

Promises
For
Now And Evermore

A Promise for Salvation

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This promise makes the others pale in comparison, the promise of salvation, deliverance from sin, freedom from its bondage, release from its guilt, salvation from eternal damnation and to see that replaced with eternal life.

Every now and then, you and I get so tangled up with the here and now that we really forget that we are pilgrims on our way to a greater place. But in those moments when we don't forget, we realize that above everything else salvation is what I need and salvation is what I desire. So the promise in 1 John 5:13 is especially meaningful. "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."

I was in my mid-20s when I read that seriously for the first time, and it literally made my head jerk. I got to that verse and thought, what? John, the apostle, has written something here so that I can know that I'm saved because more than anything else in the world, I want the promise and the assurance of salvation. Do you know what I did that day? I went back and started all over again, and I read very slowly and very carefully to see those things that he had written so that I can know I'm saved.

Do you want the promise of salvation? Let's see the facts he wrote.

1. You're a sinner. John says, if you want to embrace the promise of salvation and know you're saved, understand first of all that. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1:8) You're a sinner, I'm a sinner, everybody I know who reaches the adult years has chosen to sin, not born in sin, but chosen the path of sin.

He reminds us. "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (1:10) You see the problem, my sin. My sin separates me from an all righteous and an all holy God who has never sinned, who will never sin, and who cannot by his very nature abide with sin in his presence. That's a real problem, isn't it? I'm a sinner, you're a sinner, and we serve a God who will not live with any sin. That's why Romans 3:23 says, "...all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory..." And Romans 6:23, three chapters later, says, "The wages of that sin is death." That's our problem.

Do you know one of the great misconceptions that we have in our country? George Gallup reveals it every time he does a religious poll about heaven. He'll ask people who believe in a heaven, "do you believe you are going to heaven?". Most of America says, yes. He then asked "Well, why do you believe you're going to heaven?" The typical response is: Because I think I'm as good as everybody else. But that's not the question. The problem doesn't deal with how good you are, or how good you may not be. Your goodness is not the issue. It's your badness that's the issue. Though you may be awfully good, you're still bad because you are still a sinner and the one sin that you first committed was enough to tarnish you to keep you out of the presence of God for eternity. Do you understand that?

Sometimes we focus on our goodness. That would be like lining all of the American population up on the coast of California and saying, "On command, we're going to all jump in the Pacific Ocean, without food, without a rowboat, without a life jacket, without any aid of any kind and swim to Hawaii." Now how many are going to make it? That's what I thought. I'm not either.

But you know we could argue about how far we're going to make it. Some of you might not get even over your head before you drown because you're dangerous in a bathtub. Some of you are pretty good swimmers, maybe you could go a quarter of a mile, maybe you could go a half-mile. I think I could go the better part of a mile if the waves aren't too bad. Some Olympic swimmers might go 50 miles, maybe more, but I'll tell you what's going to happen to every one of us. We're going to drown. Whether you're 50 miles offshore, or 50 feet offshore, you're going to be dead as a doornail, because the issue is not how good a swimmer you are. The point is the chasm is too great. That's the point about my sin. You and I think we're good. If we had any glimpse of the chasm between little minute, vile humanity and the God who created the Universe, we would bow in shame and say like Isaiah "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:5) The apostle John makes sure we know that we are a sinner.

2. Jesus Christ is the answer to sin. "I write this to you so that you will not sin." (1 John 2:1) Why? Because sin is to our own detriment. "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2)

Some of the older translations say, "The propitiation, atoning sacrifice, for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." That's the best news you will ever hear, if you've never heard it, most of you have. But even if you have, it's the best news you'll ever hear.

You and I, when we stand before the judgment seat of God, the Father, have one who is our "advocate." That was a Greek term for defense attorney. The other day I went into a courtroom and I saw a defense attorney standing beside the defendant. Suddenly in my mind, I thought of the picture of Jesus standing by me as I stand before the Father's throne.

The good news is, He said, He is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice. The Greek root means, "to deflect," to deflect wrath. It was sometimes used in another form to refer to an instrument like a shield that would deflect the blows from swords and spears, from opposing soldiers. Do you see the point? When Jesus hung on that cross, all of the wrath of God that is aimed toward sin because he hates sin, hit that cross and Jesus deflected it from you and from me. And that's why he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Let's all understand that the key to salvation is Jesus Christ. That is the power of salvation. The apostle said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven among men wherein we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Do you want to know what that name is? It's the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:21, the heralding of Jesus' upcoming birth says, "give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be made alive." The great news is, when Jesus came out of that grave on the third day, that tomb was left empty. The bondage and the power of sin and damnation were left right there. It was broken by Jesus Christ, our atoning sacrifice. Fact number one is I'm a sinner. Fact number two is Jesus Christ is the answer. What else does John tell us about the knowledge of salvation?

3. Claiming that salvation - "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." (1 John 5:1) That's part of the answer.

"This is the one who came by water and blood---Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For these are three that testify: The Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement."(verse 6) Now that may sound a little confusing to you at first, but let's sort that out.

First of all, accepting the salvation that Jesus offers begins with the belief that he is who he said he was. God come in the flesh, the Son of God, that's what verse one of chapter 5 said. Make no mistake about it. That belief is the foundation for the eternal life that Jesus offers. You can do anything else you want, you can repent, you can be baptized, but if you do not believe in your heart that Jesus is God's son, you do not have the foundation for coming to him. But with that belief, there is the concept of repentance. Now quite frankly in this brief epistle, John has no direct reference to repentance, but I'm certain that his readers knew of it and it flows throughout the New Testament.

John the Baptist, the forerunner and the proclaimer of Jesus, came preaching a message of repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness. Do you remember the day the church began in Acts 2? Peter stood up on behalf of all the apostles and preached about this man, Jesus. He closed by saying, "This man, Jesus, whom you crucified, God hath made him both Lord and Christ." And those who heard those words were pricked in their hearts, and they said, "Brothers what shall we do?" Peter said "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38)

In Acts 20:21, Paul while in Ephesus said "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

So a belief is necessary in repentance. The culmination of the faith response of accepting Jesus into your life is baptism.

Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the one who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies because the Spirit is the truth." (1 John 5:5-6) The language is almost poetic, it may be confusing. But do you see how he says the three testify: the spirit, the water, and the blood. And before that, he says, "When Jesus came, he didn't come with water only."

Now if you know something about your Bible, you know that when John, the baptizer, came as a forerunner, he said, I come only with water, but there's one who comes after me who baptizes with water and with the Spirit. Who was he talking about? He was talking about Jesus. That's who he was proclaiming. Sure enough, Jesus did come with water and after his sacrifice, He poured out the Holy Spirit upon all mankind and it's all possible because of the blood he shed on that cross. Do you see why those three, the Spirit, the blood, and the water, testify together?

The point of that metaphor in 1 John 5:6-8, is because of the blood that was shed on Calvary. When you and I are baptized in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of our sins, we are reenacting the very burial and resurrection of Jesus. At that time we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit along with the forgiveness of our sins and all three of those testify together. It's beautiful. Some people don't understand it, but that's how John and the rest of the New Testament writers tell us we come to the Lord Jesus Christ and accept the salvation he offers.

4. God adopts us as children. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1) When we come to Christ in obedience to the gospel, we are adopted as children. Galatians 4:7 says the same thing, and so does the Ephesian letter.

5. He gives us his Spirit. "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." (1 John 4:13) He says the same thing in 1 John 3:24 "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26-27) He "bears fruit in our lives" (Galatians 5:22-23) He works to help conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:29)

What happens when one comes to Christ? What happens when one obeys the gospel? John says He gives you the Spirit to live within you to help you in your walk with the Lord.

6. Our lives change. Our lives change after coming to Christ and receiving forgiveness and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

a. First, we don't yield to sin with the same frequency that we did before becoming a Christian. "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." (1 John 3:6)

Does that mean we're perfect people after we come to the Lord? No, remember "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (1 John 1:8-10) That was written to people who are already Christians. We do sin, but because we serve a different Lord and Master and because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit living inside us, helping us in our prayer life and in our walk to conform more like Jesus, we are different people. We don't fall victim to the same temptations. We don't long for the ways of the world and the ways of the flesh. No, we are changing day by day, growing closer and seeking after the things that God wants us to seek.

b. It makes a difference in how we treat our fellow man. The Spirit does that in our lives. "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:19-20)

Not only do we go away from the world's values and follow the way of Jesus, we are just going to treat our fellow man the way God wants us to do.

Summary

Let's go back to the original promise. It's the promise that you can know you're saved. Somebody may say, "Well, how can I know I'm saved?" It's not a hard thing.

1. You're a sinner. That's not a hard thing for most of us to know.
2. Jesus Christ is the answer through his atoning sacrifice.
3. Accept Jesus Christ as my Savior by believing, repenting, being willing to confess, and experience that new birth in baptism where the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, all testify in agreement to Jesus.
4. Is the Spirit of God bearing fruit in my life? I can sense that by whether my longings are to follow the devil in the world, or whether day by day it just seems to become a more natural thing to follow God's way. I can test it by how I'm treating each one of you every day. Am I loving you like a brother or am I trying to exploit and abuse you or ignore you?

I've heard people say, "I don't believe you can know you're saved." John says you can. Somebody says, "Oh, but it's complicated." No, it's not. You've either accepted Jesus Christ, or you haven't. You've either obeyed the gospel or you haven't. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to examine one's own life and to say, "I'm either walking by the Spirit, or I'm not." It's not up to me to judge you and it's not up to you to judge me. But it's up to you to judge you.

The whole summary of this lesson is. "And this is the testimony: 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." It's not all that hard, but the promise is sure. Do you have the Son of God in your life? (John 5:11-12)

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