

Coming to assurance of salvation

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] You'll find the text this morning in John 20 at verse 27. John 20 verse 27.

Then said he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side.

And be not faithless, but believing. Now this is a very well known part of the Bible.

Here we see a man who would not believe. And then we see Christ giving him assurance, and bringing him out of his unbelief, to the point in which he can say, My Lord, and my God.

Now that is the point to which I would like to bring some of you today. To the point I mean at which you are not doubting anymore, but I'll come to the position in which you can say, like this man here, My Lord, and my God.

[1 : 39] You will agree with me that the Lord Jesus Christ is full of grace, and rich in goodness.

And that grace and that goodness are to be seen in two ways, especially. It is first of all in his readiness to save us.

Christ never complained to the disciples at any time about the difficulty which he was having to face in suffering and dying for us.

The Gospels are singularly free from anything like murmuring or complaining on our Saviour's part. He is rich in grace and ready to save. And he gives abundant invitations to men to be saved.

[2 : 47] Not only so, but when he speaks to sinners, he allures them with his gentle words. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Our Saviour is most generous, most kind, ready to save. Indeed, that is how he portrays his whole work and his whole mission.

The Son of Man, he says, speaking of himself, has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Now that is good news for those of you who are still uncertain about your spiritual condition.

Because you know from the very start that Christ is more ready to save you than you are to be saved by him.

He is more concerned for your good than you are for your own good. Indeed, he is more concerned for your good than anybody connected with you, husband or wife, parent or child.

[4 : 05] our Lord's whole ministry is that of being gracious to sinners and welcoming them to himself that's one way in which Christ is so rich in grace but then there's another way and it is this it is that he is kind and generous in the way in which he gives assurance of salvation to those who come to him not only does he save them but he assures them now my text obviously has a very great deal to do with Christ's readiness to give assurance and certainty and proof that men's faith may not be hesitant but well grounded it's a very touching thing the disciple a week ago had denied that Christ had been raised from the dead oh he said I will not believe but seven days later he was a very different man so soon can Christ reassure you so quickly can Christ change men's mind so that what they think in one week they may unthink the next week and what they are saying to others in one week they may be unsaying by the next but that can only come about when you like Thomas receive this inward assurance from the Lord Jesus Christ of the reality of what he has done for you and also in you and that is my subject today

I won't take time to give you many texts but let me give you one or two quickly to show you how very ready Christ is to give assurance of redemption and certainty of salvation to people if you are careful in your reading of the four gospels you will be familiar with the way in which he deals with individuals that were in any kind of need the woman that came with the issue and touched the hem of his garment to take one case he said to her woman go in peace thy faith hath healed thee now the same was true of Zacchaeus who climbed the tree that little man he came down at Christ's behest and he went for a meal in his home and our Lord gave him assurance this day his salvation

come to this house for that he also is a child of Abraham or take the woman who went into Simon the leper's house and washed our Saviour's feet with tears and wiped his feet with the hairs of her head so much did she love him for having saved her from a life of shame and you know that Christ was criticised for having even permitted this woman to come so near to touch him but our Lord would not let her go without a word of comfort and as she quietly walked away he said woman be of good cheer be of good comfort thy faith has saved thee now there are many similar cases but I draw your attention to this fact that so gracious is Christ that he will not only have us saved but he will have us certain that we are saved not only will he have us brought to God but he will have us confident that we are received by God and my concern today is to speak to you on the readiness of Christ therefore to assure those who are in need of that assurance saying as he does here to Thomas reach hither thy finger and behold my hands and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side and be not faithless but believing my friends that's what he's saying to numbers of you here today be not faithless but believing now to begin what is the connection between faith and assurance well it's the difference between being saved and knowing that you are saved now being saved and knowing that you are saved are not things of equal importance being saved is far more important than being certain of being saved to be saved is to be pardoned but to be assured of salvation is to be comforted and strengthened if need be we can do without comfort and if necessary we can do without being strengthened but we cannot do without forgiveness many Christians have little comfort but they will get to heaven in the end through faith in Christ and that is the main thing but I would like to suggest to you here today that it is of great help to every Christian not only to have pardon but certainty and inward strengthening for many reasons it is good for you to have it but it is good for others to see that you have got it because those who are saved but not assured will often be much less useful to the salvation of their families and others than those who both are saved and have certainty of salvation to clarify the subject let me mention three things which we need to separate and to distinguish one from another they are these first false assurance second true assurance and thirdly lack of true assurance those three there is such a thing as false assurance there are many people of course as you know who suppose themselves to be converted when they are not now that is what we term a false assurance it is based on a failure to know that nothing will bring us to salvation but only the new birth and that mere historical knowledge of the facts of the gospel is not sufficient to bring to us eternal life there are many who do not know that so you meet people in this life and it is the saddest thing of all they have an assurance which is worthless rather like having a whole wad of counterfeit banknotes in your pocket they think they are rich whereas they are desperately poor they think they have what they don't have and that's far worse than not having it and knowing that you don't have it those are the hardest people of all but then secondly there are those who have true assurance now this true assurance is something which is well grounded upon Christ it is a trust in Christ alone for salvation it has nothing to do with their own personal worthiness it does not look to anything they are or anything they have done or anything they might do it has a regard only to the cross of Christ it has only a respect to his worth and to his merit I am persuaded there are some of you here today and if we could only get the real voice of your heart speaking you would say to us but I do trust in this saviour more than all else in the world but you would never say that for many reasons I want to say this to you dear people who are in that condition that sin has so ruined us all that we are incapable of reading our own hearts aright without the spirit of God dear trembling uncertain

[13 : 54] Christian do you understand what I say we dare not trust our own judgment of ourselves without the assistance and the help of the Holy Spirit we are never capable of reading our own hearts aright even in a state of grace we are apt to write bitter things against ourselves and to fail to know that we have got what we have got and that is what we refer to as lack of true assurance there is no inward certainty of the faith allow me to use this illustration supposing there was a young man who very much loved a young woman to whom he had made a proposal of marriage and time had gone on and the preparations for the wedding had been laid and the wedding date had been set but she was temperamentally a young lady who continually doubted the love and the affection of her suitor her fiance as we would say so to reassure her he writes her a letter full of the terms of affection and endearment but unfortunately she has lost her glasses and she cannot read the writing and her eyesight is poor the letter is full of expressions of love but they do her little or no good because she cannot read the writing so often

Christians are in that condition they cannot read the writing they fail to derive the comfort based upon the clear statements of Christ in his word by which a thousand times and ten thousand times as the lover of your soul he reassures you to every believer he gives this reassurance that he has loved us with an everlasting love love it is it is because we have lost the glasses and cannot read the writing even sometimes in a state of grace that the apostle Paul says this I pray he says that God would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened or illuminated that you may know what is the hope of his calling and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe all of that is what he prays and must needs pray for these people because they were Christians who had poor eyesight and we all have poor eyesight and I speak to those of you today dearest friends whose eyesight is so poor that you can neither read the promises of God toward you nor can you read the handwriting of the grace of God and the tracery of that grace upon the tablets of your own heart so I want to go on and I want to say how does assurance come to a person how does it come well here I must speak about a starting point things which we must make clear to ourselves we must make a distinction between saving faith and developed assurance those with the slightest degree of saving faith are Christians those with faith no bigger than the grain of mustard seed they are true Christians they are as saved as others they are as justified as others they are as much heirs of glory as others no matter how little their assurance may be but this assurance is something we must strive for and greatly desire because it brings many blessings to the souls of those who have saving faith what does it bring it brings maturity and how we need mature Christian men and women it brings boldness before God in prayer and how we need to see fresh faces fresh persons in all our prayer meetings it brings greater usefulness and how much we need useful men and women for the service of the kingdom of God a good old writer put it like this the difference between little faith and great faith is this assurance is not of the essence of faith but of the cream of faith now those words are good and they are true you can have faith and yet not have bold confident assurance of it but that bold confident assurance belongs to the cream of faith it is the richness of the gospel it is the meat of the grace of God it is so fattening experience to have that assurance but now the two are connected my friends

I speak to those with little faith let me tell you that assurance grows out of little faith just as mature men and women grow out of little children just as oak trees grow out of tiny acorns so assurance grows out of the acorn of little faith faith faith grows into assurance and faith in due time will ripen into assurance but not automatically it doesn't happen automatically it is something which you are responsible for asking God to give you it is something you are to seek so the difference between the Christian who has little faith and the one who has bold confidence is this the difference between an apple tree at the beginning of spring when the white flower begins to appear on the bough and the same apple tree in

September and October when the full fruit hangs heavy on the branches and we do not want only to see the flower beautiful as that is but also to see the fruit of the spirit and grace of God and the we Christians duty is to seek this experience let me tell you how to do it the way to increase in assurance is this it is to put your eyes upon the promises of God in his word and to plead those promises in prayer now everyone with weak faith prays all that have faith pray that is the way faith always behaves faith is a praying thing and those that have it must need pray because faith is spiritual life and just as a newborn babe cries and makes its presence felt and heard and known by its voice so does the young convert make its presence known to

[22 : 45] God who hears the cry of his children it's only a stillborn child that is silent all the time and it's only those with false faith who never really pray so I say here dear friend is the way to come to this boldness take such statements of the bible as this that fear has torment now that means those who are not assured of their salvation have a kind of inward torment those words you will know are found in the first letter of John fear has torment now those in that condition must go to God and they must confess to God that they have this fear that they are not his people and they are tormented by uncertainty and they must go to God in his richness of promise and fullness of grace and urge upon him not to leave me in this condition in which

I fear and in which I am tormented or again take this other text relating to the same theme perfect love casteth out fear perfect love that is boldness or assurance or the confidence that we belong to God it's again from the same passage in 1st John now there are two ways in which God gives this

boldness and assurance to men with faith the first way is to his head the second way is to his heart I'm going to deal with these two methods in that order first of all assurance for the head and then secondly assurance for the heart assurance for the head first assurance for the head means that God first of all convinces us in our own mind and in our thinking that we must be his children it is an intellectual conviction and persuasion and the way to come to this is in this way not to study our own lives first of all not to search our own hearts first of all that's the mistake if you are in the condition dearest hearer today in which you have this weak faith but not bold confidence then don't go away and start to examine yourself that is the mistake which so many make what you are to do is this you are to have your head

I'm talking about the head just now the mind the intellect you are to have your head filled with the promises of God in his own word you are to go in other words and ask not what do I feel but what has God said it is a great mistake to begin the search for assurance by staring in the mirror because as we look at ourselves of course we cannot see what there is which is different from the world we are blinded by sin and indeed we are so incapable as I have said before of reading our own experiences or understanding what has happened to us or tracing the work of God within the soul that we had better not begin by the subjective side of this exercise but to go I say to the promises of God now what has he promised well you know very well that what he has promised is this not a hundred times but a thousand and more times the Lord God has promised in black and white in his word sealed with his own authority in his promises he has said that if we have faith in Christ then we are accepted with him it is a very simple message and it was intended to be simple because sinners you and I we are simple people if it was as complicated as a textbook on atomic physics then very few of you would get to heaven very few indeed very few of us would get to heaven but the Bible makes the way of salvation like ABC what could be simpler than this that

God has promised in his word that if we believe in Christ and trust his blood we shall have eternal life now what you are to do is this to come to the subject of assurance not to begin with yourself or your heart or your feeling that's the wrong way but to begin with the promises of God what the Lord has said what is written in the book and to remember that his promises are yea and amen in Christ that is to say they are covenant promises and you now have this duty in connection with the covenant promises to go to God and plead with him in prayer to make these covenant promises things persuasive to your mind let me give you an example take one promise of many where Jesus [28:57] Christ says in John 6:37 him that cometh to me I will in no ways cast out now that's clear if we come to him he won't cast us out he will receive us that is his infallible promise friends heaven and earth would crack and splinter like glass and crumble and vanish into smithereens before one of the word of God could be broken God cannot lie so you go to this God with his promise in your hand and you say oh God who can't not lie graciously fulfill to me the terms of this covenant promise that I might know it in my mind and be persuaded of it and rest in its assurance and in its consolation now that is something you are to do and then you go step farther and you ask yourself how would

I know if this has happened to me how would I know if God had brought me to the point in which he had changed my whole nature how would I know if I am really one of those with the faith of God's children now this is the more subjective side this is the second half of the exercise notice the first half begins with a promise then the second half begins with this self examination and what you are called upon to look for in your own life by way of self examination is this to see if those fruits are present in your life which are described as being the evidences of the new nature do you love the word of God I grant you you might find it very hard to say that you love God you may find it very hard to say you love

Christ so do I intensely hard to say I love Christ when I consider the disparity between what he is worthy of and that little feeble glimmer of love that we give him no wonder the Christian finds it hard to say he loves Christ who dare say it except in a whisper but you must remember this that it is not what we judge ourselves that counts do you have within yourself those fruits of a changed life can you say that you love the Bible well you can't love the Bible unless you love the God of the Bible no unconverted person ever loved the Bible you know how they treat it they won't even touch it I once had a man whose mother had a Bible and this man wasn't a Christian and he came all the way to church not to listen to me preach but he came to give me this Bible that his mother had had well I said my friend I have many

Bibles I'm very grateful to you for your kind thought but I have many Bibles why not keep it in the home and read it and he visibly shivered in my presence he shuddered down his spine oh he said I wouldn't give it house room he said that's what the world thinks of God's word they wouldn't give it house room they don't love it so if you love the Bible you may not be able to say that you love God you may not yet have the boldness to say you love Christ but if you love his word if you love his house if you love his people if you love to be where they are then I say to you is not your mind beginning now to see that these are the fruits of a divine change in your life now let me move on from the mental assurance to assurance of the heart what I've said so far under this heading concerns assurance for the mind and that's where it begins the mind has to be grounded in the truth of God faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of

God faith is not some mysterious thing that floats in the upper ether which on a good day you may catch with a little net at the end of a pole that is not faith faith is receiving the word of God the promises of God so we begin with those not with ourselves not with any airy fairy mysticism but with the word of God but it doesn't end there there is mysticism there is mystery and that's what I come to now it's what we call the assurance of the heart it is more than of the mind because true religion is more than notion something must be known and felt felt in the heart felt along the blood felt in the bowel of the soul things that this world knows nothing of which the bible calls those powers of the world to come now the

[34 : 34] Westminster confession of faith refers to this that I'm now talking about as infallible assurance that's a good phrase infallible assurance unbreakable assurance unshakable assurance the Wesleyan Methodists John Wesley and his company they were Arminians evangelical Arminians but they were good men and they had a different expression for the same thing they didn't use that term what they used was this perfect love but what they meant was it by it was full Christian assurance which came or comes by the operation of God's Holy Spirit moving upon the affections and the emotions of a Christian's heart heart there is a music in the gospel and it is as though the

Holy Spirit were the master pianist sitting down at the piano of the Christian's heart and this music which he plays upon the emotions of a Christian's heart is that inward mysterious conviction born home not simply to the intellect but born home to the emotion that God loves me now what is the difference between this mental assurance and this mystical assurance let me give you comparisons between them I've said the first one belongs to the head the second one to the heart but there's more to be said the first one that's the mental one that assurance is indirect it comes through the Bible but the second is direct it is something in which the Holy Spirit who dwells in the body and in the soul of a

Christian he brings home a rich warmth of feeling directly in the heart it is it is as though waters of divine affection were flooding over him and that he was unable to contain his sense of gratitude to God isn't this what David talks about my cup runneth over there's so much inside the Christian's heart that he can't contain it all it is effervescent it bubbles over it overflows like a fountain in full spade there's more than he can handle then again there's another distinction that assurance which is for the mind is logical and that assurance which is for the heart is experimental you know the famous Scottish phrase it's better felt than telt and what we mean by that is that you can't put it into words the apostle says this it's the peace of God that passes all understanding

I can't tell you he means how it is that I feel all heaven is mine God is mine I can't tell you how I feel that but oh there's a peace like a river righteousness like the waves of the sea flood over my soul there I was he means in prison with Silas the two of us were in prison you remember on that evening when we were thrown into the very dungeons and our feet put in stocks and by all human account we should have been miserable but we were so full of joy by the Holy Spirit and by the assurance Paul would say that we couldn't stop singing we sang our hearts out we went up and down the psalm praising God that we were counted worthy to be his children even though the cost in this life for a little time was a bit of suffering yet because of the glory of the sense of God with us we felt we could do nothing but sing his praise you see it's something that passes all understanding it goes beyond the intellect it is in the heart now my dear friends

I have to say to you that this is very desirable and much to be prayed for let me quote to you Thomas Goodwin he said it very well Thomas Goodwin this experience of direct assurance is so profound it is comparable to a new conversion amen that was my experience when I got it I felt I was a new man twice over converted others have said this when I got this I felt as bold as a lion this

is the gateway to a whole universe of comfort why well because and here I must close in a moment but because and this is the climax of it you see this assurance of the heart as well as of the mind this assurance does not simply tell me that I am a child of God now it is assurance about something far greater what's that it's the assurance that I was eternally chosen in Christ before the world began that's what

[40 : 11] Peter says make your calling and election sure the calling is the conversion well that's very important very important to have evidences of conversion I've talked a little bit about it but there's something deeper even than that it is the assurance not simply that we're converted which is good but the assurance that we have been elected and that's much more friends have you had this assurance of election you say that's presumption no no it's not presumption it's the Christian gospel how could David say goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever it was because he was assured of his conversion yes and assured of his eternal election from God so it is an experience we are in the covenant we belong to God as I close let me remind you of what an old writer said his name was James

Hervey or better Harvey an 18th century preacher in England a very wonderful and worthy man a man of great usefulness in his generation perhaps not remembered enough now but certainly worthy of being remembered he had served God and he was talking on his deathbed he was dying and we're all going to be dying aren't we before long and this is what he said oh welcome welcome death thou mayest well be reckoned among the treasures of a Christian he meant that text in 1st Corinthians 3 all things are yours you are Christ and Christ is God's all things are yours life death things present things to come all are yours you're Christ Christ is God's and then he went on and this is what he ended up with to live is Christ but to die is gain and my dear friends that's what you know when you have this assurance oh beloved friends now is the time to don't give God rest