

MBC – 2/27/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson

JAMES: TESTS OF A LIVING FAITH

“The Perseverance of the Saints”

James 5:19-20 – pt.2

- James 5:19–20 ¹⁹My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Some would say that James is talking here about a true Christian who loses their salvation, and we need to go after that person, and lead them to Christ – to be saved, again. We spent our time last Sunday showing from Scripture why that interpretation is not an option.

I have a book in my library entitled, The Heresy of "Once in Grace, Always in Grace." The author says this—

- The "Eternal Security" theory is one of the most devastating heresies that ever swept over Christendom. It is like a running and leaping wildfire; it has fast girdled the globe, and now rages on all sides before our eyes. I dare say that at the Judgment Day it will account for more lost souls among so-called Christians of the 20th century than any other lying vanity in existence!"

This author also believes that when you get saved, only the sins you have committed up to that point are forgiven. What kind of a Gospel is that? – That you are only half-saved, it's up to you to keep yourself saved, and in the end, you can lose whatever you had and perish in hell? And what kind of a Savior does that make Jesus?

- Ed Breazeale used to say: “Once you understand eternal security, you see it on every page of the Bible!”

So why in the world do people reject the security of our salvation when it's so clear in Scripture? Let me give you 3 reasons—

1.) Some, like this guy, believe that unless a person has the fear of hell hanging over their head, there's no motivation for obedience and holiness: Tell a person their salvation is secure, and they will go wild! That might be human reasoning, but it's not what Scripture teaches. Our Thursday night study is showing us the opposite: the more you grasp that God's grace will never fail, the more you desire to please Him out of gratitude. We obey out of love, not fear.

2.) Some reject eternal security because they believe that nothing in the universe can trump the free will of man, not even God. So people choose to be saved, and people can choose to be unsaved – they can *de-construct* their faith and God has no say in the matter. But didn't Jesus say “No one can snatch them out of My hand?” Yes, but these people believe that *you* can choose to jump out!” And God can't intervene. This is what A.W. Tozer was saying in the article I emailed. It's not what the Bible teaches.

3.) And this is probably the most common reason: “Eternal security can't be true” some say, because they've known people who were saved, who walked away from the faith forever. The answer to that is, “You don't know that they were saved, and you don't know that they won't come back!” Beloved, we

can't always judge by appearances. We have to trust what God says in His Word. So there has to be another explanation—

And there is! Scripture answers all three of these objections in the precious doctrine that we call “the perseverance of the saints.” If you look in your bulletin you can read this definition from the WCF—

- "They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

Beloved, if you are a true child of God, you might stumble and fall, but you will never “totally nor finally” turn away from Christ, because *He will hold you fast*. He will keep you trusting Him and loving Him. You will persevere in the faith because of *His* faithfulness! We ended with this song last Sunday. It is all about the perseverance of God's children—

When I fear my faith will fail, *Christ* will hold me fast.
 When the tempter would prevail, *He* will hold me fast.
 I could never keep my hold, Through life's fearful path.
 For *my* love is often cold, *He* must hold me fast.

(And) *He will* hold me fast, *He* will hold me fast.
 For *my Saviour* loves me so, He will hold me fast.

Can you say amen?

I. Saved if . . .

I want to give you three biblical principles that form a logical *sylllogism*:

1. Major premise: **Security. God's elect are eternally secure and can't be lost.**

If the Father chose us unconditionally before time began, if Jesus really saves, and if the Holy Spirit is our God-given seal and guarantee of future glorification – then how could we be lost? How could God un-adopt one of His children and allow them to return to being dead in sin and under His wrath? How can "eternal life" be temporary?

To speak of “losing salvation” is nonsense. I told someone this week that it puts the *moron* in oxymoron. But the Scriptures also teach—

2. Minor premise. **Necessity: God's elect must persevere in faith or they will be lost.**

And that might sound like a contradiction to the first point, but let's complete the syllogism:

3. Conclusion. **Certainty: Therefore, God will cause His elect to persevere to the end.**

So back to our “*if*:" the Scriptures can say that our salvation is *secure* and at the same time add a *necessary* condition, “*if* we continue in faith and obedience,” then that “*if*” is a *certainty* because God will enable us to persevere all the way home. We must, and we will, and both are true.

And I'll give you the "so what?" right now: This doctrine is a *powerful* comfort and security but it's an *equally powerful* motivation to pursue faith, obedience, and holiness, because perseverance in these brings blessed assurance that you truly are a child of God who can never be lost.

So let's look at some Scriptures that teach—

II. The *necessity of perseverance.*

And I want us to turn to Hebrews because *perseverance* is the theme of this letter. It was written to Jewish-Christians who were beginning to suffer persecution and they were tempted to go back to the security of their Judaism. But the writer of Hebrews warns them this would be disastrous: if you leave Christ, you leave salvation. So he pleads with these believers—

- Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we *must* pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (You must, or you might!)
- Hebrews 2:3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? (If you neglect this salvation, you won't escape.)
- Hebrews 3:6 ⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house *if indeed we hold fast* our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (And if you don't hold fast, you aren't part of His household.)
- Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brothers, [Christians!] lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. And—
- ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, *if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* (and if we don't, we haven't come to share in Christ!)

"To fall away" is literally, to *apostasize* – to fall into eternal condemnation! Now you say, "but this can never happen to a true Christian!" That's true! But please listen: it's impossible for a Christian to ever lose his or her salvation, but ***it is possible to be deceived about being a Christian!***

And I mean, really truly deceived. Many people will go to the grave in perfect peace about their status with Jesus Christ only to find out that they were deceived—

- Matthew 7:21–23 ²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

They thought they were Christians – they were in the ministry, in church every Sunday. Jesus doesn't say to them, "I used to know you." He says to them: "*I never knew you.*" They were never saved. They thought that they had entered through the narrow gate, but they ignored the narrow road on the other side of that gate. And notice what our Lord Himself tells us about who goes to heaven: it's not those

who say “Lord, Lord!” but those who *do* the will of His Father, i.e., those who persevere in faith, love, and obedience.

And our favorite verse in the Bible says the same thing—

- John 3:16 ¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should *not perish* but have *eternal life*.”

There is eternal security in the verse! But it’s only for “*whoever believes*” – and this is a present tense verb – whoever continues to believe, whoever perseveres in believing – that person is promised eternal life and will not perish. Therefore, a true child of God, will continue in the faith. One more from Hebrews—

- Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

Fear is *phobeo* from which we get the word “phobia.” This Scripture is telling you and me: “Have a healthy fear of being self-deceived about our salvation if you are not actively and intentionally persevering in faith and obedience.

- I remember having a lively discussion about perseverance of the saints with my dear pastor friend Steve Fernandez. He said, “Doug, I don’t my people worried that they might not be saved!” I said, “Steve, I agree. Unless they are not saved!”

*You see, true believers will heed these warnings, they won’t blow them off. A child of God doesn’t read this and say: “Hey, ‘once saved, always saved,’ I’m not sweatin’ this holiness stuff.” No, a true child of God will say, “Lord I don’t doubt your love and Your promises, but I doubt my own flesh, so help me, keep me loving, serving and obeying You!”

- The thought occurred to me: 11 out of the 12 Disciples were truly saved men, right? But when Jesus said, “One of you will betray Me,” Didn’t every one of them say, “Lord, could it be me?” Something to think about . . .

Look with me at the strongest warning of all in this Hebrews, written to believers, but it has an “*if*.”

- Hebrews 10:26,27 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.
- Hebrews 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

So throughout Hebrews, Christians, those who can never fall away, are urged, “make sure you don’t fall away.” One pastor I greatly admire says that these warning passages couldn’t possibly be addressed to Christians, since Christians can’t fall away. I disagree. *The Bible assumes no contradiction in warning true believers who can’t fall away, not to fall away!* And the Holy Spirit uses these warnings as one of the *means* to the *end* that will persevere.

- Spurgeon said this about the warnings in Hebrews: “God preserves his children from falling away; but he keeps them by the use of means; and one of these is, the terrors of the law, showing them what would happen if they were to fall away. There is a deep precipice: what is the best way to keep any one from going down there? Why, to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. . . So God says, "My child, if you fall over this precipice you will be dashed to pieces." What does the child do? He says, "Father, keep me; hold me up, and I shall be safe." It leads the believer to greater dependence on God, to a holy fear and caution, because he knows that if he were to fall away he could not be renewed, and he stands far away from that great gulf, because he knows that if he were to fall into it there would be no salvation for him.”

Let’s leave Hebrews and turn with me to—

- John 8:31 ³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide [continue] in my word, you are truly my disciples.

Jesus was speaking to Jews who professed to believe in him, but profession is not the same as possession, so Jesus gives an “*if*.” “*If* you abide in My word, you are truly my disciples.” To abide in His Word simply means to keep believing it, all of it – it means you never come to a passage and say, “No, that can’t be true.” Jesus says if you do that, you are not My disciple.

- And of course believing includes obeying, because if you don’t obey God’s Word, you don’t really believe it.
- When I was a very young pastor in L.A., an actor began coming to our church. He was a nice guy, loved my preaching, and one day he took me out to lunch in his BMW, while we were finishing he said, “Hey Doug, I gotta run; my girlfriend and I going to look at an apartment!” I said, “Uh, Bill, what do you think God thinks about that?” He said, “Doug, you need to understand: I love your messages, but I don’t believe everything the Bible says!” He wasn’t Jesus’ disciple. Neither are people like Josh Harris, who was a mega-church pastor, who *de-constructed* and said he doesn’t believe everything the Bible teaches. Christians believe *all* that Scripture says, and they *continue* to believe—

And if you keep reading in John 8, the Jews Jesus was speaking to didn’t abide in His Word, they picked up stones to kill Him for saying, “Before Abraham was, I am.” They proved they were not His disciples.

So to answer the objection I mentioned earlier: When you and I see a person who professed to be a Christian, but later rejects the faith and goes back to the world, they didn’t lose eternal life! They never had it. The seed never took root. They deceived us, and they deceived themselves – just like Judas convinced every one of the other 11 disciples that he was one of them. Maybe John had Judas in mind when he said—

- 1 John 2:19 ¹⁹They 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.

But then again, we never know if God might bring back that wandering sheep, and now I’m getting into what James was dealing with in the last two verses of his letter! Let’s finish our syllogism—

III. The *certainty* of perseverance.

If God's children *must* persevere in faith and hope and obedience and holiness, then they can know that by God's grace, and through His strength, they will:

- Philippians 1:6 (NASB) ⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

When did God begin His good work of salvation for you? Before time began! If He chose you in eternity past, He promises to be at work in you until He brings you to perfection, when you see Christ. Let me show you how this works—

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 ¹³But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because *God chose you* as the firstfruits to be saved, *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*. ¹⁴To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh don't miss this: the cause of their salvation was God's choice – God's election – the certain result would be their glorification, but between these two is the *means* by which God would bring them all the way home: They will "be saved, *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*."

? But Paul is so careful not to say, "saved by your sanctification," or "on the basis of your sanctification," but "*through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*." This is *means* by which God gets His children all the way home. And it's *necessary*. Look with me at how the writer of Hebrews describes believers:

- Hebrews 10:14 ¹⁴For by a single offering he has *perfected* for all time those who are *being sanctified*.

By His death on the cross, Jesus accomplished salvation for His people, once and for all, but those who are justified by faith alone in Jesus, are also called "those who are *being sanctified*." If you are a Christian, God is growing you, God is changing you. When you were born again, God didn't leave you in your diapers, the Holy Spirit began the process of progressively putting off the flesh and conforming you to the image of His Son. You are not saved *by* that, but you are saved *through* it, and you aren't saved apart from it. It is a necessity and a certainty.

- Let me ask you a question: Is your faith in Jesus Christ a gift that you received from God? Eph.2:8 says that faith is His gift. What kind of faith does God give to His children: a faith that might finally fizzle out? A dead faith that produces no good works (and as James said, can't save)? No! God gives the gift of a faith that grows, and bears fruit that remains and takes His children all the way home. Security, necessity, certainty.

Look with me—

- Philippians 2:12 ¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

Paul didn't say work *for* your salvation, he said, work *out* what God has already worked in. And take this with the utmost seriousness, because your salvation is at stake! But then he says—

- ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to *will* and to *work* for his good pleasure. (is that okay with you? Do you give Him your permission? He doesn't need your permission.)

We have the *necessity* of working out our salvation, and the *certainty* that God is at work in us – even in our desires – so that we will. God knows our hearts: sometimes we are drifting and getting lazy and we need to hear that we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And sometimes, we get discouraged and we need to hear that God is always at work in us so that we *will*.

IV. So what?

So how should you respond to what God is saying to you this morning? Four passages help us:

- 1.) John 15:8 ⁸“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Bear the fruit of your salvation to show the world that you are a follower of Jesus. Bear fruit to please your Master and make Him look good. If you have no desire to do this, then you are not a Christian, and if you do desire this, then know that God is at work in you creating and fulfilling this desire! And the key to bearing fruit is - ? - Abiding in Jesus Christ. Feeding on Him in His Word. Are you doing that? That is a means of grace. You must be renewing your minds through daily intake of this Book in order for God to transform you into the image of His Son.

- 2.) 1 Corinthians 15:10 ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not *in vain*. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Work hard in the grace of God to show that God's grace is never *kenos* – vain. I mean by this, rolling up your sleeves and doing something for the kingdom of God: we have so many opportunities for this at this church: We need people who can disciple and teach, work with our children and teens, help out our older folks, fix things, and clean things around the church, cook meals, give money to support our ministries – and when you do this, you show the world that God's grace doesn't come to His children in vain. Spurgeon said this: *“The saints prove their conversion by their perseverance, and that perseverance comes from a continual supply of divine grace to their souls.”*

- 3.) 2 Peter 1:10 ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. [the qualities he has just mentioned]

Be diligent in your walk with God to have assurance that you are one of His called and elect. Some of you struggle with doubts and guilt and you just sputter along in your walk. Peter speaks boldly here: If you want to make sure that you are one of the elect, stop moping and live out the life of Christ in you! And then stand back and see what God will do!

- Another story from when I was a young pastor, late one night, I got a frantic call from a gal in our church, Donna. She said, “Pastor Doug something is wrong with Norm, please come.” So I ran down to her house and I saw Norm, in bed, shaking, staring at the ceiling, in a cold sweat. He

didn't respond to anything I said. I had never seen anything like it. We called an ambulance and followed it to the hospital, and after awhile the doc came out to the waiting room and said, "There's nothing physically wrong with Norm. He was having a panic attack." So after a couple days I went to talk to him and he said, "I just feel like a spiritual blob. I don't read my Bible like I should, I'm not really serving, or leading my wife. . . I feel aimless and worthless." (And he was right on all counts!) He said, I wonder if I'm even saved." So I took him to this passage in 2 Peter, we read vv.1-11) amazing passage – I encourage to read it when you get home), and I said, "Norm, this is how to know you are a Christian, so get to work!"

And he did – and he never had another panic attack. And he never again doubted his salvation. And finally—

- 4.) Joshua 1:1–6 ¹After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ²"Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. ⁴From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. ⁵No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

Didn't God promise Joshua that he *would* conquer the land, but that he *must* conquer the land? You see, the promise was certain, but he still had to fight the battles! I'm sure Joshua didn't say to himself, "God promised me the victory — so I wonder what would happen if I just stayed here in my tent and didn't fight . . . ?"

No! He said, "God promised me victory — *so where's my sword?*" The certainty of God's promise moved him to fulfill the necessity of the condition! And he saw the *power* of God and *faithfulness* of God when stepped out in obedience. Do you get it? That's our motivation for pursuing holiness. Pray—

Spurgeon: Hold on, then, and trust believer! You have "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, which enters within the veil." The winds are bellowing, the tempests howling; should the cable slip, or your anchor break, you are lost. See those rocks, on which myriads are driving, and you art wrecked there if grace leaves you; see those depths, in which the skeletons of sailors sleep, and you are there, if that anchor fails you. It would be impossible to bring you back again, if once that anchor broke; for other anchor there is none, other salvation there can be none, and if that one fails you it is impossible that you ever should be saved. Therefore thank God that you have an anchor that cannot fail"