

KNOWING...FOR SURE!

1 John 5:1-15

1. Interesting, isn't it—what makes people feel secure. Our world is not a very secure place these days. Maybe a little like a recent experience I had. I'd always love float-planes, dreamed about them—and even wrote about them. I finally got to **fly** in one! It was so cool! But I realized how fragile they are. Imagine flying in an aluminum fishing boat at 3000 feet—with no parachute--and that would give you a feel for it. -I heard a story a few years ago about how Billy Graham was on a small plane with a brilliant scientist and a boy scout when it developed engine trouble. Without saying a word, the pilot grabbed a parachute, opened the door and jumped—leaving everyone else to fend for themselves. The scientist said, "I'm one of the smartest men in the world—the world can't do without my cutting edge discoveries!"--then grabbed a parachute and jumped. There was only one parachute left. Billy Graham said to the Boy Scout, "Son. I lived a full life—and I know what's going to happen to me when I die. **You** take the parachute!" The boy said, "Oh, that's okay Mister. The smartest man in the world just jumped out of the plane with my knapsack!"

-There are a **lot** of people in our world who seem **very** secure, **very** confident about their path, their opinions, even death. But confidence is only as good as what's actually **in** the pack when you jump from the plane, right?

- a. There are some things in life some uncertainty—or a lot of uncertainty—is no big deal. Like whether or not Einstein was right. Or how well the Leafs will do. Deodorant? **Some** uncertainty. Whether or not eating butter tarts will give you cancer?

-There is **one** area where I'll bet most of you would want a **lot** of certainty. It's whether or not your friends **really** like you and support you to your face—and behind your back. How many of you would say **that's** an area where a little uncertainty is **too** much uncertainty?

-When uncertainty makes it's way into the closest circle of friends—or family—it's **devastating**. That thought of getting voted off the island by your family or your spouse cuts to the core of who you are. There's not a person on this planet who doesn't crave love and acceptance—and fear rejection.

- b. We live in a fickle world like ours—where acceptance is so often appearance-driven or performance-driven. And **God** knows us better than anyone ever could—our most noble thoughts—and our most scandalous actions. The question we sometimes ask ourselves is, **Will the One who knows who I really am...reject me—because I'm too screwed up, too much trouble, too far away?** And the answer is, because of Jesus—**NO!** Through Jesus, God offers us an **unbelievable** gift: the assurance of his unconditional love and acceptance as His child—as His friend—not just in **this** life, but forever. -For some of you—this may be hard to believe—especially if you grew up in a context where to be loved, you had to perform. My Grandfather was like that.

My Mom would do her best, get all A's—and one B. He'd say, "Bring up the B next time." Some of your experiences were **way** worse. The message you got from them was basically, "You're unacceptable the way you are. I **have** to love you—but I really don't **like** you."

-And sometimes we believe that God **has** to love us because He's God—but He really doesn't like us. Unless, of course, we shine up our lives, support His favorite causes, and avoid His list of questionable activities. So. Why would God give us hearts that **crave** unconditional love—if His love is conditional—maybe more conditional than ours? The answer is—it's **not!**

-Do you **know** this? That God has accepted you forever, loves you more than you have **ever** been loved—and **likes** you? This isn't just a question about how you feel; this is a question that has the power to unchain you from the performance treadmill so you are free to serve with an open, loving and grateful heart!

2. John, the disciple and early church leader wrote a narrative of Jesus' life—and made it clear why God showed up here:

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17 NLT)

God's motive was...**love**. God's intent was...to **save** the world. Everything. Everyone. No one left out.

- a. And now the ball is in my court—and yours. Will I be God of my own life—and find my security in me and my choices—or will I choose the grace and the life Jesus made possible?

-In our world, people say things like, "Well it really doesn't matter what you believe or what you do—as long as you're sincere?" Now, think about that for a minute in the light of the story I told you earlier. When you're jumping out of a plane and you grab a pack, does it matter **who** packed it and what's **in** it? It kinda matters what's **in** the pack—unless you've got a great set of wings!

- b. After John's book about Jesus, He wrote a short letter to the followers of Jesus reaffirming what he had said earlier. He reaffirms what genuine faith in Jesus is like; that it's a **relationship**—not a religion. If you wrong someone in a relationship, you make it right. Maintaining a loving relationship with someone involves respecting who they are, valuing what they say and believing the truth about them—and not the slander you hear.

-And he reaffirms what Jesus said; that the key to this relationship with God is the Holy Spirit. He's the One who comes to live in us and keep us connected with the Father. Over time He the key thing He does is make us loving, peaceful, joyful, patient, faithful--**infectious** people. And the Spirit is not only

our guarantee of a future inheritance with Jesus--**He's** the source of this inner confirmation that we are children of God. Then John writes these words:

And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for. (1 John 5:11-15 NLT)

- c. Now, these verses need to be taken in context. At the very beginning of this letter, John emphatically states the he and the other disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus. They knew Him, they watched His miracles, they saw Him die, they saw where He was buried—and, finally, they were witnesses to his resurrection from the dead. They talked with Him, touched Him, smelled Him—Jesus really was God made flesh!

-What he's making clear is that the Good News of Jesus isn't based on philosophy. Theory. It's based on the **historical fact** that Jesus showed up, performed miracles, died and rose from the dead. There were hundreds of eyewitnesses—who were still alive as the accounts of his life were being written. And most of the immediate eyewitnesses' lives were transformed—and died with Jesus' name on their lips. The best explanation for all that happened is that God **really did** show up—and brought **life** with Him!

-John says something else that is critical: God doesn't lie. God doesn't mislead people ever—especially when it comes to relationships. **We** do that. Humans have been known to mislead people—fake love or friendship when they want something from them—but not God. If God says He loves you—and offers you life forever with Him and will never let you go, never turn you away—then He won't! God doesn't lie. That's why you can know that Jesus' offer of life is real. **Count on it!**

3. Now, what do you think people struggle with when we say something like, "I **know** that I've been given life and will live forever in Jesus' Kingdom." They think, **Wait! I KNOW YOU!** How many of you would say, "I am a **blatantly** imperfect person!" How many of you would say, "I'm not so bad—but this person next to me?? Not so sure!" Others look at us and think, "Wait a minute! I **know** what you're like! You don't deserve forgiveness and eternity more than anyone else! If you can make it to Heaven, **anyone** can!"

-And you know what? That's the **truth!** In fact, **that's the POINT!** If a thief hanging on the cross next to Jesus who'd spent his life hurting others can be welcomed to paradise—as Jesus said he would be later that day—why not us? Eternal life is based on pure grace—paid for with Jesus' blood—**not performance!** Paul, an early church leader, puts it like this:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT)

-Now, this is where it gets confusing among followers of Jesus. What if someone does a **grab and run** thing. Get Heaven...live like hell! I mean, the Bible does say things that can be taken two ways. It's clear that salvation can't be earned by **anyone**—you, me, or Mother Theresa; it's a gift based on Jesus giving His life for us. When we put our trust in Jesus, not ourselves, we are simply declared, **not guilty!** Forever!

-But it **also** says things like this:

Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:13 NLT)

- a. Genuine followers of Jesus have fallen into two extremes on this. One way could be put like this; "Just say this little prayer telling God you're sorry; if you do, you'll go to Heaven no matter what you do or how you live." That has **one** thing right; that eternal life isn't based on performance.

-But it misses repentance. Repentance doesn't just mean you feel bad that you got caught; it means rethinking **everything**—especially the way you've been going. And this attitude misses what Jesus said about being **born anew**. About how that when we receive Him—the Spirit of God transforms us the interior of our lives and makes all things new. John, the one who wrote that we can be assured of eternal life also said:

And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is. (1 John 3:5-6 NLT)

-This is **not** saying that if you belong to Jesus, you'll never sin; it **is** saying that if claim to live in Jesus—and there is no change in your life or your attitudes something is wrong. When you're in a relationship with someone—and you love them—why would you just continue to treat them like they don't matter?

- b. But the pendulum swings the other way, too into something I'm quite familiar with; the **holiness movement**. This was a reaction to two things going on among Christians of that era; 1) an institutional relationship with God—provided by and maintained by the church; 2) the teaching by some that since you're saved by faith, it doesn't matter how you live.

-They would say, "Oh yes it **does** matter how you live—because "...**those who are not holy will not see the Lord.**" In some circles, this got twisted to the point where they believed God was **already** majorly ticked and a person's salvation hung by a thread. To sin was to cut that thread!

-This devolved into all kinds of things people needed to do and things they needed to avoid so they could be connect with God and be separate from the world. This kind of thinking—and I'm giving you the simplistic cartoon version of it—tended to create two kinds of people: People who could be smug, judgmental, and self-righteous--and people who lived in terror that they would fail and be permanently rejected by God.

-In my opinion, to teach that salvation is a gift of God—but a gift we keep by our performance is **not** salvation by the grace of God—and I don't believe it for a minute.

4. There are a couple of images Jesus uses that contradict both of these extremes. Both are found in the Gospel written by John. The Jesus developed was that of a shepherd and his sheep. Sheep, to be honest, are dumb, lovable and vulnerable! Their main quest in life is the next clump of grass—even if it happens to be in front of a wolf! Sheep need a shepherd. David said in his most famous Psalm, **The Lord is my Shepherd...I have everything I need!** Jesus applies this to himself:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.”
(John 10:11-16 NLT)

- a. This speaks to this issue of **belonging**. Sheep know that their best friend in the fields is the shepherd. They feel safe when the shepherd is there. When the shepherd calls them—they listen, because they know it means safety, food, help. Jesus is clear here—that, like a Good Shepherd, he lays his life on the line for the sheep. **They belong to him!**

-Using this analogy, know what the **real** question is for someone who says they are a follower of Jesus? Do they actually **follow** Him? Do they **belong** to Him? Do they **trust** Him—what He says, where He leads them? Or is it more like, “I want what you can offer me—but I don't want you!”

-See, the main issue that broke our relationship with God was rebellion—this “No one is going to tell **me** what to do” attitude. Does it make sense for someone living in rebellion to then say, “However—I **do** want the peace, beauty, security and hope of living under your authority **after** I die!” Doesn't compute, does it?

-People who truly belong to Jesus **follow** Him.

- b. Jesus goes on to say these words:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.” (John 10:28-30 NLT)

-Notice what Jesus says here about those who belong to Him. It’s relational—not institutional—language. They *listen to his voice*. He *knows* them. They *follow* Him. Why would we follow Jesus? It’s because we have a loving relationship with Him; we *believe* that He loves us more than we could even love ourselves. It’s because we believe that Jesus is right about everything—that He’s *Lord*. It’s because we believe that following Him is the best way. We have this inner sense of *belonging*. Notice, then, what that means:

***I give them eternal life.** Remember, life is a gift.

***They will never perish.** Does the word *never* leave any openings? To the best of my knowledge, **NO!**

***NO ONE can snatch them away from me!** Think of this in sheep terms. Sheep have a lot of predators—because they’re kinda dumb—and very vulnerable. I mean, think about it—what’s a sheep going to do with a lion or a bear or a wolf after it—run faster? Bite back? They’re pretty much in the mutton category when it comes to predators. Jesus says, **No predators are going to take them down!** And He tells us why. The Father is engaged in this process—and **He** is the One who has placed them in Jesus care—and He’s more powerful than anyone. All this communicates one thing. When we humble our pride, choose to trust Jesus and follow Him—we are secure in His loving hands.

- c. So, quick quiz; Who belongs to Jesus in this way? Those who place themselves in his care as their Shepherd, their leader and caregiver; those who *listen* to—and recognize His voice; and those who *follow* Him.
- Now, does that mean that we just stay close to Him and never stray—and if we do, we’re toast? Of course not. We **do** stray. We **do** get ourselves in nasty situations and make dumb choices. People chose a **lot** of different shepherds; money, popularity, friends—but **Jesus** is the only Shepherd who comes looking for us! And I need to just ask you—**who’s your shepherd?** Who do you look to for leadership, for life, for peace, for meaning?

5. The Bible also uses the image of a **family** to describe who we are because of Jesus. Jesus was the One to introduce us to the Father—**Abba**—as He called Him. Jesus talked about this transformation of our hearts as being **born anew** or **born of the Spirit**. He puts it like this:

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God...Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ (John 3:3, 6-7 NLT)

- a. After Jesus death and resurrection, you see the **family** language all through the leaders who wrote about Him and about the church. People started calling each other, **brother** and **sister**. Paul, an early church leader and writer describes this Father/Child relationship:

**So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.
(Romans 8:15-17 NLT)**

-This clarifies the relationship we have with God, doesn’t it? When we choose Jesus—the Father adopts us as His very own children. In that process the Spirit of God comes to live within us to change us to look, love and live like Jesus. He also affirms to **our** spirit that we are God’s children.

-In the letter he wrote to the churches, John even identified different stages of development. Those how are mature; those who are young people—likely what we would call **youth**—and children.

- b. Now, think about this a little. Having a child or adopting a child is quite an ordeal. There’s **no** doubting who that child belongs to—once that happens. Babies are **cute, adorable, fun**—but are they easy? Of course not—they create messes, keep parents up at night. And, to be honest—and I say this confidentially—they are **self-centered!** But as tough as it gets—**we don’t kick them out of the family!**

-What do good parents do when the kid is learning to walk? The child toddles back and forth—then falls down. Would a good parent ever kick them around and say, “What’s **wrong** with you?!” No—that’s horrible! They pick them up—and cheer them on to try again. It’s a **long** process isn’t it—teaching them how to walk, feed themselves, do math, get along with friends, help out at home—move **out!**

- c. At what point does a child **cease** to be your child? For good parents—never. Some children do horrible things. Their parents are heartbroken—but don’t usually say, “That’s it! We’re disowning you!” Children run away—and their parents think about them, pray for them, hope for their return.

-How many of you think that **Abba**, the Heavenly Father, is less devoted, less patient than us? Does **He** kick his kids out of the family when they fail, goof up, hurt the family name? I wouldn’t want Abba as **my** Father if He worked that way.

- d. There are some things to know about being God’s child that are very important: *First, His intent is that we grow up. That we learn to feed ourselves. That we grow out of our teenage defiance against authority—you know, where everyone

else is wrong and we're right. And that we grow to the point of being able to spiritually reproduce.

*Second, there is such a thing as discipline. God loves us too much to just give us everything we want and let us grow soft and selfish. He has the power to bring us to a full and sudden stop—and sometimes, for redemptive reasons—He will!

*Third, one of the natural consequences of rebellion is a sense of having a broken or strained relationship. With the Spirit of God living in us, giving us both the will and the power to obey—to say “no” when we **need** to say “no” and “yes” when we **need** to say “yes”—defiance creates a strained relationship—and sometimes a sense of alienation. That doesn't mean that we've been rejected—it just means that we need to humble our pride and come home!

-The deal is, friends, we **are** free to rebel—as all children are. And that **does** take us into dangerous territory where **everything** is at risk. And we can experience terrible consequences—God doesn't put his children in a magic bubble! And in those times when we are ashamed and alienated—when we choose death rather than life—we may even give up on ourselves. But God **never** gives up on us! And He's with us—even there—longing to show us the way home.

6. I know it sounds a **lot** like I'm saying, “Man, once you're in—**you're in!** Even if you don't **want** to be in!” Even if you wreak havoc, deceive, lie, flip God off—and run the other direction!” Years ago, I met Rick and Cathy in this small town where I served—and in a short time they decided to follow Jesus. Then the next day, they asked me if I'd co-sign with them on a loan for a sports car. Their lives never changed. They continued to get drunk—party into the wee hours of the morning. Authorities found out that their two young children were getting both breakfast and lunch out of the garbage can—and they were removed from their home.

-If you were to ask them, “Are you born again believers?” my guess is that they would say, “Of course! Why, we prayed with Ken one day!” Do **I** think they are? No. Friends, there's some **mystery** to this belonging to Jesus—that I don't want to try to pin down to a stainless steel autopsy table. The Bible clearly calls us to **persevere** in our faith. To make our faith **sure**. Jesus said that there should be **fruit** to our lives—love, the fruit of the spirit. Jesus said that our attitude will change toward serving, loving and helping those in need. And He says this in his most quoted message:

“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’ (Matthew 7:21-23 NLT)

(Q & A)

7. How many of you, if you were honest about the interior of your hearts--**long** to be loved and accepted? To **belong**. Most people do. The most **amazing** truth on this planet is that the One who made **everything** has made it possible for you to **know—to KNOW**—that you belong to Him forever. That no matter what happens—you have crossed from death to life; you will **never** be condemned—and that the Holy Spirit lives in you as a guarantee of what's next.

-If this is new to you, there are some questions you will want to explore:

*First, is what the Bible teaches an accurate and true account of Who God is and what His mission here is all about? Can you and I really **count** on what it has to say? Is it **true?** Is what it says about Jesus, His words, His identity and his death and resurrection real? I've looked at the evidence—and I'm convinced that the Bible unparalleled in it's accuracy and truth. It's the Bible that tells us that we can **know** we have eternal life. By the way, if you don't have a Bible—we'd love to give you one!

*The second question is **much** more personal. Have you ever, in your life, humbled yourself before God, turned from yourself, turned from just living however you feel like living--and accepted His invitation to be adopted as His Child? If so, you don't have to live in uncertainty and fear. These words apply to you:

And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13 NLT)