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Words of Assurance

1 John 2.12-14

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

June 2, 2024

I. Introduction

- A. Mike Carey was the head basketball coach at WVU for the women's team for many years
 - 1. Before that he was the head basketball coach for the men's team at Salem University – another college in West Virginia
 - a. Near where Don's son and his family live
 - 2. Once someone asked Mike what was the difference between coaching the men's team and coaching the women's team
 - a. He said that if he went into the locker room and criticized the women's team, every member of the women's team thought that he was speaking directly to them
 - b. And he said that if he went into the locker room and criticized the men's team, everybody on the men's team thought he was talking about somebody else – one of the other guys on the team
- B. It's possible that we have the same reaction in our study of 1 John on these communion Sundays
 - 1. Is John talking about me?
 - a. Or is John talking about one of those other guys?
 - 2. The purpose of John in writing this epistle is so we would have assurance of our salvation
 - 3. **1 John 5:13 (ESV) —**
 - a. **13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.**
 - 4. That's what John wants for us
 - a. He wants us to know that we have eternal life
 - b. He wants those of us who believe in the name of Jesus to be assured of our salvation
 - 5. And yet, the way John has gone about it may have raised more questions about our own relationship with Christ
- C. I remember another story about Dr. John Gerstner – the former Professor of Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
 - 1. I told one in the last in this series about Dr. Gerstner; here's another one
 - 2. One of Dr. Gerstner's students back in the day was R.C. Sproul
 - a. And Sproul recounted the time that he invited Dr. Gerstner to preach in his church
 - b. And to preach a series of messages about the assurance of salvation

3. After Gerstner preached his series of messages, R.C.'s counseling load multiplied for the next two months!
 - a. Evidently, people weren't all that assured by Dr. Gerstner!
- D. Well, John, in this epistle really does want you to be assured of your salvation
 1. But in these rich chapters, he leads us through a series of tests
 - a. A series of assessments
 - b. So that we might see objectively whether we are genuine Christians
- E. **First test – lifestyle of holiness**
 1. That's a consistent pattern of walking in the light of Christ – not perfection
 2. **1 John 1:6–7** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
 - b. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- F. **Second test – obedience to the commands of Christ**
 1. **1 John 2:3–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
 - b. 4 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,
 - c. 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.
 - d. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
- G. **Third test – love**
 1. Love for our brothers in Christ
 2. **1 John 2:9–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.
 - b. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
 - c. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
- H. So what's John doing here?
 1. This apostle
 - a. This “apostle of love”
 - b. This apostle who so much wants you to be assured of your salvation
 - c. What's he up to?
 2. Well, he wants you to be sure of your salvation
 - a. But there's one thing worse than not having assurance of your salvation

- b. And that's to have a false sense of assurance
- 3. So he has to strip away our presumptions
 - a. He has to pull on the loose threads of the garments that we have created in our own minds to cover up those things that might indict us
 - b. He has to turn the light on in the dark recesses of our souls to reveal what might be separating us from God
- 4. And only when he does that, can we find real assurance
 - a. Only then can we have confidence in our walk with God

II. To the Genuine Christian

- A. But John's heart isn't to create doubt in the genuine believer in Jesus
 - 1. His heart is to create assurance
 - a. To give us the confidence that we belong to God
 - b. That we are His children
 - c. His children by faith in His Son
- B. I've found a similar experience in studying the scriptures in the book of Hebrews
 - 1. You might recall that one of the most challenging chapters in Hebrews is Chapter 6
 - a. That's the chapter that raises the issue of apostasy – that of falling away from a commitment to Christ
 - 2. That passage in Hebrews actually begins in Chapter 5
 - a. In which the author criticizes these Hebrew Christians for their immaturity
 - 3. **Hebrews 5:12–13** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.
 - b. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.
 - 4. Then he doubles down and raises the issue of apostasy
 - 5. **Hebrews 6:4–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,
 - b. 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,
 - c. 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.
 - 6. That ought to get your attention!
 - a. But again, the author of Hebrews is not interested in creating doubt
 - b. He follows that difficult passage with these words of assurance:
 - 7. **Hebrews 6:9–11** (ESV) —

- a. 9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.
 - b. 10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.
 - c. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end...
 - 8. The author of Hebrews doesn't want to leave these dear believers – these dear *Jewish* believers – hanging on the edge of a precipice of doubt
 - a. He wants them to have the full assurance of hope
- C. And that's essentially what John does in this next section of 1 John
 - 1. He's given us three objective tests
 - a. Test of a holy lifestyle
 - b. Test of obedience to the commands of Christ
 - c. Test of love of our brothers and sisters
 - 2. But then, with the tenderness of a Father who wants His children to know that He will never leave them as orphans or outcasts, he says this:
- D. **1 John 2:12–14** (ESV) —
 - 1. 12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.
 - 2. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.
 - 3. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.
 - 4. I write to you, children, because you know the Father.
 - 5. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.
 - 6. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
- E. “Here are the tests of assurance;”
 - 1. “But I'm confident that you are genuine children...”
 - 2. “Children of your heavenly Father.”
- F. “And here is the evidence; here is why I have such confidence that you belong to Christ.”
- G. A couple of issues of interpretation should be noted
 - 1. Because John speaks here in metaphors commentators don't always agree on what groups of believers John is writing about here
 - 2. These are metaphors
 - a. John clearly does not mean children, fathers and young men in the purely chronological sense
 - b. That this is not a lesson in human developmental
 - c. That he's not talking about believers who are still in grade school; or youngsters who are adolescents or young adults; or fathers who are headed into retirement
 - 3. It might be easy to come that conclusion
 - a. I heard someone once say that there are three stages of adulthood

- K. The second issue of interpretation has to do with the structure of the passage
 - 1. In a sense, this is pretty typical of Hebrew poetry – there is parallelism and repetition in this passage
 - 2. Each of the three categories is addressed twice
 - a. There are two messages for children
 - b. There are two messages for fathers
 - c. And there are two messages for young men
 - 3. And in addition to that repetition, there is a kind of synthetic parallelism
 - a. Synthetic parallelism is when a statement is made, and then a corresponding statement then elaborates or explains the initial proposition
 - 4. So, as we begin to unfold the text, we'll see how that applies and helps us to understand what John is saying
- L. But – bottom line – in every case, John is saying, “I’m really writing to you who are genuine believers in Jesus”
 - 1. You’ve passed the tests
 - a. Not tests of perfection
 - b. But assessments revealing that God is in fact at work in your life
 - 2. And you do belong to your heavenly Father
 - 3. These are words of assurance

III. To the Children (the Baby Saint)

- A. There are two statements made to the children
 - 1. Who I take to mean those who are early in their walk with Christ – young Christians
 - 2. At the same time, if they apply to the young in the faith, the baby saints, they apply to us all
 - a. Because that’s where we all started this journey of faith
- B. **1 John 2:12** (ESV) —
 - 1. 12 I am writing to you, little children,
 - 2. because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.
- C. **1 John 2:13** (ESV) —
 - 1. 13 ... I write to you, children,
 - 2. because you know the Father.
- D. So two dimensions of the new believers relationship with God are mentioned
 - 1. Your sins are forgiven
 - 2. And you know that Father
- E. Forgiveness of sins is where we all begin, isn’t it?
 - 1. You cannot be a genuine Christian unless you come to the end of yourself, recognize that God is altogether righteous and holy, that we are not
 - a. That we have no righteousness of our own
 - 2. That our sins flow from a nature of sinfulness
 - a. That our sins overwhelm us
 - b. That we can do nothing ourselves to atone for our sins
 - 3. That only God can forgive us of our sins

- a. And only He can do that by the finished work of Jesus Christ
 - b. By His life of righteousness
 - c. By His death in paying the just punishment of our sins on our behalf
- 4. And that only by faith in Jesus does God impute – or account – our sins to Christ and His righteousness to our account
- F. And we are forgiven **“for his name’s sake”**
 - 1. Our forgiveness is through the name of Christ
 - a. In Christ alone are we forgiven
 - b. We are not forgiven by Christ plus anything else
 - c. Not Christ plus our own contribution of righteous acts – our righteous acts are as filthy rags
 - d. Not Christ plus our religious activities
 - e. Not Christ plus our church membership
 - f. Not Christ plus our family legacy of Christianity
 - 2. No, our forgiveness is in the name of Christ
 - a. By Christ alone
 - b. By faith in Christ alone
- G. That’s one of the reasons why our mission of TVC is **“building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in Jesus Christ”**
 - 1. Forgiveness is one of our chief concerns
 - a. And unless we cast ourselves on Christ alone and trust His life, death and resurrection for our salvation, we are lost
 - b. We might be good people from the world’s perspective
 - c. Even the best
 - d. But we are lost apart from Christ
 - 2. **Acts 4:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- H. And the second statement flows from the first
 - 1. “I write to you, children, because you know the Father.”
 - 2. By coming to faith in Jesus, by trusting in Him alone, we are adopted into the family of God
 - a. We now have a heavenly Father
 - b. A Father who welcomes us into, not just His kingdom, but into His family
 - 3. **Romans 8:14–16** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
 - b. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
 - c. but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”
 - d. 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...
- I. Even if you’ve just become a Christian, you’ve passed the test

1. And now know for sure that your sins are forgiven
 - a. And that you are adopted into God's family
- J. And even if you came into this relationship with God through Christ many years ago
 1. You can know the certainty today of your forgiveness
 - a. And you can know that you are loved by your heavenly Father
- K. We gather around this table – it is a family table
 1. And the table is set
 - a. Not by the deaconesses – although they have done their part for which we are thankful!
 - b. Not by the servers – though we appreciate their ministry
 2. The table is set by the Father and the Son
 - a. And by the Spirit, who communicates with our spirits that we are children of God
 3. When we receive these elements we take them together as a family
 - a. As those who are His children
 - b. Whether little children or big children
 - c. We are a family
 4. We receive the body and blood of Christ – the representation of His life, death and resurrection
- L. O, little children
 1. Your sins are forgiven for his name's sake
 2. And you know that Father

IV. **To the Fathers (the Seasoned Saint)**

- A. Next in our text are the fathers
 1. These, of course, are not just male heads of households
 - a. These are men and women who have the experience of walking with Christ over many years
 2. Spiritually, they are fathers
- B. These are those who have been with Jesus for decades
 1. And they have been through the challenges of life
 - a. And they have had to not just study the Word of God
 - b. They've had to apply the Word of God
 2. And they have found God sufficient in every dimension of life
 - a. In family life
 - b. In relationships
 - c. In work
 - d. In sickness and health
 - e. For better or worse
 3. **Psalm 54:7 (ESV)** — 7 For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.
- C. I learned very early on in my life to treasure these seasoned saints
 1. It's easy to be influence in the Christian life by the next new shiny thing
 - a. Or even the next energetic, enthusiastic, vocal advocate

- b. Who bursts onto the stage of church life
 - c. Gathering a following; generating excitement
 - 2. But you know, you can pick who you want to emulate
 - a. And you can look beyond the outward and the exciting
 - b. And discover the depth of experience in the seasoned saints
 - c. And decide that those are the ones that you'll look up to
 - d. Those are the ones who, when they speak, finally speak, you listen carefully
 - 3. Back in 1989 when we were in the Morgantown, WV church, I was in the midst of the Ministerial Study Program of the C&MA – preparing for pastoral ministry
 - a. We had a pastoral transition
 - b. We were searching for a new Senior Pastor
 - c. And the church asked me to be the interim preaching pastor
 - d. That was quite a step for me
 - e. But I sensed the call of God in it and accepted
 - f. I ended up in that role for 8 months, doing the bulk of the preaching
 - 4. And when that happened, and it was made known to the congregation, I found two seasoned saints, two elders in the church
 - a. Elders in every sense of the word – held the office of elder, plus we really elders in the “elderly” sense
 - b. I remember them clearly; I had observed their lives for nearly a decade
 - c. They exemplified what it meant to walk with God faithfully over the long haul
 - 5. Walter McKinney and Alvie Squires
 - a. I went to them and I said, “I want you both to know that if ever I need to be corrected or admonished in anything, I want you to have the freedom to tell me what I need to know or what I need to do”
 - b. They said to me, “We appreciate that; but we’d have told you anyway, whether you asked us or not.”
- D. Now we have a few of those seasoned saints around here
 - 1. But again – age alone is not the issue
 - a. Experience with God over the long haul is the issue
 - 2. And what does the text say to these “fathers”?
 - a. Well, in this case, in both repetitions, it says the same thing
 - 3. **1 John 2:13** (ESV) —
 - a. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. ...
 - 4. **1 John 2:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. ...
 - 5. “Because you know him who is from the beginning”
- E. The goal of the Christian life is to know God and Christ

1. In fact, that's the way Jesus defined eternal life
 2. **John 17:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
 3. And Jesus is the One who was from the beginning
 4. **John 1:1** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- F. What is it that is unique in this encouragement to the fathers that is not included in the similar statement to children?
1. Children: "I write to you, children, because you know the Father."
 2. Fathers: "I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning."
 3. Those who are fathers – those who have walked with God over decades – have learned something about the eternity of God
 - a. The enduring faithfulness of God
 - b. That Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever.
(Hebrews 13.8)
 4. And so the seasoned saints have the capacity to trust in this eternal God
 - a. Because they know He is faithful
 - b. That He will never leave them or forsake them
 5. And they have learned this – not only from reading the Word
 - a. They've learned this by experience
- V. **To the Young Men (the Tested Saint)**
- A. Finally, the young men
 1. Which I've called the tested Saint
 2. The lengthiest and most complex set of assurances are given to them
 - B. **1 John 2:13** (ESV) —
 1. 13 ... I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.;;;
 - C. **1 John 2:14** (ESV) —
 1. 14 ... I write to you, young men,
 2. because you are strong,
 3. and the word of God abides in you,
 4. and you have overcome the evil one.
 - D. The "young men" – of course, it's not just talking about men, but women also
 1. Are those are in the midst of the chief challenges of life
 - a. Those with the most responsibility to care for self, family and church
 - b. Those with the most capacity – physically and mentally – to fight the good fight of faith
 2. Again – there is no direct correlation with age
 - a. While we have plenty of seasoned saints

- b. There are still many in our midst who have the energy and capacity for ministry
- E. John says to these “young men” that they are strong
 - 1. Of course, we think in terms of age we immediately think of strength
 - a. We struggle at our age to do certain things and we think, “Oh, to be young again!”
 - b. We stand up at the first tee and hit the ball 150 yards; and we say, I used to be able to hit it 250 yards
 - c. Because the young are strong
 - 2. But that’s not what John means; he talking about spiritual strength
 - a. They have the strength, not to hit golf balls or to lift boxes
 - b. They have the spiritual strength to withstand the onslaught of satanic attacks
- F. Now why are they strong?
 - 1. John tells us why
 - 2. “... the word of God abides in you”
 - 3. These are those who have studied the Word of God
 - a. Studied it in small groups or in Bible studies
 - b. But certainly studied it in personal devotions – like we do together in Study with the Pastor
 - 4. And the Word is applied – because it abides in us
 - a. So when push comes to shove, we have the Word of Christ at our disposal
 - b. Memorized maybe; but even when not memorized, we know its substance
 - c. And can act with confidence when the temptations come, when life throws its challenges our way
- G. And then finally, John tells us the result of our being strong in the Word
 - 1. “And you have overcome the evil one.”
 - 2. This is his point of emphasis – it’s repeated in each element of the pair
 - a. So that for those at this stage of spiritual development, we have experienced victory
 - 3. That doesn’t mean that we haven’t had our defeats
 - a. But it does mean that we’ve learned from them
 - b. Applied the word of God to them
 - c. And then surprised the enemy of our souls the next time he tries his seductions and deceptions
 - d. And we’ve been able to send him packing

VI. Conclusion

- A. These are all wonderful words of assurance from one of our spiritual fathers – the apostle John
 - 1. Spoken to genuine believers
 - 2. Tender words
 - a. To all of us

- b. At whatever stage of life; whatever part of our journeys
- B. Sins forgiven
 - 1. Knowing the Father, having been adopted into His family
- C. Gaining a sense of faithful, eternal, Father who will never leave us or forsake us
 - 1. Growing in strength
 - a. Abiding in the Word of God
 - 2. Overcoming the enemy of our souls
- D. If you really do trust Jesus alone for your salvation
 - 1. This is who you are
 - a. Who you have been
 - b. Who you will be