

2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 3:5

Are you **sure** that you are **saved**, and that when you **die** you'll go to **heaven**? That's the question which is asked in the evangelism handbook, Talk About The Savior. We all **know** the **answer** to that question, and it is, "**Yes**. I'm **absolutely** sure." But there are many people in our world today - perhaps even **most** of the people in our world - who do **not** know the correct answer. Most of the people whom we encounter day after day are **not** sure of their salvation. They would answer that question by saying, "I **think** I'm good enough - or I **hope** that God will take me to heaven - or I've **tried** really hard, and I **deserve** to go to heaven." But they are never **sure** that they have **done** enough, or that they are **good** enough - because they're **not** good enough. **None** of us can get to heaven on our own, because that takes **perfection** - perfection that we can never **attain** by our works.

But you and I **know** that we are saved, because we know that **Jesus died** to **pay** for our sins, and that He gave us **His** perfection. So, the LORD **smiles** as He sees that we are **sure** of our eternal salvation. And He encourages us to **Stand Firm** in that salvation, as we **Hold On To God's Teachings**.

Many people think that **faith** is simply a spiritual **feeling**, or the **knowledge** that somewhere out there is some kind of a god - **whoever** or **whatever** he or she may be. Others think that **faith** is having a **positive attitude** when times get **rough** - having an **optimistic** outlook when **trouble** comes into their lives. But faith is much **more** than that. As the writer of the Book of Hebrews said, "*Faith is being **sure** of what we hope for, and **certain** of what we do not see.*" Faith is the **assurance** of our eternal salvation. It is the **certainty** of knowing that I am **acceptable** to God, and that I will live with Him **forever** in heaven, because of what **Jesus** has done for me.

That's the only way we can **have** that kind of assurance. It can **never** come by looking at ourselves, because when we look at **ourselves** in the mirror of God's Word, we see an imperfect **sinner** looking back. We can fool some of the **people** around us, **some** of the time, into thinking that we are hot stuff - brilliant, superior to others in morality - but we can **never** fool **God**. He sees **beyond** the surface. He sees into our **hearts** - hearts that **daily** sin against Him - hearts that too often focus on **earthly** things rather than on **heavenly** things. God says, "*There is **no one** who does good, not even **one** ... **All** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" **Every day** we sin against the Lord, and even if we tried to **count** all the ways that happens, we wouldn't be **able** to. But then again, we don't **need** to add them all up,

because God says, *“Whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles at just **one** point, is guilty of breaking **all** of it.”* When we look in the mirror of God’s Law we see a **sinner** looking back - a **thief**, a **murderer**, a **liar**, an **adulterer** - and **because** of our sins, we justly deserve eternal **condemnation** in hell.

No one will **ever** have the assurance of salvation by looking at his own life. There is only **one place** to turn our attention, and that’s to God’s Son, **Jesus**. Jesus is just what the doctor ordered for all of us **sick** human beings. Jesus brings **hope** to those who feel **hopeless** and have **given up**. Jesus gave up His **life** to pay for the sins of the world. He died the death on the **cross**, which our sins **deserved**. The holiness of the **sinless Son of God** is given to each one of us, through **faith**. So, **Stand Firm** in your faith.

Listen once again to how the Apostle Paul **addresses** believers in Jesus, and notice how **sure** he is of our eternal salvation. Paul wrote, *“We ought always to thank God for you, **brothers**, loved by the Lord, because from the **beginning**, God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the **Spirit**, through **belief** in the truth.”* Thank **God** that we are **loved** by the Lord. Even before God **created** the universe, He **chose** us to be saved. He **planned** how the Holy Spirit would set us apart from this sinful world, and would make us **holy** through **faith** in Jesus. He **provided** us with the Holy Spirit, to **lead** us to believe the truth of God’s teachings in the Bible. Now that we **have** them, we need to **Hold On To God’s Teachings**.

God fulfilled His loving plans for us. Paul told the Thessalonians, *“God called you to this through our **gospel** that you might share in the **glory** of Jesus Christ.”* God called us to faith in Jesus through the message of the **Gospel** - the Good News that reveals God’s undeserved love for us, through His Son **Jesus**. In our baptism, God called us to **faith** in Jesus. And through the years God has continued to **strengthen** that faith, as our parents, and pastors, and teachers, and Christian friends have **nurtured** our faith by sharing God’s Word with us.

The purpose of God’s **calling** is that we will **share** in the heavenly glory that Jesus **already** enjoys. There is a point to **everything** that happens in our lives. Our **baptism** wasn’t an **accident**, our attendance at worship services, and in Bible classes, is not because of mere **tradition**. Our lives have been **scripted** by God. Think of it this way. If you’re a fan of the NFL, then you know that in most of the games the first 10 plays of the game have been **scripted** by the head coach, or the offensive coordinator. After that, the game plan may **open up** a bit more, and a veteran quarterback can frequently make his **own** choices - he can be **on his own**. But when it comes to our salvation, we are **never** on our own. **God** has scripted

everything. He has been **behind** it all, so that there will never be any **doubt** about our eternal outcome. We can continue to be God's own **people** - people who will **share** in what He already **has** - the **joys** of everlasting life - because **God Himself** is making it happen.

For all of this, God deserves a big **thank you** from us. Thank God that He has given us the **assurance** of our salvation. Thank God that we can say **boldly** and **confidently**, "*(Christ) has **redeemed** me, a lost and condemned creature, **purchased** and **won** me from **all** sins, from **death**, and from the power of the **devil**; not with gold or silver, but with **his** holy, precious **blood**, and with his innocent **sufferings** and **death**."* Thank God that we can say, "*The **Holy Spirit** has **called** me by the gospel, **enlightened** me with his gifts, **sanctified** and **kept** me in the one true faith.*"

Our God has made us **certain** - absolutely **sure** of our salvation - because it doesn't depend on **us** - it depends on **Him**. For that reason Paul encourages us with these words: "*So then, brothers, **stand firm** and **hold** to the **teachings** we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.*" The believers to whom Paul wrote these words were living in **difficult** times. Severe **persecution** had broken out against them. They were on the verge of **losing hope**, and were often tempted to ask, "Why would a **loving** God let these things happen to us?"

Does that question sound **familiar** to you? We face those times of persecution and pain in **our** lives too. There are those days when we wake up in the morning, totally **crushed** by what we did the day before, and we start to wonder, "Can God still forgive me for that **too**?" We face setbacks to our **hopes** and **dreams**, we have friends who **desert** us, and **troubles** that hound us. At times like that we are tempted to ask, "What did I do that was **so** wrong to deserve all **this**? Would a **loving** God really allow all these things to happen to me?" Then of course, our **chief** enemy, the **devil**, will **pounce** on those doubts and fears, and he'll chime in with, "You're **right**. God **doesn't** love you. But **I** do. Come to me, and I'll make it all **better** again."

Will we **give in** to the **lying** temptations of the devil, or will we **Stand Firm** and **Hold On To God's Teachings**? We know what happened when Adam and Eve gave in to the **devil's** lies instead of **trusting** and **obeying** what **God** had told them. Let's remember who we **are** - we are God's dearly loved **children** - we have been **chosen** by Him from all eternity - we have been **called to faith** by Him through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament - and we have had our faith **strengthened** by Him through that **same** Word and Sacrament. We are **Saints**

Triumphant - triumphant over sin, death, and the devil, through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, our **Savior**.

The Lord Jesus is our **strength**, and our **focus**. And as Paul told the Thessalonians, “*The Lord is **faithful**, and he will **strengthen** and **protect** you from the evil one. We have **confidence** in the Lord that you **are** doing and will **continue** to do the things we command.*” May the Lord enable us **always** to **Stand Firm** and **Hold On To God’s Teachings**. Amen.