

Jesus, Our Assurance



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 6:11, 18-20; 10:19-23, 35; 11:1-6.

MEMORY TEXT: “Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:22, 23, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The recipients of the epistle needed assurance, and Hebrews shows them where this assurance can be found.

MOST HUMANS HAVE A DESIRE for some level of certainty and assurance in their lives. Who would get on an airplane without some certainty, some assurance, that it was well-maintained and mechanically sound or that the pilots knew how to fly? Who would go to the doctor without some certainty regarding the physician's competency in medicine? Who would seek employment without some assurance that the company would be around for a while? All of us, in one way or another, look for and need a certain level of assurance in the most everyday things of life.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In what ways does Hebrews present the topic of assurance? How is faith linked to assurance? What conditions are placed on assurance? How do we strike a balance between assurance and presumption?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 13.

Sunday

September 7

OUR STATUS AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

The book of Hebrews, along with other New Testament writings, offers us certainty in regard to our relationship with God. Assurance is an important theme in this epistle, and in others. How could it not be? After all, we are sinners who daily confront our own weaknesses, faults, and shortcomings. If we didn't have some sort of assurance of salvation and acceptance, who wouldn't eventually give up the faith completely?

How do each of the following texts give us assurance of salvation in Christ?

Heb. 2:17 _____

Heb. 3:14 _____

Heb. 6:18 _____

Heb. 9:15 _____

Heb. 9:28 _____

Heb. 10:14 _____

Dwell specifically on the notion that we are made “partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14). What does that mean? How should this experience change our lives? What condition does the author place on this good news?

Because Jesus has “made purification for sins” (Heb. 1:3, NRSV) and because He has “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) for us, we can be accepted by God, even as sinners. Thus, we have assurance of salvation, not from anything in ourselves but because of what God did in Christ, the Son of God, our King, our Brother, our Sacrifice, and our High Priest. Our assurance rests in Him, not in ourselves.

“Christians are holy, sanctified, perfected, cleansed, purified—all terms associated with the sanctuary and its services. They *are* God’s people, even now. Now they are ‘clean,’ now have access to God, now have consciences purged, now have Jesus as Heavenly High Priest.”
—William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 155.

Why is assurance of salvation so important in the Christian life? At the same time, how do we protect ourselves against turning assurance into presumption?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 8:10-12.

Teachers Aims:

1. To illustrate how Hebrews presents the topic of assurance.
2. To define how faith is linked to assurance and the conditions placed on it.
3. To explore how to strike a balance between assurance and presumption.

Lesson Outline:

I. Our Assurance of Salvation.

- A. Christ became human so He, as a full Representative of humanity, could present our case before God.
- B. We partake of Christ's sacrifice by our faith in Him.
- C. He is our ultimate Mediator, because, through His death, we inherit eternal life.

II. Christ, Our Assurance.

- A. Jesus' intercession still continues in our behalf.
- B. He paid the price for our sins.
- C. He offers us the power to overcome sin.

III. Additional Promises.

- A. We must seek mercy, and God promises it is there for the asking.
- B. He asks us to spread His message of salvation to all and to uphold our faith in Him as an example to others.
- C. Have faith in Him, and He will take care of us in all things.

Summary: Through our faith we accept Christ's sacrifice for us and the promises of salvation that come with it. In addition, we receive the assurance of eternal life that transcends the mundane goals of our present life.

Commentary.

Jesus, our Assurance, is one of the main concepts that runs through the Epistle to the Hebrews. The "boldness" believers in Christ have to enter the heavenly sanctuary through Him is set in contrast to the restrictions placed on those who lived during the time of the earthly service.

Monday

September 8

OUR ASSURANCE FOR TODAY.

Yesterday, we studied some promises made to those who belong to Christ. Most of these promises used verb forms that relate to the past. What about verses that spell out Christ's ministry in our behalf and how it impacts us now?

What is Jesus doing for His children today?

Heb. 2:18 _____

Heb. 4:15 _____

Heb. 7:19 _____

Heb. 7:25 _____

The passages that describe what has been done *in the past* deal with different aspects of our salvation. The passages for today, in contrast, contain some practical aspects of present-day life that, nevertheless, depend on Jesus' high-priestly ministry.

Jesus makes intercession in our behalf. He sympathizes and deals gently with us. He has suffered in the flesh, as we have suffered in the flesh; thus, He can relate to us as a human to a human in our fleshly sufferings. Yet He never succumbed to sin; and thus He offers us power to overcome sin, as well. As Christians, we never have a good excuse to sin.

We know that God loves us, and we know that Christ is working in our behalf, even now. Yet, we have to be careful how we understand what that means. What it *doesn't* mean is that life will always be sweet and nice, because we have Jesus as our High Priest ministering in our behalf in heaven.

We can have assurance, we can have hope, we can have peace from the knowledge that not only has Jesus died for our sins, having paid the penalty for them, but that He now ministers in heaven in our behalf, representing us before the Father, not with our own merits but with His own perfect record. Talk about assurance.

But that doesn't mean that we will never have suffering in this life. On the contrary.

Read carefully Hebrews 12:6-11. What is the author telling his readers? What reason does he give for what they might be going through? How are they to respond? How have you, in your own life, experienced what the author is talking about?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

In the earthly service, not all the people could exercise this privilege, that of entering the sanctuary; only the priests could, and only then at certain times and under certain conditions.

But those who have been cleansed within, consecrated and made perfect by the sacrifice of Christ, have received a free right of access into the holy presence, and Paul urges his readers to benefit themselves fully of this free right.

The invitation to “let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith” has already been issued in this Epistle (Heb. 10:22, NKJV); on that occasion the invitation was based on the assurance that Jesus the High Priest who passed through the heavens is One whose experiences of temptation enable Him to sympathize with His people in their trials. Now a further assurance is given: the way by which this High Priest has entered into the presence of God is a way that remains open for His people to follow Him there.

This free right of access is described as the assurance given by Jesus Himself into the holiest by His blood. Jesus’ blood gives us full assurance. The boldness of our entry, far from resting on any supposed merit of our own, is justified and indeed demanded by the blood of Jesus; that is to say, on the basis of the incarnate Son’s atoning self-offering and thus by virtue alone of His merits.

Jesus Christ’s work includes more than His ministry on behalf of humanity. The assurance of the cosmic reconciliation will reach its consummation at the end of the great controversy, before the destruction of the evil powers, when every creation from God in heaven and on earth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. In describing Jesus’ assurance, Ellen G. White says “Christ assured the angels that by His death He would ransom many, and would destroy him who had the power of death. He would recover the kingdom which man had lost by transgression, and the redeemed were to inherit it with Him, and dwell therein forever.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 65.

Similar to the assurance given to the angels, Jesus assured us of His love and salvation. Are we willing by faith to take Jesus’ word and rest on it? Jesus’ word never fails nor will it ever fail. This is the kind of assurance we have as Christians.

Paul, in speaking of this assurance, points out that “Now faith is the assurance (*hypostasis*) of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, NASB). Faith and assurance are related; they are like brother and sister. The Christian faith consisted simply in taking God at His word and directing the life accordingly.

This Greek word *hypostasis* has appeared twice already in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 1:3, the Son was stated to be the very image of God’s *hypostasis*; in chapter 3:14 believers are said to be Christ’s associates if they hold fast the beginning of their *hypostasis*, firm to the end. That is to say, things, which in themselves have no existence as yet, become real and substantial by the exercise of faith. In other words, the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to be faithful and confident to the end.

Tuesday

September 9

OTHER PROMISES.

Hebrews contains texts filled with hope and promise. After each text, write down what that promise means to you and how the hope it expresses has impacted your faith. (For example, for the first one: How have you experienced that promised rest?)

Heb. 4:3 _____

Heb. 4:16 _____

Heb. 8:10-12 _____

Heb. 10:22 _____

Heb. 12:28 _____

Heb. 13:5, 6 _____

Look carefully at Hebrews 10:22. It talks about the “full assurance of faith.” The Greek word translated “full assurance” means also “to be absolutely certain,” “to be completely sure.” The apostle says that we should draw near to God in full assurance of faith that the promises He has made to us will be fulfilled (vs. 23 says that He “is faithful that promised”). Why do we have this “full assurance”? The three verses before help answer that: Jesus, by His death, is now our High Priest, who has consecrated a new and living way for us to have access to God.

Notice, however, how the author, though stressing the “full assurance” we can have, also balances it with something that can save us from presumption. What is it? See verse 23. How does this help put all the promises in the right perspective?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

It was for faith and assurance of this kind that men and women of old received the divine commendation, and this has been placed on permanent record as an example to their descendants. It is very important to emphasize that in order to have assurance we have to have faith. William G. Johnsson clearly observes, “That’s the apostle’s point. Faith, he says, is your title deed and mine to the glorious future God has in store for you. Faith turns hope into reality and the invisible into the concrete.

“Thus, faith isn’t a one-time matter, a decision to turn from the world and to follow Jesus. Faith is a way of life, an attitude.” —*Hebrews* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 205.

The Christians who have faith have assurance, because Jesus is our Assurance. Jesus is also the world’s Assurance, the world’s Redeemer and Creator. In Jesus, humanity receives the full assurance of salvation; let us hold to this precious gift.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Romans 3:20; 6:4; 12:3; James 1:5, 6; 2:19; Jude 24.

1. Other religions and traditions offer assurance of salvation (or whatever the ultimate goal is) based upon an individual’s own capabilities and strengths. Why might such a view be attractive? What are the problems with it?
2. Christianity bases the assurance of salvation on the deeds of Jesus Christ, the God-man. To some extent, this takes away our illusion of control. Do you find this comforting, or disturbing? Why?
3. Christ’s sacrifice “cleanses” us so we can approach God, at least through Christ. Are we really clean, or is this just a legal fiction? Or can we look at this cleansing as a process? Does the fact that God views us as being clean make it easier for us to become, in fact, clean?
4. Assurance is a result of—maybe even a synonym for—faith. Where does this faith come from? What part do we play in producing this faith? How can our actions and attitudes negatively or positively affect it?
5. In our culture, faith is usually taken to be a synonym for acceptance of a set of beliefs. How would this definition be confusing to someone looking for a true understanding of what it means to have faith? In what way would true faith differ from mere acceptance of a creed?

Wednesday

September 10

TERMS DESCRIBING ASSURANCE AND SURETY.

The topic of surety and assurance is expressed by a number of Greek words used in Hebrews with different shades of meaning: *plrophoria*—full assurance, conviction, certainty; *parrsia*—boldness, confidence, assurance; *hypostasis*—confidence, assurance, conviction; *tharre* —to be full of courage, to act boldly, to be confident; and *asphals*—safe, sure.

What is the message of those texts that contain the noun “assurance” or “confidence” (some different translations might use different words with the same meaning)?

Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:35 _____

Heb. 4:16; 10:19 _____

Heb. 6:11 _____

Heb. 10:22; 11:1 _____

These texts can be grouped into four categories. The first group stresses the fact that we with confidence may draw close to God. We have access to the throne of grace in the heavenly sanctuary. We are cleansed and washed. The barriers are removed. Instead of fear, confidence fills our life. The second pair connects assurance and hope and seems to be a call to stay faithful and endure unto the promised end. The third connects assurance and faith. It is by faith that we have the assurances of what Christ has done for us and what He will do, even in those things that are yet unseen. Faith is an indispensable element of our hope, confidence, and assurance. The last category consists of calls to hold fast confidence, not to throw away assurance.

According to Hebrews, we should have hope, confidence, and assurance. What are things that we confront as believers that daily work against these things? How do we confront those challenges?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

WITNESSING

Key Texts: Mark 2:1-5, Luke 19:1-5, John 12:2-8, Hebrews 4:15, 7:25, 10:19-23.

What risks would you take to get to Jesus?

Zacchaeus, stumpy tax collector, shinnies up a tree just for a glimpse of Him. Four friends rip open a roof and lower the twisted body of a paralytic to Him for healing. Mary Magdalene disturbs a feast in His honor by anointing His feet with spikenard and wiping them with her hair.

Need emboldens these men and women to take risks to be near Jesus. Even if it means climbing a tree and exposing oneself to the ridicule of a throng. Even if it means vandalizing a roof. Even if it means becoming a spectacle in front of disapproving dinner guests. Spiritual risk takers boldly surmount obstacles. Their need to be in Christ's presence is so strong they allow nothing to hinder them.

The book of Hebrews encourages us to let nothing hinder our approach to Jesus but rather to "come *boldly* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16, NKJV, emphasis supplied). Such boldness involves a risk of trust in Someone other than yourself to save you. True, risk involves the potential for failure.

But Christ eliminates failure, because we stand to lose nothing of value but gain eternity by trusting Him.

Why, then, with such assurance, do we often draw back from coming boldly to Him, afraid we must be perfect before we approach? Much of the answer lies in 1 Peter 5:8. Satan, the diabolical saboteur of holy boldness, excels in the dark art of poisoning minds with fear. He blackens our eyes with every past failing, assaults our hearts with every imperfection. Who are *you*, mortal gnat, he accuses, to approach the Most Holy God? Heartsick, many focus on their sin-crimes and fail to look to Christ.

The book of Hebrews contains an arsenal of Bible promises engineered to arm us against the deadly war on our faith. Read Hebrews 4:15, 7:25, and 10:19-23. Have you betrayed someone's trust? Look boldly to Christ. Have you lusted after someone's spouse? Look boldly to Christ. If you've lost your temper, boldly ask Him to take your anger in exchange for His peace. Salvation is not about what we offer Christ, it is the assurance of what He offers us. That is enough to inspire the most downcast sinner to risk casting aside fear to come boldly to Jesus.

Thursday

September 11

FAITH AND ASSURANCE.

The word *faith* (in various forms) appears dozens of times in Hebrews. It comes in clusters. The first use is found in Hebrews 2:17, where Jesus is called a “faithful” High Priest. The next two chapters focus on faith. Another cluster appears in Hebrews 6 and the most extensive one appears at the end of Hebrews 10, running through chapter 11, which discusses the famous heroes of faith.

Perhaps the most explicit and systematic explication of faith appears in Hebrews 11.

Read the first ten verses of Hebrews 11. Compare them with Hebrews 10:19-23, 35, 38, 39. What’s the main point these texts make? How does it fit in with the overall theme of Hebrews?

In Hebrews, the concept of faith and assurance are linked. We’re saved by faith, not works; thus, as long as we cling to the Lord in faith, we have the assurance of the salvation that comes to us by faith.

It’s interesting that Hebrews 4 contains a call to make a decision and believe. However, the book is addressed not to non-Christians but to Christians. Thus, in Hebrews, faith does not simply refer to a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Faith is practical. On one hand, it leads to assurance and provides hope; on the other hand, it has to do with the conduct of life.

Meanwhile, in Hebrews 10:35, the author calls his readers not to throw away their confidence, their assurance. How do they not cast it away? The answer is that they persevere *in faith*. Those who persevere will receive the promise (vs. 36)—the second coming of Jesus (vs. 37) and final salvation (vss. 38, 39).

Read Hebrews 3:15-19. It seems as if disobedience and unbelief are almost used interchangeably. Why is that so? In what ways are disobedience and unbelief so linked? Notice, too, whom he charged with “unbelief.” What message does that hold for us, as professed followers of Christ?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: There's a story about a man who had to cross a wide river that was frozen from the winter weather. Afraid the ice might be too thin, he began to crawl on his hands and knees. He was so afraid of falling through at any moment. Just as he neared the shore, exhausted, another man glided past him nonchalantly on a sled loaded with goods. How like some Christians! Headed for heaven, we tremble at every step, afraid the divine promises might break under our feet.

Thought Questions:

1. With the above story in mind, interpret this statement: "You can never break God's promises by leaning on them." List at least two characteristics of each faith hero in Hebrews 11 that testify to the assurance that comes with trusting in God's promises.
2. The validity of Christ's promises results from the act on the cross. About two hundred years after the church began, Origen suggested that the death of Christ was a ransom paid to Satan (see Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* [Nashville, Tenn.:

Word Publications, 2000], p. 54). This theory continued to be believed for more than a thousand years. How different is this theory from the one that by "taking our place" on the cross Jesus took upon Himself our sins? Does the meaning of assurance change in both theories?

Application Questions:

1. When you rest completely on God and take His promises at face value, you can drive out the paralyzing fear that hinders you from effective service. What practical things can you do every day to keep God's promises fresh in your mind? How do promises cultivate faith?
2. What do you think is the relationship between faith and confidence? When you have total faith in God's involvement in your life, how will it affect your confidence in your accomplishments? In your personal family life? In your workplace? If faith and confidence go hand in hand, what would the seeming presence of one and not the other be an indication of?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Ellen G. White’s statements on faith and assurance in *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 531, and *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 287. Study Hebrews 11.

Note: “The Sacrifice of Christ assures Christians of two great facts: First, the Act *has been done* that solves the sin problem. They don’t have to strive and stretch, to hunger and thirst, to press and prevail, in the frantic, frenzied—and futile—effort to find cleansing from their sins. By one sacrifice for all time God has utterly dealt with sin. Nothing we might do can add to that or diminish from it. Calvary gives us absolute confidence of the putting away of sins.

“Second, Calvary assures us of our full access to the presence of God. No matter who we might be, we *belong* in Jesus Christ. The gates of the temple stand flung open. All who believe may enter—not cringing, but boldly.”—Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 118.

“We have the assurance of a Saviour who has come—a Saviour who has been crucified, has risen, and has proclaimed over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ In our knowledge of Jesus and his love, the kingdom of God has been placed in the midst of us. . . . We have had presented to us by the messengers of God the richest feast,—the righteousness of Christ, justification by faith, the exceeding great and precious promises of God in his word, free access to the Father by Jesus Christ, the comforts of the Holy Spirit, and the well-grounded assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God. We ask, What could God do for us that he has not done in preparing the great supper, the heavenly banquet?”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, January 17, 1899.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Why do some people have problems with assurance of salvation? Why is trust in what Christ has accomplished for us the only place where we can rest our hope of salvation?**
- 2. Though filled with promises of assurance, of hope, Hebrews always balances it with the call to remain steadfast in the faith. Skim over the book and mark out the places (for example, 2:14; 3:6-12) where the apostle exhorts them to persevere. Write down the specific things he says that we need to do in order to maintain this assurance. Do any patterns emerge? If so, what are they?**

SUMMARY: Assurance and faith are related to each other. By faith we take hold of Christ’s achievements for us and the promises found in them. This assurance allows us to have a better quality of life, to live in hope, and to have a goal that transcends our present life.