

As a kid I was made to go to church, as were some of you. Sunday morning, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, revival services...you name it I was in church. And while it was the same 30-40 people every single week, we regular heard the pastor call us to confess our sins and accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior.

If no one went up...we would sing the hymn *Just as I Am* about a million times. I swear some of the board members would go to the altar just to put us all out of our misery!

But I can't tell you how many times I would sit there, wrestling with myself about my salvation. About midway through my teenage years I would walk away from my faith for awhile, but for a good part of my adolescence and early teenage years...I was seeking. I wanted to be saved. I said the sinner's prayer. I would say it every time the pastor led us in it, "just to be on the safe side." I would regularly go to the altar either at the closing invitation or during the altar time in the middle of the service. I figured maybe, by going to the altar in the middle of the service, I could avoid the guilt feelings.

As I have spent more time in the church and around Christians I realized...I wasn't the only one having these issues. I wasn't surprised to see this question asked..."How do I know if I'm really saved?"

Our message series, Got Questions? is the result of some very real questions that you have. You posed these questions. As we work through this material, I want you to do more than just sit and listen. I encourage you to go read the Bible, search the Internet, read some good theology about the questions you are asking. And don't just read stuff from people you already like and agree with...find some alternative view points that force you to think outside of your comfort zone.

When we ask the question, "How do I know if I'm really saved?" we are also asking a much deeper, more theological question, "What is salvation?" And this can be a more challenging question to answer than you might think. So this morning we are going to talk a little bit about the root causes of our question, "How do I know if I'm really saved?" and then touch a bit on "What is salvation?"

So why do we even ask the question, "How do i know if I'm really saved?"

There are several reasons:

We have sin in our lives.

A big part of the reason we ask this question is because we have unconfessed sin in our lives, and we know, deep down, it is hurting our relationship God. Sometimes the sin is known is known to us, and we have been ignoring or excusing it for a long time. I have seen people get mad at the church and Christians, use all kinds of excuses and blame them of guilt tripping them and various others things...but when it boiled down to it... they had sin in their lives and felt guilty.

When I was in high school, I went to Dayton Christian. They required us to be in chapel 2 times a week, I think it was. And there was this one speaker they brought in on a

regular basis. I hated him. I tried to get sick whenever I knew he was coming in... because he had a way of presenting the Bible and God's call to salvation that created all kinds of conviction in my life.

He wasn't a jerk. He wasn't unloving. He didn't guilt people. He simply present God's love and forgiveness and a call to turn from sin, and God used his words in a powerful way...and I hated him.

As a Christian, unconfessed sin blocks our relationship with God. When we allow sin to creep into our lives, go unconfessed and unforgiven...it will cause doubts in our lives and hinder our spiritual growth and relationship with God.

1 John 1:5-10 says,

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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, purifies us from all sin.

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

At regular times in my life I say this simple prayer, "God, is there any sin in my life that separates me from you?" At times, God has remained silent. At other times, God has spoken very clearly about an area of my life that I need to confess to Him and turn from.

God's desire is a deeper relationship, and sin will create doubt and separation in our relationship.

We are fighting a spiritual enemy.

Many people have some mixed up views about the spiritual realm. They believe in demons but not angels. They believe in angels but not demons. They credit the demonic with too much power or they fail to recognize the dark forces in our world actually have power in our world.

Sometimes when we ask the question, "How do I know if I'm saved?" it isn't because we have sin in our lives, but rather because we are battling an enemy who's sole desire is to shipwreck our faith. And one of the best ways to do that is to cause doubt in our minds about the reality of what we have experienced.

Ephesians 6:12 is the classic verse here,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm

You and I are facing down a very real, spiritually dark enemy. If he can trip you up, distract you, cause doubt in your life...he has kept you from fully experiencing what God wants to do in your life.

John 10:10 says,

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

God's intention is to fill you with overflowing life. The enemy, the thief want to steal, kill, and destroy the work of God in your life...

Another reason we ask the question...

We have emotional fluctuations.

Doubts are a natural part of the process of life. There is an ebb and flow to all of life. We have high moments and we have low moments. There are good times when it is easy to believe and difficult times when it is harder to believe and sense the presence of God in our lives...so it is natural to have feelings of doubt and emotional fluctuations that cause us to question.

Maybe, the root of your questioning is not a spiritual problem at all or the result of an enemy attack, but the natural result of too little sleep, a low emotional time in your life, a series of emotional hits due to tragedy, or a bad diet and lack of vitamins.

I have found that I struggle with doubts and depression more when I'm not taking care of myself...exercising, eating right, sleeping, reading, and resting...

We like to believe we compartmentalize, but our spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical are all connected in a symbiotic relationship where each part affects the other parts. Connected to this emotional fluctuation...Maybe we ask the question because

We haven't had a certain "experience."

Sometimes what gets in the way is we think salvation should look a particular way. As a kid sitting in church I would listen to testimonies by other Christians and think, "I never felt like that!" "When I got saved I felt no compulsion to run the aisles of the church like Bro. or Sister So-and-So!" So I must not be saved.

Each and everyone of us is a different person. When some of you get excited everyone in the world knows it...you shout and cheer and jump up and down. Others of you can hear that you just won the lottery and give nothing more than a shrug and a "Cool!"

We cannot compare our external spiritual experiences to the spiritual experiences of others. Maybe the doubts are there because you are seeking after a particular experience. You want God to write big letters in the sky...or send you some miraculous feeling...or who knows...and while those things may happen...God is work in response to an authentic heart...whether you have a big emotional experience or not.

We have fear.

I went to the altar on a regular basis because I was scared to death of Hell. I didn't want to go there, and I was going to make sure I didn't by confessing and inviting Jesus into my life at every moment.

What I discovered is that my fear was its own form of selfishness. I wasn't really seeking after Jesus I was trying to save my own butt...and in a weird twist...that motive was completely contrary to the message of the Gospel.

1 John 4:16-18

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Fear reveals our lack of trust in God. When you and I learn to rest in the grace of God, we discover there is no need to fear. We may not always get it right, but God is one our side. If we keep moving toward God, He keeps moving toward us. If we turn away from Him...He keeps pursuing.

As a personal belief, I think we can turn our backs on God and leave our salvation. He allows us to choose to respond to Him and He allows us to choose to walk away. BUT I don't believe God stops pursuing us and desiring a relationship with us.

So if you and I are seeking after God...He will be found. Our fear of being left out or being sent to Hell...or whatever fear prompts this question...it is not God's desire for us.

We are convinced of self-reliance.

Radical independence and self-reliance are two of the hardest things to get over in terms of our Christian faith. We are part of a culture where our poets and singers proclaim, "I did it my way!" Where we DIY everything. So when it comes to our faith it is hard to sit back and be told, "You cannot earn or deserve this!"

So we try doing good deeds, praying, reading our Bibles, going to church...all as a way to earn it. And we will ask, "How do I know if I'm saved?" because we want to know how much we have to do to be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

As Americans, we have trouble with the idea that we cannot work harder or do more to get our salvation. Even after turning our lives over to Jesus we often ask, "Am I doing

enough?" And the answer is not whether we are doing enough, but whether we are moving in the right direction...

When we ask, "How do I know I am saved?" we are really asking,

"What is salvation?"

When I was in seminary I took several classes in evangelism. We were taught a method, that at first, seemed like a great way to go about things. We always started with the question, "Do you know for certain that if you were to die tonight that you would spend eternity with God in heaven?" Then, when the person expressed doubt, we would lead them through a step-by-step approach that was meant to culminate in a conversion.

But the more I did this form of evangelism, the more I had problems with it. I think we need a structure and approach for sharing our faith, but this was more sales technique than Gospel. I mean practically everyone responded to the question with, "I'm not certain where I would go!"

And in some ways the process made things worse by playing on that fear and insecurity.

So how can I know I'm saved.

Matthew 4:18-20

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

When Jesus called the disciple along the shore, he simply said, "Come follow me."

Most of our is caused by bad theology and poor Scripture interpretation. It begins with a paradigm of being either in or out of salvation.

Most of us think of salvation as either you are in or you are out. Either you are a Christian or you are not. So we try to define what that line is...what is the line that makes a person a Christian? Is it how they act? Is it whether or not they have said the right prayer? Whether or not they have the right theology?

A few years ago I came across a very helpful explanation. It is a mathematical theory called Bounded vs Centered Sets.

Bounded Sets say there is a line that defines a certain set, and something is either inside or outside.

But for us as Christians, bounded set thinking has complicated things. Jesus says in Matthew 21:3, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."

The Pharisees were solid moral citizens, and yet they were far from the Kingdom. Their theology was better. They had done all the requirements expected of a follower of God...and yet, they are outside of the Kingdom.

That is where Centered Set helps us. Salvation is less about in and out, and more about direction of travel. Either you are moving toward Christ or you are not.

Let me give you an example from Scripture...

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

In the original Greek, John uses the word "believing" as something that happened in the past, but has continuing implications. You wouldn't necessarily know the full extent of that from the passage. In fact, I found no translation of the Bible that translates this in the proper tense...probably because it is so wordy to translate properly...and most have made an interpretative decision for you...So let's do a more direct translation....

The one who is believing in the Son has the life of the ages, but the one who is not obeying the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God abide on him.

This is essential to properly understanding our salvation...Our belief is not a one and done thing. There must come a point in our lives when we believe in Jesus Christ, but we are also to be constantly in the midst of believing. So while the day you turned your life over to Jesus is an important and transformative day, the real question is Are you believing in Jesus now?

Is your belief up-to-date?

And tied very closely to this is the idea of obedience. See our belief makes a difference in our life. We have all met the "Christian" who can name the day and time they were "saved." Maybe they said the Sinners Prayer as a kid at VBS. Maybe they were a teenager at a summer camp. Or they had a memorable point in their lives where they said the prayer and invited Jesus into their lives...the problem is they live their life as though it has made no difference whatsoever.

So it is interesting here, that John ties "belief" with "obedience," and puts them both in the present tense.

See we are called to be believing in Jesus and obeying His words.

Conclusion

So how do we know we are saved?

There are several questions that we should be able to answer:

Am I following the person of Jesus Christ in my life?

Am I obeying the words of Jesus Christ in my life?