

Doubt: Dark Side of Faith II

Heaven Bound

August 26, 2012

PRELUDE – “Offering”

**Congregational Songs – I Will Follow /
Just as I Am**

Drama – “Mr. Peepers Goes to Sleep”

**Feature – “Everybody Wants to Go to
Heaven”**

I think that’s very true, don’t you?
Everybody wants to go to Heaven ...
just not right this minute!

However, to that I would add that a
whole lot of people – Christians even –
who are not sure they’re going there at
all.

It’s kind of fascinating - and more than

a little ironic in my opinion because, surveys consistently show that the average person who has little or no knowledge of the Bible tends to believe (for various reasons we won't get into this morning) that they *will* go to Heaven when they die.

But many people who know the scriptures, who are aware of what Jesus said and aware of what the Apostles taught, who sing "Just As I Am" as we did this morning, often wrestle with doubt over whether or not they truly are saved; whether or not they really have believed in Jesus; whether or not they really are "going to Heaven." In fact, as Ladell said, when it comes to our own personal experience with God, this was the number one doubt expressed by the

people of North Heartland.

And, as your pastor, I have to tell you that I feel a heavy burden about that because there are few things worse than being unsure of where you stand with God. There are few things worse than being a person who truly has been forgiven and saved and yet living in fear and doubt. And there are few things worse than being a person who has *not* been saved and forgiven and yet living with a false sense of security.

So, this morning, I want to be as clear and precise as I have ever been in a message because I want you to walk out of here this morning knowing where you stand and knowing what you need to do about it.

Now, the way I want to go about this message is to break it into three parts.

1. Why we doubt our salvation and forgiveness
2. What we clearly know about salvation and forgiveness from the scriptures
3. What we should do, how we should respond, in light of what we know and in light of our doubts and what the scripture says

And I'm going to cover a lot of ground this morning so you might want to take notes on this – just jot down some of the points I'm going to make so you can have it all in one place. But before we begin, I want to pray for you because

the Bible says that these kinds of things are spiritually discerned. So, let's pray for that.

Lord, we ask for the Spirit to be here. I pray that you would take these words, these scriptures, and make it clear to us, maybe in a way that it's never been before, about salvation, about forgiveness and about where we are in this whole deal. So, we give you this time, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Why We Doubt

Ok, let's talk for a few minutes about why we might question whether or not our salvation is real; whether or not we

are really saved. As I thought about it, I came up with a list of six reasons as to why people doubt their salvation. And most of these were expressed by you all in one form or another when you wrote out your doubt lists last month.

1. I think the biggest reason we doubt is probably what I would call “scriptural warnings” which say, in essence, that some who think they are saved really are not.

For example, on those doubt lists one person wrote “Matthew 7:21-23 makes me doubt – do I do enough of God’s will? How do I know that Jesus knows me?”

The reason that question was phrased that way was because they were

referring to the passage near the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where he said ...

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?'

Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you

*evildoers!' Matthew 7:21-
23 (NIV)*

Pretty frightening passage of scripture, isn't it? So, you can see why that person was condemned.

And then, of course, there is the passage in James where it says:

*What good is it, my
brothers and sisters, if
people claim to have faith
but have no deeds? Can
such faith save them?*

James 2:14 (NIV)

*Show me your faith
without deeds, and I will
show you my faith by
what I do. You believe
that there is one God.*

Good! Even the demons believe that —and shudder. James 2:18-19 (NIV)

In light of this passage, one person wrote a really great question: “How do I know I've done enough good deeds as a result of my faith?”

Another reason people doubt whether or not they truly are saved comes from ...

2. Questions about our “salvation experience.”

One person wrote on their doubt list: “If you haven't had a huge conversion experience, how do you know you are saved?” (I bet a lot of people in this

room fit into that category!)

Sometimes people will look back to the day when they first accepted Jesus as Savior and they worry, "Did I do it right? Did I say the right words? Did I believe enough? Was I sincere enough? Did I really mean it? I'm not sure. Maybe I should do it again."

Or some people can't remember when they came to believe in Jesus – they've always believed, they grew up in a Christian family or it's been a growing knowledge in them until one day it becomes clear, "Jesus is my savior, my Lord. I believe in him." But because of that, when they hear about how other people have this blinding-light experience, they wonder if they're

saved.

A third reason that people doubt whether or not they truly are Christians has to do with ...

3. Our struggle with sin and guilt.

I'm sure this isn't breaking news but Christians still sin even after accepting Christ! And this is a struggle because we think we should be past this.

Several people wrote in about this issue but one was particularly moving:

“When my adult son went thru a very difficult time, I prayed every day that God would intervene, but He did not. I asked God why, but

he never answered me. I never gave up my faith as a result but, at that point, I gave up reading the Word and praying so, in a sense, I turned my back on God. I have prayed for God to forgive me for this but I don't feel He hears me. If Jesus came back today, I believe I would be left behind."

Wow. What a tough place to be in. But others expressed similar sentiments:

- Am I really worthy of God's love if I've made poor choices?
- Is every sin really forgiven - even if it's horrible?
- Why do I feel I don't deserve to be forgiven?

- Does God really give me grace when I do the same sin, ask for forgiveness, and then do it again?
- How is the Holy Spirit in me even when I mess up?

Obviously, the struggle with sin and guilt is a very big deal for us when it comes to lacking assurance that Jesus has truly saved us.

To compound matters, this particular struggle plays into the fourth reason I think a lot of us question our salvation ... which is what I would call ...

4. Demonic lies.

In an amazing passage in the Book of Revelation, Satan is called the "accuser

of the brethren" (a term which would obviously apply to sisters, female believers, as well).ⁱ The idea here is that Satan is before God, forever pointing out to Him how we have failed. Your sin and mine – how guilty we really are.

But that's not all Satan is doing. Paul tells us we need to "take a stand against the devil's schemes" and we need to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one that are coming our way."ⁱⁱ Well, what are those evil things coming our way? Satan and his demons are forever pointing out our sin and guilt to *us*. They are accusing us, suggesting things like:

- "You know God could never love

you. Not after you did *that*! You claim you're a Christian but you've committed the unpardonable sin!"

- "You turned your back on God and once you do that, Hebrews 6:4-6 says (the devil knows the scripture by the way) it's impossible to be restored back to Him in right standing. So if you think you can turn around and walk back whenever you want, you're just deceiving yourself!"
- Satan will also say – and, I've heard this from people at this church - "You don't belong among these good people here at NHCC. You aren't worthy." That's Satan talking to us.

As one Puritan writer put it many years ago: "The devil is always following and tempting us to doubt the love of Christ ... For the devil knows well enough that the more we doubt Christ's love, the more we shall embrace Satan's love. He who lacks assurance converses too much with Satan."

Yet another reason we question our salvation has to do with ...

5. A lack of connection with God.

For one reason or another, we don't sense His presence. It might be that we're going through a trial and God seems distant. Or it might be that we fear that God is angry at us (we've been listening too much to Satan's lies) and

so we're avoiding Him. Or it might be that we just are being lazy and aren't pursuing Him.

Whatever the reason, a lack of that fellowship and connection with God can also cause us to doubt our salvation.

Finally, some of us question our salvation because ...

6. We simply aren't saved.

We doubt our salvation because we don't have salvation. And that could be because we've never heard the gospel. Or we've heard it and haven't yet responded to it. Or, we've heard it and rejected it.

Whatever the reason, some of us question our salvation because we're simply not saved.

What We Know

Now, at this point, I could try to address all of those causes individually and specifically, but I think a better way would be to address the one issue that lies at the root of all of them ... except for maybe the sixth one – I mean, if you're not saved, you can't deal with doubts about your salvation until you actually get saved. However, as I think you'll see, this one issue speaks to that cause, too.

So, what is the issue that's at the root of our doubts? *It's that we do not have a clear understanding of salvation and forgiveness from the scriptures.*

And, because we do not understand ...

- We worry about passages that address "counterfeit Christians."
- We obsess over our "experience" of "accepting Christ."
- We are confused and disheartened about our struggle with sin.
- We're defeated by the lies of our spiritual enemy, Satan and his demonic angels.
- We're hesitant to pursue God out of fear.
- We never come to the place of

salvation because we don't understand.

So, what I want to do is to just make a list of what we know for sure about salvation from what the Bible tells us. I think if we get the facts straight and the truth clear, we'll go a long way towards dealing with our doubts – whatever the cause.

And I'll start with the one truth that I think most of us already have probably heard (if we've been in a gospel-preaching church for any time at all), which is that ...

1. Salvation is not earned by “good deeds.” It is the free gift of God given when we trust in Christ.

Please tell me that you have heard this somewhere before here at North Heartland!

Or maybe you've heard it because it's all over the New Testament. We could spend the rest of this message looking at passage after passage in which the Bible teaches this truth, but I'll give you just two. For some of you, this might be news to you.

Paul writes to Titus:

*God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.
Titus 3:5 (NIV)*

And to the Ephesians he wrote:

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Now, this is very clear. It's very simple and straightforward. However, it's incredibly hard to actually believe because this is not how life works on the human plane. In real, everyday life, people don't give us stuff for free. You have to earn it. And, most of the time, that's kind of a good thing.

But it doesn't work that way with God. Salvation is not earned by dropping a \$10 or a \$20 in the plate, or whatever

the song said. It's a free gift that comes when we trust what Jesus did on the cross instead of in our own attempts to be "righteous." And that, friends, is the first and probably most important truth you need to know.

Here's the second.

2. Salvation is primarily about life and death; *not* forgiveness.

This is a big deal because when most people think about the problem of sin, they think the answer is forgiveness: "we sin, so we need to be forgiven." And there *is* a lot in the Bible about forgiveness of sin (and we'll look at some of it in a few minutes).

But the message of the Bible is that the primary issue when it comes to sin and salvation is not forgiveness, it's *life and death*. Because of sin, the Bible says, we are dead, and salvation – whatever else it does – has to deal with that issue first and foremost.

And the Bible tells us that is exactly what God does whenever He saves someone.

The Apostle Paul wrote ...

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been

saved. *Ephesians 2:4,5*
(NIV)

Jesus himself said:

I tell you the truth: whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. John 5:24 (NIV)

The Apostle John echoed the same thing in one of his letters, he wrote:

God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11-12 (NIV)

The truth about every human being – the truth about you and me – is that we are either spiritually alive or we are spiritually dead. We either have Christ and life or we do not. There is no middle ground.

That's very important to understand and it logically leads to the next truth about salvation, which is that ...

3. Salvation, once obtained, cannot be lost.

Once you become alive in Christ, you're alive for good – forever - because the life you receive is "eternal life" – the never-ending kind of life God himself experiences.

And you don't go back and forth from that kind of life to death based on what you do or don't do anymore than Jesus himself could go back and forth from life to death. Once Jesus was raised from the dead, he was alive – He is alive - forevermore as what the Bible calls "the firstborn of the new creation."

In the same way, Paul writes that ...

*If anyone is in Christ, he
(or she) is a new creation.
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)*

If you have the Son (to quote John) then you are in Christ and you are a new creation.

Now, it's true that you still have what the Bible calls your "old nature" – the part of you that wants to rebel against God – but you are now implanted with the Holy Spirit. He now lives within you and He has brought your spirit to life and it will stay that way forever; and it will even result in you becoming a new physical creation (similar to what happened to Jesus) when Christ returns.

This is why Jesus once said:

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can

*snatch them out of My
Father's hand. John
10:28-29 (NIV)*

It's kind of like this double lock. You've got Jesus and the Father. You ain't getting the believers out of either one of their hands.

Salvation once obtained cannot be lost.

Of course, some might say, "Well, OK, I think I get what you're saying that Satan or other people, no one, can ever snatch us out of Christ's hand, but what about us removing ourselves? Can't we choose to walk away from God?"

Well, I don't think so. How can you 'walk away' from someone who lives in you

and who promised, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'?ⁱⁱⁱ You may think you are 'walking away from God', but really what you are doing is walking into Divine discipline. You are walking into an area where God is going to discipline you as a father disciplines a son or daughter because He is in you always.^{iv} No one who is truly saved can ever walk away.

"But, Rick, we all know people who used to be saved – who used to live a Christian life – who are no longer following Jesus. Some of them are even against Him now. What about them?"

That exact situation happened in one of the early churches and, in fact, the whole first letter of John was written

because of people who had “walked away” and who were now coming back to that church and trying to lead other people astray with them.

Here’s what John said:

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had (really) belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 1 John 2:19 (NIV)

In other words, John is saying, people who do not “persevere or endure to the end with Jesus” were not believers in the first place. And, by the way, these are the people who on Judgement Day

will say, "but, Jesus there was a time when I did follow and serve you" and they will hear Jesus say, "depart from me, I never knew you."

So, what do we know so far?

- Salvation isn't earned – it's a gift that comes when we believe in Jesus.
- And it's primarily about having life – eternal life.
- And once you have eternal life, you cannot lose eternal life.

And because you have this kind of life and you cannot lose this life, it means

that ...

4. The forgiveness aspect of salvation is total and complete. It covers every sin – past, present and future.

In the same way that you don't go in and out of eternal life – you're either alive in Christ or you are not – you don't go in and out of forgiveness. When you are in Christ, you are already forgiven of every wrong or bad thing you've ever done or ever will do.

Again Paul wrote:

When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.

Colossians 2:3 (NIV)

This is so hard to accept for many Christians because again, in human relationships, it doesn't work this way. Whenever we mess up with other people we have to go to them and ask for their forgiveness, so we try to apply the same logic to Jesus. We think the fact that he is our savior means "Great, now every time I sin, I can just ask for forgiveness because He died for that sin on the cross and I know he will forgive me."

The problem with that logic (besides the fact that you will certainly forget to ask about something – and then where are you?) is that if you have to keep asking Jesus to forgive every one of your sins, eventually you will start

thinking (and Satan will start whispering) things like: "This time, you've gone too far" or "you've asked forgiveness for this one too many times" ... and then you start to doubt ... *because you don't understand salvation.* Salvation means every sin is already covered by the blood of Jesus and there is no need to ask for forgiveness. Your forgiveness was already taken care of – signed, sealed and delivered – 2,000 years ago at the Cross.

In fact, even though you sin, because you are in Christ and because you have life, you are actually perfect in God's sight.

The writer to the Hebrews puts it like

this:

When this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

*Hebrews 10:12,14
(NIV)*

That's how powerful salvation is. There's nothing like it on the human level, which is why, I think, we have trouble grasping it sometimes.

Of course, at this point most people who know the Bible will ask two questions.

1. "But what about the unpardonable sin Jesus talks about? I mean, if you commit *that one* it would seem like it wouldn't matter if you were already saved."

I understand why someone might think that. However, if you truly are a Christian, then you *can't* commit the unpardonable sin! I don't have time to go into it but the particular sin that Jesus is talking about is blaspheming the Holy Spirit and what he means by that – if you read the scripture in John 8 – is denying the Holy Spirit's witness to us that "Jesus is God" and instead rejecting Jesus as being some kind of a trick of Satan sent to deceive us. That's what the Jewish leaders were doing in John 8.

So, here's the deal. If you believe that Jesus is really from Satan, you can't also believe He died to save you from your sins and, therefore, you cannot be saved. That's why it's the unpardonable sin – it keeps you from being saved. And, logically, because a Christian is by definition someone who has come to believe *exactly the opposite about Jesus – that he is from God and he is our savior*, it's impossible to commit that sin. So, friends, I think some of you just need to let that go – you are not in danger of committing the unpardonable sin if you're already a Christian.

2. The second question people think of when they hear that salvation is

complete and total forgiveness covers every sin past, present and future is ... "Oh Wow! If that's true, then why not just live as a big sinner? Go do crazy stuff, do whatever."

Again, the answer is that, if a person really is saved and really has passed from death to life, it's impossible for them to do so.

Let's look back at the verse we just saw from Hebrews 10, this time with a slightly different emphasis.

When this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who

are being made holy.
Hebrews 10:12,14
(NIV)

See, not only are saved people already perfect – spiritually alive and totally forgiven – in God’s sight, they are also in the process of being made holy – or perfect – in their everyday reality. They are becoming more like Jesus. Their *default direction* in life is towards *perfection*. They can’t help it because that’s what the Holy Spirit automatically does in the lives of those who are saved.

Actually, that’s the final truth about salvation I want to put on the list this morning ...

5. Salvation means “our direction is towards perfection.”

In fact, this is the external evidence that we really are saved. Salvation is not just that we believe the right things about Jesus and about ourselves. Yes, that's important. *It's also that our belief begins to change us from the inside out.*

As the Reformers – Luther and Calvin and the like – put it: “We are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone.”

In other words, we're not saved by anything but faith in Jesus and what he did on the cross, but our faith – if it is true and saving faith – will never result in a life that is not taking on more and

more of the heart and character of Jesus.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Practically speaking this addresses some of the things people wrote on their doubt list. For instance, one person wrote: "Am I a Christian if I barely ever come to church?"

If it was me, I'd wonder. I mean, the Bible says that Jesus is the head of the church and he gave his life to create the church. So, if I find in my being no

interest in the church or in the People of God or in the mission of God or anything else God is up to in this world, I've got to ask, "is the Holy Spirit really living in me?"

Another person wrote, "If you accept Christ as a teen, but don't follow it up as an adult, are you really saved?"

Again, if it was me, I'd wonder. If there is no direction towards more and more perfection ... I don't know. I mean, if you're not interested in knowing God or serving God ... I don't know - why would you want to be saved in the first place? Why would you even care about going to Heaven? Yes, it's better than the alternative, but you probably wouldn't enjoy it anyway – because it's

going to last for all of eternity.

What We Should Do

Let's draw this message to a close. What do we do with all of this? I think two things.

1. If you've never come to the place of salvation in your life and it's because you've never understood what salvation really is ... today can be the day.

And here's how you do it. We've looked at this scripture in every message of this series, Paul writes:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that

*God raised him from the
dead, you will be saved.
Romans 10:9 (NIV)*

That's how this begins.

I think what that means is that you look at your life and you say, "I've been living like I'm Lord. I've been making my own set of rules. And, God, I've ignored you, and you call that sin. So I'm going to tell you that's the truth about me and I want to repent. I want to change my mind and I want to change my direction. I want my direction to become more like you. I believe that that's what Jesus took care of on the cross. I believe that he died for me and he rose again. I want him to be my Lord." And when that becomes the

sentiment of your heart, it doesn't matter if you walk an aisle or you say a prayer, or you dream a dream – what matters is what your heart does, it doesn't matter how you get there.

Some of you today may need to pray that - "Jesus, you are Lord. I believe that you died and you rose. I want to be saved."

But for those of us who are saved ... I think we ought to be encouraged. I think this is *good news* and a lot of us live like it's bad news. I want to encourage you to remember and to rejoice in the salvation that God has given you. And when you sin, the Bible is clear on this – confess it, repent of it and then rejoice that even though you

still stumble and fall, God promises that our direction is towards perfection and that our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west! What good news.

Let's pray.

God, thank you so much for this good news. I pray that as we close this service that we would just respond in the way you want us to. Some of us this morning need to say, "it's clear to me what salvation is. I've thought all along that I had to earn my way, that I had to clean up my act, I had to go to church so many times, I've got to tick off a spiritual to-do list – but none of that matters." What matters is that we're dead and we need to be alive. Jesus died for us and then

rose from the grave so we could die to sin and be alive to Christ. God, some of us need to say “yes” to that, and I pray that we would. Some of us though are walking around like we’re convicts – we’re not really pardoned, we’re just on parole. And if we screw up we’re going to go back in the slammer. And God, that’s not really true and that’s not how you deal with us. I pray we would have freedom this morning to walk in the newness of life that you have given us. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Feature – “I Will Not Be Moved”

A few things as we close ...

1. I mentioned in the message about the fact that there are spiritual forces in our world that are fighting against us.

Video – “Second Sons” Promo

David is set up outside in the commons if you'd like to check out the book. Half of the cost of the book goes to Accelerate campaign.

2. I want to say a quick thank-you to everyone ...

- <8:30/11:30> Who was planning to come to the 10:00 and switched to this service instead.

- Who helped out in getting us moved into this area (tearing down auditorium, etc)
- Who stepped up and volunteered to help us pull off three services instead of two.

3. We welcome comments/suggestions about this experience (not anonymous)

4. Pray for KCMO building permit Monday.

Endnotes

ⁱ Revelation 20

ⁱⁱ Ephesians 6

ⁱⁱⁱ Hebrews 13:5

^{iv} <http://realanswers.net/realanswers/?p=285>