

Back to Basics pt. 13
“Faithful to the End”
Hebrews 12:1-8

Intro

We have been on a great journey together during these 13 weeks of Back to Basics. We have learned what it means to have a personal relationship with the living God. We have learned about spending time with the Lord, the Word, prayer, fellowship, witnessing, our identity in Christ, the Holy Spirit, baptism, loving others, lordship and the battles we face.

Today in our last message in this series we have the privilege of learning about how we are called to be faithful to the end. Someone once said, continuance is the test of reality. If something is real, it will last the long haul.

Hebr. 12 says we are to run the race with endurance. To make it to the finish line. And the race is a marathon and not just a sprint.

Mt. 24:13 he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Jesus went the distance for us, and we are called to go the distance for Him.

We are learning about a doctrine called the perseverance of the saints. And it is defined by Dr. Wayne Grudem (quotes in USA Today this week) in this way, and this will serve as our central truth today:

Central Truth: “The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”
(Dr. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 788)

This certainly begs the question: What about those who fall away? And here’s a biggie: Can a Christian lose his salvation? What is it that should give us the assurance of salvation, simply the fact that we prayed a prayer back when, or should there be more that gives one assurance of eternal life? What does the Bible say on these matters?

Well, we are going to find out and to do that we need to be sure we really look at what the Word of God says and not be swayed by our emotions or human experience. Therefore, I am going to be giving you a lot of scriptures on the screen today just to save time in you not having to turn to them. In addition, I strongly recommend you read chapter 40 in Systematic Theology.

- 1. God calls us into a relationship with Him that is a life-long journey and that lasts forever.**

When God calls us into a relationship with Him, He expects that it will be one that lasts, not only our whole lives here but also for all eternity. This is why eternal life in Jn. 17 is actually defined not as simply heaven when we die but knowing God.

Jn. 17:3 and this is eternal life, that they may know thee

A relationship with God is likened to a **marriage** in the bible, with Jesus as the groom and we are the bride. And with this comes the assumption that there is no divorce. We stay spiritually married to God forever. But at times we are unfaithful? Yes, we are and that is why God told Hosea to marry a harlot in the OT and that he was to remain faithful to her even though she would be unfaithful to him, and God had him do this to portray his unending love and devotion to us even when we are unfaithful to him. No spiritual divorce.

But just like with marriage there can be some really tough times where you are tempted to throw in the towel. It can get very hard at times to stay faithful to God. We learned last week that this is because in our walk with God we battle with the world system which can be pretty anti-God, our flesh which at times will want to sin; and the devil.

Speaking of these 3 battleground, I need to quickly expound on something I said last week that I might not have been as clear on as I should have.

I said last week that we have this unholy trinity (**draw it out with camera on it**) ... I said you really don't need to distinguish between the 3 because But what I need to clarify is that there can be things that are demonic and in such cases you do need to identify it as such and get deliverance. Therefore, I would say that on the demonic it is important to know whether or not it is from Satan so as to get deliverance. Just wanted to clear that up.

TS Now back to this eternal relationship. The next point deals with who we really trust in to keep this relationship going. Do we trust in ourselves or in God? Point 2:

2. God is faithful and promises to keep us in Him.

Check out all these wonderful passages and allow them to increase your confidence in God's faithfulness today:

John 10:27-30

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **no one can snatch them out of my hand.** 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; **no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.**

John 6:39-40

39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that **I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.** 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who

looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and **I will raise him up** at the last day."

John 3:36

36 Whoever believes in the Son **has eternal life**, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

You see the promise here; He promises eternal life. God grants us eternal life – a relationship that lasts forever.

Rom 8:30

30 And those **he** predestined, **he** also called; those he called, **he** also justified; those **he** justified, **he** also glorified.

Eph 1:13-14

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, **you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory.

Phil 1:6

6 being confident of this, that **he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.

Isn't it reassuring that we have a future that is guaranteed?!! The beauty of this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is that it gives all the glory to God for salvation, it leads to great praise, and it gives us joy to know that from beginning to end our confidence is in the Lord to keep us.

You need to understand salvation as a covenant relationship and God would never break covenant. He has promised eternal life to all who are in Him and He will fulfill that promise.

In the **OT when a covenant was made** the 2 parties would pass between the carcass of an animal and if one were to break covenant it was like they were saying "may happen to me what happen to this animal if I break covenant: death." When God cut covenant with Abraham in **Gen. 15**, He Himself passed through the animal halves and basically said "death to me if I break covenant." **Romans 4** makes it clear that we stand in the Abrahamic covenant today because we are justified by faith, just like Abraham was in **Gen. 15:6**.

Hebr. 12:2 God is the author and finisher of faith. Salvation is all God's doing and if God were to break covenant which He won't, He would have to die and He cannot!

But what if we break covenant? We can't because of this next point:

TS Based on that foundation, we now go to point 3:

3. True followers of Christ will persevere to the very end.

Again, what does the Word say? We must be sure we do not allow our human experience or emotions take precedent over what the Word says. Check out these verses. And before we do that, let me interject this: this is a great example of how on a controversial topic you must begin with what the bible is clear on and then move to the more foggy areas and that is what we are doing today.

Don't doubt in the darkness of experience what is clear in the light of God's Word:

John 8:31-32

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

A sign of a true disciple is holding to the teachings of Jesus. I like the way Jesus says 'really my disciples' because He knew that many would claim to be Christians but it be merely lip service, like in James where it says you believe God is one, the demons believe and shudder.

Matt 10:22

22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Heb 3:6

6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

You are only of His house, or in His family, if you hold on to the end.

Heb 6:11

11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.

None of these passages suggests that if you don't persevere then you once had it but lost it. Instead, they just state that if you are truly God's house you will hold fast, you will persevere, you will hold on to my teachings.

What about the times when we get out of His will, fall away, become a prodigal. That happens doesn't it? It sure does, and just like the Prodigal came back, so will those who are true followers of Jesus, which is exactly what Hebr. 12 teaches – that God will discipline us back to Himself.

Heb 12:5-8

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For

what son is not disciplined by his father? **8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.**

The Word of God teaches that a true Believer will persevere to the end. One of the surest signs of a true Christian is that when they get out of God's will, the Holy Spirit who indwells them will show them. They will experience conviction, and if they don't, then it might indicate they are not saved at all. If they don't come under the discipline of the Lord, then they are illegitimate children and not true sons. They may appear to be a Christian. They may claim that at one time they prayed to receive Christ, but remember Jesus said you can tell a tree by its fruit.

This is why you see passages like **1 Cor. 6:9-11** says: "the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God ... nor homosexuals, etc. but such were some of you..." If these behaviors describe your life, according to God's Word you may not be saved. Can you be saved? Of course – "and such were some of you but you were washed."

TS Then what about those who don't persevere to the end? Point 4:

4. Those who don't persevere to the end reveal that they were never truly born again.

You might think this is a cop out or just a matter of semantics but once again look at what God's Word teaches:

Heb 3:12-14

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 **We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.**

If we don't hold firmly we never came to share in Christ.

Notice that this passage in Hebrews is written as a warning to the readers that they not fall away. The purpose is not to make those who are following Christ to worry that they might fall away one day, but rather to warn those who are thinking of falling away or have fallen away. For those who have fallen away, this would say to them that they never had true saving faith. They may have prayed a little prayer at some point and mistakenly thought that gave them a ticket to heaven, but if they are not following Christ, then it is likely they were never saved in the first place and need to repent and trust in Christ in order to be genuinely born again.

Col 1:21-23

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But **now he has reconciled you** by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation- 23 **if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.**

If you don't continue you were not reconciled. He doesn't say you were reconciled and then lost it. He says you are reconciled if you continue. This next passage is the real clincher:

1 John 2:19

19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but **their going showed that none of them belonged to us.**

This one says it as clear as you possibly can. This is why Dr. Grudem says:

“Those who continue show thereby that they are genuine believers. But those who do not continue in the faith show that there was no genuine faith in their hearts in the first place.”

Dr. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (p. 793)

Furthermore, the Bible clearly says that

People can give external signs of being a Christian and yet not be saved at all.

Matt 7:21-23

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 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 perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Notice “never knew you”, not I once knew you and now don't. I never knew you.

TS Now to be totally fair, there are some passages that at first reading might suggest that one can lose his/her salvation, so our next point is this:

5. Passages that appear to teach you can lose your salvation have good explanations to the contrary.

Here is where I would strongly encourage you to read chapter 40 of ST Due to time I will have to be brief but Grudem does a great job with a number of difficult passages. Let me say this also: you have a huge number of passages that clearly promote eternal life to those who are in Christ and do not in any way imply you can lose your salvation, then you have a few passages that at first might appear to suggest that some can lose their salvation. Be sure you look at the weight of evidence.

The main passage that people like to bring up that I will touch on is Hebr. 6 so please turn there with me.

Hebr. 6

This is a person who comes face to face with the Gospel and even personally experiences the power of God and the work of the HS (tastes it but doesn't receive Him) and still says “NO”. This person comes to the point where they have had their last chance. Beyond the point of salvation.

Enlightened ... tasted ... shared ... none of these means saved. Enlightened just means they came to understand the gospel but doesn't mean they responded with genuine faith. Tasted is used in **Mt. 27:34** of Jesus tasting the liquid they offered him on the cross but he did not drink it. Tasted it on a surface level but did not take it in. Shared/partaker can refer to someone who is a loose associate with you and not a close companion – as is in **Luke 5:7** of their partners in the boat.

Further evidence that this verse does not teach that you can lose your salvation is found in

Heb 6:7-15

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

This land does not produce something good and then it turns bad. It is bad land that produces thorns and thistles.

9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.

If he were concerned that these people were losing their salvation, he would have said so. Instead, he said he is confident of better things for them. He is confident they are saved and yet he is still warning them to keep on keeping on.

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

The truth that you cannot lose your salvation should never cause one to think they can just pray a prayer and everything is OK. If they do not continue then they were probably never saved in the first place. You can tell a tree by its fruit.

And now v. 13f is the clincher. He goes back to the Abrahamic covenant!!!!

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

God is the one who makes the covenant and just like with Abraham, He made it and will keep it. This goes right back to our 2nd point – another reason why you correctly interpret verses in their context.

There are **other passages** that must be reckoned with as well, not many, but there are a few more, and Dr. Grudem handles these with excellence so again I encourage you to get the book if you want to go deeper with this important topic.

(let me also say this: whether you believe you can or cannot lose your salvation, the practical application is very similar: if you are not walking with God you do not have a biblical basis to be assured of your salvation and you need to repent and get right with God!

TS So what do we look to to give us assurance of our salvation, because early in this series you said we could know for sure that we are saved and have eternal life? That is right: 1 Jn. 5 says we can know for sure we have eternal life. How? Final point:

6. Assurance of salvation is based on God's promises as well as our faith and fruit.

Jesus made it very clear in

Mt. 7:15-23

(context is false prophets – those who appear to be Christian leaders and yet are not even saved – heavy stuff) that you can tell how genuine something is based on the fruit.

Saved by faith and assured by God's promises and fruit in our lives! Fruit is lifestyle; fruit is growth; fruit is conviction when you sin; fruit is fruits of the HS; fruit is repentance when you sin; fruit is not just impact on others; don't forget last week: growth takes time; many battles, there are ups and downs, etc. We are not denying that at all.

1 Peter 1:3-6

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Notice here God's faithfulness, God's power, and it is through faith as well. There is a partnership here.

We go back to our central truth:

Central Truth: "The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again."

(Dr. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 788)

Bottom line today: if you are not walking with God, you have no biblical basis for assurance of salvation. You should probably assume you are not saved and get saved and begin to walk with God.

No one who is clearly living for self should have biblical assurance of their salvation. Assurance is based on God's promise which is based on faith and fruit! You can tell a tree by its fruit.

Conclusion

Have you been saved? Are you born again? Do you know for sure you have Christ in your life? Are you following Christ? Are you committed to Christ for the long haul? Are you in this until the end? Will you hear "well done, good and faithful servant?"

Prayer?

Intro to Skit: We should all live today with the end in view. What will be written on our tombstone one day? What will people remember us for? What will people think when they gather around our deathbed? **When all is said and done, what will your life song be?**

Response call before or after or during last song?

End:

Dan Kalmes from Bethany has put together a work team to go down to New Orleans to work through Urban Impact Ministries the end of this month. (Oct 28th to Nov 4th) This is similar to the trip Dick Fox went on last spring and is considering going on again. They have 11 persons signed up and would like to get up to 20 and Dan sent me some information to get to our people. The cost is about \$375.00 per person. I just received the information from Dan this past weekend and was too late to get it in the link.

I was considering having a table in the foyer on Sunday October 8th and wanted to see if it was ok with you. Also, would it be possible to get a mention of it on Sunday during the service?