



That you may KNOW (1 John 5:1-15)

Insurance. We all have it in some form or another. Life Assurance, Home Insurance, Car Insurance, Personal Accident Insurance. Why? Because if something was to go wrong we need help to pay the bills.

In fact we “hedge our bets” in lots of ways in life. We have extra food put by in winter – just in case we get heavy snow. Or perhaps we get in some extra candles or in my case we have extra wood and coal for the fire. So insurance is quite a natural thing.

For many people, it's exactly the same with faith – and unfortunately the church of God has become polluted by that kind of thinking. It goes something like this. People are not sure whether there is anything “beyond” so just in case there is, they become adherents to Christianity in some form or another as an insurance policy. The insurance policy even has a name – Pascal's Wager – after the famous French philosopher Blaise Pascal. His argument for believing in God was that it was probably the best bet! We trust in Christ, we perform all the necessities (or so we think) of the Christian faith just in case it happens to be correct. We're not sure it's correct but it's our insurance policy: it's the best bet.

Are you sure of your faith? If you died tonight, would you be SURE you were going to heaven? You may be familiar with that question if you filled in the survey. Many answered yes, but some answered no or just didn't fill it in. Whether you were sure once and now you're not so sure, or were never sure: if you could not say yes to that question, then you are playing Pascal's Wager – you're here doing all this in the hope that somehow this will get you eternal life – but you're not sure. But your belief looks like the best bet. You may not like me putting it like that, but for people who lack assurance of salvation, that's about the measure of it. Worse, we may attest to being sure, but as Christians we struggle through our faith as though we don't. So each time we have problems in life, we have a crisis of faith.

Christians unsure of their faith often have other problems too. Some become very legalistic, trying to live as pure a possible life in the hope of pleasing God. They may get heavily involved in the church so they can please God. The other reaction is the reverse and will manifest itself in a lack of commitment. After all Jesus and the Christian faith is only bet value and they just get on with more important things in life. Either way, lack of assurance leads to a sense of imperfection and failure. It creates Christians and church fellowships with a sense of failure.

What is the Bible's answer? God doesn't believe in insurance policies – he's all-knowing and so doesn't need them! And when it comes to matters of faith, we shouldn't need them either! We read 1 John 5:13 - these things are written that you may KNOW you have eternal life. It's about being SURE. Christianity is not about Pascal's wager. It involves certainties. Another favourite verse of mine is Hebrews 11:1 which has the same sentiment *11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Faith is about being sure, being certain.*

If you are not sure and certain of your faith this morning then you are not sure and certain about the power and the promises of God – and it will blight your Christian life. Do we want to see victory in our lives as believers? Do we want to see an end to the feeling of depression on decline I know many of us are feeling as we've seen things start to come undone in 2005?

Then it's going to start with an assurance that we have in a Saviour who saves to the uttermost. A Saviour who brings eternal life. A Saviour who brings life into our mortal bodies. A Saviour who speaks into our lives. A Saviour who transforms people's lives. A Saviour who does the miraculous still. A Saviour who fills us with His Spirit. A Saviour who transforms whole communities. A Saviour who transforms us. A Saviour who transforms our fellowship. As we grasp the enormity of this, we find it empowering and life changing as we enter into a deeper communion with Him.

Is that your Saviour? Or is he one you're not sure about? What does John say? **13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.**

What does it mean to believe? Lots of people believe things – the world is flat. Some people believe that it is a kind of personal thing. But the word John uses and which the NT uses is *pisteuo* 1) **to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence; to trust in Jesus or God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something; saving faith; to entrust or be entrusted with.** What that means is that believing in 1 John 5:13 isn't about just thinking that something might be true, but placing one's whole trust in something. Remember last weeks verse? *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in His should not perish but have everlasting life.* That's a promise of God. If you have a problem with that, then you have a problem with the promises of God.

I love roller coasters. They are designed to do all sorts of things to you. They are designed to make you afraid. But in truth, you put your trust in them and get the thrill because you know that modern coasters are built to rigorous standards and even if it comes to a halt upside down, you will not come to harm.

That's the nature of having faith in Christ. If you believe in Him, you place yourself in His hands, trusting that the promises of God – your manufacturer – are completely true. It's saving faith and you rest in it not in anything of yourself and your own works. And it will make a difference in how you face the world.

Belief that isn't saving faith is big blight on lives and our church. We believe Jesus is the Son of God. In one sense that's good, but the devil believes too. What's the difference? The devil acts on what he hears because he seriously believes it's true. What does he do? He shudders!! We believe in our heads but not our hearts so we rely on our works, our folk Christianity or our own wisdom and not Jesus. Saving faith is trusting in Christ alone.



What happens when we believe: we trust, we know. It should transform us as we realize God has given us His Spirit to be a life-transforming people. Because there is no-one that can stop the purposes of God, and no-one who can destroy us. I saw an interview with Terry Waite the other day. He said that it sounds trite now but when his captors threatened him he said something along the lines that you can take away my freedom, you can take away my dignity, you can murder me, but you never can destroy me. That's assurance of eternal life speaking.

So how do we know apart from God's written word that we have eternal life? Let's see what John says:

- You overcome the world when you believe Jesus is the son of God

4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. If you are struggling in life, then who are you trusting in this morning? If it's Jesus, then He's in control so commit yourself to Him and trust in His ways, however bizarre that may seem. You've seen so many things happen in the past where you took the world on and won with God's help. You know that. So whatever may have happened since, you have that testimony and you know it's true. So God's promises are true and I have eternal life.

- You have the promises of God bearing testimony in you.

You believe the testimony that God has placed within you by His Spirit
9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

If you are a believer this morning, then the testimony of God is already within you. Reflect on what God has done in your life and you'll see He's there and you can trust Him. How quickly we forget who Jesus is to us when the going gets tough. We might have been filled with assurance years ago. But are we getting old and cynical. Then look at yourself this morning and see Him in your life and start trusting Him again. Come on, you know it's true. Your inner testimony tells you that. So God's promises are true and I have eternal life.

- You know God answers prayer

When you pray, things happen. *14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.* We have a God who answers prayer. We know because He's done that in our life before. Maybe we have problems with unanswered prayer now. Apart from the fact that no is a valid answer, our prayer is often not believing prayer. It's Pascal Wager prayer. We fire it off in the hope that God will somehow answer. It's a bet. But are we trusting? Have we sought our things with God. One of the really good thing that has come out of our re-establishment of weekly prayer meetings has been the notion that we wait for God to speak to us. Want answers? Wait for Him to talk first. It's very enlightening. God answers prayer. I see His power in my life and the lives of others and I know His promises are true and I have eternal life.

And John looks at these three testimonies in our lives and says *13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* No assurance this morning even though you say you have believed. Get real. If you've seen God's presence and power in your life in the way John describes, then claim the promises of God. You know you have eternal life because if He wasn't present in your life then you wouldn't be a Christian. If you are, then you have eternal life. Simple as that.

So are you a believer this morning? Have you believed that Jesus is the Son of God and what He has done has dealt with your sin and is sufficient to save you to the uttermost? Then you have the promises of God and you should have no problems with assurance of faith because you will have in you the seeds of that knowledge – the ability to overcome the world, the inner testimony of God and the testimony of answered prayer in your life – even if you are not feeling like any of these right now.

Let me give you an old favourite quote: *Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* If you are trusting Jesus this morning, then you are not condemned, but you are His. Let me give you another old favourite from *Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If we are believers this morning, then we have these promises. You're His for eternity. If your trust in Him has waned, then be assured - His commitment to you hasn't. Yet He is the Saviour who dealt with your sins when you first trusted and deals with your sins now so that because of your faith, you can take these promises afresh and be sure.

This morning we are going to re-affirm our faith as we come around the Lord's table, Maybe this is a time that you need to claim afresh the promises of God.

If you are sure, then you can re-affirm your assurance.
If you haven't been sure, then claim God's promises and affirm His testimony in your life this morning and claim that assurance.

And as a church I believe it is a key to change. What's the main difference between us and some of our growing neighbours? I'll tell you. They actually believe. They actively rely on the power of God to transform them and transform their communities. And they live as they act, allowing God's Holy Spirit to use them as a church. It all falls to a certainty of who Jesus is, what He has done, but most of all the assurance of what He has done in their lives. And that's the difference that God can make here in this fellowship.

So let's affirm our assurance this morning and ask God to give us the power to live according to His promises.



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