

Can I Be Sure

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Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 8:29–30

How many of you have a routine you go through before bed? I've got my list. I turn on the dishwasher and let it run overnight, make sure the lights are off, make sure all the doors are locked.

I learned that one from Ally. Because for a while, the second I got into bed she'd ask me — did you lock the doors? And if I couldn't answer her confidently, I'd have to drag myself back downstairs and check.

So now sometimes I'd mess with, because I know it'll drive her crazy. She'll ask, "did you lock the back door?" — and I locked it, but just to mess with her, I'll just go, "...I think so." And roll over. And go to sleep. And that little bit of doubt will eat at her all night. That's my job as her husband — to drive her crazy.

But isn't it true that those small questions of doubt have a way of creeping in at night? The house is quiet, your head finally hits the pillow, and that's when it comes. Did I lock the door? Did I shut the stove off?

And you can do something about those, can't you. You can get up and check.

But there's a heavier question that creeps in on those same quiet nights. And this one you can't get up and check. *Am I really saved? Do I really believe? If I died tonight — can I be sure?*

Where do you go to be sure of that?

This morning is one of those mornings where we're going to slow down and chew on just a couple of verses. Two verses that have the intention of giving us assurance.

How can I be sure of my salvation, how can I be confident that I am saved?

And the answer we find this morning is... We can be sure of our salvation because from beginning to end it's God's work — and God finishes what He starts.

Look with me this morning back in [Romans 8](#) and this morning we're looking at just two verses.

Part of the reason we need to slow down is because these are two verses that pack a heavy punch. Let's just say out of the gate, we're swimming in deep waters this morning.

But it's more than just deep doctrine that matters, it's how these verses help us understand the promises that surround them.

Think about those promises. Think about the one just a verse before — [Romans 8:28](#). We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We love that verse, and for good reason. But we can't detach it from these verses. How can God work all things for our good unless we have an eternal relationship with him?

And what is this purpose he has for us — what does it mean to be called according to it? All of those questions get answered in verses 29 and 30.

Or think of verse 31 — if God is for us, who can be against us? Or that life-giving promise in verse 39 — that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What an amazing promise. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God. But how much more powerful is that promise when we realize God's love started long before we loved him — when we realize he has been carrying us, guiding us, preserving us in the faith all along, that he carries us to the end!

Verses 29 and 30 are more than rich theology. They bring life and meaning to the promises all around them.

Paul is dealing with assurance.

How can I be sure God is working all things for my good? How can I be sure God is for me, that he loves me? How can I be sure nothing in all creation can separate me from his love?

How can I be sure of my salvation?

And the answer Paul gives us in these verses is this:

We can be sure of our salvation because from beginning to end it is God's work — and God finishes what he starts.

Here's where our assurance comes from in our passage, where it starts.

You can have assurance this morning because God loved us before we loved him, he loved you before you loved him.

LOVED US

Now we know this, this is what Paul told us back in [Romans 5](#), that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

This truth, that God doesn't wait until we choose to love him to love us back, that he doesn't wait until we get it all together, but while we were still in our sins, before we ever loved him, he loved us.

Apostle John writes in his letter that we love him because he first loved us.

Here's the question, though, how long before we loved God, did he love us? Like was it a few days before, was it the day we were born that he started loving us, was it because he could see down through time and he knew that one day we would love him that he decided to love us.

There are two words in these verses that tell us how long ago God started loving you, started loving me. God loved us before we were ever born, he loved us before the foundation of the world.

Notice these two words there, ***For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.***

Two words, two powerful words that are meant to stir up assurance, and humility and worship, but two words that also bring some questions.

I want you to know this morning that if you are here and you belong to Jesus, you belong to him long before you chose to follow him, you belong to him from eternity past.

That word foreknew, or foreknow. It means to know beforehand, to know ahead of time.

And that's how some have chosen to understand that word.

That it means that God simply knew ahead of time, that because God is outside of eternity, he kind of looked down the corridors of time, he looked all the way through eternity and knew who would love him and he set his love upon them.

The challenge with that of course is that it makes us the initiator of salvation. It makes God's response to me dependent upon me.

It reverses the order that Scripture gives, doesn't it? If John says that we love because He first loved us, well that's the order.

His love first. Our love second. Our love is the response, His love is the cause.

But this view takes that verse and runs it backwards.

It says God loved us — because He looked ahead and saw that we would first love Him.

That changes everything doesn't it?

But here's where this really matters for us this morning. Here's where it touches the question we're asking — can I be sure?

Because follow it all the way down. If God chose me because of something He saw in me — my faith, my love, my decision — then at the bottom of my salvation... is me.

And if the foundation is me, then the doubt comes right back, doesn't it?

Was my faith real enough? Did I mean it enough? Do I love Him enough?

You're right back to lying awake at night, wrestling.

A salvation that starts with me can never make me sure — because I know me.

But that's not what Paul wrote. Paul says those whom He *foreknew*. Not those whose choices He foresaw — those whom He *knew*.

And let me say this carefully — there are faithful, Jesus-loving Christians who understand this differently than I do, and we'll worship side by side in glory. This isn't a test of salvation. But I want us to wrestle honestly with what the text says.

What does it mean then that God foreknew? Well it comes from the Greek Word *proginosko*, *pro* meaning before, *ginosko* meaning know.

But that meaning, that word in the original language it has a deeper meaning than just knowing ahead of time, but it's knowing lovingly, relationally, intimately.

It's the same word that is used to describe how Adam knew Eve or Joseph knew Mary, a husband knows his wife.

It's more than just knowledge about, it's knowing intimately. It's the way Jesus describes His sheep in [John 10:14-16](#)

John 10:14–16 ESV

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Do you see how Jesus uses that word know, how does He know His sheep, how He does know His Father and how does the Father know Him. That's the same word used.

Jesus knows His sheep personally and intimately, The Father knows the Son personally and intimately, the Son knows the Father personally and intimately.

And what's interesting is that Jesus says He has other sheep, that have not come to Him yet and He knows those sheep who are yet to come personally and intimately.

Do you see the implications of this? Why it's so important, why it's the foundation for our assurance. Oh man, God loved me, long before I loved Him, He knew me, long before I knew Him.

He knew me personally intimately, from eternity past He set His love upon and called me to Himself before I was even born!

Isn't this what God says to Jeremiah and the other prophets?

Jeremiah 1:5 ESV

⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Do you see what God says... Jeremiah before you were born, before you were even formed in the womb, before you even existed... I knew you. Not just knew about you, I knew personally and intimately.

But notice what else He says and before you were born I consecrated you, that is I set you apart, I chose you for a purpose.

I want you to know this morning, that if you belong to Jesus, that is true about you as well.

Not only did God set His love and affection on you before you were born in eternity past, but God chose you, He set you a part for His purpose.

That's what's tied up in that second word there, ***that those whom He foreknew, He also predestined.***

Now listen, I know as soon as some people hear that word, their backs get up, their turn off their brains, their minds, they don't want to hear about it.

But, can I say you have to believe something about predestination? Because it's a word and truth that pops up all over the Scriptures. It's right there in your bible in front of you. I didn't make up that word, it's a truth right in the Scripture.

And the meaning isn't complicated... pre meaning before, destined, meaning decided ahead of time.

God's foreknowledge is always tied to His predestining. And He shows up everywhere Scripture.

Let me just share with a you a few, may I?

Ephesians 1:3-5 ESV

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

It shows up again later in that passage:

Ephesians 1:11 ESV

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

And in these verses Paul doesn't just give the word predestined, but he tells us what it means, it means that God chose me, chose you before the foundation of the world for His purpose and His will.

Foreknowledge is all about God setting His love and affection on you in eternity past, but predestined tells us what He does for those He loves. He sets them apart for His purpose, He marks them out, chose them for His purpose and His will.

Just pause for a moment and think about those implications, what that means. And how that should bring such sweet assurance to you and me this morning.

It means that if I am here this morning and I belong to Jesus, I have chosen to follow Jesus, that it was never by accident, it was by design. And all the events of my life led me to that moment.

How humbling, that God would choose me, why me? Honestly, I wouldn't choose me. There are people who would be far more faithful, far more productive, far more intelligent and useful to Him.

But He chose me, He loved me before the foundation of the world, and He set me apart for His purpose.

Isn't this what Jesus said to His disciples? When He said to them you didn't choose me, but I chose you.

And right there, some of you are probably saying, wait a minute. Didn't I choose to follow Jesus? Didn't I have a say in this? Maybe you're wondering how this squares with my freewill.

And I think it's important to say your choice was real. Nobody dragged you to Jesus. You came because you wanted to come.

You know Scriptures holds these two truths in tension, God's sovereignty and human responsibility, and often they are mentioned side by side.

I think of Jesus' words in [John 6:37](#).

John 6:37 ESV

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

Those two truths are there, God's sovereignty, all that the Father gives me will come, but human responsibility, whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

The bible gives us both, that God sovereignly chooses those who belong to Him, and those that come to Him, come willingly.

And we have to hold both those truths. One doesn't cancel out the other.

Both are true. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, and whoever, whoever will come will be saved.

But what made a dead heart want to come? We've seen it already in Romans — no one seeks God, dead hearts don't move toward Him. So, if you found yourself wanting Jesus... that wanting was grace. God didn't override your will. He brought it to life.

Your choice was real — it just wasn't first.

You can be sure because God loved you before you loved Him and He made you alive so that it was possible for you to love Him back.

What's the purpose? Well He tells us in our passage this morning.

Read it again, those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son... that's your destiny, that's my destiny as God's children.

God is forming us into the image of His Son. He is making us more and more like Jesus. This is so much more than being set a part for heaven, no, something far greater.

God is changing my heart, my character, my will, my love, my actions, my life into the image of His Son.

It brings life to that promise of last week, doesn't it? That God works all things together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. What purpose? The purpose of being made into the image of His Son.

It's how God is using all things in my life, the good, the bad, the sweet, the bitter, the hard, the blessings, all of it are being used to fulfill the purpose for which I have been set a part for. To form me into the image of His Son.

And listen, that can only be true if my life is eternally in His hands, not just from the moment I believe. But my life is eternally in His hands, from before the foundation of the world is how God is able to use all things.

I want you to know that this is meant to bring sweet assurance to you this morning. You can have faith, you can have assurance of your salvation because it's not your initiative, it's not dependant upon you, but you are saved because God loved you before you loved Him, and He chose you before you chose Him.

Here's the second reason you can be sure of your salvation,

Because our salvation rests on His work and not our own.

HIS WORK

It's about what He has done, not what we have done.

If salvation were left up to me and my efforts, if me being saved were up to me. I would lose before the day even started, my salvation would fail before I even lived one day of it.

But we can rest, we be sure and have assurance because it rests on His work and not our own.

I mean, notice something about these two verses. Notice who is the subject and the focus, who is it that is doing all the acting and holding the whole chain together?

For those whom He foreknew, He predestined, He called, He justifies, He glorifies. He is the one who hold this all together, He is the one who is doing all the acting, you and I are never mentioned, you and I do not do any work, He does the work.

He is the one who knew us, He is the one who predestines us, but He is the one who calls us. In verse 30 Paul says, ***those whom He predestined He also called.***

This is where the work of eternity past starts to play out in present day, there was a day where each of us who belong to Jesus felt a call.

Like, understand there are two different calls. There is a general call that genuinely goes out to the whole world, that's the call of [John 3:16](#) that whoever believes in Him shall be saved, it's the call of [Romans 10](#) that all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

There is a calling that goes out to the whole world, come, come and be saved, come and believe, whosoever will come.

But we know that not everybody comes. This is the mystery isn't it? It's amazing that every time God's Word is preached, there could be two people sitting next to each other and one hears the gospel and their hearts are turned, they are convicted of their sin, tears come to their eyes and they repent and give their life to Jesus and the person next to them can hear that exact same message and feel and hear nothing life changing.

The answer is while there is a general call that goes out to the world, there is an internal call that draws people unto Jesus. We've all experienced this, if you are a believer in Jesus there was a time where you heard the gospel and something within you drew you to Jesus, something in you awakened your heart to faith, your eyes to truth, your ears to the message.

What was that? You may have heard that message a hundred, maybe a thousand times before and nothing, but for some reason this time something clicked. That's the calling. The inward calling; the awakening of your soul by the Holy Spirit to the message and the truth of God.

It's what Jesus said in [John 6:44](#).

John 6:44 **ESV**

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...

Do you see what Jesus is saying? That while He is giving this genuine call, there is this inward call of the Father to come to Jesus and no one can come, no one is able to come unless the Father calls them.

That word draw there is the image of someone drawing water from a well.

What does this look like? It looks like what happened to Lydia in [Acts 16](#), where Paul and Silas were preaching in Phillipi and as they were preaching [Acts 16:14](#) says that a woman named Lydia heard the message and the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

The Lord opened her heart to the message.

Here's what I understand about what I do every Sunday. I have so little control over how you respond to the message. Like some of you hear God's word and you leave here unaffected, you're just watching the clock for the time to go by.

And yet others are here and they hear the same message and their lives are impacted and transformed and it isn't because I'm an amazing preacher, no, it's because God is using His Word, His message to do a work in their hearts.

He who has ears to hear, let them hear.

That while there is an outward call to everyone to respond, that those who do respond, respond because God is working their hearts, calling them, drawing them to Himself.

Maybe you hear God doing a work right now on your heart. Maybe you hear Him calling you to Himself this morning. You hear the message that He loved you so much that He sent His Son to this world to take on your sin and die in your place and be resurrected from the dead to unite you to Him, to reconcile you to Him.

And God is calling you this morning to surrender, to place your faith, your trust in Him. My friend, if you sense that inner calling this morning, do not harden your heart.

But if we respond because God has called us, man, that gives us such assurance this morning.

This sense of purpose, this draw unto Jesus that I have is not something that I have imagined, or made up on my own, but I decided one day to follow Jesus, not of my own initiative, but because one day I heard God calling me; His Holy Spirit awakening me to my need of Him and that day, that day I responded.

And here's what happens that day we sense the call and respond, that day immediately we are justified.

Those whom He called, He also justified.

We know what that word justified means by now, we've spent enough time in Romans and heard that word enough that I hope you know.

That it is a legal term, a judicial term that describes my standing before God. That because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty that I deserved for my sin, that I am declared as right before God.

Not because I have earned it, not because I am right, but because Jesus paid the price, He took on the punishment that I deserve.

Jesus Christ, the righteous and holy one, the one who knew no sin, became sin, that I may become the righteousness of God.

God not only calls us to salvation, He sent His Son to secure our salvation. How much more assurance do we need?

Would God go to such great lengths to save you, to save me to give up on us, to turn His back on us?

Just glimpse down to verse 32 and chew on what it says for a moment.

Romans 8:32 ESV

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Paul says, consider what God was willing to give up in order to save you, what He was willing to sacrifice? He did not spare His own Son. If He went so far as to send His Son to save us, what lengths would He not be willing to go, what more does He have to do to prove to you His love for you.

Brothers, sister I just want you to have assurance of your salvation this morning.

That's what these verses are meant to do, to give us assurance, because God loved us long before we loved Him, and He did all the work, and our salvation rests on His work and not our own.

But here's the last thing you can be assured of this morning, here's the real reason you can have assurance.

We can be sure of our salvation because what God has started, He will finish.

HE WILL FINISH

What God has started He will finish.

How many of us have that problem of starting a project but not finishing? Husbands, or maybe I should ask the wives, is that true of their husbands?

Maybe you've got something at home half built, or a project that you've been working on that keeps getting put off. We're like that sometimes aren't we, we start things, but don't finish them.

But what we need to know is that God is not like that, He doesn't leave projects half done. The promise we have in His word is that if He has started a work in you, He will see it unto completion.

If God has foreknown, predestined, called and justified us, He will also glorify us.

In fact, it's what we should notice about this chain in these verses, that it's a chain. And once that chain starts He goes all the way, do you notice that?

It says... and He also, and He also, and He also, and He also... it's like a domino effect that once that first domino falls it goes all the way to the end. This is an unbreakable chain from start to finish.

But something else is subtle, but powerful. Do you notice the verb tense? Do you notice that each of these words are past tense, meaning it's already done, it's already complete?

You have already been foreknown, predestined, called, justified and even glorified. And that last one is really telling isn't it? You have already been glorified.

And you say, well wait a minute, I thought that glory wasn't something that happened until Christ returned and you would be right. Paul has already told us in chapter 8 that we are eagerly longing for the glory that shall be revealed.

Well, then ask yourself, why is it listed here as past tense, as though it's already happened? And the answer is that in God's eyes, it already has!

God stands outside of eternity, He doesn't experience time like we do, He sees all of eternity at once, He sees it from start to finish and in His eyes we have already been fully saved, glorified.

It's already done, your salvation is already complete. That while you and I are waiting on glory, waiting for our salvation to be fulfilled in God's eyes He sees it as already done.

Ask yourself if God sees it as already done, can anything else happen?

No, we're guaranteed to make it to the end, those who have been foreknown will be glorified, we will make it!

If you have been saved, you will be saved.

And maybe you're asking the question... what about those who don't make it to the end?

We can all think tragically of those who once followed Jesus so passionately, those who started out so well, maybe even those who served the Lord for years, but one day turn their back on Jesus, how do we understand that in light of this verse?

Well, we understand it by taking the whole story of Scripture into view. For instance, we know that there will be those who stray from the Lord for a season, but they come back. There may be those like Peter who go through a season of doubt or challenge, or darkness, and stray, but ultimately the Lord will call them back.

In fact, I know that's part of many of your testimonies that you've shared with me. Some of you may have recently come back to the Lord after a season of straying.

But the bible does talk about those who leave and never come back, who tragically turn their back on Jesus and never return.

And here's what John says in 1 John 2:19.

1 John 2:19 ESV

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

I say this with grief not with pride...

What John is saying here is meant to comfort us, not cause fear, what he is saying is hard to hear but he reveals that those who leave the faith were not once saved but lost it, but he says their leaving shows that they were never really part of us, they were never really saved.

Their leaving didn't break the chain — it revealed they were never in it. The chain still holds. Not one link that God forged has ever snapped.

But I know what that does, it then moves us to start to question, what if that's me? What if I could one day leave the faith? I would say the very fact that you are wrestling with that should be a comforting sign to you.

No one who leaves the faith lays awake at night worrying, That ache you feel — that fear of losing Him — that's not evidence against you. That's the Spirit in you, holding on.

There's a difference between struggling and walking away. We all have seasons of struggling, we all have seasons of doubt, but the Spirit of God that saves us, keep us.

Falling away is not stumbling — it's turning around and leaving and never wanting to come back. And if your heart still wants Him, even faintly, even this morning — you have not left. He has not let you go.

Because here's the promise underneath all of this. Your perseverance does not finally rest on your grip on God. It rests on His grip on you. And He does not lose what is His.

So, can I be sure? Yes. Because what God starts, He finishes — and that includes you.

We've been wrestling with the question, can I be sure of my salvation? Is it possible to have sweet assurance?

And the answer that God's Word gives us is an emphatic yes!

Not because of anything that we have done, not because of anything that we can do.

But because from start to finish, salvation is God's Word and He finishes what He started.

You can be sure this morning because God loved you before you loved Him — before you were even born, before the world began.

You can be sure because your salvation rests on His work and not your own — He called you to Himself, and He paid the greatest price to secure you.

And you can be sure because God finishes what He starts — in His eyes, it is already done.