

Concerns Christians sometimes have The Assurance of Salvation

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

00:49 The Assurance of Salvation

Today we will look at the subject of the assurance of salvation. Our salvation is based upon Christ giving His perfect life for us on the Cross of Calvary and His glorious resurrection from the dead. He expresses this beautifully in John chapter 10:11,

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep”,

and verses 17-18,

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Then, in the same chapter, Jesus says,

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (vv.27-30).

This is Christ’s most direct statement about our assurance of salvation. In John 3:16, we read,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The ground of our salvation and eternal security is entirely based on what God in Christ has done.

I want to start by looking at the seven statements of Jesus Christ as He was dying on the Cross of Calvary to impress on us the cost of our salvation.

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ’s love

Luke recorded the first and the last words Jesus spoke from the Cross. They were addressed to His Father. First, the Son of God asks His Father to forgive those who crucified Him.

“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on

the left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'" (Luke 23:33-34).

His words show us how all the suffering, pain and shame heaped on the Saviour demonstrated a love that could never be quenched. His love made possible our forgiveness and peace with God (Romans 5:1).

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ's promise

Part of His suffering was hearing the thieves crucified beside him join in with the rulers, soldiers, and all those who expressed their contempt for Christ. But Luke records how one of them, as he witnessed the patient suffering of the Saviour, repented and defended the Lord.

"Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing we are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom'" (Luke 23:39-43).

Whilst the Saviour was dying for the world, He brought one lost soul to Himself. In this simple conversation, the Lord describes His love for the lost. As the Good Shepherd, He saves the thief and assures him of eternal safety. He is not simply promised Paradise but to be with the Saviour in Paradise. The thief's salvation demonstrates that all the redeemed will only be in heaven because of the work of Christ. The thief had no opportunity to do anything but believe. And that was all he needed to do, "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ's care

Hanging from the Cross, Jesus saw His mother, Mary, and John, the disciple who always described himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

"Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27).

Whilst dying at Calvary, the people in Christ's heart were those who hated Him and those who loved Him.

After Jesus was born, he was taken to the temple and the aged man of God, Simeon, rejoiced to hold Him in his arms and said,

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace. According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples. A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

Then he later prophesied of Christ's rejection and said to Mary,

"Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (vv.34-35).

The spiritual leaders of Israel had made their thoughts clear and crucified the Lord of Glory. At the same time, Mary's heart was pierced. But Jesus ensured she was cared for by John. The love of Christ went beyond the Cross. Mary's care is a token of Christ's care, not only for His earthly family, but all the family of God. And that care extends to them in all life's circumstances, trials, temptations and failures. It is not by accident that all of Christ's disciples forsook Him and fled when He was arrested. Or that Peter denied his Saviour as He went to the Cross or that Thomas refused to believe Christ was risen. Did the Saviour forsake His disciples when they fled, denied and doubted? No! The love of Christ does not save us, and then rest on our faithfulness.

"It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

Our title to heaven does not rest on His love and our faithfulness. But on His grace alone.

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ's judgement

We begin to understand the cost of our salvation when we read the following words of Christ on the Cross,

"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:45-46).

Only one Man had the right to ask that question of God, His Son. But in love, He became our substitute and stood in our stead. And paid the price of our redemption, His life.

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ's poverty

At the end of those three hours of darkness, Jesus said,

"I thirst!" (John 19:28).

It was a cry of exhaustion. It indicated the weight of the load Christ bore. It was a cry of weakness and poverty. The moment had come when everything would be given. Paul would later write,

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ's power

But astonishingly, the Lord's penultimate cry was one of power,

"It is finished!" (John 19:29-30).

As the Good Shepherd, He declared,

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

The assurance of the Cross of Christ: Christ's sacrifice

And to His Father, He addressed His final words,

“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:44-46).

The Lord laid down His life, and He rose in resurrection to show the disciples His hands, His feet, and His side (Luke 24:40 and John 20:20). It was the same hands He lifted in blessing as He was carried up in glory to heaven (Luke 24:50). Redemption was completed.

The cost of our Salvation

We can scarcely comprehend the depth of what it cost Christ to redeem us. Only in heaven will we fully understand its wonder. And the immensity of His sacrifice comes with the assurance of John 10:28-30,

“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”

And of Romans 8:35-39,

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Understanding the cost of our salvation and Who bore that cost is essential. The Son of God became the Man Christ Jesus.

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Hebrews tells us,

“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12).

What we know beyond doubt is that only God can redeem and only God can keep. To believe that Christ can save, but we can afterwards be snatched out of the Saviour’s and the Father’s hands is to doubt the power of Calvary, the truth of God’s word and the depth of God’s love and grace.

Christ beautifully describes His salvation in the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15.

“What Man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his

friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" (vv.4-6).

The finding, the keeping and the bringing home are by the power of the Shepherd's work, and only He fulfils it. He saves from the penalty, the power, and ultimately, the presence of sin.

Our spiritual standing and our spiritual state

We should not confuse our spiritual state with our spiritual standing in Christ. When my daughter was small, we drove home on a bright clear night. She sat in the back of the car and could see the night sky through the window. After a while, she asked me, "Dad, why is the moon moving?" I explained the moon was not moving, but we were!" So often, we judge our position before God in terms of where we are and what we do. If everything is going fine, we feel spiritually blessed and secure. But when things go wrong, and we fail, we can think that God's feelings towards us change. Our Father always sees us "in Christ." Paul explains in Galatians,

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:16-17).

We will not escape this internal conflict until we are with Christ. But it is not the conflict that determines our standing before God. We will not go to heaven based on how successful we are in this battle within ourselves, or on how much good we have done, or how obedient to God we are. We will only be in heaven because of Christ's redeeming love and grace.

That does not mean it does not matter how we live. Of course, it does. The same love that has saved us draws from our hearts a desire to serve and honour the Person who so loved us. We want to live in the reality of Romans 12,

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

Think of a troubled child who does not get on well with his parents. One day his behaviour is particularly awful. His mobile phone is confiscated, and his game station is disconnected. He lies on his bed and lights a cigarette from a packet he had hidden away. He feels drowsy and drifts asleep, dropping his cigarette on the floor. Moments later, the fire alarm is set off. Where do the parents go? Does the breakdown in their relationship with their child lead them outside our upstairs to rescue their son? If Peter had died after denying the Lord, would he have been lost? Or would Thomas have been lost if Thomas had expired after saying, "I will not believe?" Our fellowship with God can be broken by sin and disobedience, but the failure of a true child of God does not cause the Saviour, Christ, to desert one of His sheep or God the Father to disown His child. Our eternal security is in Christ.

Our sanctification

God has saved and sanctified us, and we must look closely at these aspects of our lives before God. Alongside our security and safety in Christ, let us consider our sanctification. Sanctification means to be "set apart", and God has redeemed and set us apart as His people. But sanctification has two aspects. The first aspect is our position in Christ. Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 2, he writes,

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.”

Then in chapter 6, verse 11, he writes,

“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

This is our settled, unchangeable position before God in Christ.

The second aspect of our sanctification is progressive. It is the ongoing work of God in our hearts through the Spirit of God and the word of God, making us Christlike. It is presented in the following Scriptures:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25-26).

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

The word of God and its effect on us and our obedience to it are vital to this progressive work of sanctification. The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father,

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

This work is happening within the conditions explained by Paul in Galatians 5,

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (verses 16-18).

The challenge is to walk in the Spirit who empowers us to live consistently with our position before God in Christ. But there will be times of failure, giving way to temptation, back sliding, loving the world, and we can sin. John teaches us that,

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

But then he tells us

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (verse 9).

We are saved from the penalty of sins, and we can be delivered from the power of sin, but we are not free of the presence of sin until we die or the Saviour returns. So, our faith is constantly tested, and its genuineness is proven.

Our potential reward and loss

Our present faithfulness to Christ is the subject of reward and the loss of reward, but it is not the ground of our salvation. We will not stand in judgement before the great white throne described in Revelation 20:11. But we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul describes the works of those whose salvation is founded on the Saviour. These are essential verses in distinguishing between our salvation in Christ and our lives for Christ.

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (vv. 11-15).

Paul illustrates the difference between what is valued by God in our lives and what is not. The pictures used are gold, silver, precious stones and wood, hay, and straw. The first three the fire refines, the second three are destroyed. I have always considered the gold, silver, and precious stones as pictures representing our faithfulness to God, our faithfulness in the Gospel and our faithfulness to the people of God. Gold in the Old Testament was always associated with the presence of God, for example, the mercy seat of pure gold in the Most Holy place in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25). Silver is associated with redemption, as in the atonement money (Exodus 30). The precious stones represented the people of God (Exodus 28). This devotion and sacrificial service is a response to, not a means of, our salvation.

We are all conscious of how easy it can be to fail to redeem the time we are given and to invest our time and energy in what is of no value in the sight of God. The parables of the talents and pounds record the pleasure the servants had in bringing to their Lord the profits they had made from what he had given them. But there were also the servants who made no profit. These parables are potent reminders to use what we have been given in response to the One who has given all for us.

Possessors and professors

Interestingly there is a difference between the servant in Matthew 25, who buried what he was given, and the servant in Luke 19 who hid what he was given. The servant in Matthew was lost. The servant Luke 19 suffered loss.

Some live under the banner of Christianity but do not have life in Christ. The Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13 reminds us that Christendom is a mixture of the true and the false, of possessors and professors. Paul reminds us of the solid foundation of God stands and, “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19). We can be so near to Christ yet never know Him.

There are verses in the Bible which cause Christians to doubt the assurance of salvation. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about the race of faith, his service for Christ, and how he disciplined himself in case he was disqualified from finishing his race.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (vv.24-27).

In these verses, Paul is not writing about his salvation, but the working out of the life he possessed in faithfulness before God. He encourages us to commit entirely to living our lives for God, and the reward, “an imperishable crown”, is associated with this commitment.

Paul writes to the Philippian church,

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure” (ch.2 vv.12-13).

He is not writing about obtaining salvation but about demonstrating we have salvation.

But one passage in the New Testament has troubled many Christians and is the basis for believing that Christians can lose their salvation.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrew 6:4-6).

The first question we need to ask is, who is the writer of Hebrews writing about? He is describing people who enjoyed the blessing and privileges of Christianity without possessing Christ's life. These were those who witnessed the enlightenment, and the effects of the Gospel, came under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, heard the whole counsel of God, and saw the supernatural power displayed in the life of Christ and His apostles. But they never trusted Christ or received life in Him. Instead, they wilfully turned their back on the Saviour and His grace. Judas best describes this dreadful condition. He fell under the category of being enlightened, hearing the gospel, even participating in miraculous missions, listening to God's good word from the Saviour's mouth and seeing in Him the powers of the age to come. But Judas followed Jesus but never believed in Him, ultimately betraying the Lord of glory. Some have associated these verses with Jewish professors of Christianity returning to Judaism. The verses indeed describe apostasy. This is abandonment of the grace of God revealed in Christ by people who came under its blessing and influence, but never knew the Saviour at its centre and eventually rejected Him.

Apostates are not to be confused with true Christians who believe in, and follow, the Saviour. They may fail and let the Saviour down, but the Saviour will never forsake them. Compare the outcomes of the life of Judas and the life of Peter. Judas's ended in destruction. Peter was loved, forgiven, restored, and called to become a shepherd of the Flock of God. When Jesus asked Peter three times if He loved Him on the final occasion, Pete replied,

“Lord you know all things, You know I love you” (John 21:17).

At that moment, Peter understood he was entirely in the hands of His Saviour. He would fail again, but the Saviour upheld Him. The last words Peter wrote were,

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18)

Living in the light of the assurance of Christ’s salvation

Paul wrote,

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

The secret of the Christian life is to look up, not within. Each day we spend most of our time looking down or just ahead. We are occupied with the details of life and work and constantly adjusting to the things immediately in front of us. It can be challenging to find time to pause and look above. One of my favourite places in the Lake District is Surprise View, a high point above Derwent Water which gives you a beautiful view of the lake, the surrounding hills and countryside and beyond and of the town of Keswick. There are not many times on our visits to the Lakes when we don’t find ourselves making the upward journey to this special place, either by ourselves or with friends, to enjoy its peacefulness and beauty. The majesty of creation lifts our hearts in wonder to the Creator who made it and redeemed us.

Paul encouraged the Colossians to “seek those things which are above” and to “set your minds on things above”, reminding them they were raised with Christ. This can be a difficult concept to understand. We live on earth in a material world, but the apostle tells us we are raised with Christ at God’s right hand in heaven. And our lives are hidden with Christ in God. This is the life we possess now, and one day we shall experience its fullness when we “appear with Him in glory.” Paul explained that the life we have in Christ in heaven now is the power which enables us to live the abundant life we have in Christ on earth.

Paul lived the most practical and sacrificial life. He made tents, travelled extensively, preaching the Gospel, teaching, and caring for the people of God. He was a living example of what he encourages us to do,

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

But there was a serenity about his life which came from the experience of the Lord’s presence.

I have been to Surprise View often, but only once to the Lake of Galilee to stand on its shores and sail on its waters. It gave me a sense of the wonder of that day when the risen Son of God invited His disciples to, “Come and eat breakfast” (John 21:12 ESV). The Lord brought His disciples into His presence at the beginning of the day. The occasion demonstrates how as the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd, He feeds us, sets things in order, reveals His purposes, encourages us to follow Him, deals with our distractions, speaks to our hearts, “You follow Me”, and reminds us of His coming again.

It is important to pause at the beginning of the day. Not to look down or within but look above and take, in our hearts and minds, that upward journey to “where Christ is” and see things within the context of our life in Christ. There we discover the glories of the Saviour and are enabled by Him

to experience and express the abundant life we have in Him (John 10:10). It is a life His love assures us will never, will never be taken from us. Never forget that

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Be assured of your salvation.

If you have any concerns about this vital subject, please contact us.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on the Assurance of Salvation, Talk number T1322.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.