

"Restore to Me the Joy of Your Salvation"
(Psalm 51:12)

Introduction: Last week we were looking at the importance of having a solid basis upon which to build our Christian hope. Remember a person may believe that they are saved and yet not be saved. We also saw that a person might truly be born again, and yet not have the assurance of his or her salvation. The Bible does not teach that everyone who is a true believer in Christ will necessarily be convinced that they are. Some of the Reformers taught that if you have true and saving faith that you will be assured of your salvation. But later Reformed pastors realized that this was not the case with many of their people. Some struggled long and hard to obtain a sound assurance that they were the Lord's. As a matter of fact, the whole book of 1 John is devoted to the discerning between a true and a false conversion. In 1 John 5:13, it reads, "THESE THINGS I HAVE WRITTEN TO YOU, WHO BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD, IN ORDER THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE." It is possible to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and still not know that you have salvation. For those of you who were not here last week and who would like to know what it is that John says are true signs of a saving conversion, you can get a copy of the sermon tape, but especially, you can read the letter of 1 John. John gives us the very clear marks of saving conversion throughout his epistle. But again, what we also saw last week is that they may all be summed up in love. If you are truly converted, if you have received the grace of the Lord Jesus in your heart, then you will love the true God and His Christ; you will also love the things of the Lord, such as His Word and His ordinances of prayer, public worship and the sacraments; and you will love the Lord's people and enjoy sweet and spiritual fellowship with them. These things will be your greatest delight in life above all others. And everything that you do, will be done for His glory and out of love for Him.

What we will look at this evening, which we looked at very briefly last week, but which is also very important to our Christian experience, is why we have so difficult a time obtaining assurance, and having obtained it, why we so often lose it. David was a born again believer. He had the Spirit of God in his heart. He truly loved and worshiped God. He was called by the Lord, a man after God's own heart. Often times David fulfilled the role of a priest, by sacrificing to the Lord; of a prophet, by receiving from Him direct revelation and writing inspired Scripture; and of a king, having an extraordinary courage, boldness and wisdom from God, that he might lead God's people into all righteousness. And yet we learn from this Psalm this evening, that David, who once led the people of God into the sanctuary of God, who saw the Lord's gracious hand again and again deliver him out of all of his troubles, lost the assurance of his salvation. The heading of this Psalm tells us what the situation was in which David wrote, "A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN NATHAN THE PROPHET CAME TO HIM AFTER HE HAD GONE IN TO BATHSHEBA." And as we see from this Psalm, as a result of his sin, he all but lost the sense of his assurance, "CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A STEADFAST SPIRIT WITHIN ME.

DO NOT CAST ME AWAY FROM THY PRESENCE, AND DO NOT TAKE THY HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME. RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF THY SALVATION, AND SUSTAIN ME WITH A WILLING SPIRIT." This tells us that David had lost the sense of joy which accompanies salvation. He had through his sin forfeited, at least for a time, not the Holy Spirit or his salvation, but rather the full assurance of God's presence that brings joy. This is even more remarkable when we understand that he wrote this psalm after Nathan had come to him and reproved him for his sin. For David had confessed his sin, and Nathan had assured him of God's forgiveness. But here we see the affect that sin can have on the assurance of salvation. And what I want you to see tonight is,

Once the assurance of your salvation is obtained, it is possible to lose that assurance through sin.

First I want you to see that assurance is hard to obtain, but it may be easily lost; second, how you may regain it once it has been lost, and third, what you may expect in your life when you regain it.

I. *First, I Want You to See that Assurance Is Difficult to Obtain, And It May Be Lost.*

A. *Assurance Is Very Difficult, First of All, to Obtain Because There Are So Many Things Trying to Hinder You From Gaining It.*

1. *First of all, the remaining sin and corruption within you hinders you from receiving a full assurance of faith.*

- a. *You must be aware that this sin is in you and that it is powerful.*
- b. *It may be so strong at times that it seems as if there is no grace in you.*
- c. *When this corruption gets the upper hand, you may feel as evil as you ever have, and that will certainly quench any assurance.*

2. *Secondly, the world is full of things to entice you into sin and will keep you from a full assurance of faith.*

- a. *If it is not bad enough that there is an ocean of sin within us, there is also a world of iniquity outside of us.*
- b. *As long as the world system is controlled by the devil and wickedness is working in the world, you will be presented with many occasions to fall in this life.*
- c. *And the more you are enticed by them and fall to them, the more you will struggle with assurance.*

3. *And thirdly, the devil and his minions are working overtime to do all they can to keep you from obtaining a full assurance of faith.*

- a. *The devils can fill your mind with ungodly thoughts and imaginations, and they will do it as often as they can.*
- b. *But they can also use the enticements of the world against you to stir up your corruption. That is*

why sometimes it seems as though all the power of hell is coming against you in certain temptations.

- c. All of these things must be understood and overcome, and you must stir yourself up to a lively exercise of the means of grace, before you may have assurance.
- B. *But This Assurance Once Gained May Also Be Lost. It May Be Lost By Falling Prey Again to the Things that Hinder You From Receiving It in the First Place.*
1. *David all but lost the assurance of his salvation when he fell into his very serious sin with Bathsheba.*
 - a. *The result was that he was pleading with the Lord to not cast him away from His presence, and to not take His Holy Spirit away from him.*
 - b. *Perhaps David thought that what he had experienced up to that point was merely the non-saving influences of the Spirit, and was fearing that he might have run in vain.*
 - c. *A true believer, however, will never have the Spirit removed, but you may certainly have your assurance shaken to the very core.*
 2. *But there are other reasons it may be lost, as well.*
 - a. *It may be lost through a strong temptation that suddenly comes upon you when you are not prepared for it.*
 - b. *It may be lost by falling away from the Lord for a time like Peter when he denied his Lord when confronted by the servant girl, or like John Mark when he deserted Paul and Barnabas in Perga because of persecution.*
 - c. *It may be lost by falling into some false teaching of false belief for a while, such as Finney's doctrine that you are only saved as long as you live according to an absolutely perfect standard. If you don't measure up, then you lose your assurance.*
 - d. *You may lose your assurance through the neglect of preserving it through the means of grace. If the grace in your soul is not constantly nourished by God, it will grow weak, and so will your assurance.*
 - e. *God may even take away the light of His countenance, the sense of His love and blessing from you for His holy own ends -- all of which are good -- and allow you to walk in darkness. Just read Psalm 88 to see what the psalmist endured without God's light.*
 - f. *Your temperament may even continually hinder you from enjoying assurance if you are the type that expect perfection from your life before you can be assured.*
 - g. *And you can be certain that the devil will take full advantage of all of these things to keep you in despair over your condition.*
 - h. *The result of these things is that your assurance may be shakened, lessened, or intermitted, which*

means it may be on again, off again.

- i. But if you are the Lord's, it will never be fully lost. Even David was still able to function as king which required a measure of the gifts of the Spirit; he was still aware of the Spirit of God dwelling in him for he prayed that He might not be removed. Even so, God never removes His Spirit entirely so that we will not fall into utter darkness and despair.

II. Secondly, I Want You to See How Assurance May Be Restored After It Has Been All But Lost.

A. If It Is Due to a Particular Sin, Then You Must Confess and Forsake That Sin and Renew Your Obedience to the Lord.

1. If your assurance is at a low ebb because of some sin, it will never be restored until you forsake that sin.
 - a. As long as you love sin, any sin, and indulge yourself in it, you will not have assurance.
 - b. You must turn away from all known sin. You must stop loving it, stop thinking about it, and stop doing it.
2. You must not only forsake that sin, you must also renew your whole-hearted obedience to the Lord.
 - a. You can never really be assured that you have put off the old sin until you have put on its righteous opposite.
 - b. If you are putting on righteous patterns of life, it will give you assurance of your salvation.

B. If It Is Due to Temptation, Then You Must Overcome That Temptation.

1. Sometimes temptations come upon you suddenly and you cannot possibly avoid them.
 - a. Maybe someone you are close to at school comes up and entices you to some sin, and because of fear or of being thought different, you don't even think about it, but just do it.
 - b. Or maybe you are watching TV, and some lude or pornographic commercial or program suddenly comes on.
 - c. It is these surprise attacks of the devil that you need to watch out for.
2. But those temptations which we can avoid, we must.
 - a. If you flirt with things which are harmful for you, they will rob you of assurance.
 - b. But if you put away from yourself every opportunity to sin, it will greatly increase your assurance.

C. If It Is Due to a Partial or Total Desertion from Christ, Then You Must Return to Him.

1. You must come back to Christ and to the fellowship of His people.
 - a. Obviously, as long as you are in the world away from Christ you can not have assurance.
 - b. And so you must return to Him in renewed faith and

- repentance.
- c. And you must renew your fellowship with His people.
 - (i) You need the encouragement and nurture that the family of God brings.
 - (ii) You need the other gifts which the people of God have to build you up.
 - (iii) And, most importantly, you need to be obedient to the Lord who tells you not to forsake the assembly of the saints together.
2. And you must fight against letting the enticements of the world again lure you into its trap.
 - a. You must see the world for what it really is. Sin is fun for a season, but in the end it leads to death.
 - b. If you break your heart away from worldliness, it will greatly increase your love and assurance from the Lord.
- D. If It Is Due to Your Neglecting to Maintain It Through the Means of Grace, then You Must Stir Yourself Up to a Greater Use of Them.
1. The Lord has granted these gracious means for you in order to strengthen and nourish your faith.
 2. If you have neglected them and as a result have lost a small or great measure of your assurance, then you must discipline yourself and stir yourself up to a greater use of them, even if you do not feel like it.
 - a. Remember, the devil is going to help you find any number of reasons to stay away from the things that will make you strong in the Lord.
 - b. You can always count on very good reasons from him why not to read your Bible, why not to pray, and why not to come to Sunday School, morning worship, or evening worship.
 - c. But you must do these things because they are right in the sight of God, and not only when you feel like doing them. If you do, it will greatly increase your assurance.
- E. If It Is Due to a Melancholy Temperament, Then You Must Learn How to Listen to the Truth of Scripture Over Your Feelings.
1. If you are one of those who is very likely to be overcome with depression, you must be very careful for Satan loves to oppress people like you.
 2. You must learn to listen to the Scriptures and not to your feelings, for they can deceive you, but Scripture will not.
 3. And if you always follow the rule of the Word of God, it will lead you out of your depression, and into assurance.
- F. But If It Is Due to God's Sovereign Good Pleasure to Teach You a Greater Reliance Upon Himself, or a Greater Watchfulness Against Sin, Then You Must Throw Away Your

Pride and Acknowledge that You Cannot even Take a Step Without His Grace.

1. *Pride comes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling, and so you must forsake it.*
2. *And you must acknowledge that it is in Christ alone that your sufficiency lies. You must say to yourself, "Apart from Him I can do nothing" (John 15:5), but "I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME" (Phil. 4:13).*

G. But Again, Make Sure, as Best as You Possibly Can, What the True Cause of Your Lack of Assurance Is.

1. *If it is due to a heart which has none of the grace of God in it, which is always a possibility as well, then you must first seek after God to give you that grace through faith in Christ.*
 - a. *Nothing will do you any good until you have first turned to the Savior.*
 - b. *If you are outside of Christ, then any assurance which you think you may have can only be false.*
2. *It is never safe to live in a condition where you do not know whether you are Christ's or not.*

III. Lastly, I Want You to See What the Results Are of Strengthening Your Assurance.

A. First, There Will Be Much Greater Strength in Your Life to Serve the Lord.

1. *Satan will not be able to rob you of your enthusiasm in serving Him.*
 - a. *As long as the devil keeps you bound in despair, it will greatly weaken your service.*
 - (i) *If you believe that after your life is over and you lay down to sleep the sleep of death that you are going to be swept into hell, then how can you labor fervently for the Lord?*
 - (ii) *This kind of thinking will take the heart right out of your obedience.*
 - b. *But if you know that you are the Lord's, then you will serve Him with wholeness of heart, and in the confidence that He will grant you His divine enablement in your labors. Apart from the faith that He will, you will receive very little help.*
2. *You will also have much more faith and confidence that when you pray that the Lord will hear and answer.*
 - a. *You know that the Lord has said that He will not hear the prayers of those who are in sin (Isa. 59:1).*
 - b. *But you also know that it is His delight to hear the prayers of His children when they come to Him in faith through His Son.*
 - c. *And so you will have greater confidence knowing that God hears you and will answer you for Christ's sake.*

- B. *Secondly, There Will Be A Much Greater Joy in Knowing that You Are His and He Is Yours.*
1. *As long as you are unsure of the Lord's love toward you it will throw you into despair.*
 - a. *Not knowing whether or not you are the object of His eternal love can be very frightening.*
 - b. *To be without His love means absolute hopelessness, and if your sense of it is very weak, you will always be wondering whether or not you have it, or are only imagining that you do.*
 2. *But knowing that you are loved by that most glorious Being in all the universe, and that you can love Him, and that He will even receive your love brings a greater joy than any earthly relationship can.*
 - a. *To know that you are loved by Christ is to know that you are secure for eternity.*
 - b. *But it also means that you are one of the most privileged people in the whole universe, for the Lord of glory has set His affections upon you and called you into a special love relationship with Him, which will fill and bless you more than anything that you have ever experienced on this earth.*
 - c. *Perhaps at some time in your life you have felt what it is like to have the love of God shed in your heart. But when He takes you to be with Him forever in glory, that love will be perfected, full and never-ending.*
 - d. *And knowing that you are headed for such a glorious future will give you tremendous joy in this world.*
- C. *And Lastly, You Will Be More Willing to Tell Others How to Find Joy and Blessing in Christ, When You Have Experienced It Yourself.*
1. *As long as you are unsure of your own salvation, you will be reluctant to tell others of how they may be saved.*
 - a. *If you are not sure of the truth of it yourself, or if you have not experienced its reality, then how can you convincingly tell others about it?*
 - b. *After all, if it has not been that life changing for you, if you tell someone else, what if it doesn't do anything for them either?*
 2. *But if you are assured of your salvation, then you can say as King David, "I WILL TEACH TRANSGRESSORS YOUR WAYS, AND SINNERS WILL BE TURNED UNTO YOU."*
 - a. *Others do not want to hear what you only probably believe to be true.*
 - b. *They don't want something that you can't even evidence in your life to be true.*
 - c. *The power of its reality in your life will be the most convincing thing in their's to turn them unto the Savior.*

- d. When you are assured of Christ's reality and of His love towards you, then you may share out of a full heart and a full life the things that will change the hearts and lives of others.
3. And so people of the risen Lord, strive after assurance, seek it as fine gold, let it be to you the pearl of great price. I am not now saying seek assurance above Christ, but rather seek the assurance that you know and love Him and are loved by Him. Make sure that you are in Christ. If you do it will greatly strengthen you in your love and obedience to Him. But if you do not, it will greatly hinder you from serving Christ for you will never be sure if your house is built on the rock of ages, or merely on sand. May the Lord grant to all of you His children this great blessing. Amen.