A Soul That Can't Repent — Delivery Transcript

Hebrews 6:1–12 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, March 30, 2025 · *Neglecting Salvation*

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Everybody there, Hebrews chapter 6. Hebrews chapter 6 is a doozy. It is one of those passages that is extremely difficult to preach on because it's a passage that's extremely difficult to understand. And it's one of those passages that when you read it causes people who read it to raise the question, can I lose my salvation? Has anybody ever asked that question before? Actually, as a pastor I've helped people wrestle with the question, am I really saved? But I haven't often dealt with people who wonder, I know I was really, really saved, but now I'm wondering if I've lost the salvation that I had.

Just because it's not as common doesn't mean your answer to that question isn't important for how you live your life because how you answer that question has a big impact on the way that you live your life. Case in point is when I was not living for the Lord, it was before I became a pastor, and I was hanging out with some other people who were not living for the Lord.

And as often comes up when you're hanging around people who are not living for the Lord, the topic of the Lord came up. So this guy that I was hanging out with was not living a good life, but for whatever reason Christianity came up and I asked the question, are you sure you're going to go to heaven, you know, when you die? Because, you know, look at the way that you're living. He didn't even really believe in God anymore. He was talking about being an atheist. And he goes, oh no, for a hundred percent, I have no doubt whatsoever that I'm going to go to heaven when I die, because when I was like ten years old, I prayed that prayer and I got baptized.

And when the preacher said after he baptized me, brother or son, once you're saved. Can you finish the sentence with me? Once you're saved, you're always saved. And so he said, I know I don't believe it anymore or anything like that, but even if God does exist and I get to heaven when I die, I figure I'm good. And I was so shocked by that. I've never met anybody so brazen

and confident in their salvation because personally I was struggling. Because I was doing things I didn't necessarily want to do, but I couldn't seem to find a way to stop doing them.

And I struggled with am I really a Christian? And I did find comfort in that phrase, once saved, always saved, because that's not just a phrase, it's a biblical truth. The Bible teaches that once you become a believer, salvation is something God does, it's not something you do. Since it's given by God and accomplished by God and it's ultimately for God's glory, there's nothing you can do as a person to threaten it or cause yourself to lose it. Yet, even though all those things are true in the scriptures, for every word of assurance in the scripture, there is also a word of warning.

And according to the New Testament, the assurance that you can have of salvation. It's always attached to your endurance as a believer. It is the endurance of faith, in other words, that gives you confidence that you are truly saved. Assurance of salvation always goes together with endurance of faith. Now notice I say faith, not works. Faith and works are two sides of the same coin, but the message of the gospel isn't if you live a holy, righteous life, then you can have assurance of salvation. The message is if you continue to believe in Jesus, the object of your faith, then Jesus will keep you and work in and through you until he finishes what he began.

And that is certainly a glorious truth, but when you take that truth and stack it up against the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews is emphasizing the endurance of faith part, not so much the assurance of salvation part. And the reason he's doing that is because he's writing to a group of Christians who had converted to Christianity from Judaism. They were second generation believers, so they were getting their gospel message from guys who had heard and preached and hung out with Jesus, but it was secondhand information nonetheless. And they were getting pressure from their former Jewish colleagues or church members or the temple members saying, you have lost your Jewishness.

You are in jeopardy of losing your salvation. You think you need grace through faith to be reconciled to God. Whereas you used to believe it was about the sacrifices and the adherence to the law and the ritual washings. Are you really sure? Are you really sure you can go to heaven when you die based on faith alone? And some of those people were drifting back into that old covenant bondage and so the author of Hebrews writes Hebrews to say going back to what was is going back to something inferior to what has now become in Jesus.

The new covenant in Jesus is greater, it's better, he's superior, he's a better prophet, he's a better priest, he's a better king, he offers a better covenant, he offers a better rest, and over and over again. He emphasizes these truths. And when you get to the warning passages in Hebrews, he's essentially saying, keep believing. Don't have ears that won't hear, don't have a heart that gets hard and refuses to believe, and don't have a faith that stays immature but

rather persevere like press on to maturity so that you can keep believing and growing in your knowledge.

That's where we were last week. This week we're looking not at the problem that they had, but the consequence that they are going to face as a result of their problem that if they did not heed the exhortation to continue in maturity, then they were going to experience God's punishment as a result. So let's read it together first in chapter six, starting in verse one. Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance. And again, repentance is just changing your mind to agree with God about the truth.

So let's not go back and change our assumptions about God as it relates to dead works, faith in God, teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Let's not do that, but let's go on to maturity and we will do this, go on to maturity, if God permits for it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age. And who have fallen away.

This is because to their own harm they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. So as you can see, a very severe warning. And in the original Greek New Testament, it is one long sentence, verse 4 all the way to verse 6. One long, choppy, bulky, hard-to-read sentence that is in some of the most technical high Greek of the entire New Testament. And so a lot of people come to this text and say, what in the world is going on here? How do I make sense of that text?

And when you're trying to interpret a really difficult text, one of the important things to remember is to ask simple, clarifying questions. When you got a tough text, ask simple questions. Clarifying questions like who, what, when, where, why, how, and to answer those questions from the mindset of the original author and the ears of the original readers and the setting of the historical context. Those things are very important because if you don't, if you just interpret a text based on your experiences and your assumptions and what you want to be true, you may make sense out of a text, but it may have nothing to do with what the original author wrote to the original audience.

And that's what's inspired. The inspired text is not what you think it means. It's what the original audience thought it meant, what God intended it to mean to that original audience through that original reader. Does that make sense? So we got to ask that kind of question from the text, not our systems, not our assumptions, because a lot of people will get you know theologically trained and they take their theological systems and impose them on this text, and that's not wise. So if you ask those questions, who, what, when, where, why, how of this text, what kind of takeaway would you get about this warning?

Here's my sentence. You may tweak it a little bit. I tweaked it about five times, but here's where I am at. The warning is that a professed believer can fall away and suffer God's judgment unable to repent. Now you might switch those last two. The reason that they suffer God's judgment is because they're unable to repent, but the reality is they can't repent, and so they get judged by the Lord. The debate is really raging around are these true believers or false believers? Does fall away mean losing salvation or something else?

And is the warning legitimate or is it just a rhetorical device? In other words, is it true or fake believers? Is it a true or fake warning? And is it warning against hell or something else? And how you answer those three questions will determine how you view this text. And typically as a preacher, I don't preach the views. I preach the text. But because this text is so confusing. I think it would be helpful for us to look at the different views, how they try to handle the text, because in looking at those views, hopefully you'll be able to arrive at what you believe based on these pretty sound principles.

So this week's going to feel a little bit different than typical weeks. If you're a guest today, I talked to two guests in the last service. I said, why did you come to church today? I was like, what are you talking about? He picked a doozy of a morning to come, but let's try to answer these questions. What does it mean that a professed believer can fall away and suffer God's judgment because they're unable to repent. Well, the first view is what's called the test of genuineness view, and it sees this warning applied to what we're going to call fake believers.

They're not true believers, they're fake believers, they're false converts, it's a true threat, and they can lose their salvation. Now what they do is they come over here with these descriptions of the believers, and they say that these descriptions are talking about people who participate in salvation but they don't possess it. Just like you could be someone who doesn't believe in Jesus but you can go to the church, you can listen to the sermons. You can go, wow, that's a much better way to do my finances, or that's a much better way to treat my wife or my husband.

And you can benefit from the truth without actually believing in Jesus as Lord. Does that make sense? And there's a lot of people that do that today. And in the New Testament, there's certainly a category for people who associate with believers, participate in what believers do, maybe even benefit from the grace of God through the local church, but are not themselves believers. A name that comes to mind is a guy named Judas. You guys remember Judas? Walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, heard Jesus preach, was a son of perdition, not a true believer.

The New Testament has all kinds of passages. One of the most famous is Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 7, he says, many will say to me on that day, Lord. Didn't I cast out demons in your name? Didn't I do many miracles in your name? Didn't I prophesy and do all these wonderful things in your name? And then Jesus is going to say, I

never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. The entire Gospel of John has an entire category of believers who don't possess salvation, which is so interesting.

John's gospel was written so that you might believe. And he says, of those who believe in his gospel, some believe and are saved, and some are not. There's this famous passage, it's one of my favorite passages, it's what we use in our discipleship training at Broadview in John 8:31, or John 8:30, it says that Jesus did this teaching and many Jews believed in him, but he said, it's only if you continue in my word that you're really my disciples. In other words, some people are going to believe, but they're not going to be saved because they don't continue in the Word.

This is exactly what John said in his letter in 1 John 2, verse 19. They went out from us because they did not belong to us. Because if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us however they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. So there is certainly a category in the New Testament for someone who looks like a Christian, talks like a Christian, walks like a Christian, but is not a Christian. And the proof of the pudding is in the tasting is that they do not persevere to the end.

They shipwreck in their faith and they prove themselves to have never possessed, saving faith to begin with, because saving faith endures to the end. So maybe they would say that's what's going on in Hebrews. The only problem with that is what's going on in Hebrews, to say that they were enlightened. Certainly sounds like they were not just enlightened about how to do marriage and how to do their finances. It sounds like they were enlightened about the truth about Jesus. They were enlightened I'm a sinner separated from God and I need his grace and that the only way to experience God's grace is through repentance and faith in Jesus.

That's the enlightenment being talked about because in Hebrews 10 he uses the same word of the same people and that's what it's talking about. Or when it says that they taste the heavenly gift, well that's an interesting phrase. Or this one's the one that gets me, they participate in salvation. They partake of the Holy Spirit. I'm sorry, they partake of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians, the whole distinguishing mark of a Christian is that they have the Spirit of God in them. You cannot partake of the Holy Spirit and not be a believer.

At least not in the way that word's describing. Charles Spurgeon said, if these people are not Christians, then I do not know who is, if this does not describe salvation, then I do not know what does. And I'm with him. Now that's not to say they are all Christians. That may be true. They may not all be believers, but I think the author of Hebrews believes they are. The author of Hebrews assumes that their faith is genuine.

One way I know that is because he includes himself in the warnings and he believes himself to be a Christian. And so whatever the warning means, it to me can't mean that they're fake

believers, or if they are, it can't mean that the author intended that because he assumes that their faith is genuine. Now people much smarter than me, more godly than me, more learned than me, take this view and more power to them, I just don't see it. And you may see that view and more power to you, I just don't see it.

So if they are true believers, then what is the judgment? That's the second question. And there would be some people who say because these are true believers, the judgment is they lose salvation. They would focus on language like they re-crucify the Son of God, they hold him up to contempt. This is basically their way of saying not that Jesus comes back and he dies on the cross again. It's his way of saying if you slip back into Judaism, you are in effect saying through your unbelief, the death of Jesus is not sufficient for me. You are in effect saying, like the other Jews of that day, the death of Jesus is not special at all.

It's just some old guy, another failed Messiah. Got crucified by the Romans, and there's nothing meaningful about it. You're holding him up to contempt. And the author of Hebrews, on this view, is saying to these people, who shipwreck in their faith and say, I don't believe in Jesus anymore. Well, if you do that, you're not coming back. And you've lost your salvation and there's no hope of getting it. Why? Because you've crossed the threshold of unbelief. There's actually two versions of this view. One version says you lose your salvation, you never get it back.

The other version says you can lose your salvation and maybe get it back. They would read this language of impossible as with man it's impossible, but with God maybe. If I was going to hold this view, which I don't, I would hold the first view, not this view. Because the language of impossible sounds like it's impossible. Whatever you're not able to do, you're not able to ever do it. Does this mean you can lose your salvation? That's the question. Is this describing the loss of salvation? Maybe is a better question to ask.

Because some people would say it's talking about losing salvation, but it's hypothetical, not actual. I suppose it could be hypothetical, not actual, but the idea that Christians can genuinely lose salvation, I struggle to believe, because it contradicts other clear passages in Scripture. One of the things when you're interpreting a tough text is not just to answer those questions in light of the original context, but to also interpret unclear passages in light of more clear passages. This is a Reformation principle called the principle of perspicuity. I can't ever pronounce the word.

It means it's clear. The clarifying principle. How to take the principle and make it more clear is to take the more clear and take the less clear and evaluate it in light of the more clear. Perspicuity, P-E-R-S... I just can't say it. I don't know why I can't say that word. But you understand what I'm saying. Especially if the two passages are talking about the same thing. And the thing is, the New Testament talks about losing salvation, whether it can or can't happen. In fact, Jesus talks about it.

Jesus in John chapter 6. Says that everyone who the father gives me, again, salvation is something God accomplishes. It is a gift of the Father. Everyone the Father gives me. How many people are included in everyone? It means everyone. Everyone except that one guy that crucified Jesus again. He's not included. No, everyone. The Father gives me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will how often? Never. How often is never? Never. Never not once. Doesn't mean except for the one time or this one.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them. They follow me. I give them what kind of life? Eternal. Eternal. How long is eternal? It's forever. It's not five years, not ten years, it's not 85 years, but you rascal, you sinned so bad on your hospice bed, you lost your salvation. No, it's eternal. It's eternal. And they will how often perish? Never. These mysteries are so profound. Who can know them? No one will snatch them out of my hand. My father who has again given them to me is greater than all.

So the author of your salvation is bigger and better than you are. Has anybody ever felt like they let God down? But even when you let the Lord down, He keeps holding on to you because it's not about what you do. He's greater than your failures. He's greater than your suffering. He's greater than all of the things that cause you doubt and unbelief. He's greater than everyone. Therefore no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. This is so interesting. I and the Father are one. So Jesus says, I've got you in my hand.

And I'm holding on to you tightly. And even if someone can snatch you out of my hand, which they can't, my hand's in the Father's hand, so your eternal security is 200%, and it's never going to happen. This is why when the New Testament talks about salvation, it talks about it as one thing that has three different stages. And you never if you're in it at any point, you're in it for all of the points. People say I was saved, and I got saved when I was seven years old, Southern Baptist church, reading the back of the Baptist hymnal.

God convicted me of my sin. I recognize I need his grace or I'm going to hell and I don't want to go to hell because I never listened to the preacher's sermon, so I was not that good of a kid. And so Jesus saved me. I went down that aisle. I prayed the sinner's prayer and I gave my life to Jesus Christ. I was saved. But I'm not today who I need to be. I am gradually being transformed from one degree of glory to the next is what the Bible calls sanctification.

So I'm being saved, and yet I believe with all of my heart one day Jesus will come back and I will be saved. I will be glorified. I will no longer struggle with the things that I struggle with today because salvation will be complete. It's still salvation. It's just different. Different dimensions based on the stage that it's in. But that's how the New Testament understands it. That's why Paul in Romans 8 talks about what some people call the golden chain. Those whom God foreknew he predestined, those whom he predestined, he called, those he called, he justified, and those he justified, he glorified.

It's one thing. And if you're in it at any point, you're in it for all of it. And that's why he concludes, nothing, death, life, angels, rulers, present, to come, powers, height, depth, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So whatever Hebrews 6 is talking about, I struggle to believe it's talking about a believer genuinely losing their salvation. Because Jesus and Paul and the witness of the New Testament seem to suggest they will not.

They will persevere. That saving faith perseveres to the end. Genuine faith is characterized by perseverance. Doesn't mean you never doubt. Doesn't mean you never sin. Doesn't mean you never falter or enter into seasons of rebellion and prodigal son, all of that's in there, but you will persevere because it's not up to you, it's up to God, and God will see to it that you finish. So my problem is it contradicts other scriptures. So if they're genuine believers and it's not talking about losing salvation, then what is it talking about?

Well, there's another view that tries to solve this dilemma, and it is a dilemma, isn't it? It's a dilemma because it looks like a paradox. True faith must persevere and believers are eternally secure. How can both of those things be true? G. K. Chesterton says of Christian paradoxes that they are the hallmark of the Christian faith, and that though we like circles because they're nice and tight and tidy and easy to understand, the symbol of the Christian faith is not a circle, it's a cross. A cross is two lines going in completely opposite directions for all of eternity, just like a paradox.

But the way to solve a paradox is not to change this side or that side, it's to look more deeply into either truth. And if you will look more deeply into either of those truths, you will find that they trace back to the center of the cross of Jesus Christ, in which all of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith are resolved. That God is both finite and infinite, that He is both flesh and spirit, that He is both gracious and just. All of those paradoxes are at the center of the cross with Jesus.

And so how can it be that true faith endures to the end and believers are eternally secure in salvation? Well one view says the way that's possible is to just look more carefully at the warning in Hebrews six. We've already seen a little bit of this in Hebrews chapter three. We talked about how the author was using Old Testament imagery to serve as the backdrop for the warning. And the specific Old Testament imagery he was using was the Exodus community. In Numbers and in the book of Exodus, the people who were liberated from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt.

That's who the author uses as an example for why not to stop believing. And if you look at that story, you will see some crazy similarities between the language in Hebrews chapter 6 and the language in specifically Kadesh Barnea, which is Numbers 14, Psalm 95. And that's what they'll say. This is what's called the loss of rewards view. Their faith is failing, but they

did not lose salvation. They're true converts, it's a true threat, but it's the loss of God's blessing. The key verse in this view is right there in verse 3.

We will do this if God permits. They read that phrase and say, that sounds just like Psalm 95. I swore in my wrath they will never enter my rest. What was Psalm 95 about? That's about Kadesh Barnea, that's about Numbers 14, that's about the Israelites coming away from Sinai. Now they're on the edge of the promised land. Moses sends twelve spies out to scout out the land to plan out the attack. Two spies come back and say, God is good, he's with us. Let's go. We got this, 10 spies come back and say, yeah, but there's Nephilim and they're really big and we're like ants and we can't go or we'll die.

And the whole community was persuaded by the negative report, and they disbelieved the Lord, and as a result, God got very angry. Some of it was because they tried to stone Moses and Caleb and said, we're going to go back to Egypt. And so he says, you guys, I've had it. Ten times I've showed you my power, ten times I've showed you my commitment to deliver you, and these ten times you've seen it and still you don't believe. And so I am going to punish you. And how does he punish them?

One he kills the ten spies with the negative report. They are dead as a doornail, just like that. And then he says to everyone ages twenty or older, you will wander in the wilderness for 40 years until you die. And then after everybody 20 years or older is dead, then your kids will come into the promised land and my judgment will be over. And you know what happens? When they see those ten spies drop like flies, they say, wow, I guess God's for real. We changed our mind. We were wrong.

They actually cry. They held this whole thing. And they say, we're going to go into the promised land. We were just kidding, Lord. We repent. And they were not able to repent. You know why? Moses said, it's too late. God has already decided. He's going to punish you. And he tells them in Numbers 14, he says, don't go, the Lord is not among you, and you will be defeated by your enemies.

And still they don't listen, so they try to go in and the military campaign is a disaster. Most of them die. The rest of them are routed further down in the promised land. And so what a lot of people say is this must be the same thing. Hebrews 6 must be about the promised land. It must be about Kadesh Barnea. There is other evidence for that. If you look at the description of the believers in Hebrews 6, you will see eerie similarities between that and God's description of the Exodus community, specifically in Nehemiah.

Remember, he said they were enlightened, they tasted the heavenly gift, they shared in the Holy Spirit, they tasted God's good word. Same language, Nehemiah 9:12, talking about the Exodus. God led them with a pillar of cloud, pillar of fire to illuminate. Same Greek word, different English word, same Greek word, illuminate the way they should go. This is the

Latin Vulgate. I mean, this is the Greek Septuagint, not the original Hebrew, but the same Greek word is used here as in Hebrews 6. He says in Nehemiah 9:20, you sent your good Spirit.

They were partakers of the Holy Spirit. Well, that's what happened to the Exodus community. They did not withhold God's manna from their mouths. They tasted the heavenly gift. You gave them water for their thirst. You seeing the parallels? God's good word, powers of the coming age. Well, when Aaron repeated everything the Lord said to Moses, he performed signs and wonders before the people. So they heard the word of God, the Ten Commandments, they saw the power of God and still they didn't believe. But these are the same people, they would say.

These are the same people. This is the same covenant community, therefore the same kind of judgment needs to apply. Did the people who didn't go into the promised land, did they all go to hell? It's actually a valid question. Some people would say no. Or yes. They didn't enter God's rest. God's rest is heaven. Therefore, they all went to hell. I struggle with that because there's at least one guy who didn't go into the promised land. I know he's in heaven. You know who he is? Moses. And the reason Moses didn't go in is because of his unbelief and sin, which is the same reason God said y'all don't get to come in.

The other reason I struggle with it is because when Moses heard God say, I'm going to wipe these people out and I'm starting over with you, he pleaded to God, please forgive them of their sin. And Numbers 14, 20 says, I have pardoned them, just like you requested. So they're forgiven of sin. If you're forgiven of sin, can you go to hell? That's hard. Moses didn't go into the promised land, Deuteronomy 4:21. He's in the Hall of Fame in Hebrews eleven. So we know he's in heaven, but guess who else is there?

By faith, the Israelites. The Exodus community, they crossed the Red Sea, though they were as though they were on dry ground. God continues to treat them as his covenant people. He accepts their worship, he leads them, pillar of cloud, pillar of fire, all the way through for 40 years. He preserved their clothing, he kept their feet from swelling. In other words, he committed to still be their God and they still be his people, but there was punishment because it was the discipline of a loving Heavenly Father.

And so they would say that discipline is what's going on in Hebrews 6. We don't lose our salvation, we lose God's blessing, we lose our rewards. And it actually makes sense with some of what Hebrews says. If you read in Hebrews chapter 6, verses 7 to 8. It says, the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it's cultivated. That kind of ground receives a blessing from God, but if it produces thorns and thistles, it's worthless, about to be cursed, and at the end will be burnt.

So there's a couple things. Number one, the contrast is not salvation or hell, it's blessing or no blessing. Those who do the right get blessed, those who don't get burned. But the burning is not burning in hell. It's the same kind of burning that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 3, that you can build on the foundation, but if you build with bad materials, in other words you live a life that's not holy, that's characterized by unbelief. Then on the day of judgment you will experience loss. The fire will test the quality.

The fire on the day of judgment will test the quality. If anyone's work was shoddy, or if anyone's work was good, then he will receive a reward. But if anyone's work is burned up, he will experience loss. But notice, he himself will be saved. In other words, some people will go to heaven, but they will smell like smoke when they get there. And they'll be like, well, where's your mansion? Here's my mansion. Where's your mansion? I don't get a mansion, I get to sleep on the curb. But I'm in heaven, so I'm not complaining.

And I know that sounds crazy, but Jesus does talk about storing up treasure in heaven. So you can either store or not store. That does suggest there's degrees of treasure, there's degrees of reward. He talks about in the parable of the talents. Some people do good, some people don't. So I don't know what all that looks like, but I do know that there's a category for people who through unbelief don't lose salvation, but they do lose the blessed life. Just like Abraham and all these Old Testament stories. When they walk by faith, they experience the blessings of the covenant.

When they don't, they don't. But they continue to be covenant people. And so maybe that's what's going on in Hebrews chapter 6. It's not the loss of salvation, it's the loss of rewards. It's the loss of blessing. And while I think that's possible and there's good biblical precedent for it, I struggle with that view because of the text of Hebrews itself. Yes, the author of Hebrews is using the Old Testament similarities to communicate. But the reason he uses the Old Testament is not to show the similarities, but to show the intensity of the better covenant in Jesus.

In other words, yes, this was true in the Old Testament, but how much more so is it true now that it's in Jesus? And therefore a greater covenant invites greater punishment. And so it must be some kind of punishment beyond the mere loss of rewards, because the way he structures every warning, the technical term is called a qal wahomer, or a fortiori, argument. In other words, from the lesser to the greater, a greater covenant invites greater discipline. So I wonder if maybe it isn't just the loss of rewards, but the threat is actually the loss of salvation and hell.

So you say, well, well what's your view then? You think they're real Christians? You think it's a real warning? And you think it's losing salvation. Well there's two ways to try to reconcile it. One view is called the wow, we're out of time. One view is called the hypothetical view. This view's got two versions. The first is called the grounds of assurance view. This view says

that the author is using the warning as a rhetorical device. And so they're true converts. He's talking about the potential loss of salvation, but he knows that's not really going to happen.

And so it's really kind of a false warning. This view is kind of leaning on the fact that these are Jewish converts. They are afraid because they're getting pressure. To drift back into Judaism. And so the author is saying, I know you're scared. I know you feel like you got to go back and do a lot of works and that Jesus isn't enough. But let's just take where you're at and let's work this out for a minute. This is what's called a reductio ad absurdum. It's where you give the benefit of the doubt to a person's premise in an argument.

And you say, if what you're saying is true, then this is where it leads, you crazy fool. This is what some of you want to do with the Democrat or Republican friends of yours. You fascist, you communist, this is where it takes you. That's what he's doing in the book of Hebrews, perhaps on this view. And so the idea is that, well, if you don't believe anymore, then that means Jesus would have to come back from the grave. He'd have to be recrucified. You'd be holding him up to contempt.

Surely you don't mean the cross is nothing. Like I can understand you're struggling with grace alone really, but surely you believe the death of Jesus is significant. But if you keep believing this, if you drift, this is where you're headed. You're headed to open scorn. You're headed to, why did Jesus die at all? Might as well just have him keep dying over and over and over again because it's not sufficient. The once and for all death is not sufficient. Surely you don't believe that. I mean that would be crazy, right?

And you're not crazy. And this kind of makes sense with what he says in verses 9 and 11. Even though we're speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in other words, I think you're true Christians. In your case, we are confident of things that are better, that pertain to salvation. And then he talks about their works. God's not unjust. He will not forget your work. The love you demonstrated for his name, serving the saints, and you continue to serve them. In other words, you think it matters what you're doing?

God has to see what you're doing. He sees what you're doing, he sees your hospitality. But you don't have to go back and be justified by your works. That's a fool's errand. And I know that's not what you're going to do because you truly believe, and true belief perseveres to the end. So don't be afraid. Don't fear. And in that way, the warning's not a warning at all. It's an assurance text. It's a ground of assurance. The only problem I have with that is the warnings do not feel like words of assurance to me.

They feel like words of warning. Fear of no faith. He wants them to fear not having faith. And so I don't fully get it. So where I'm at, and again before I give you my view, I just want you to understand any of these views are possible. None of these views are heretical. One of them certainly isn't Baptist, but you don't have to be a Baptist to go to heaven. Aren't you glad you

don't have to be a Baptist to go to heaven? And there are good reasons to take alternative views, so do not mishear me.

I'm not saying if you don't believe like I believe you're wrong, because I don't even know if what I believe is right, but here's my attempt. Believers are eternally secure in their salvation. And yet in the New Testament, assurance of salvation requires endurance of faith. I believe both of those things with all of my heart. And that means the warning is real. It's not fake. You must persevere. It is a dangerous thing to live in sin. Don't you dare. And if you persist and if you must continue in sin, you should have zero grounds of assurance.

Because genuine faith doesn't do that. Genuine faith keeps on, keeping on. And so what I think is that God in His grace has given us warning passages like these in the book of Hebrews. Because he knows our hearts are prone to wander. And he knows that we are in need. If we are going to be people who keep on believing, then we need a strong rebuke from time to time to wake us up and say, cut it out. Keep believing. Don't stop believing. And therefore, he's given us warnings as a means of perseverance.

It's not a grounds of assurance. It's a means of perseverance. Can you have assurance? Yes and amen. If you keep believing. Are you saying true believers lose their salvation? No. True believers do not lose salvation. They persevere to the end. Not because the believers are so great, but because the object of their faith is so great. This is why I think the conclusion of the sermon, I wish I would have put this on the notes, Hebrews chapter 12, he says, therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses, people of faith, by the way, their faith wasn't perfect, but they kept believing.

Let us lay aside, this is Hebrews 12:1 and 2. Let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. In other words, these things that are causing us to struggle in faith, let's put them down and let us run with what endurance. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us. Oh yeah, brother Wes, you got to have perseverance of the saints. You got to do hard, you got to strive, you've got to live a Christian life, you've got to grow in your knowledge.

That's not what he's saying. He says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. What do you got to do? What's the one thing God wants from you? It's not church attendance, it's not great tithing, it's not theological knowledge. He says, keep your eyes on Jesus, that's all you got to do. Keeping our eyes on Jesus. Why? Because it's the object of faith that does the work. It's not us that do the work, it's the object of our faith. He's the pioneer, verse 2.

He's the pioneer and the perfector of our faith. In other words, the perseverance of the saints is because of the work of Jesus Christ. He's the one who perfects it. He's the author. And the finisher. Some translations say completer, some translations say other things. It's the Greek

word telos. It's the same, it's interesting. It's the same Greek word used in Hebrews 6, which says let us go on to maturity. That's the Greek word telos. Let us go on to completion. How do we go on to completion?

Not laying again the foundation of repentance and going beyond it. Like let's not leave the basics. We're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It's grace alone through faith alone from beginning to end. So just keep believing. Just keep your eyes on Jesus and He will help you finish your faith. But if you shrink back. If you say Jesus is not that special, that the cross was not sufficient, that I need him, plus something else, then you are in dangerous territory because you will have no power to repent. You will have no power to overcome sin.

You will have no power to persevere, and those who don't persevere don't have true faith. I guess in that way all the warning views can work. Because they may not truly be Christians. The author thinks they are, but they may not be. They will lose rewards. At minimum, they will lose the blessing, but it won't stop there. They might lose their salvation. But God in his grace has given every means necessary so that those who have true faith can finish it through to the end by keeping their eyes on Jesus. And so the application regardless of your view is just don't stop believing.

Don't stop believing. Stop. Here's what would happen to me. I would get so focused on my sin. I just got to stop doing this. I got to stop doing this. And the author's saying, drop that. Set that down for a second. Look to Jesus. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Look to the cross. Look to God's great love for you. Look that the once and for all debt has been paid. It's because of what Jesus has done. Just don't stop believing in Jesus. And for those of you who have kids who are running from God and you wonder, you know, did they lose their salvation?

Are they really saved? In some ways I don't know. I don't know the answer to that question. I would never be so bold to say they are or they are not, only God knows. But here's what I know should be our prayer. It's not that they would stop doing what they were doing, but that they would first start. That they would not stop believing. And then if they don't believe, that they would start believing because the only power to overcome sin that so easily entangles is to look to Jesus. And if you're struggling in sin, just look to Jesus.

Keep your eyes on Jesus. And through faith, God's grace will be unlocked in your life. And it will enable, it will give you every resource. And every means to endure to the end, including really difficult to understand warning passages in the book of Hebrews. And so here's how I want us to respond as the band leads us. I just want to invite you to keep believing. And if you're not a Christian, to this morning start believing. Let today be the day where you say, it's no longer about what I do.

It's about trusting always and forever in what Jesus Christ has done. And if you're struggling in your faith this morning to allow the person and work of Jesus to reinvigorate your

confidence and assurance in salvation. Your assurance is in the endurance of faith. All the Lord wants from you is to stop trusting in that or them or yourself and start trusting in Him and what He has done for you. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so as the Lord leads, you respond, I'm going to pray. I'll be here to pray with anybody that wants to pray, but let's stand together and respond to the Lord.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this warning. I know it's difficult and confusing, but your Holy Spirit can unlock even the deepest mysteries of God and help us to understand. And so we thank you for the work of your Holy Spirit on a day like today, and we pray now that He would give us courage and faith to put into practice the things that you've spoken, the warnings that you've given and the severity of each one and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.