you see and trust that you do, that he is worthy of that. This Jesus Christ is worthy of that deepest allegiance, more so than your spouse, more so than your children, more so than the stuff of life. You could be like me and have the greatest spouse on earth, great kids and love them and it's good that you should and do, but it should always be clear in your mind in these earthly affections, in these human relationships, in the best of human friendships. As I look at my friend DC on the front row there, in the best of these things and as we rightly enjoy them together, there should always be a clear ringing separation as you think on those earthly affections, there should be a clear separation in your mind, "As much as I love my spouse, as much as I love my friends, as much as I love my children, not one of them died to save my soul." And when you understand the purpose of the cross, when you understand that it was your guilt that sent Christ to Calvary, then you understand that no one could replace the supreme affection that you have for him because no one else could have died for your soul. And so the doctrines that we teach out of the Scripture as we teach the choice of God to bring some to salvation, as we teach the atonement and the propitiation, it's all designed to help you see exactly what Christ did on your behalf and to motivate you to love him enough to surrender everything else to him. It's all about Christ and he made it all about himself. Christ says, "I must have the supreme affections in your heart or you can't follow me."

With that background in mind, turn back to 1 John. Beloved, listen, I worry about the way that I preach. I really do. I really, really do. I worry about it. I know I'm animated and it's intense and all of that and I worry about that. I want you to see how lovely our Lord Jesus Christ is. I want you to love him. But part of the reason that I'm animated when I preach is that somehow together as a body, we have to cut through all of the watered down stuff that we have all grown accustomed to for so many years and we have to come back and see what Christ really said about being his disciple. And if we are not clear about that, if we don't communicate some sense of urgency in that, if I'm up here and I act like this doesn't really matter, you're going to walk away thinking it's not that big of a deal, and if I left you with that impression, woe is me. Woe on those churches. Woe on those churches that leave you with the impression that it's really not that big of a deal and it's really about you getting along in life and being happy with things, and if you're not happy, to ask the Lord to change it so that you will be happy. That's not the Gospel. What else can I say? It's not the Gospel.

So John says in 1 John 5:13, having heard all of this teaching from Jesus with his own ears and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." You see, even as Christ makes those profound claims on the allegiances of your heart, the supreme allegiance of your heart, even as he does that, it is

all bundled together in such a gracious initiative of God that he wants you to know this is the word of God speaking. John was the human instrument but this is God.

Please look at chapter 5, verse 13 of 1 John there. In light of everything that we've said. God says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." Do you know what the motivation of God is for you as a Christian? He wants you to have assurance. He wants you to have confidence that you are a true recipient of eternal life; that you would have confidence as you go through this life and approach that door that leads into eternal life, that when you, as it were, as you reach toward the door knob, lay hold of it and turn and open, as it were, that you would be confident on what's on the other side; that salvation isn't one of those game shows, "Do you want what's behind door 1, 2, or 3?" and then you're kind of guessing about what comes and what happens when the door is opened. Jesus said, "I am the door. He who enters through me will have eternal life." God wants you to know. As stark as the claim of the Gospel is, "Come to me and leave everything else behind," there is a gracious motivation from the heart of God in it that says to his children, "I want you to know that you have eternal life. I want you confident. I don't want you to go through life wondering, fearing if death suddenly comes and you've only got a few moments to contemplate it, that there be a confidence and a supernatural peace that would overwhelm you at that moment." This is what God has appointed for me before the foundation of the world. Of course it's going to be well. My Savior has me in his hand and no one can pluck me out of it.

So are you a true Christian? Young people, old people, I won't fix on anybody's particular eyes, I know that gets sensitive when I use the word "old." Do you know and as you look at your life, as you look at what you love and what you do, as you listen to what you talk about, is there a ringing, resounding note that you love Christ more than all else? Because that's the mark. That's how you know that you belong to him and that you have eternal life.

Now to get to what I had prepared to say, what are these things that John has written about? What are the grounds of assurance? How is it that you can know the answer to this most important question: do I have eternal life? Are my sins forgiven? How can you know? Because God says "so that you may know that you have eternal life." How can we know? Well, let's look at a couple of different things quickly here this morning. In some ways this is a review message but this is a review verse in John's mind. He says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God." What things? What things are you referring to, John? Well, he's referring to everything that he said in the letter. He's bringing it to a conclusion and he's saying, "Everything I have said in the prior four chapters and 12 verses of chapter 5, everything I've said has been to drive you to this one point that you would have a settled assurance that eternal life truly belongs to you"; that in light of the great demands of Christ upon those who would follow him, those who would come to him for salvation, in light of the greatness of his call, you could look at that call and say, "I know. I'm certain. I'm confident."

What is it that we look at? We'll try to go through these quickly. I'm going to give you a total of six questions to ask yourself about the reality of your claim to salvation here and it's a lot of review, really, of things that we have covered in the past. But ask yourself this question, first of all: do you love the Bible? You could say, "Do you believe the Bible?" and that's true enough but the question is really do you love the Bible more than your necessary food? Is the Bible the most precious book in the world to you? Because someone who truly belongs to Christ understands that the Bible is a book from God. It's the place where his salvation is revealed and therefore it is the place where his heart affections go repeatedly over time.

Look at chapter 4, verse 6 of 1 John. The Apostle John is writing, speaking of the circle of the apostles, he says, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know," there is that word "know," right? "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." John is saying, "He who knows God listens to apostolic teaching." He pays heed to the word of God. He loves the word of God. His mind, his heart, the one who knows Christ, his whole life is an ever-growing effort and testimony to the reality of framing an entire way of viewing and living life through the perspective of the 66 books of the Bible. You love the Bible so much that it informs the way that you think, the way that you talk, and the way that you act, and everything is measured by that somewhere in your mind and thinking. You say, "This is the bread of life. This is more precious than gold and silver and so I love this word and I want to conform my life to it. It's not a book that sits on the shelf and that I have trouble finding on Sunday morning before I come to church." No, no, no, no, a true Christian looks at his Bible and says, "I'd give everything else up before I'd give up this word. I'd give up my life before I let go of my heart affection for the Scriptures." And it's because, it's not because you've got to be animated like I am in a pulpit about it, that's not the point at all. It's that you recognize that the saving Gospel, that which delivers your soul from that day of judgment and eternal damnation, you realize that the only place where the salvation from that judgment is revealed is in this book and therefore you love it. Therefore you love it. You treasure it. You guard it.

So do you want to know if you're a Christian? Do your affections go somewhere in that direction toward the Scriptures? Do you love them like that? Do you recognize the supreme elevated place of the Scriptures in the plan of God? And do you love them and honor them? Want to know them? Want to understand them? Read them? Do you love the Bible? That's the mark of a true Christian and, beloved, let me just state it as plainly as I can: indifference to the Scripture no matter what else you're doing externally with religious stuff in your life, if you could really take or leave the Bible one way or the other and it's not a big deal to you, you're not a Christian. You are in danger of eternal judgment because the people that God has given birth to loves the word that God has given birth to. God gave us his Son, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ and we love him. He has given us his word which reveals Christ to us, the written word and we love it as well. That's the mark of a true Christian.

Secondly. Do you believe the Bible? Secondly, do you confess your sin? Do you confess your sin? The Bible says that all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

What do you say about yourself? This is one of the things that John wrote in order that we might know if we have eternal life. Look back at chapter 1 of 1 John, chapter 1, verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Do you see it there? Someone confessing his sin, acknowledging that his soul is warped, his soul is distorted by sin; that there's a fundamental principle of evil within me that urges me to sin? It's not just that I've committed acts of sin, I'm fundamentally wrong in the presence of God. There is something wrong with me even as a believer that pushes me toward sin. Do you confess that about yourself? Is that your self-assessment that even as a Christian you fall short of the glory of God? That's the mark of a true believer.

We're not saying, beloved, a true Christian when he says, "I'm a sinner," a true Christian when he says, "I have sinned," please hear me on this, your soul, this is about your soul, that's why this matters. A true Christian is someone who is saying far, far more than, "I've sinned once or twice." It's more than just an acknowledgment that, "Ah, you know, I had that day in high school. Wow, that was bad but everything else was, you know, pretty good." This is more than just an acknowledgment that, "I stubbed my toe once or twice now let me get back to life and I'll just keep living the way that I did." No, no, the Bible's confession of sin is for the sinner to say that, "My soul has been fundamentally wrong. I have not loved God with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind. I have been indifferent to Christ. That's wrong and I want to be delivered from that. Even today, I want to be delivered from everything that would hinder and diminish my walk and affection for Christ." That's what we're talking about when we say, "Do you confess your sin?" Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 5:3. "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted," Matthew 5:4. There is a recognition that sin is a really serious matter between you and God; that your heart needs to be redeemed; that your affections need to be cleansed; that God needs to extend grace to you because you bring no merit of your own to him. The question is: do you confess your sin like that because that's the mark of a true Christian?

Let's look at it from a different perspective here: a true Christian does not trifle with sin. A true Christian when he's thinking clearly doesn't try to calculate how close he can get to the line of sin and set up camp just on this side of the border. The true Christian as he's thinking about life wants to look out and see the border defined of sin and then turn his back on it and get as far away from it as he can. That's the attitude of a Christian toward sin, not how close can I get to it, how far away can I get from it? And you say, "Well, why would you be so animated about that?" Well, you know, you bring it back to Christ and you say, "Look, of course that's the way I would view it. Sin is what killed Christ, in a manner of speaking. Christ laid his life down for my sins. He suffered greatly because of my sin. My sin brought eternal torment on him in that infinite suffering that he experienced at the cross and I love him too much to trifle with, to play with that which slew him." You look at yourself in the mirror and you say, "How could I interact with sin. How could I treat sin that lightly when the sinless Son of God laid himself down to deliver me from it?" Look, I realize and understand what I'm saying, I understand that we're all still short of the glory of God here, that we all still sin in our daily life; what

we're talking about here is what is your perspective toward that? Is that something tolerable? Is that something that's okay? You know, it's not that serious so let's not get too worked up about it? Or when you think about sin in your life, does it come to you with the force that says, "I've got to put this to death. I have to be separated from this." That's the mark of a Christian. You confess your sin and you hate it.

Thirdly, do you believe the Gospel? Do you believe the Gospel? Look at chapter 4 in 1 John, verse 9. As we read these verses, you ask yourself: is this what I believe? Is this where I rest my soul? Are these among the most precious words of life to me? Verse 9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Do you see in Christ the offering, the sacrifice that was made so that your sins could be forgiven? Is that the way that you view Christ? That's the mark of a true Christian. If that's the way that you think about Christ, you have grounds for assurance. You have grounds to believe that you have eternal life and that it will go well for you on the day of judgment. You believe the Gospel. Do you believe and trust these promises? And, beloved, let's look at this from a different perspective as well, you know, because some of us have come out of backgrounds where Christianity was just a bunch of rules and do's and don'ts and all of that. You know what I'm talking about. When you really understand the Gospel, when you really believe the Gospel, you understand that what's on display here is a self-sacrificial act of love by God himself toward you and rather than simply having a sense of fear toward this God, you realize that he has acted in love on behalf of your eternal soul. Look at it again with me in verse 9, "By this the love of God was manifested." Verse 10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

You know, as we kind of examine ourselves and all of that, it's important to remember this aspect, this unspeakable gift of love that God took initiative toward you. God looked at your soul in pity, with compassion, and said, "I want to set my anger against that sin aside. I'll provide Christ as the sacrifice which satisfies what my judgment requires so that," oh, beloved, follow it, "so that these people who love my Son could be the recipients of my unending kindness and grace and mercy throughout all of eternity so that I could show them and display the great love that I have for them so that they would, in turn, bring glory and ascribe glory to my name that they see my love, they recognize it and they honor me for it." The Gospel is a message of the love of God, the goodness of God, the kindness of God. You see the connection here, we confess our sins and we feel the weight of that, as it were, and then you turn your eyes to the cross and you see the love of God displayed and fear and guilt dissolve into an assurance, a confidence that God meant what he said, that God will keep his promises of the Gospel, and that he won't bring these sins up against you anymore. Instead, you're going to be the recipient of his undying, eternal love throughout all of the ages and eons of eternity forever more. And you hear those things, you hear those words and you say, "That's true. I believe that. I trust that. I rejoice in that. That lifts my spirits. I am so joyful as I hear those things." Beloved, that's the mark of a true Christian and if your heart wells up in hope and joy and confidence at the sound of the love of God found at the sacrifice of Christ on the cross,

you're a true Christian. Judgment doesn't await you. The blessing of God has only begun. The blessing of God has only begun for those who know Christ. So a Christian is marked by that hope and love and belief in the Gospel.

You see, what I want you to see, I've kind of structured all of this really loosely here this morning, but what I want you to see is that the things that undergird our hope are external to us. It's based on a word that God has given to us. It's not about how we feel from moment to moment, it is about placing our trust, our confidence, finding our hope in a word that is outside of us that predated us and will live after us. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away." We are trusting in a word that came from God as the foundation of the safety of our souls. That's the mark of a true Christian. Not trusting in ourselves, not trusting in what we think, not trusting in our feelings, resting, reposing, walking confidently in what God has said and the hope of the Gospel, in the love of God. That's the mark of a true Christian.

Well, let me just go through these other things real quickly because we have covered them so many times in the past. As you say these things, as you mark your love for the love of God, you mark your love for the Gospel, you mark your love for Christ, there is no competing allegiance to him ultimately when you're thinking clearly, "Yeah, I want Christ more than anything." Well, then certain things are going to flow out that will be confirming marks in your life of the reality of your salvation. The fourth question for you this morning is: do you honor God's word? Or let's state it this way: do you obey God's word? Does obedience to God matter to you? That's really the question. Does it matter? Is it important? Is it a priority to you? Do you think about it during the week? "How can I honor God? What does God want from me? What does the Scripture say that I should do about this or that?" Is that an operative principle in your mind or not?

Look at chapter 2, verse 3. Do you obey God's word? That's the fourth question that we are looking. "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." The principle of rebellion and disobedience that formally marked your life is now marked by a principle of compliance and submission and willing obedience to the word of God. If that's the mark of your life, look, that didn't come from the devil. If you see the evidence of that in your life, you have grounds to say, "I truly belong to him therefore my sins are forgiven, therefore I own the gift of eternal life, therefore it will go well for me in judgment, therefore I'm not afraid." And all of these things just build on each other and the snowball goes downhill, as it were, and it gets bigger and bigger as the hope and the assurance of your heart grows and grows as you see more and more of what God says is the mark of a true Christian.

A true Christian is marked by a love for God's word, confession of sin, trust in the Gospel, obedience to God's word. Fifthly: do you love other Christians? Do you love other Christians? I know we've covered this a lot but John has said it a lot and so it must be important. Verse 14 of chapter 3, "We know that we have passed out of death into life," how can we know that? How can we have that assurance? "Because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." We find in the people of God our truest comrades of soul. We find in the people of God those that we have the greatest affinity

with. We find in the people of God the people that we delight in serving, in loving and associating with, and knowing and sharing life together. We find in them an echo of the love for Christ that's in our own heart. If you love the people of God, if your life makes room for the people of God, that's the mark of a true Christian and you're entitled to an assurance that you have passed out of that realm of death and judgment into the realm of forgiveness and life. Look at verse 14, chapter 3 again. How do we know? "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

Finally, a sixth question here: does the Holy Spirit affirm your confession? Does the Holy Spirit affirm your confession of Christ? You see, when a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity comes and indwells their heart and part of his ministry to us is that he affirms in our hearts that which we say to be true about the condition of our soul. We say, "I'm a Christian." There is an internal echo that says, "Yes, that's true. I affirm that." It's the witness of the Holy Spirit on our hearts. Look at chapter 4, verse 13 here, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God."

I have the clearest memory in my own life about this. In the days before my conversion, I would have told you I was a Christian and I said that to people, "Yes, I'm a Christian. Yes, I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." So the verbal profession that I was making was, in some ways, the right one. If anyone had asked me, "Does your heart affirm what you're saying? Is there an agreement inside with what your lips are saying?" If I had been honest I would have said, "No. I know I'm lying through my teeth. I know I'm lying through my teeth. I haven't given my life to Christ," is what I would say back then, is what was true back then. You know, it was really weird, it was really weird. I remember this as plain as day. I had an immense difficulty for the first 22 years of my life saying the two words, "Jesus Christ." I couldn't say it. I couldn't bring myself, it was all I could do to bring myself to spit those words out with every effort that it took. Do you know why that was? It's because the Spirit of God was not truly indwelling me. I was in darkness. I was a child of the devil. And so the sweetest words on a Christian's lips couldn't come out of my mouth because there was no reality to his presence in my heart and I'd tell the lie, "Yeah, I believe in him," but I would quickly want to change the subject. Well, one of the things, one of the many marks of the reality of my own conversion to my life over time is that now when I stand before you, however many of you that are in here and I look at you and I say, "I'm a true Christian. I know Christ. I belong to him. I'm going to heaven when I die," there is an abiding supernatural affirmation of that in my heart that says, "Yes. Finally after all those years, you're telling the truth."

So that's not independent of these other five things that we've mentioned. These things all work together. You can't view one in isolation. It is possible to be deceived, to be self-deceived about the reality of your conversion, the reality of your claim to know Christ, but for the true Christian there is that echo in the heart that says, "Yes. As you speak of belonging to me," the Spirit echoes, as it were, a harmony, an agreement that bears witness with what you're saying that says, "Yes, you're a child of God." Do you know

something about that? That's the point. If you do, oh, give glory to God. If you know the realities of these things, this is the greatest thing on earth; if you know the realities of these things, that's why we can be so joyful. That's why we can be so happy. That's why we can be so enthusiastic. When a talented vocalist who loves Christ gets up and leads us in music, we say, "He's giving voice to what lives in my heart and I love that. Can we go an extra three hours today? Forget about the snow. Can we just go another three hours singing and loving and worshipping Christ?"

You see, we've kind of come full circle here by the grace of God. You can't address these issues without recognizing the sobriety and the magnitude of what's at stake because your eternal soul is at stake. Every one of you has an eternal soul that is going to live on forever after you die and somehow I've got to awaken you, God has to awaken you to realize that and to take it seriously. But having been awakened, having gone through what John says, "I have written these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life," and then you look at your life and you join with me as I look at my life and say, "These things are true of me," then, then it's, "Hallelujah! Praise be to God this is real! There are countless untold billions of people deceived and going to hell and it grieves me but do you know what? I'm not in the midst of them. God has saved me. God has reached down and he has had personal mercy on me and delivered me from that horrible judgment and now I stand as a child of God certain of my salvation and certain of what lies ahead. What else can I do but sing? What else can I do but rejoice? What else can I do but praise the one who made this possible on my behalf at the price of his blood and at the price of his life? How can I but sing? How can I but rejoice?" You see, and that's what God intends for the spirit of the Christian life to be like for us, a confidence, an assurance that these things are real and that they belong to me.

What does that do once you have that assurance? Where does that take you? Romans 8:38 says, "I am convinced," then, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." I'm confident. You're confident. These things are real. These things are true and nothing, here's the point, here's the point of it all, nothing can change that. If God has been faithful to you, if God has redeemed you, nothing can overturn the divine verdict of his favor upon your life and you can walk out of here rejoicing no matter what. You walk out rejoicing with one single future certainty that you know you're still going to enjoy.

1 John 3:2, turn there with me as we close. 1 John 3:2. For the one who understands what Christ did for him at Calvary, for the one who has assurance now that his salvation is real, for the one who has confidence that when he turns that door, glory is the only thing on the other side, 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God." "That's me," you say to yourself if you're a Christian. "That's me. I'm a child of God purchased with the blood of Christ. Tell me more, John. Tell me more." "It has not appeared as yet what we will be." "You're kidding me, right? There is something else here involved? This is already so glorious that my soul is enraptured with joy and confidence and love for Christ and you're telling me there's more? Are you kidding? How could that be?" John says,

"Settle down. Just follow me. We know that when He appears," when Christ comes back, when we see him, "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." We are going to be transformed and the partial, dim glory that we see now as Christians in this flesh and in this sin torn world, is going to be exchanged for a greater reality where Christ makes us like himself, where we share in his perfected resurrected glory. We're somehow going to be like the one who saved us. That's the confidence. That's the joy. We're not going to become deity, the creature can't become the Creator, that's not what it's saying at all but somehow the glory that Christ has, that resurrected glory, somehow he's going to clothe us in it and we're going to be made perfect and we're going to enjoy the glory of Christ without shame, without guilt, without stain, without spot. We're going to be in his presence and belong there and in the presence of the holy Son of God be more at home than we've ever been on earth. Isn't it great to be a Christian? Isn't it wonderful to be a child of God? That's what we're going to sing about in just a moment.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, as we reflect on the wonder of salvation, we're just thankful, we're thankful that you have saved us and that it's your intention for us to know that we're saved and that we have truly been delivered from our sins. Thank you, thank you, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. And Father, for those that are still outside or those that are somehow deceived into thinking that they know you when they don't, Father, if there is any like that here, Father, may the tests, the marks of a true Christian come back to their mind again and again until they come to Christ and say, "Lord, I'm ready to lay it all down now. No more objections. No more resistance. No more competing affections in my heart, Lord. I give myself to you unconditionally. I trust you and your work on the cross completely for the salvation of my soul and the forgiveness of my sins. Take me and do with me what you will, that henceforth from this day forward I belong to you." Father, don't let anyone walk out without that being the dominant animating affection of their hearts. We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.

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