

Salvation

It may seem an odd subject for us to consider in ministry, but I would like us to look at the subject of salvation, or more particularly, the security of our salvation. I personally have never had any doubts at all about the certainty of my salvation but many saints have. Much may be due to their personal situation or frame of mind at a given point in time, but a great many saints have doubts because of wrong teaching. We are fortunate in the UK that it may not seem to be a problem, but I remember speaking at a meeting and mentioning only briefly the subject of our security. There was a missionary in the audience on furlow from eastern Europe. The country had many assemblies, but apparently the Christians there had been taught that it was possible for them to lose their salvation.

Here at home, the doctrine of being "saved and lost" is widely held in evangelical churches so we must not be complacent in our position. So what would be the root of this doctrine? It may not seem like it but it has its roots in the old spirit of the Pharisees. Here were men who looked for salvation by works – by keeping the law. They felt they had to be doing something. Many Christians feel the same – it is not enough for them that Christ has died – they want to make their own contribution, even though the bible clearly states that salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast". We all know the words of Romans 3:23 – "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God". But the very next verse is beautiful – "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". The two key words are "freely" and "grace". It cost us nothing; it was undeserved; but it cost our Lord everything in redemption.

What would give us confidence to say that once saved, we are always saved? There are many points we could consider.

1. The work of Christ
2. Eternal life
3. The family of God
4. Divine hands
5. The Lord's shoulders
6. The book of life
7. The power of God
8. The seal of the Spirit
9. Our Advocate

1 The work of Christ.

In I Corinthians 15, we have the only divinely inspired gospel message in our Bible. Paul speaks of the gospel which he had received and which he preached. He got it, according to Galatians chapter 1 "by revelation of Jesus Christ". This gospel has three elements to it:

Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures

He was buried

He rose again the third day, according to the scriptures

This gospel has enabled God to fulfil His one great purpose for mankind. It was first expressed in Genesis chapter 1:26. There the triune God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". God made a man who was like Himself. The reason? It pleased God to come down into the garden and there commune with Adam. God was seeking the fellowship of the man whom He had made. This divine purpose has continued into the Christian era. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that we have been chosen to be "holy and without blame before Him in love". God wants men to be like Him, and also to be before Him. God still has this purpose in view at the outset of eternity. Revelation 21:3 tells us, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people". There is no doubt about it – God wants to keep company with men.

But as we know, the purpose of God was soon thwarted in Eden by the sin of Adam. Sin has brought three things upon the human race.

- Death
- Separation from God
- Hell

God had warned Adam about the consequence of eating that forbidden fruit. In many ways, the sin of Adam was far worse than that of Eve. Paul says in I Timothy 2:14 that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression". Adam sinned knowingly and wilfully. The first consequence of his sin was death. He did not die immediately, but he brought the sentence of death upon himself and the whole human race. "Death passed upon all men for that all have sinned". "The wages of sin is death", and those wages must be paid. The second consequence was separation from God. Genesis 3 tells us that "God drove out the man". It was no longer possible for a sinful man to remain in the presence of God. The final consequence of sin is hell itself. In John's gospel, the Lord said, "If ye die in your sins, where I am going to, ye cannot come". There is no possibility of heaven for those who die in their sins ie with their sins unforgiven.

God, if we can dare say such a thing, had a problem - how to remain holy and righteous and yet fulfil His own purpose by having the fellowship of man. God's answer was to find another man who was able to take the place of fallen man and bear all the consequences of sin. These we remember were threefold - death, separation from God, and hell - and the Lord suffered all three. His first experience was that of separation from God, during the three hours of darkness at Calvary. It was then He was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. It was a dreadful experience for One who knew no sin. Yet, "God made Him sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". This was the One who had said, "He that sent Me is with Me. The Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always the things that please Him". But because He was made sin, God turned His face away from His own Son. Hence the dreadful cry on Calvary, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me". The Lord therefore endured the first consequence of our sin - separation from God. The second consequence is death. The Lord did not die out of weakness. In the gospel of the King, Matthew, the Lord cried with a loud voice and amazing things happened. The veil of the temple was rent, the earth did quake, the rocks were rent, graves were opened, and the bodies of the saints which slept arose and came into the city after His resurrection. Why did these things happen? Ecclesiastes chapter 8 tells us, "Where the word of a king is, there is power". Mark in his account tells us of the reaction of the centurion. He was standing over beside the cross, when the Lord cried. Says Mark, "When he saw that He so cried out, he said, "This was the Son of God"". This was not the death of a man dying out of weakness. "No man has power in the day of his death, neither hath he power to retain his spirit". Our Lord Jesus dismissed His spirit as He commended it into the hands of His Father. So, the Lord passed through death on our account. He paid for us the wages of sin. "Christ died for our sins". The final consequence was hell. In Acts 2:27 we read, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption". All that was due to us as sinners, Christ endured for us. He paid the price in full. My salvation then rests in His work.

The second part of Paul's gospel was His burial. Some have said over the years that He didn't die at all but only swooned, but you don't bury people who are alive. And what of that tomb? If one had been standing outside the tomb that day and had been asked, "Will that body ever be seen alive again, the answer would have been "impossible!" Friend and foe alike had made it humanly speaking impossible for that body ever to rise.

Nicodemus had embalmed it in 100 lbs of spices.
Joseph had wrapped it in the linen cloth
A great stone had been rolled on to the entrance
The Romans had set their seal upon the stone
The Romans had mounted a guard outside

Apart from all this human activity, there was also the power of the devil. Hebrews 2 tells

us that he had the power of death. He and all his hosts would have been doing everything in his power to keep that body in the tomb. But Christ rose from the dead and removed the power of Satan over death. In Revelation chapter 1, He says, "Behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of death and of hell". How can we be sure that one day we will rise from the dead? - because His tomb is empty. What God did for that man, He can do for all those who believe in Him. That is why I Thess 4 says, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him". If He did it for the man Jesus, He will do it also for us.

We have in part dealt with the third part of Paul's gospel. He rose again the third day. This is a vital part of my salvation. The Man who bore my sins on Calvary has ascended into heaven and now sits in the presence of God. Could He sit in God's presence if He were still bearing my sin? Impossible! Where then are my sins? He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. My sins have gone and I know they are gone for my sin bearer is now in heaven. That is why Paul says in Romans 4 that He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.

My salvation then does not rest upon me but on Him. He has done the work that has satisfied God and now I can be sure of my salvation. If it were possible to be "saved today, lost tomorrow", would it mean that He died for my sins today, but did not die for them tomorrow. If I am restored in my Christian walk, will He die for sins again.

My first and foremost hope for eternal salvation is that I am depending on His work for me, and not my work for Him.

2 Eternal life

Whoever believes in Him, we are told, "hath everlasting life" (John 3:16). Can this eternal life be lost, for surely if we can lose our salvation, we must also be able to lose our eternal life.

Let's begin by asking, "What is eternal life?" Is it simply "life for evermore". We must remind ourselves that all men shall live for evermore - saint and sinner alike. All who are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth - some to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of condemnation. Eternal life means much more than just eternal existence. In I John chapter 1, the Lord Himself is described as "that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us". He is eternal life, so the life which the Christian has is divine life. It is given to us with a very specific end in view. In John 17, the Lord Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent". Eternal life is given that we might get to know the Father and the Son. But can eternal life be lost? If one can be saved and lost, it must be possible to have eternal life and then lose it. What is meant for example, when Paul says to Timothy, "Lay hold on eternal life!" Is it in case he might lose it? Is it not rather a command to grasp it - to take full advantage of it, so that in a real practical way, we do get to know God?

What else can we learn about this eternal life? The Saviour spoke about it in John 10:28. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish". The word "never" is most emphatic. Scholars tell us that it is a triple negative meaning "no, by no means, not unto the ages". If we can paraphrase the Lord's words, He is saying, "They will not perish, there is no way that they can perish, they will never ever perish". Eternal means eternal and it is impossible for the child of God to perish.

3 The family of God

Earthly families have sons and daughters. Sometimes children can go astray. Relationships can become strained, children and parents can drift apart. But one thing never changes - a son is always a son, a daughter is always a daughter. Family ties cannot be broken. We are in the family of God. In John 1:12 we have those well-known words, "To as many as

received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on His name". Everyone who believes on Him becomes a child of God – we join His family. The word for "power" in this verse is most interesting. Sometimes you will hear it being translated as "might" and sometimes as "right". In reality, it means both things. It is an authority which is based on the power and the strength which God alone can give. Men sometimes say, "I could never be a Christian. I don't have the strength to continue". But God gives the right and the might to become one of His children, to join His family.

So what if we sometimes stray? What if our practical links with our God are sometimes not what they once were? Do we then cease to belong to the family of God? Let us look at some examples. David had a son Absalom, who was not just a wayward son but also a rebellious son. He sought to woo the hearts of the Jews away from his father and towards himself. Eventually he rebelled against David and the king had to flee for his life. Absalom had a sad end – suspended to a tree by his hair and then thrust through with three darts by Joab. Was David therefore glad to see the end of this wicked son? Rather we hear David weeping, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee". A son is always a son, no matter what he becomes.

Another illustration is found in the parable of the prodigal son. We know the story well. The son in the far country came to himself and headed homewards. On the way, he rehearses his little speech. "I will say to my father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants". The son would have been happy to become a servant. At last he arrives home, and begins his little speech. "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight". At that point the father interrupts him and he says to the members of his household, "This my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found". The son is always a son, whether he is a prodigal or profligate son or no.

To summarise, by believing we have the might and the right to become the children of God. We have joined His family, and once in a family, the ties cannot be broken.

4 Divine hands

In the same chapter in which the Lord spoke about eternal life, the Lord also spoke about divine hands. I might lament, "I am weak; I will never be able to keep up the Christian life". Hebrews 12:12 speaks of "feeble knees and the hands that hang down". Even Moses had hands that hung down. One day Israel was fighting against the Amalakites. When the arms of Moses were lifted high, Israel prevailed. When his arms grew weary and he laid them down, then Amalek prevailed. The two companions of Moses then held his arms aloft till Israel had gained the victory. It is good to know that our hand is held, not by a servant of the Lord, but by the Lord Himself. It is the Lord Himself that tells us in John 10:28, "No man is able to pluck them out of my hand". That is of great comfort to me. The Son of God is holding my hand. But what about the other hand? The Lord also tells us, "No man is able to pluck them from My Father's hand", and as the Lord also tells us, "My Father is greater than I". Thus my hands are secure because they are in the hands of the Father and the Son. They will never let go and no one can pluck my hands out of these divine hands.

5 Divine shoulders

In Luke 15, we read the parable of the lost sheep. When the shepherd has found it, he lays it upon his shoulders and comes home rejoicing. As we often hear, it is a lovely picture of the Lord Jesus seeking the sheep that was lost. It is just a parable, yet again it underlines the care that my Saviour takes of me., The sheep is carried upon both shoulders. Yet in Isaiah 9:6, we read the "the government shall be upon His shoulder". Here is the Son of God bearing up on one shoulder the government of the universe. One shoulder is sufficient for this task, yet He finds the lost sheep and bears it upon two. It is

not that the sheep is a greater burden, but rather He takes more care of me than He does of the government of this world.

We see this thought running throughout the gospels. In Luke 10, The Father is Lord of heaven and earth, but what gives delight to the Father and the Son are those things which the Father is revealing to the babes.

In John 13, the Father gives all things into His hands – He has been given the reins of government, but what does He take up in His hands? He takes the basin and the towel and begins to wash the disciples' feet. In John 17, the Father has given Him power over all flesh. How will He use this power? Will He vindicate Himself over all His enemies? Will He return to justify Himself before Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod? No, He is using all this power today to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. We have already seen why we have been given this eternal life – to get to know God and the Son of God.

6 The book of life

At the end of Luke chapter 10, the Lord said to Martha, "Mary hath chosen that good thing which shall not be taken away from her". Martha was serving in the wrong spirit, and there is the suggestion that the service that Martha rendered that day would not be added to her account in heaven. If we can lose our reward in heaven, can we also lose our place in heaven? Earlier in the same chapter, the 70 disciples are sent out by the Lord to serve Him. They come back full of the joys of service. "Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through Thy name". The Lord however somewhat puts into perspective their enthusiasm for service. "Rejoice rather because your names are written in heaven". Nothing can be more secure than this. This is not our name on a church role. Our name can easily be removed from that - but this the Book of Life as spoken of by both Paul and John. At the Great White Throne, the final condemnation for men is that their names were not found written in the Lamb's book of life. We can rejoice in the sure and certain knowledge that our names are in that book.

7 The power of God

A man might lament, "I am weak, I can never keep up my faith". But we are not asked to keep ourselves. In I Peter 1:4&5, we read about our inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. That is great news, for in heaven our inheritance cannot be attacked by moth or rust. But there is something even better than this. Peter goes on to speak of "you who are kept by the power of God unto salvation". It is God who is keeping us, not we who are keeping ourselves. And it is the power of God that is keeping us. We learn of this power in Ephesians chapter 1. "The exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand etc". We have available to us the resurrection and ascension power of Christ.

In John chapter 17, the Lord prays, "Holy Father keep through thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me". In His public ministry, the Lord had been keeping them, and none was lost save the son of perdition, Judas, but now the Lord commends His own to the Father in heaven.

8 The seal of the Spirit

Ephesians 1:13 says this about our Lord Jesus – "In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise".

It is good to know that we have heard the word of truth, a truthful word. It is even better to know that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. A seal is a mark of ownership. The farmer puts his mark on the sheep so that he can single out that which belongs to him. In Revelation 13:9, we read, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his

mark in his forehead, or in his hand.." The mark of the beast identifies all those who worship him. The Christian has received the seal of the Spirit. Having the Spirit is what distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His". "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God". But can we lose the Spirit, this seal of salvation? In John 14:16, the Lord says, "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever". We believe that "for ever" means just that, that the seal of the Spirit is for ever, because He is with us for ever.

9 Our Advocate

Those who would teach being saved and lost would point to those times when the believer may be at a distance from God. Sin and failure may have come into his life. Does this mean that during this period of time, he has lost his salvation? Does he need to get saved again? Separation from Christ is a two-sided thing. If I am at a distance from Him, then He feels the separation just as much, if not more than I do. In Ephesians chapter 5, we read of the threefold love of the Saviour. In the past, He loved the Church and gave Himself for it. In the future, He is going to present it to Himself as a glorious Church. But presently, what is He doing? He is sanctifying it by the washing of water by the word. He does this presently because He wants to keep me in the love of Christ. He wants my affections now; He wants my fellowship now. If salvation is of the Lord as Jonah said, then it is His to give and it would be His to take away. But if I fail, does He take my salvation away? No it is then that I come to appreciate His work as an Advocate on my behalf. I John 2:1 says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous". The preposition "with" is in fact the Greek preposition "PROS" which means "towards". We have an Advocate towards the Father. If I sin, I may be moving away from the Father: He works to bring me back towards the Father. But is there a depth of sin from which there is no recovery? Surely Peter reached that depth in his denials of the Lord Jesus. Matthew in his account tells us of the increasing intensity of Peter's denials.

He denied

He denied with an oath

Peter began to curse and to swear.

In chapter 19 of his gospel, John twice tells us that Peter stood and warmed himself by the fire of coals. He was becoming comfortable in the company of the Lord's enemies. Matthew says that he was with the servants and the soldiers, and soon he began to speak like them – with oaths and curses. John goes even further. He identifies the man whose ear Peter cut off as one called Malchus. Soon Peter is confronted by a kinsman of this Malchus. This man also was in Gethsemane with the Lord's captors. He says to Peter, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" Now this man was not just an eyewitness of the events in the garden, but he must have paid special attention to Peter who had cut off his kinsman's ear with a sword. Peter is now backed into a corner. There is surely no denying now, but that is exactly what Peter did. He told a barefaced lie. "Man, I know Him not". If you had been with Peter that night, you would have said that he was not saved at all. How could a disciple of Jesus ever speak in such a way and tell such an obvious lie.

But did the Lord abandon Peter after such a fall? In fact, the Lord who knew the end of the matter from the beginning began to work for Peter's recovery even before Peter fell. In Luke 22, the Lord says to Peter about the intent of Satan. "Satan hath desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted (turned again), strengthen thy brethren". The Lord then did something else for Peter – He washed his feet. He did it for all the disciples including Judas. But Peter singles himself out, first by questioning the Lord's action, then by refusing to allow it. "Now shalt never wash my feet". To this the Lord replies, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me". The feet-washing is a graphic illustration of His work as the Advocate. The Lord washes the feet of Peter. The third action was to give Peter a sign. "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me".

All this was before Peter fell. And after Peter's fall, the Lord's actions follow in quick succession.

The sign fulfilled

The Lord's look towards Peter

The angelic message from the tomb – "Go tell my brethren, and Peter"

The Lord's private meeting with Peter – see Luke 24

The Lord's public interview with Peter in John 21.

The Lord worked continuously to restore the fellowship of His erring servant Peter. The Lord will never cut us off. Though we might fail, He will work to bring us back to Himself and the Father.

To summarise then, how can we be sure that we will never lose our salvation?

Our nine reasons are

1. His work for us – His death, resurrection, and ascension
2. Eternal life
3. The family of God
4. Divine hands
5. Divine shoulders
6. The book of life
7. The power of God
8. The seal of the Spirit
9. His work as our Advocate

There is one thing in life then that we can be absolutely certain about. If we are truly saved by believing on the Lord Jesus, then that salvation is absolutely secure. It is secure because Father, Son, and Holy Spirit want me to be in heaven with them. "Father I will that them also whom Thou hast given Me, may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory".