

Reading: 1 John 5:1-21

Theme: Assurance.

Last week as we looked at v9-12 we considered the 2nd certainty John wrote of - **believers have eternal life**. We saw various matters and I said that we would come back to deal with v13 in more detail, where John wrote to these hurting, struggling believers and said “*so that you may know that you have eternal life.*” Here is John’s aim and purpose. Here is something he wanted these and all believers to know, to be sure of, to be certain of. Yes, he has written of many things, of details, tests to test false teachers and to assure oneself of true faith. It is so easy to miss the forest because of the trees - here John states he wanted believers to **know** they have eternal life.

He wants believers to be sure, certain about such. It is what we term “assurance”, “assurance of faith”. How would we define assurance of faith? One writer (John Murray) says it is “*the assurance entertained by a believer that he is in a state of grace and salvation, the knowledge that he has been saved, has passed from death into life, has become a possessor of eternal life and is an heir of glory.*” Basically, it is knowing you have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and have, always will have, eternal life and a home waiting for you in heaven. This is the privilege a Christian is to have and some would even say it is the duty of a Christian to know it!

Some people and churches say it is arrogance and presumption to say we can know we have salvation and have a home in heaven. RC teaching denies this - unless assurance is given by special revelation. Others say they are not good enough to know this, don’t deserve this or they are not perfect in life, word or thought. Some say this assurance of faith is only for special Christians - the apostles or “the saints” and I agree with them! For every Christian is special to God, every Christian is termed “a saint” in NT and it means every Christian can know assurance of faith! As we sang earlier “*Now I*

belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me. Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.”

It does not mean that we will all know this assurance to the same intensity as each other, nor know it the same intensity all our lives. Assurance of faith and the accompanying joy, peace and hope will vary and fluctuate. Yet it does not mean our salvation is any more or less secure. We are to remember and underline that our salvation is secure; eternal life remains ours no matter our degree of assurance, or even how we are feeling – up or down, glad or sad.

It is so comforting for Christians to be assured they have eternal life. For if it is true assurance, it will not make us proud or arrogant, but be a source of real comfort, encouragement and purpose in our lives. Assurance will enable us to more enjoy the certainty of knowing we have eternal life, and will enable us to live it out, to be ready and willing to speak to others of the hope we have within us. If we are uncertain, doubting, worrying if we are saved, or have eternal life, we could easily become introspective, morbid, ineffective and not have any desire to witness, because we feel we can't encourage people to have eternal life because we are not sure of it. Lacking assurance, hinders our having the joy of our salvation as something active and positive in our lives, nor being able to really appreciate the delight of having our sins forgiven, peace with God and eternal life. Assurance of faith occurs at 2 levels:

1. The Implicit (Implied).

We need to understand that assurance is implicit, is implied in the salvation a believer has come to have by faith. It is recognising we take our assurance, joy, comfort from **the work God has done in us**. It does not focus on self, on our worth or unworthiness, on being good or not good enough, on our achievements or failures. It focuses our attention on God and all He has done for us. The trouble is we

can forget, have obscured what God has done for us as we can so easily be distracted, forgetful or brought low.

What then has God done for us if we are a Christian? He set His love on us in eternity ‘past’ - He foreknew us, predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, He called us (*our conversion experience, brought us to faith*), He justified us and, in His plans and purposes, He has glorified us. If one of those are in place, then all the rest have to be. There is no weak link in this chain of salvation. Yes, God has saved us, but He hasn’t just saved us, but He wants us to know and enjoy its certainty now in our lives. The Holy Spirit is given as the guarantee of our eternal life, this is the 1st fruit of our salvation and gives to us the promise of more and better to come. He, the Holy Spirit is the one who witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God. It is not a case of arrogance or presumption, but of God the Holy Spirit being a witness, a testimony that Jesus Christ is God the Son, He is our Saviour and by believing in Him we have eternal life and are a child of God.

The NT is written to drive home the reality and certainty of having eternal life - based on who Jesus is and all He has done for us. John wrote his gospel so people could know of Jesus, believe on Him and have eternal life (John 20:31). The apostles went about preaching, declaring eternal life in Jesus. Paul wrote letters reasoning, arguing, underlining that people can have eternal life and all because of what God has done. Nowhere does the NT say to get assurance we must be good enough, believe enough, work hard enough. John says that here in this verse, Paul says it in 2 Timothy 1:12 “*Yet I am not ashamed, because **I know whom I have believed**, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day.*” Likewise, Peter says in 2 Peter 1:3-4 “*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through **our knowledge of Him who called us** by His own glory and goodness. Through these **He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that***

through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Yes, Peter does later say that we are to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10) but there he is calling us to make sure we have trusted the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour, then having done that, we are not to think our security and safety for eternity relies upon ourselves, how we feel, or pray, or live, or what we know or experience. If we have believed, if we have asked and trusted the Lord Jesus to be our Saviour, then we are to realise He will not throw us away as worthless, or demand that we be perfect here on earth. Salvation from beginning to end comes from the Lord (Jonah 2:9), from 1st to last it is from the Lord and its security does not depend upon us at all.

If it is the case and our assurance is implied, implicit in our salvation. Then why do we feel we cannot have assurance or know we have eternal life? Does it mean that we doubt God never really intended to save us at all, that we doubt God's salvation can be ours, or doubt God will keep His word to us? Why would we do such? Maybe because we feel we cannot be so bold, so arrogant, so presumptuous as to believe God really and deliberately wants us to trust Him and His promises! In doing so, we almost call God a liar and question if He really wants us to know, to enjoy the assurance and joy of salvation because we do not feel worthy, good enough, have faith enough! Even weak faith is saving faith and the Lord has built even into weak faith the implied assurance of faith - for we are His through His work and He gives us freely and richly all riches in Christ Jesus.

2. The Explicit.

Our enjoyment of assurance of salvation hangs and turns on the great truths of our salvation that we have looked at. If they are not believed, or are forgotten or obscured, then we may have little or no assurance. We are not only to recognise God's eternal purpose is

towards us, but that God's eternal power is at work in the seemingly most insignificant believer.

If we look at 1 Peter 1:2-7 will see what magnificent things are true of us - chosen, sanctifying work, sprinkling by His blood, grace and peace in abundance, great mercy, new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, into an inheritance can never perish, kept in heaven, through faith shielded by God's power until the complete coming of our salvation; yes we may have to suffer but these come so that our faith, of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. We could look at what Paul says in Romans 8:38-39 as he emphasises that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, or what he says in 2 Timothy 1:12 (*mentioned earlier*). In case we doubt them, realise that they were basing what they wrote on what the Lord Jesus had promised in John 10:28 *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can 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."*

Recognise the foundation of salvation is the work of God and is to be the foundation, the evidence on which we build and rest our own assurance on. Sadly, some of us build on shaky foundations - our sense of worth, our achievements, how good we are, have been or even our own feelings. These are not safe and secure foundations to build our assurance on. Yes, I am aware it is possible to have a false assurance. A person may have had a need met in a meeting, felt tingly, or moved, or emotional. They become religious as a result of that experience, but they need to maintain or repeat that experience for such feelings again, but they do not truly possess eternal life through a saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Sadly, true believers can be deprived, robbed, cheated of the wonder of the assurance of faith.

They may limp along in their Christian life and seems a harder and a tougher journey than it really is.

Yes, some believers are affected by their own personality types, even medical conditions and they get despondent at those who seem to ooze joy and assurance. Others may limp along because they do not trust God's promises in His word and always feel they're not doing enough – must do better attitude. Others are infected with a low view of sin and their proneness to sin causes them to lack assurance. Thomas Fuller (Puritan) said *“Assurance has a narrow throat, and may be choked with a small sin.”* William Jenkyn, another Puritan said *“Sin can never quite bereave a saint of his jewel, his grace but it may steal away the key of his cabinet, his assurance”*.

Saving faith is saving faith and it can never be lost. Assurance of saving faith can ebb and flow and may for a long time be lost, but it is only **the assurance of salvation** and not **the reality of salvation**. For all believers the assurance of our salvation is a most pleasant and sweet satisfaction. In closing let's note some ways we can grow assurance:

A. Understand the nature of salvation: note where it comes from and what it accomplishes in us. It is all of God and accomplishes, achieves an eternal work in our souls. It is gloriously more than the glorious work of sins forgiven and freedom from its due penalty. It speaks of new birth, justification, eternal life, adoption, redemption, preservation and glorification. All those are works of God. It includes the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, His witness, testimony to and in us. Yes, it shows us who and what we are, that we can do nothing, but also declares the glory of God in saving us, giving us eternal life.

B. Recognise God really means what He has promised: we will have our ups and downs, our doubts and fears, will even cut

ourselves off from the assurance of knowing we have eternal life by sinning, by failing to use the means of grace. Yet we are to recognise our security rests in the faithfulness of God and that He will not break His promises or covenant with us. All God's promises to us in the Lord Jesus are "*Yea and Amen*". God has promised and our salvation rests securely and totally on Him keeping His promises. If we have no assurance, perhaps we are not sure God really meant what He offers and says in the gospel and will not do as He promised.

C. Obey His commands: 1 John 2:3 – "*We know we have come to know Him if we obey His commands.*" Our assurance will suffer if we disobey Him, deliberately persist in sin. Disobedience will rob us of and undermine our assurance, but it will not rob us of our salvation. Obedience fosters, nurtures, evidences we love God and enriches, grows our assurance.

D. Self-examination: never take our salvation for granted. Assurance is not presumptuous self-confidence. Often examine our lives with biblical criteria with the help of God's Holy Spirit. By this I do not mean morbid introspection and we become full of doubts and fears, but it looks for evidences of God's grace and mercy and quickly rejoices in such and gives God the glory and asks for more grace and mercy.

E. The internal witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit: we noted something of this previously - 1 John 5:10 "*Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart.*" Romans 8:15-16 "*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*"

F. The external witness of the word of God: this is the source of God's promises, telling us of the work of salvation, we are to read

them, learn them and ask for such to be internalised, applied to our own hearts and souls. This will encourage and grow our assurance - especially as the word of God is in place as we use all the means of grace - His word read and preached, prayer, fellowship with God's people and the ordinances of the church - baptism (*once*) and the Lord's table (*as often as...*).

Assurance is to be desired, cultivated and known in our lives. It is not by extra ordinary revelations as some say, but it is a birth right of every believer, every child of God. Eternal life is for all who believe and the evidence of that life will vary according to what stage in the Christian life we are at. We are not to look at a mature believer and doubt our own possession of eternal life because we don't have the same evidences, knowledge or gifts. A new born baby is as much alive as an Olympic athlete - both show life - yet in different ways, but the crucial thing is life. It is important that we have God's gift of eternal life. Do we have eternal life? Do we want eternal life?

If we do have eternal life, then we are to know and evidence we have such, for it is our privilege and honour to know and show it is so in our lives.