

Assurance from Beginning to End

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Date: 27 November 2022

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] All right, today we finish the letter of John, John's first letter here. And you may be noticed when we read that if you've been with us throughout the series at the very beginning in our passage in verse 13, he says in that second half of the sentence that he writes so that you may know you have eternal life.

Now John has said this a lot of times already that I want you to know that you have eternal life. He said it in chapter one.

He said so that I'm here so that you might have fellowship with God and eternal life. Chapter two, he comes and says, I'm here so that you might know you have eternal life.

And you come to chapter five and there's more instances than that. I write to you so that you may know you have eternal life. Now if you're married, you know this about your spouse.

And if you know this about your parents, nonetheless, even if you're not married, that your spouse and your parents, they say the same things over and over again to everyone.

[1 : 11] You stand in a circle of friends and your husband, your wife, they tell the same story. And it gets to the point in your life where you know that you can finish the story, the sentence, the very phrase that are going to use for them before they say it.

And you remember that about your dad, about your mom. John repeats himself constantly, but he doesn't do it like we do when we repeat ourselves constantly.

John comes and tells you in verse 13, this is why I can't stop repeating myself. In other words, he says, I write these things to you because I'm about to tell you the point of the letter.

I keep saying the same things over and over again because this is the point of the letter, the main point, so that you might know that you have eternal life.

And so I can't stop saying it. John's saying I can't stop repeating myself. I'm saying it over and over again. He wants you to know. And we've talked about this already a few times and it's assurance.

[2 : 14] He wants you to have the assurance of faith. And the assurance of faith is a deep certainty in your mind and in your heart that you are saved by God and you're kept by God forever.

John wants you to know that. That's the big idea of the whole letter that he's writing. Now there's a lot in this passage about prayer and there's a lot about quote, the sin that leads to death as John puts it.

And there's a lot about being protected from the evil one. And we will mention those things, but we need more sermons than we have. But if nothing else, we want to hear John give us the main point, which is that you might have assurance, that you might know that you have eternal life.

Now another way to say this is that John wants you to have what you could call the certainty of faith. The certainty of faith. The certainty of faith is a kind of certainty that's different, a kind of confidence that's different from other types of certainties.

So you all know that we have scientific certainties that if I stand up here and drop one of Billy's books over here, I won't do it. Drop one of Billy's books that I see on the table here to the ground over and over again that every single time it is going to fall at a negative 9.8 meters per second acceleration.

[3 : 37] And we know that because we've done it our whole lives and we've got scientists who calculate the data for us. That certainty by way of empirical experiential proof over and over again.

It's the kind of certainty you get when you want to find something out. That's talking about a certainty here that's a certainty of faith and it's not without reason. No, not at all.

But it's different. It's actually simply when your soul can finally rest. It's that kind of certainty. It's the certainty of soul when your soul finds a place to rest and have an anchor as we just sang about.

It's not a product of experiments. It's not like the scientific laboratory. But it's when your head and your heart find a rest in the one that makes sense of everything else for you.

And that's what he's talking about here. And in the context of the letter, there are people in the region that he's writing to that are telling the Christians. He's writing to Christians. They're saying to the Christians, you can never know that God really loves you.

[4 : 44] That's what people were saying. They were saying, you can never be certain that when you die, you're going to have a hope of real life. You can never really know that.

You always have to hope, but you can never know. And so they pitted hope against knowledge. And John says, you don't have to do that. You can know. You can know that you have eternal life. You don't have to be wracked with purposelessness in your life or guilt that you can't get rid of. Forgiveness is sure. Meaning is sure. Hope is sure because God is not fickle.

And this is what he teaches us, two things. Assurance means having confidence in Jesus, number one, very simply. And secondly, assurance then means knowing your rights, your rights.

Okay, so let's look at those two things. First, assurance means confidence in Jesus. That's what John says here. Now in first John 5, 13, he says, I write these things to you.

[5 : 45] That is a direct quote, if you will. He's repeating himself, not just in his letter, but that's exactly what John says at the end of his gospel. So in John 20, he says, I write these things to you so that you may believe.

And then in the letter at the end, he says, I write these things to you so that believing, you may know you have eternal life. So you see in the gospel, the gospel he's saying, I wrote the gospel about Jesus so that you would believe in the first place in Jesus.

I'm writing the letter so that those of you who do believe would now be confident in that belief, that you would have faith in the midst of that belief. Now that means that when you approach verse 13, and we can just walk right through verse 13, he says, I'm writing these things to you who believe so that you can gain confidence in that belief.

Meaning, if you want to have confident faith, step one, the presupposition for John is you've got to have faith. You got to have faith. You got to have faith.

You got to have faith. That's the foundation of any possibility of an assured faith, of a confident faith. And you see the way he puts that. He says that I write these things to you so that those of you who believe in the name of the Son of God might have confident faith.

[7 : 10] Now he says here, if you want to know assurance in your life, you've got to then believe in the name. That's how he says it. The object of your belief has got to be the name, the name of the Son of God.

And that's an incredibly strange way to speak. But I say, John says to you today, believe in the name. Why does he say that?

And it's because this in the old world, in the old world, the pre-modern world, names meant so much. The power of naming, the power of spoken word even was so much more than we know it today, but especially when it comes to people's names.

Now my name, I've said this before here, but my name has the background of Greek, a Greek etymology, Greek origin and Gallic origin.

So in the Greek, my name comes from the word quora, which is a very not famous and unpopular goddess in the Greek pantheon, in the Greek mythology.

[8 : 13] And my name, Kuri, my name, my first name, also comes from a Gallic word. Whose etymology means empty, an empty cavern, a hollow rock or a shallow pool.

So my name from Gallic means empty, hollow and shallow. Now thankfully in the modern world, we don't believe that the meaning of your name is who you are.

Now it may be true of me, but at least we don't believe that in the modern world. But in the old world, that's exactly what it was like. So God says Abram, your name is no longer Abram, it's Abraham.

Meaning you are the father of nations, which is the very word Avraham. That's what it means, Abraham, and go be the father of nations. In other words, in the old world, name meant the unity of identity and vocation.

Your name is who you are and what you should do in life at the same time. That's why people had the last name of Smith. It's who they are and what's what they do. They Smith, they're steel workers, whatever it may be.

[9 : 18] Now, let me give you another example of the power of words, the power of the name. Esau and Jacob, you remember the Old Testament story?

Jacob tricks his father, Isaac, and his brother Esau into getting the firstborn birthright from his dad. But then Esau figures it out and he goes in and he says, dad, why can't you just give me the birthright?

You know, yes, you said it to Jacob, but you could just turn and say it to me and say, I messed up. Now I'm going to give it to you, the real firstborn.

And what does Isaac say? Isaac says, I cannot give it to you for I have already spoken. I've already declared that Jacob's name is firstborn.

Doesn't matter his biology. The words have gone forth and that's the power in the old world and the ancient world in the Bible of naming. Now John's gospel, John 1 12 says the same thing.

[10 : 18] So John's repeating himself, remember John chapter one verse 12, the gospel of John. It says this to everyone who believes in the name, they will be given eternal life.

And here it is again at the end of John's letter. Now God says, God says, if you believe in the name, you shall have eternal life. Why? Because the angel Gabriel came down to Joseph and said to Joseph, when your wife, Mary has that baby boy, his name shall be Jesus, Jesus, Joshua, many ways to say it.

What is his name? His name is God saves. You see the power of the name, belief in the name in other words is trust in the power of the person that has been named.

And Jesus's name is not only what he is, but what he does in power. And when he says here, you must believe in the name if you want to have confident faith. It's saying you need to know that when Jesus is named Jesus, God saves.

It's because in his person and in his work, it's exactly what he is and what he does. He can't help it. He has to. It's what he is. It's what he does. It's the power of his name.

[11 : 36] And that means today, before you can talk about the assurance of faith, the confident faith that John wants you to know, there's a choice. Faith is a choice.

John talks about the obedience of faith. He means there that faith is a choice that stands before all of us today. And it is the choice to say today, I rest my hope on the power of the person, the name Jesus.

And that's to say, it's to ask questions like this. Can I be freed from the guilt that I struggle with?

Well, I believe in the name. I believe that he is the power and sacrifice for my son.

It's to ask a question like, is there a beginning of history and a purpose at the end? And it's to say, I believe in his name. His name is Alpha and Omega beginning and end.

That's his name. It's to ask, is there a hope for me in the midst of this life of perpetual fears, the fear of death at the end of my road, and his name is refuge.

[12 : 44] His name is rock. His name is fortress. He will keep you. So John says, that's the presupposition, that you can't talk at all today about an assurance of faith if you don't believe in the name, the name Jesus, the name of the Son of God, that he is power and that he has truly done it.

Now, then if you do today, that means you're a Christian and that means you have the possibility of having a confident faith, an assurance of faith. And that's what he says in the second line.

He says, so that you might know, if you believe in the name today, I want you to know that you do have eternal life. I want you to have a confident faith. Now, here's how you get it.

Here's how John tells us that you get it. Remember John 1-12 in the Gospel where he's repeating himself. He said, if you believe in the name, you have eternal life because God has given you the right to be called child of God.

How can you have confident faith today? How can you walk away from here having the assurance of faith believe in the fact that God has given you the right to be called child of God?

[13 : 54] Now, we talk today about human rights. Human rights are all over the place. The right to healthcare, the right to life, all sorts of things, the right to choices of all sorts.

Rights are anytime, what do we mean by that? Rights in the modern world, in the philosophical sense are anytime a justice is owed to you with respect to simply being a human being.

The justices that are owed to you as a human being, period. Now, this is how you can have an assured faith. Hear this. God, if you believe, John 1-12 says, John 1-5 says, if you believe, it is only because God has given you, gifted to you the right to be called named child of God.

You have a justice that's been given to you from outside of you that is to be named by God child, son or daughter. Now, let me make a little more sense of this.

Two problems that every Christian today is going to lean towards. All of us. If you're a Christian today, you either tend this direction or that direction.

[15:03] Here's the two directions. Some of us today come to this and say, I do not have confident faith because I'm not willing to say for sure that I'm a Christian.

I know my own thought life. I know what's in my heart. I know my doubts. I know my fears and I know my sins. I'm not willing. Some of you today are saying, I'm not willing to say outright, I know I'm a Christian.

I know I have eternal life. On the flip side, some of us are here today and we say the exact opposite. We say, I've always been a Christian. I know I'm a Christian. I'm confident that I have eternal life. It's because I've got strong faith. I've never really had any doubts. I've always been consistent. I've always believed. Let me say that on both accounts, whatever direction you might tend to, both of those are actually spiritual pride.

Both of those are ways of being prideful before God. In the first, it's false humility. It's saying, I can never truly know because I know my own doubts.

[16:13] In the second, it's spiritual arrogance because it's saying, I know that I know because I know the power of my own faith. You see the mistake in both of those is both of those think that the assurance of salvation comes in the confidence of personal faith, in the strength of your own faith.

In other words, you say, if my faith is weak, I can't be sure. If my faith is strong, then I'm very sure. John says no.

That's not the assurance of faith. That's not how you get confidence that you know that you do indeed have eternal life. Here's what John says instead as we close this point.

You can see it in John 1.12. He says, do you believe it's because you've been given a right by God, a justice. But here in our passage, verse 18, 19, and 20, if you just scan your eyes over it, you can see how he says it.

He says, we know that if you believe today you've been one, you've been born of God, verse 18. If you believe today, verse 19, you are quote, from God.

[17:18] If you believe today, it's because verse 20, the Son of God came for you and gave you gifts. And you see what he's saying? He's saying, confident faith is never grounded.

Confident faith is never grounded in the power of your personal faith. Instead, it's when you know that you're passive and he's active. It's when you know that God did it all.

If you believe it's because you were born from God. If you believe it's because you were quote, from God, what God did? If you believe it's because you've been given a right to be called child of God adopted.

It's all God and not you. And that means that the assurance of faith is never found in the personal quality of your faith. Not at all, but in the object, the strength of the object, which is God's work, God's doing, what God does, not what you do.

Now, here it is as we close. Here's how it works. It's all about status. Imagine an orphan, a little boy that's an orphan and he gets fostered for a long time and the family loves him and he loves the family.

[18:33] He loves the mom, he loves the dad, he loves the brothers, he loves the sisters. They come to the orphanage, they pick him up day in and day out. They feed him, they clothe him and they drop him off.

They take him back. And he loves being with them. They love being with him. And you know, that's really good.

But the little boy longs for the day, doesn't he? The little boy, he wants more than to be picked up and dropped off. He wants more than to be fed good meals. He wants more than to even be told by this couple that they love him.

He wants more than that. What does he want? He wants the day where mom and dad sit down, pull out the papers and sign their name and say, adopted.

He's mine forever. You see? That's called a status change. In other words, the little boy, the day that happens, the little boy can say, yesterday they liked me, today I am their son.

[19:40] That's status change. And when you have faith, this is what John's saying. If you believe in the name today, you can say yesterday in the past, God loved me, but today I'm his son.

I'm his daughter. I've had a status change. And what that means is that your faith, the quality of your faith does not make you a great Christian any more than the weakness of your faith gets you out of the kingdom of God.

You see that your strong faith does not get you more into God's status any more than your weak faith gets you kicked out. Not at all. It's about a status change.

It's about God's right that he gave to you to say you're adopted. Now if you believe that, you can know. You can say, I didn't do it so I can know that I have eternal life.

It's not the quality of your faith. It's the object. Jesus Christ. Secondly, and finally, now if that's you today, if you believe that and you're growing in the confidence of faith, John then comes briefly to say, you need to know your rights before God.

[20 : 51] And that's the rest of this passage. And all we can do is rifle through it very quickly with a couple of these rights. Let me mention two to you. This is the application.

This is what John says. Confident faith. This is what confident faith does. Verse 14, there's the first one. Confident faith comes and knows that you can have confidence towards God.

And here's the confidence that if you ask anything according to God's will, he will hear you. In other words, the first right that you have been given by God as an adopted son or daughter is that you can pray to God and know that he truly hears you.

Now that means that faith changes the way you pray. Confident faith changes the way you pray. And let me just mention three things in just a sentence or two that God says to you about your prayer here.

He says verse 14 first, that if you believe in him, he hears you. And that means you can know, you can know that if God has signed your adoption papers, that what Jesus said in the gospels is true of you.

[22 : 04] Remember what Jesus said about prayer? He says, when a little child comes and asks their father for bread, would the father ever turn around and hand him a poisonous snake?

And that was about prayer. He's saying, if you know that you're a child adopted by the father, don't you know that every time you come to the father, he doesn't hand you a poisonous snake? He hears you.

He hears that request for bread and for water. Now the second thing he says, that means you've got to come and pray then knowing your rights with expectation.

And so he says in verse 15, verse 15 at the end of verse 15, know that he hears you. He does hear you, so know that he does. Meaning there's got to be, that means you've got to come to prayer with expectation that God will not leave your prayers unanswered.

And at the same time you say today, look, I've prayed a lot and I know, I feel like there are times when my prayers have not been answered. And that's important to say because in verse 14, there's a qualification.

[23 : 10] Did you see it? It says, you can know every time God answers your prayers if you come to him and pray how? According to his will.

Now here it is. And we, I have to just say one thing about this and walk away. God says that your prayer will never go unanswered because you've been adopted by God if you pray according to the will of God.

How do you do that? Here's one way. Pray the Bible. How do you know that your will and prayer is conforming to the will of God?

What he wants, pray the Bible back to God. And you know that the very words of God that have been spoken into the world as you pray them back to him are definitively the will of God.

So you can walk through the Psalms and you can pray line by line exactly what the Psalms pray back to God to couch your petitions in the midst of the language of the Bible. And then you know, you know, you can walk away and say, I know that God will answer my prayer because I've prayed it in the power of his very words, his very will.

[24 : 19] Now the last thing he tells us here about prayer and we need a different day on this is he says that your prayer, confident faith means your prayer is so powerful.

Verse 16, that it has the power to be priestly. What does it mean to have priestly power? Priestly power is when you can actually represent other people before God and God respond and do something about it.

Did you see verse 16? It says, verse 16 says that when you pray for another Christian who is struggling, who is maybe going down a road that is dangerous, when you pray for them, God says, I will hear it and I will restore them.

That's priestly prayer. That your prayer as an adopted son or daughter of the king is so powerful that you can through the medium of prayer restore a brother or sister under God back to life. Now that means a lot of things and we can't go into it right now. He even says, there is a sin that leads to death and he says I'm not saying you should definitely pray for that, but he's not saying don't pray for those who have committed a sin that leads to death.

[25 : 29] What is that? He's saying pray for everybody and for those who have committed a sin that leads to death, he's saying I don't know what God will do. That's his point. But pray for them and what is that?

And I can only mention it and it's this, it's after having been in the church professing faith according to John's letter, a person comes and says Jesus Christ is not God who has come in the flesh to save.

That's the sin that leads to death in John's letter. And John is saying pray for any brother or sister who is struggling and I will give them life through your prayer. That's priestly prayer and maybe God will also work to bring somebody back.

Let's profess faith and walked away and said Jesus Christ is not God coming the flesh. That's your first right. Your second right before God that you've been given as adopted son and your final that I can mention today is this.

He says here lastly that Jesus will be a shield all around you for all of your days. And that language comes out of Psalm three where it says that God is our shield all around us, which is a seed shield. [26 : 44] It's the kind of shield that you wear when you're going into siege a castle wall and you got to have a shield over your head for the rocks and the oil and in front of you and behind you into your sides because the castle wall is shooting at you from every side.

This says that Jesus Christ you have a right before God Jesus will protect you in your front and your back and on top of your head the rest of your life. That's your right as an adopted son or daughter. Now how does he say it? He says that in verse 1819 that God will protect you. Jesus Christ will protect you from the evil one from Satan that Jesus will be the shield in the midst of the attack of the evil one.

Now what this means here is that if you're an adopted son or daughter of the king, God has declared over you judicially legally that you are forgiven and that you are his forever.

That's eternal life. But Satan comes and makes a claim against you. Satan has the right, the true right to make a claim against the world.

[27 : 50] Verse 18 says the world belongs to the evil one. Why? Because human beings have committed great injustices against God and Satan truly has a justice claim against us.

Satan in the Old Testament comes to God and says I can charge this one with guilt because they are guilty. And you see no matter what it's saying, if you're adopted, Satan can never come to God and say about you, I have a claim to make against this one.

They belong to me. I'm taking them. I'm bringing them into death. They can't have life. No, Jesus Christ is the shield all about you. He'll never let that happen because you've been legally, judicially adopted.

You can know, be confident in what Jesus says about you that Satan can never take you. If God is for you, can the evil one be against you?

Paul asks. No, absolutely not. Jesus is the shield all about you. Now, the last word. John says legally you're safe.

[28 : 58] You can know that you have eternal life. You can be confident in your faith. You have hope meaning purpose, forgiveness, that your guilt is washed away all in Jesus Christ.

You can know and you can lean into those rites of prayer, confident prayer. You can lean in to Christ your shield that no evil can take you away from him.

And then at the very end, he says now little children, keep yourself from idols. It's a strange ending. You say, John, you've been telling me all about my rights, about my confidence and faith, but the very last thing you say, stop committing idolatry.

And you say, now I'm not sure anymore. I'm not sure about my faith anymore. But remember, it's not the quality, it's the object. Why does he end like this? Why does he say at the very end, little

children, keep yourself from idols?

This is why he's been saying the whole time, God will keep you. God will keep you. You can have assurance of faith. God will keep you. He'll hold on to you.

[30 : 04] And now you need to live like it. In other words, God will keep you. God will keep you. God will keep you. Now you need to keep yourself from idolatry. In other words, live in accordance with what you are before God.

You are kept. You are a child. You are a son. You are a daughter of the king. And so live in accordance with that honor of God, your father, and Christ, your brother, who has done this great work by keeping yourself away from idolatry.

Another way to say it is like this. God has given you so much eternal life confidence. And it'll never be taken away from you. Don't settle for less than that.

Don't settle for anything less than the eternal life that God has offered you. And so keep yourself away from idols. There's something you've got to walk away from here and do. And that's to walk away, push back, fight against the idolatries that come up in your life.

Do not go from here and love things more than God because God has given you something so much better than any creature can give you. And so don't settle for creatures as your God, not politics, not pleasure, not Netflix, not celebrity, not financial peace, not your spouse, not your children, not your selfish ambitions, not your hope of a relationship, none of it.

[31 : 31] Don't let it be your God because look at what God's already given you. Don't settle for the little things when you've got the big thing. And this is a cliché way to say it as we close.

A cliché quote, not a cliché way. But it's C.S. Lewis, the weight of glory, his great essay. Did anybody put it better than this? This is what Lewis says.

It would seem here that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is being offered to us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he can't imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the seaside. Don't settle for that for an idol when you've got confident faith in the object that is God himself gifting you eternal life forever.

You see, last word, John says, little children. He keeps saying it, little children, little children, meaning you're adopted, little child.

[32 : 41] God has signed your status papers. He got on his knee, he put his hand on your shoulder, and he said, we don't just like you, we're keeping you. We're signing the papers forever.

We love you. God loves you that much. Little children assured by the word of the Father in Jesus Christ at the cross, God says this, I love you, that's the assurance of faith.

So keep yourself from idolatry. Let's pray. Father, give us the assurance of faith today. I pray, Lord, for someone who does not yet believe like the gospel calls for, that you might show them the beauty of Jesus Christ's love for them today, and for the rest of us, for those of us who are believers, whether weak or strong, give us hope not in the quality of our faith this morning, but in the strength of the object, which is you, your love, your work, the work of Christ.

We pray for that. Cast away our idols. Oh, Lord, in Christ's name. Amen.