

“CAN I BE SURE I’M SAVED?”
(Ephesians 1:11-14)

This morning I want to talk to you about a question that every Christian asks at some point in their Christian life – can I be sure that I’m saved? Comedian Jay Leno, in one of his comedy routines, talked about his mother who immigrated from Scotland. In order to become a citizen, she had to pass a citizenship test and in order to pass you could miss up to four questions, and Jay Leno’s mom missed five. Leno said question she missed was: What is the Constitution of the United States? Her answer was “A boat.” She was thinking of the USS Constitution battleship docked in Boston, and because she got the answer wrong the judge denied her citizenship.

Leno says that his father stormed up to the judge said, “What is this? Let me see the test! She’s not wrong. The Constitution is a boat!” The judge rolled his eyes and said, “No sir, the Constitution is our basic governing document.” “It’s also a boat in Boston,” Leno’s father raved, “The Constitution! Same thing! Come on!” Exasperated, the judge said, “Fine, she’s a citizen. Now get out of here!”

Leno’s father said to his mom, “I got everything fixed – you passed.” “No, I didn’t pass,” she said, “I didn’t answer the question right – they’re going to deport me.” Leno said, “From that time on, any time my mother saw a policeman nearby, she was sure they were going to arrest her. He said, “When I took her to Scotland in 1983, and we were flying home, she asked ‘Will I be able to get back in?’ ‘Ma! Don’t worry! That was 50 years ago!’ But her doubts never ended.”

Many Christians, at one time or another, worry about their salvation in the same way that Jay Leno’s mother worried about her citizenship... “Am I really a Christian? Can I lose my salvation? Once I’m saved, am I always saved? Can I ever be sure of my salvation?” The answer to these questions plays a vital role in how you approach the Christian life – Do you live in fear or in freedom? Do you experience the joy of your salvation or dread that at any moment you could lose your standing with God?

I was saved at the age of six, and I distinctly remember kneeling by my dad’s living room chair and asking Jesus to be my Savior from sin. At some point in my childhood, however, I remember doubting whether I was saved or not. “Maybe I didn’t say the right words. Maybe I’m not good enough to go to heaven.” To make sure, I asked Jesus into my heart every day for at least a month. Anyone ever done the same thing? Even after praying every day for a month, I wasn’t completely sure.

If you ask me today if I am sure of my salvation, the answer is 100%, without a doubt, yes. “How can you be so sure?” you ask. The key is understanding the process of salvation – from beginning to end – and this morning as we continue our study of Ephesians, we come to a passage that explains how we can know that our salvation is secure.

The past couple of weeks we’ve been dwelling on the incredible chapter of Ephesians 1 where Paul describes all the spiritual blessings we’ve received from God – especially the blessing of salvation. In verses 4-14 Paul pens one long paragraph without a period – the wonder of all we’ve been blessed with comes flowing out, one thought after the other. In verses 4-6 he describes our blessings from God the Father who chooses us to be saved before the creation of the world and adopts us into His eternal family.

In verses 7-10 he writes how Christ – the Son of God – makes salvation possible by redeeming us through His blood and forgiving us all our sins – and that when Christ returns to earth our final salvation will be realized as all of creation is brought into complete unity and harmony.

Now today in verses 11-14 Paul talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation. In verses 11-14 we find three reasons you and I can be secure in our salvation and be confident that God will see us through this life all the way to heaven. Let's read these verses together and then explore each point one by one...

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”

If you didn't understand all that, join the club. There's a lot here to digest, and once we do, we learn why we can be secure in our salvation. The first reason is because **God chose you to be His own**. To understand salvation, we start with the fact that salvation was God's idea, not ours – and since God initiated salvation, He decides whether or not it can be lost.

Paul writes, *“In Him you were chosen...”* We already talked about the idea of God choosing us back in verse 3, and here in verse 11 the word “chosen” is slightly different – it's a word that is only used here in the New Testament. It has the idea of choosing to be an heir to an inheritance. The question is: Is it talking about believers who receive an inheritance from God, or is it talking about believers being God's inheritance? Do we possess what God has, or does God possess us?

The Bible teaches that both are true. When you become a part of God's family, you get all that He has – you get all the wonderful blessings of salvation – you get abundant life of joy and peace and hope in this life, and you get an eternal heritage of living with God in a perfect world to come.

Likewise, the Bible also teaches that we belong to God as His inheritance. For example, God spoke of the people of Israel as being His inheritance in Deuteronomy 4:20... “But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.” Deuteronomy 14:2 says... “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.”

Just as God chose Israel, He chooses believers to be His inheritance, His possession, and His heritage. He chose us, verses 3 says, before the creation of the world. You and I did not choose God – He chose us. He initiates our salvation. He chose us not because we were a cut above everyone else, He chose solely based on His grace and mercy.

If God chose me before the creation of the world – apart from anything I am or do – then there is nothing I can do that would make Him un-choose me. Since I did nothing to gain my salvation, there is nothing I can do to lose my salvation. Salvation is a gift of God, and Romans 11 says that the gifts of God are irrevocable.

In John 16:37 Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” A few chapters later Jesus says, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will 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).

Reason #1 you can be sure of your salvation is because God chose you to be His own, and when He chooses you, it's for life – it's for eternity – and all who are genuinely saved cannot lose their salvation. This truth is further confirmed by the word “predestined” in verse 11... “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.” “Predestined” means that God determined ahead of time that certain things would occur, and here Paul says He predetermined who would be saved.

Paul says He predestined us according to His plan. We saw last week that history is not just a random set of events, but it is moving along according to God's plan predetermined before creation, and part of His plan was to choose people to be saved, and make all the necessary arrangements for that to happen. Once God's plan is set into motion, nothing can stop or thwart His plan. He will save you and see you through to the end.

At this point I can hear the wheels of your mind turning... What about people who renounce their faith and walk away from it? What about someone who says they're a Christian but doesn't live like a Christian? Do they have assurance that their salvation is secure? Hold those questions, and we'll get to them in a minute.

Reason #2 that you can be sure of your salvation is because **you believed the gospel message**. After reading about God's choosing, you might ask, “Am I chosen?” Simply put, if you believe in Christ, you're chosen. In Verses 12-13a Paul says, “In order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed...”

We might get the idea that when God chooses us, there is no responsibility on our part in the process of salvation. When we talked about choosing a couple of weeks ago, we saw that from our human perspective, we do not know who God chooses. The only way we can know that we are chosen is by trusting Christ as our Savior from sin. Over and over in scripture – from a human standpoint – we are given the choice to accept or reject Jesus. If believe in Jesus, you are chosen. Belief is how you know.

The Apostle John puts it like this... “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:12-13). Did you catch the word “know?” You can know that you have eternal life by believing in the name of the Son of God.

The key question then becomes: What does it mean to “believe?” One thing we know for sure is that belief is not just an intellectual acknowledgment about the facts that Jesus died and rose again. James 2:19 says that even the demons believe that there is a God, but they don't have eternal life. To be truly born again you must not only believe in Jesus, but you must receive Him as your personal Savior from sin – you must trust Him alone for your salvation and nothing else.

Just saying a prayer doesn't save you – neither does walking forward when the preacher gives an invitation – growing up in a Christian family doesn't save you – all these things can be instrumental in you becoming a Christian, but they're not what makes you a Christian. A Christian is a person who has fully trusted in Jesus Christ as their only Savior from sin.

Verse 12 says, “We were the first to put you hope in Christ.” In saying “we were the first” Paul most likely is talking about himself and his missionary team that first came to Ephesus and preached the good news of Christ. In verse 13 he says, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and you believed.” Paul says, “We trusted Christ first, and then you good folks at Ephesus also came to be included in Christ when you heard us proclaim the message of truth and believed.”

From God’s standpoint, we were chosen to be saved before the creation of the world, but from our standpoint we were saved when we heard the gospel message and believed. This is why evangelism is stressed so often in the New Testament. Some Christians think, “Why should we even bother to share the gospel – if people are already chosen to be saved, then they’re going to be saved.” Yes, but we don’t know who they are – only God does – and He uses us as evangelists to spread the good news of salvation.

Romans 10:14 says, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” God has so designed the process of salvation to include people like you and me to tell people the good news of how they can be saved through Christ. Surveys show that the vast majority of people are saved through the influence of a friend or parent or co-worker who models a Christ-like life and who verbally shares the plan of salvation with them. I got that privilege just a few weeks ago as I sat down with someone and explained how to be saved and they prayed to receive Christ as their Savior.

How do you know if you are saved? The Bible says you know by believing in the Son of God. Do you believe? Some Christians wrestle with assurance of salvation because they can’t remember a time or date when they received Christ. The important thing is: What do you believe right now? I sometimes encourage people who wrestle with assurance to drive a stake – to pray right then and there and make verbal profession of their faith – and then write that date down on their calendar and remember it as their spiritual birthday.

Getting baptized is also a way to mark your decision to follow Christ. Baptism doesn’t save you, but it publicly identifies you as a believer, and whenever you may doubt your salvation, you remember your baptism and your public declaration of Christ. We are having a river baptism on August 21, and if you’ve never been baptized, this is an excellent opportunity for you to do so.

Reason #1 you can be sure of your salvation is the fact that God chose you to be His own; #2 that you believed the gospel message; and reason #3 is because **you were sealed with the Holy Spirit.** Verse 13b says, “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” Not only did God choose you, not only did you believe, but upon belief you were marked with a seal – the seal of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?

In the ancient world a seal was an official mark of identification that bore a unique insignia or emblem. If someone put an important letter or document in the mail, they would seal it by pouring hot wax on the envelope and then pressing their insignia into the wax with a ring. **SLIDE.** The seal said, “This letter, this document, belongs to so-and-so, and you do not dare mess with it.” After Jesus was buried in the tomb, the Romans sealed the tomb shut with the emperor’s insignia, and if anyone tampered with the tomb, they would face the wrath of the king.

In the same way, when you are saved, the Holy Spirit is the seal authenticating that you belong to God and that you are protected by God. All three persons of the trinity are involved in your salvation. God the Father chose you, God the Son redeemed you, and the Holy Spirit of God seals you – or better put, His presence in your life is the seal – the mark that you belong to God and are secure in Him.

Before Jesus went back to heaven, He promised He would send the Holy Spirit to dwell inside believers. Up until this point, the presence of God dwelled in Holy of Holy Places in the temple, and only the High Priest had access to His presence once a year on the Day of Atonement. But Jesus says, “After I’m gone, the Father will send the Holy Spirit to dwell directly within you.”

Jim Crumley gave me a list, some years back, of things that instantaneously happen the moment we’re saved. On the list are something like 40 things that take place the moment Christ comes into our lives – and among those is the indwelling and sealing of the Holy Spirit. All that we need to grow and thrive in the Christian life we have the moment we’re saved.

The Holy Spirit is what makes our salvation real and experiential. In Romans 8:16 Paul says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives ministers to us in a deep, personal, and intimate way – and assures us that we are God’s children. In John 3 Jesus says that the presence of the Holy Spirit is like the wind – you can’t see the wind, but you feel and experience the effects of the wind. Likewise, the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers to produce tangible fruit or evidence that we are truly born again. When you see change taking place in your life – when you experience an inner joy and peace, when you slow down to pray and read the scriptures and sense the Spirit’s presence – it bolsters your confidence and assurance that you truly belong to God and nothing can break the seal that binds you to Him.

Paul goes on to say in verse 14 to say that the Holy Spirit “*is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.*” Here Paul talks about our final redemption – the final stage of our salvation – when Christ returns and we are finally with Him face to face. The Holy Spirit, Paul says, is a “deposit” guaranteeing that that will happen.

The Greek word for “deposit” – *arabon* – was a common word used two ways. First, it was used to describe a down payment or earnest money guaranteeing that the rest of the money will come at a later date. In the same way, the sealing of the Holy Spirit is like a down payment of all the blessings we will enjoy in the future when we are fully redeemed by God in heaven. We inherit all kinds of blessings now – peace and joy and hope and meaning – but it’s just a foretaste of all that will be ours when we see Christ. The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives gives us assurance that God will continue the good work He has begun in us and carry it on to completion until the day Jesus comes.

The word *arabon* was also used to describe an engagement ring. When the girl you loves says “yes” to marrying you, you give her a ring that declares your pledge to marry her. Until the day that you actually walk down the aisle and say “I do,” the ring is a deposit or guarantee that you will keep your promise. The Bible says that all those who belong to Christ as His bride – we are engaged to Him. One day He will return for us, and the book of Revelation talks about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when we as the bride of Christ will be united forever with Christ in heavenly marriage. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives guarantees that Christ will keep His promise to fully redeem us.

The title of today’s message is: Can I be sure that I’m saved? And the answer is yes – you can be assured of our salvation because God chose you to be His own, and once His, you are His forever; you can be assured because you believed the gospel message – if you truly believe in your heart that Christ died for your sins and receive Him as your Savior from sin, God declares you saved; and you can be assured that you’re saved because the Holy Spirit seals you and guarantees your final redemption.

Yet, while we believe this, many of us know people who at one time professed faith in Christ, but then renounced their faith and stopped believing. Isn’t that proof that you can lose your salvation? To start with, this assumes that everyone who calls themselves a Christian is truly been born again. *Profession* of faith must not be confused with *possession* of faith.

Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one 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).

Jesus also talked about the wheat and the tares, and how the heads of the grain of both look identical and you can't tell them apart until the harvest. In other words, just because someone says they're a Christian doesn't necessarily mean that they're truly saved. Jesus said that in the last days we should not be surprised when people deny the faith. God knows His own and will keep them safe until the final day of redemption.

“Yes,” you say, “But what if I backslide and sin? Am I still saved?” A couple of quick things... One is that moral perfection can't save us, and therefore moral imperfection can't cause us to lose our salvation. Many heroes in the Bible – such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Peter – had moral failures.

Furthermore, the Bible says that a true believer will not continue in a lifestyle or pattern of sin. If someone professes faith in Christ and continues living a sinful lifestyle, it can mean one of two things:

- 1) They are not genuinely born again;
- 2) If they are a true child of God, God will discipline them (John 15:2; Hebrews 12:5-11).

The Bible encourages us to examine if we're truly in the faith. I would never tell someone living in unrepentant sin to not worry about their salvation, because they may not really be a Christian. Which brings us back full circle to how we know... We know because God chose us to be His own, because we believed the gospel message, and because the Holy Spirit's presence will be obvious in your life – your desire to sin will decrease, and your desire to please God will increase. Day by day your life will change and others will see evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. And all this will assure you that you're saved and give you confidence that He who began a good work in you carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.