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Bridgeway Church
Kept for Jesus Christ #1

Sermon Summary #1

How Deep the Father's Love for Us! John 6:35-44; 10:27-30

Many of you live with deep-seated anxiety about eternity, an anxiety that occasionally degenerates into outright fear. "Am I *really* saved? I *think* I'm saved. I *hope* I'm saved. But these doubts are driving me insane. What if I sin again today, just like I did yesterday and the day before that? Will I eventually cross the point of no return? Will God, at some point, cease to love me and just give up on me?"

Some of you live confidently in the assurance of your salvation. You're even happy and joyful about it. Others, who aren't saved, are persuaded they are. Their so-called "assurance" is little more than presumption and arrogance. What are we to make of this, and what does the Bible say about it?

Let's begin with a hypothetical case, but one that most of us have seen in real life in someone we know or perhaps even a close family member. We'll call our lead character, *Charley*.

Charley was born into a Christian family. His parents were devout followers of Jesus, and both of his siblings, an older brother and younger sister, came to faith in Christ and remained vibrant and deeply committed to him throughout their lives.

Charley was raised in the church and was usually present whenever the doors were open, whether at a Sunday service, a youth meeting, special events throughout the week, or a summer retreat. When he turned 12 he professed faith in Jesus, largely through the influence of his parents and older brother. He was baptized soon thereafter and was discipled by his youth pastor over the course of the next few years. Charley's "faith" appeared to be quite vibrant and joyful. He endured the same trials and temptations as do virtually all teen-aged boys, but he never wandered far or failed to repent when he sinned. He prayed every day and read his Bible and was growing in his understanding of God.

Following graduation from high school, he fell in with a different group of friends at college. They challenged his faith and insisted that he was being naïve to believe in Jesus. The arguments they regularly threw in his face were fairly typical:

Only ignorant and uneducated people believe that Jesus was really born of a virgin and rose physically from the dead.

Evolution is a proven scientific fact and makes the existence of God unnecessary.

If there is really an all-powerful and good God in charge of the universe, why is there so much evil and injustice?

And if you keep this "faith" that you obviously inherited from your parents, you'll never be able to drink and sleep around and experience the really fun stuff in life.

It wasn't long before Charley stopped attending church and eventually declared himself to be an atheist. He gradually displayed an anger at the "institutional" church and a deep resentment toward those who influenced him while growing up, having become convinced that they hid the truth from him and only wanted to control his life.

Charley is now 30, already twice divorced, an alcoholic, and painfully bitter and unpleasant to be around. He wants nothing ever again to do with Christianity.

So what's up with Charley? What happened?

Without getting too technical, it's important that you understand how Christians from various traditions and denominations explain this.

(1) The majority of those who identify with the Nazarene, Methodist, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, and Free-Will Baptist traditions, among others, insist that Charley was genuinely born again at the age of 12. He truly trusted Christ and was truly saved. He was justified or declared righteous in the sight of God. He became an adopted son of God and was forgiven all his sins. The Holy Spirit came to indwell Charley and to empower him for godly living. But through a variety of factors and for a whole host of reasons, Charley willfully repudiated everything he once affirmed, denied his faith, and *apostatized*. Notwithstanding all that friends, family, and even God himself could do to persuade him to stay true to Christ, he walked away in denial of the Lord he once embraced. ***Charley forfeited his salvation. He is now, at the age of 30, a child of the Devil and headed for eternal condemnation, cut off from Christ.***

Although no one really likes to be labeled, we will call people who embrace this view, *Arminians*, named after the late 16th and early 17th century Dutch theologian, James Arminius. Be it noted, however, that not all Arminians deny the eternal security of the believer. More on this later in our series.

(2) There is another view that most of you have probably never encountered. People who embrace it come from a wide variety of backgrounds, some Southern Baptist and others from what we might call Bible churches. They insist that once Charley was truly saved, he was forever saved. Even though he walked away from faith and repudiated Jesus, he is still safely secure in the arms of his heavenly Father and will, ***regardless of how he lives and dies***, end up in heaven for eternity. Charley *ought* to have walked in obedience and faithfulness, and we *should* encourage him to do so. But he doesn't have to. If he chooses to live a life in unbelief and immorality, he is still saved.

However, whereas he doesn't lose his salvation, his denial of Jesus and his sinful behavior will lead to the ***loss of rewards in heaven***. Those blessings in the age to come that he might otherwise have enjoyed, he forfeits because of his earthly sinful choices. He gets into the eternal kingdom of God, but he will not experience the joy of knowing his heavenly Father's approval and he will suffer the loss of rewards that other, more faithful Christians, will receive.

Although this view is not found exclusively within any particular denomination or tradition, it has come to be known by many of its critics as *Antinomianism*. Now, please understand, those who advocate this view would *never* call themselves Antinomians. The term Antinomian comes from two Greek words that mean "against the law." It has often been used to describe those who say that whereas you ought to obey the principles and moral laws of the Scriptures, if you don't you won't lose your salvation. You'll only lose your reward. In other words, you *should persevere* in holiness of life, but if you don't you're still a child of God.

Thus, these whom I'm calling Antinomians, argue that if you are "once saved," you are "always saved," ***regardless*** of how you live or what you believe after you initially come to saving faith in Jesus. As I said, some, but not all, Southern Baptists believe this.

(3) Finally, there are those who typically come from Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, and other traditions associated with what is known as *Calvinism* or the Reformed faith who look at Charley and draw one of two conclusions. Now remember: Arminians insist Charley was truly saved and lost his salvation. Antimonians insist Charley was truly saved and will likely lose his reward, but will be eternally saved.

Calvinists or those of the Reformed faith (because associated closely with the Protestant Reformation and its leaders Martin Luther and John Calvin), interpret Charley's experience in one of two ways:

First, some would argue that if Charley was truly saved at the age of 12, he is still saved at the age of 30, and will eventually come to his senses and return to the Lord. This may come only after enduring severe discipline from his heavenly Father, but eventually God will bring him back. In some cases, people like Charley are disciplined straightway into heaven. That is to say, the discipline of the Lord results in their physical death. They die prematurely, under the discipline of God, but they are saved eternally.

Second, others contend that the likely explanation for Charley's departure from his professed faith in Christ is that *he was never truly and genuinely born again in the first place*. His so-called "faith" was spurious. His apparent life of obedience was prompted by factors other than a genuine love for Jesus. ***He was self-deceived*** and deceived everyone else who knew him. ***If he had been truly born again he would have persevered in his faith.*** He may well have wandered away for a time, and even fallen into denial and immorality, but if truly saved he eventually would come to his senses and return to a life of consistent obedience and love for Jesus Christ.

As you can see, the **Arminian** says that Charley was truly saved, apostatized from the faith, and is now lost. The **Antinomian** says that Charley was truly saved, is still truly saved, but will suffer the loss of rewards in the age to come because of his disobedient lifestyle. The **Calvinist** says, Charley may have been truly saved, but if so he will come under the discipline of the Lord who will either restore him to his walk with Jesus or take him home to heaven prematurely. The Calvinist says that the other alternative is that Charley was never truly saved and that his failure to persevere in a life of obedience is the evidence that his profession of faith was just that, a verbal profession, but that he never genuinely possessed the forgiveness of sins.

As most of you know, I hold to the Calvinist or Reformed view. What that means is that ***I agree with the Arminian*** when he says that perseverance in faith and holiness is necessary for final salvation. But I ***disagree*** with him when he says that a born again person can fully and finally apostatize from the faith, thereby losing his salvation. Likewise, ***I agree with the Antinomian*** that all those truly born again are eternally secure in their salvation. But I ***disagree*** when he says that a born again person can live in unrepentant sin throughout the course of his life and expect to find himself in heaven.

I will strive to be as fair and objective as I can in explaining what others believe, but there is no escaping the fact that I am solidly and energetically and passionately committed to the view that when a man or woman is born again by the Spirit of God and justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone, he or she will persevere in faith unto life's end, even though that perseverance may be a bit bumpy and inconsistent along the way. ***That person, however, will never utterly abandon Christ because the Father has promised never to utterly abandon us, but to keep us safe and secure through faith.***

Why do People Reject the Doctrine of Eternal Security?

So, as a Calvinist who believes in the eternal security of God's elect, why, from my point of view, do people disagree and embrace the Arminian view?

Why do people doubt or deny the doctrine of eternal security? Why do so many insist that they've known friends or family members who once were genuinely born again but through some sin or backslidden rebellion have lost their salvation? There are several reasons.

(1) Often the culprit is ***tradition***: "That's what I was raised to believe. I can't bring myself to believe that mom and dad and the preacher and all my friends were wrong." This is a far more powerful influence, subtle and unconscious though it be, than most of us realize. *I'm not immune to this* anymore than you are. To be open to being persuaded of another view seems like we are saying, "The past was all for naught. It meant nothing." To some it feels as if they must question the integrity or value of people and pastors that they love and respect and who've been a powerful influence in their lives. That is difficult for many to cope with.

(2) Undoubtedly a major contributing factor is the presence in the NT of several so-called ***problem passages***. Two such texts are found in Hebrews 6 and 10, both of which I attempt to explain later in the series. Let's be honest: ***every view has problem passages!*** There are biblical texts that seem to run counter to each of the three views I presented. We have to deal honestly and fairly with them and ask the question: which view does the best job of accounting for everything the Bible says on this topic? That being said, *many are Arminians because they actually believe that's what the Bible teaches.*

(3) I also think many ***fear*** that if people are told they can't lose their salvation, they will take advantage of this to indulge in gross immorality. They fear it will lead people to think: "If I can't lose my salvation, I'll do whatever I

please" (cf. Rom. 6:1ff.). In other words, the *legitimate* concern for holiness leads some to an *illegitimate* rejection of security.

(4) As noted, others have known people, like *Charley*, who they are convinced are Christians, who later fall away. Believing them to have truly been born again, the only explanation is that they have lost their salvation.

(5) Part of the blame can also be laid at the feet of certain *religious leaders* who need people to be *insecure* in their salvation in order to retain control over them. They cultivate anxiety and doubt in the hearts of people in order to exert greater control over their lives (and often their money). Fear is a powerful means by which to keep people under one's religious thumb.

(6) Many believe that eternal security *diminishes a person's moral responsibility*. It places too much emphasis on God's sovereignty and not enough on human free will.

(7) Finally, for some the exhortations and warnings in Scripture to be holy, to persevere, and to endure, make sense only if the *possibility* exists that one may choose not to do so.

So here is how I want to proceed in the weeks ahead. Instead of talking first about all the texts that seem to teach eternal security and then talking about all the texts that seem to deny it, I'm simply going to work my way from Matthew through Revelation, taking each text as it appears.

My only deviation from that method is today. Today I want to begin by laying a solid foundation for what I believe is the biblical view. I'm going to be perfectly honest and blunt with you. *My aim, my goal, is two-fold. First*, I want to convince you who embrace either the Arminian or Antinomian view that you are mistaken in your belief. I make no apologies for that. *Second*, I want to deepen everyone's confidence in the supremacy of God's saving and preserving grace. I want you to leave here each Sunday more joyful than you came in, because you know that your sins are forgiven and that God will never, ever leave you or forsake you.

And what will happen if at the end of this series of sermons you retain your belief that a genuinely born-again believer can forfeit his/her salvation and end up in eternal death? You will still be loved. You will still be welcome at Bridgeway. And we will all continue to move forward in our journey together, as a spiritual family, to understand the Bible more accurately.

Eternal Security in John's Gospel

We are going to look today at two passages in John's gospel. In the first passage, John 6:37-44, Jesus tells us explicitly that the will of the Father is that he (Jesus) ***"should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"*** (John 6:39-40).

The argument of Jesus in these verses must be carefully noted. On several occasions in John's Gospel divine election is described in terms of God the Father giving certain persons to God the Son (6:37, 39; 10:29; 17:1-2, 6, 9, 24). In each of these cases the giving of men to Christ precedes and is the cause of their receiving eternal life. Those who are given to the Son include not only the present company of disciples who believe in Jesus but also the elect of future ages who will come to faith through the gospel. Jesus looks upon them as already his (John 17:20-21; see also John 10:16; Acts 18:10), even though they have not yet believed in his name. They are his because they were given to him by the Father in eternity past.

What is of special importance to us is what Jesus says about how those whom the Father has given to him come to him and whether or not those who come can ever lose their salvation. It will prove helpful to look at this in terms of ***three impossibilities***.

First, Jesus says that it is morally and spiritually *impossible* for a person to come to Christ apart from the "drawing" of that person by God the Father (6:44, 65).

Second, Jesus also says that it is *impossible* for someone whom the Father "draws" *not* to come to him. He says in verse 37, "All that the Father gives me *will* come to me" In other words, just as it is impossible for a person to come to Christ apart from the Father drawing him/her, so also is it impossible for a person *not* to come to Christ if the Father *does* draw him/her.

To these two impossibilities Jesus adds a third. He has already said it is impossible to come to him *unless* the Father draws. He has also said it is impossible *not* to come if the Father *does* draw. Now he says that when a person does come through the drawing of the Father it is *impossible* for her to be cast out. Look again at verse 37: "and whoever comes to me ***I will never cast out.***" The point is that those whom the Father gives to the Son, who therefore come to the Son, will be received by the Son and shall never perish. The verb translated "cast out" in verse 37 is used several times in John (2:15; 6:37; 9:34f.; 10:4; 12:31) and always means to cast out someone or something already in. Thus the emphasis here is not so much on receiving the one who comes (although that is true enough in itself) but on preserving him.

Who would suggest that Jesus Christ would refuse to accept what his Father has given him? If the Father was pleased to make a gift of certain sinners to his most blessed Son, you may rest assured that the Son will neither despise nor deny his Father's gracious generosity. The certainty of ultimate and absolute salvation for those who come to the Son is reaffirmed in verses 38-40. Their life in Christ is eternal and irrevocable because that is the will of the Father; a will or a purpose that the whole of Christ's person and work was designed to secure, a will or purpose that shall ultimately be (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:34-35; Eph. 1:11; Acts 4:28). ***What did Jesus come to do? He came to do the Father's will (v.38). What is the Father's will? The Father's will is that all those he has given to the Son be fully and finally saved (v. 39).***

Before we leave John 6, it's important to understand that searching and studying Scripture is not simply a matter of asking, what is it saying, but also: is it compatible with what *we're* saying? Let me explain.

To deny eternal security means the possibility exists that some who come to the Son will in fact be cast out. It means the possibility exists that the will of the Father and of the Son that all born-again believers be raised up on the last day will not, in fact, be fulfilled. It means that ***although Jesus is determined to ensure that every born-again Christian is fully and finally saved, the possibility exists that every born-again Christian might be fully and finally damned for eternity.*** Are you prepared to say that?

To deny eternal security means that when Jesus said he **will** raise up finally and forever all those given to him by the Father, he was misleading us. He should have said, "I **hope** to do so" or "I'll **give it my best shot,**" but the fact remains that he **won't** raise up all those given to him by the Father. Some of them, on the Arminian view, will have apostatized.

How can Jesus say he **will** raise up all the Father gives him if in fact he will **not** because some who truly believe in him finally and forever fall away and forfeit eternal life?

Now look with me at Jesus' words concerning his sheep in John 10: ***"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one"*** (John 10:27-30).

Jesus grounds his confidence in the safety of his sheep in ***the incomparable omnipotence*** of his Father. It is because there is no one greater or more powerful than God the Father that the sheep are secure. Was Jesus *mistaken* in his assessment of the Father's power and purpose?

What will you do with his declaration that his sheep "will **never** perish" (John 10:28)? A more literal translation would be, "they shall not, by no means ever, perish." This is an ***absolute, unequivocal, unassailable negative.*** Would Jesus have said this if in fact *many* of his sheep *will* perish? If so much as one true child of God can ever perish, Jesus has deceived us.

"And no one will snatch them out of my hand" (v. 28). Not the attacking wolf (v. 12), nor the thieves and robbers (vv. 1, 8), nor anyone.

Here's a profound interpretive insight: "**No one**" means "**no one**"! You don't have to go to seminary or be able to read Greek to figure that out. "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." God the Father himself stands behind God the Son in keeping the sheep in the fold. Jesus holds us tightly. God holds us tightly. Who can steal from God? Who has the strength or the cunning or the power to outwit and outmuscle Almighty God?

In v. 28 Jesus says "no one *will* snatch them" whereas in v. 29 he says "no one *is able* to snatch them." Some may attempt to snatch them. But they cannot succeed because the Son and the Father are united in purpose and power to keep them secure."

O.K., perhaps no one *else* can snatch me from God's hand. But what if *I myself* through my sin and selfishness and stupidity wriggle free and jump out of my own accord?"

Is *your* power of choice greater than God's? Is *your* will more powerful than his? Look again at Jesus' words: "No one" is all inclusive! If eternal security is false, then Jesus is saying: "No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand; oh, that is, except for every one of the sheep." But if you mean *everyone* you don't say *no one*! "No one" is the opposite of "everyone"! Jesus doesn't say: "No one *except* for the person himself." In Romans 8:38-39 all creatures are excluded as a threat to loss of salvation. In John 10 *the Creator himself* is excluded as well.

Ask yourself this question: *If Jesus wanted to teach eternal security, how could he have done it better or more explicitly than the way he does it here?* If *you* wanted to assert eternal security, how could you do it better than by using the words of Jesus in John 10? Someone might object by saying: "They won't perish *so long as they remain sheep*." But the text doesn't say that, does it? The assertion of the text is precisely that sheep always *do* remain sheep! The point of the text is: "**Once a sheep, always a sheep.**"

If Jesus wanted us to believe that some of his sheep could cease being sheep and suffer eternal death, why did he say his sheep will never suffer eternal death and no one can snatch them from him or from his Father? Surely Jesus is not guilty of the crassest form of double-talk. In other words, "**they will never perish**" = "**they shall always stay sheep!**"

"But what if some sin I commit or failure in life or weakness or lapse of faith occurs repeatedly?" How repeatedly? How much sin does it take to lose one's salvation? What does a *good* shepherd do with wandering sheep? He wouldn't be a good shepherd if he didn't restore them when they wander. ***Our security is ultimately dependent on God's character and commitment, not ours.*** People say: "If we change, we lose our salvation." No. We can't lose it, not because we can't change, but because *God* can't.

In the final analysis, as we'll see repeatedly, the only reason I affirm the **perseverance** of the saints is because I believe in their **preservation by** the Savior. We persevere only because he preserves us in faith. Praise be to God!

Conclusion

Now, how might we think of Charley and what should we say to him?

First, I would **never** say to him what the *Antinomian* would: "Hey Charley. You really shouldn't be living this way. You are missing out on tremendous blessings. Please return to the Lord and his church. But if you don't, if you remain unrepentant in your sin, you will still spend eternity with me and all other Christians in heaven. After all, you made a decision for Christ and that's all that matters. Once saved, always saved! But you will lose out on those spiritual rewards that you otherwise might have received. As grieved as I am by your lifestyle choices, I rejoice in knowing that you are my brother in Christ now and forever, even if you refuse to acknowledge that it is true."

No! Never, ever, give assurance of salvation to someone who is persisting in unrepentant sin, regardless of how allegedly sincere they were when they allegedly believed in Christ. I may not have the right to tell Charley that he isn't saved. After all, only God knows our hearts. But I certainly will never give him the assurance that he is.

Second, I would **never** say to him what the *Arminian* would: “Hey Charley. I’m brokenhearted over the fact that you have turned your back on your Savior and have forfeited the blessings of the new birth, adoption, and justification. Turn from your sin, repent, and you can receive forgiveness and be saved yet again from your sins.”

The simple fact is, I don’t know whether or not Charley was ever truly born again. I don’t know with complete certainty if his professed faith in Christ was authentic and life-giving. Only God knows. What I do know is this:

If Charley is among those whom the Father gave to the Son, if he truly came to Christ in faith and embraced him as Lord and Savior, Jesus will **never, ever** cast him out. Jesus **will** raise him up on the last day in fulfillment of the Father’s will. **No one** will ever snatch Charley out of the loving hands of the Father and the Son.

But if Charley persists in unrepentant sin and hard-hearted unbelief, he will by his lack of perseverance demonstrate that, in all likelihood, he never knew Jesus and Jesus never knew him. And therefore you can rest assured that I will never give him a false assurance of salvation simply because he claims once to have genuinely trusted Christ. As Jesus said, “By their fruit you shall know them.”

In any and every case, I will pray for Charley, as I hope you will as well.