

## The Assurance of Salvation

Salvation

Romans 8:12-17

August 20, 2017

Welcome again to worship today.

Let me ask you something: What are you sure of? How do you know you are the child of your parents? How old you are? How tall you are? How much you weigh? In each case, you have definable witnesses that assure you of the answer to these questions.

In criminal cases, the authorities must have some kind of witness to the crime: a person (preferably more than one or else it is “he said, she said”), video, DNA; some kind of evidence.

Let me ask you another question: What about salvation? How do you know whether you are going to heaven or not? Is there any way of knowing you are saved?

I have had people in this church question whether they are saved or not. This is part of the reason we are doing this short series, “Salvation.” Last week, we talked about the misconceptions of salvation. Today, we are going to talk about the assurance of salvation, and I’m going to tell you that you can know you are saved.

I invite you to turn to page 4 in your bulletin as we consider the assurance of salvation. Let me read from Romans 8:12-17:

*Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.<sup>1</sup>*

When I talk about assurance, I mean the inward evidence of acceptance with God revealed by the Holy Spirit to our understanding and confirmed by our own conscience resulting in a confident knowledge that we are indeed children of God.

So how can I have the assurance of salvation?

**First, Believe the testimony of the Scriptures.**

Have you ever wondered why we have the Bible? Why is this book so important to us? Why is it year after year the #1 published book in the world? Well, because it is God’s word for God’s people, you and me. And because it is God’ Word, we need to read it, meditate on it, and believe it.

Paul writes to his young friend Timothy:

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.<sup>2</sup>*

The Bible tells us we can have this assurance. Why would it do that?

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:12-17 (NLT)

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NLT

Let's suppose that you were unable to have a child the natural way. But because of your great desire to love and rear a child, you decided to go through the complicated process of adoption. Let's suppose that after a year of much work, prayer, and considerable expense, a precious little six-day-old girl was placed in your arms. Even before you gazed upon her for the first time, you anticipated how you would share with her one day the fact that she is adopted. Sure enough, that day came when she was old enough to know. You took her on your lap and said something like this, "Honey, you did not come to us the way most children do. They are born into a certain family whether that family wants them or not, whether or not that family can take care of them or not. But that's not how you came to us. We dreamed about you and prayed for you for years before you came to us. Not only did we want you; we yearned for you. We thought our hearts would break if God did not send you to us. Then, on a wonderful day we will never forget, a phone call brought the great news. Someone told us that you had been born. Your mother was not able to take care of you, but she loved you so much that she made sure you had the best parents that could be found. Six days later you were placed in our arms, and we cried tears of joy. We adopted you. Everything we have will be yours one day. It would be impossible for us to love you any more even if you had been born into our family. Do you understand?"

That's the kind of conversation you would have with your daughter. Why? Because you would want her to be absolutely secure in your family. If you as human parents want your child to feel good and secure about adoption, don't you know that the heavenly Father is even more determined that our status in his family be solid and secure? Doesn't it make sense that God would put into His word the assurance that we are God's children? The Bible tells us we can have this assurance. We just need to believe.

The second way we can know that we can have the assurance of salvation is to **Believe the Direct Witness of the Holy Spirit**.

The direct witness of the Holy Spirit is the highest form of witness, for there is no greater witness than God, and the Holy Spirit is God.

Galatians 4:6 says

*And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."<sup>3</sup>*

The key in the doctrine of assurance is Romans 8:15:

*So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."<sup>4</sup>*

"Abba! Father." It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. That's what the Aramaic word "Abba" means. It is the term Jesus used to address God in prayer. We believers don't have to refer to God as "Your Highness" or "Your Holiness." We may call him "Daddy" because we have been adopted into his family.

I love the story of two little 1<sup>st</sup> grade boys who were brothers. On the 1<sup>st</sup> day of school, the children were introducing themselves. One of the boys said, "Me and Jack are brothers. One of us is adopted and one is not, but I can't remember which is which."

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 4:6 (NLT)

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:15, NLT

Well, we Christians don't have to worry about that. All of us believers are adopted. God nominates us to be members of his family. When we respond in faith and God grants us a new birth, the adoption happens. Then the Spirit confirms that it's a "done deal."

The Methodist Bishop William Cannon referred to assurance as "Methodism's most distinctive doctrine." When I think back 45 years to that blessed day when I first threw myself at the foot of the cross, I had the assurance of the Spirit. I recall there was a potluck after the service that day. I grabbed a quick bite to eat, then went back upstairs and walked throughout the sanctuary. Though I was not nearly literate enough, theologically, to explain what had happened, I knew I was different. I knew I had been accepted by Christ and that I belonged to him. That assurance has never left me.

This assurance is more than a feeling. Its authenticity is not measured in emotion. It remains even when feelings are low and troubles are as thick as flies on a dairy farm.

To what shall I compare this experience? Have you ever sat in the moonlight and told your beloved for the first time that you love her? And then you held your breath because you couldn't be exactly sure what her response would be. How relieved you were when she whispered back, "I love you too."? Didn't that feel good!

The Witness of the Spirit is even better. That's when God's spirit whispers to us, "You are an adopted member of God's family," and my spirit responds, "I sure am, and it feels wonderful."

And this is the third way we can know we have the assurance of salvation:

**Believe the Indirect Witness of Our Own Spirit.**

Romans 8:16 reads,

*For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.*<sup>5</sup>

God's Holy Spirit joins our own spirit to say, "I'm a child of God" or as a lady said on last month's Emmaus Walk, "My name is 'princess' because my daddy is a king."

Someone asked a Christian who had been a hopeless alcoholic before his conversion, "How do you know you are a Christian?" He replied, "I was there when it happened!"

I know within my spirit that I am a child of God, just as I know in my spirit if I am away at church camp, or an Emmaus Walk, Myra loves me. I don't need to hear it; I just know it.

But you might say, "Gary, I don't have that assurance. How can I get it?" You would not be alone. Billy Graham says that according to his research, at least 90% of all Christians in America are leading defeated lives. I am convinced that the witness of the Spirit can transform that defeat into victory.

Let me ask two questions and then make two recommendations. First, is there a persistent sin in your life that you have refused to confess and to ask God's help in changing? If there is, it can rob you of your sense of assurance. The second question is really 2 questions in one: Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins and have you invited Him to dominate your life?

Now for the two recommendations: First, ask regularly in prayer that God will confirm your salvation by giving you the witness of the spirit. The second

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:16, NLT

recommendation is this: once you receive the witness, tell people regularly why you are so joyful!

The story is told about an Easterner who walked into a Western saloon one day. He was amazed to see a dog sitting at a table playing poker with three men. He asked someone, "Can that dog really read cards?" "Yeah," said one of the men. "But he ain't much of a player. Whenever he gets a good hand, he wags his tail." Because of the grace of God, we are holding the best hand on earth. Our joy ought to show!

In January, 1942, just a month after the Japanese bombed us into World War II, Prime Minister Winston Churchill spent several weeks in Washington to plot wartime strategy with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Those were bleak days. Nazi Germany had conquered almost all of Europe. Allied shipping was being devastated by German U-boats. Hope was in short supply. On Sunday, Churchill and Roosevelt attended worship at the historic Foundry Methodist Church in Washington. Later, a reporter asked the President why they chose to attend a Methodist church. Both Roosevelt and Churchill were Episcopalian or Anglican. President Roosevelt replied, "At this bleak moment in the world's history, we needed to hear some robust, enthusiastic singing of the great hymns of faith; for that, you have to go to a Methodist Church."

We Methodists at our best testify and sing with enthusiasm! Why? Because from our beginning, Mr. Wesley taught us that through the witness of the Spirit, we can be absolutely sure of our salvation. When you know you have been adopted into God's family, you can't help but sing!

So, are you sure, today, that you are saved?

Sometime when you're in an airport, observe the difference between passengers who hold confirmed tickets and those who are on standby. The ones with confirmed tickets look at their phones, chat with their friends, or sleep. The ones on standby hang around the ticket counter, pace and pace. The difference is caused by the confidence factor. If you knew that in 15 minutes you would stand in judgment before the Holy God and learn your eternal destiny, what would your reaction be? Would you pace? Would you say to yourself, "I don't know what God's going to say. Will it be 'Welcome home, child,' or will it be 'Depart from me; I never knew you'?"

What is your answer?