

Title: Don't stop believin'  
Text: 2 Timothy 2.19  
Theme: Perseverance in the faith  
Series: 2 Timothy  
Prop Stmt Persevering in the faith is evidenced by genuine belief (content) genuine belief (faith), and the pursuit of holiness.

Read Text:

This morning, we are going to look primarily at verse 19, because this verse presents both a promise and a warning that every follower of Christ wrestles with. The promise is: *“God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: The Lord knows those who are is.”* Have you ever received a card from someone and you savored every word in it? You read it over and over and over and you put it away and then get it out and read it over and over again, don't you? That is what I would like you to do with this text. It is an incredible promise that can chew on over and over, but instead of losing its flavor, this is something that the more you chew on it, the more flavor you will enjoy.

The verse however, ends with a warning. *“Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”* Doesn't that sound like a warning? How are we supposed to understand that warning in view of the promise? If the Lord knows those who are is, and they are his, and they (presumably) will always be his, then why the warning? Either the promise is not really a promise, or it seems that the warning is not really a warning. Either way, something has to give.

This promise is part of a long series of promises in the Bible that guarantee the standing and the security of every genuine believer. This warning is part of a long series of warnings in the Bible that warn the complacent about playing fast and loose with the faith.

## **I. The Promises**

Here are a series of promises that guarantee the standing and the security of every genuine believer.

- Jesus is the author and finisher of the faith. Hebrews 12:2
- God finishes what He starts. Philippians 1:6
- Jesus gives ETERNAL life – John 3:16; Rom 6:22; 1 Tim. 1:16
- Jesus guards the salvation of the believer. 2 Tim. 1:12
- The believer is: declared righteous - Romans 5:1, at peace with God - Romans 5:1 and reconciled - Romans 5:10

- Genuine salvation produces perseverance. Romans 5:3,4
- Faith is a gift from God. – Ephesians 2:1-10
- God’s gifts and calls are irrevocable. – Romans 11:29
- Jesus will never drive away those who come to him. John 6:37
- Jesus will never lose any of his own. John 6:39
- Jesus will resurrect all his own. John 6:39, 44; Romans 6:5
- The Holy Spirit seals the believer. Ephesians 1:13
- The Holy Spirit is deposit guaranteeing the believer’s complete salvation. Ephesians 1:14
- The believer died to sin. Romans 6:1 (Paul’s challenge in this verse makes no sense if the believer could lose his salvation. In fact, in this verse, if a believer could lose his salvation, Paul would have certainly used that as the warning.)
- We are a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Romans chapter 8 absolutely guarantees it. The believer could still be condemned, contrary to v. 1, if he could lose it. The promise of working all things for the believer’s good is totally invalidated if glorification is in doubt (vs. 28-30) and the 5 big questions in verses 31-39 are a big lie if the believer can lose his salvation.
- The believer’s names were written in the book of life from the creation of the world. Revelation 17:8
- Believers were chosen before the foundation of the world. Eph 1:4
- Salvation is ultimately based upon the plan of God, not the believer’s. Romans 9:16
- We love him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19
- Jesus said no one can take the believer out of the Father’s hand. John 10:29
- Jesus said, “they shall never perish.” John 10:28

## **II. The Warnings**

- “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Matthew 10:22
- “but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 10:33

- “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10.37
- “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” John 15.6
- “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” Galatians 5.2-4
- “Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.” Romans 11.22
- “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.” 2 John 8
- “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations...” Revelation 2.26
- “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.” Revelation 3.5

These promises and these warnings are all in the Bible, and in verse 19, they are in the same verse. A plain reading of the promises sounds as if, once you are a follower of Christ, that you are safe in Christ forever, but a plain reading of the warnings sounds as if your security is conditional upon your endurance. Is there a conflict between these? And does it really matter? There are those who believe that once you are saved, you are saved forever and others who believe that you can be saved and then you can be lost again. But, this is a doctrinal issue that is not for theological nerds to argue about. This is something that impacts how you view your life as a follower of Christ.

### **III. The Examples**

Meet Sally. Sally is a very anxious person. She lives with the fear that she can never measure up to the expectations of other people, and especially to God. Every bad thing that happens to her, even if it is minor, can be a trigger for fear that God is displeased with her or punishing her or that somehow God doesn’t love her. When Sally reads these warnings, she can have a full-fledged panic attack and be crippled with fear.

Meet Bruce. Bruce believes that once saved always saved. He lives by the motto of: “There’s forgiveness for that.” He believes that his habit with alcohol and weed or anger and women that he has had for 28 years now, is just his little cross to bear or his thorn in the flesh. He’s so used to it and figures that God is used to it. In fact, he assumes that he and God have this little understanding. God knows that he is weak, and while God isn’t happy with Bruce’s habits, God always forgives, so Bruce doesn’t take his sin all that

seriously anymore. He kind of gave up fighting his flesh now, he just sort of figures that this is the way he is. He may not have all that many rewards in heaven, but at least he will be there and that is good enough for him. He'll be satisfied with that.

What do Sally and Bruce have in common? They are both failing to take God's Word seriously. Sally needs to repent of her unbelief in the promises of God. At the same time Bruce needs to repent of his unbelief in the warnings of God. The promises of God are true for every genuine follower of Christ, but the warnings are there to drive you to genuine faith. Here is how these work together.

#### **IV. The Solution**

The book of Romans is a detailed explanation of the gospel. It answers the question: How can we be justified before God? Another way of asking the same question would be: How can a sinner, like me, be accepted before a holy and perfectly righteous God? The answer is, we are declared righteous by God through faith alone in Christ alone. Christ came to this earth and lived the life that we could not live and died the death that we could not die. We are credited with his life and we are credited with his death, (that is, all of the benefits of Christ's life and death are attributed to us) when we by faith alone, trust in Christ.

But, how do we know if our faith is genuine? How do we know if we have truly believed? The book of James and 1 John answers that question. The evidence of genuine faith is seen in our affections for Christ, our love for other believers and our obedience to Christ. Or, as I like to say, "if it's a dog, it will bark." A genuine follower of Christ will produce gospel fruit. There are plenty of people who claim to have believed in Christ, but show no fruit, or they showed initial passion for Jesus, but then drifted away.

There are two theological truths that you need to understand because these will inform and shape your understanding of this issue.

##### **A. The nature of saving faith**

The Bible provides 3 aspects of saving faith. All 3 are necessary.

- 1) One must understand the essential truths of the gospel (knowledge – the intellectual aspect)
  - a. Romans 10.17
  - b. 1 Cor. 15.3-4

This is foundational. It matters what you believe. You often hear people say, that you "just gotta believe." "You just gotta have faith." That is not really true. Your belief is not good enough. You have to believe the right things. In order for your faith to be valid, you have to have faith in something that is true. I can believe with my whole heart that the Lions are going to go undefeated this year and win the Super Bowl. But my faith does not

create reality. I can believe it so much that I get a tattoo on my face that says Lions, Super Bowl Champs! Or I can go to Vegas and bet every dollar I have on the Lions. I can really, really believe. What if you did that last year? You would look like an idiot, because you are an idiot! What is worse is putting your faith in Mohammed, or Buddha, or yourself. Genuine faith has to have the right object of faith. You have to know what you are believing in. That means that you have to know the essential truths of the gospel. You have to know that you are a sinner, who is under the righteous wrath of God. You have to know that Christ came to this earth in order to assume a human nature so that he, as the God-man, could live a perfect life in your place and die a wrath-absorbing, penalty-paying, justice-satisfying death in your place. You have to know that Christ rose again from the dead as a demonstration of his victory over death because he paid the penalty for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him. You need to know that everything that Christ accomplished by his life, death and resurrection is credited to every single person who puts his/her faith in Christ. The second aspect of saving faith is this.

- 2) One must believe the essential truths of the gospel (assent – these things are true for me)

It is not enough to know the facts of the gospel, you must believe that they are true for you. You must give assent to them.

- a. Matthew 13.23
- b. Matthew 9.28

But, knowing the facts of the gospel and even believing that they are true, is not saving faith. Saving faith is the surrendering of my will to God.

- 3) One must surrender to Christ (I'm all in, no matter what) (volition – reliance)

- a. John 20.31
- b. Acts 16.31

So, how do I know if I have truly surrendered my will to God? How do I know if I am all in? How do I know if I have given to God the keys to my life? The answer is, am I enduring? Am I still believing? Am I still running the race in spite of the headwinds, the adversity, the challenges and even the suffering?

The gospel is wonderful stuff, but way too many people want to believe it for the wrong reasons, or even use it, teach it and promote it for their own glory. People who believe it for the wrong reasons have made false professions and people who use it and teach it and promote it for their own glory are false teachers.

## **B. The nature of regeneration**

Saving faith is not merely grasping information about Jesus. A genuine believer is one who is born again and, again, listen carefully. There is so much ignorance about what being born again means. In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And Nicodemus said how can I do that? And Jesus said, “pray this prayer after me.” Right? Did Jesus say that? No! Wow! It looks like Jesus just flunked Evangelism 101!! Why didn’t Jesus have Nicodemus pray a prayer after him? Because that is not how you are born again. You cannot cause yourself to be born again. That is the point. Jesus said, you were not the cause of your first birth and you are not the ultimate cause of the new birth. The ultimate cause of the new birth is the Spirit of God. When the Spirit of God opens the eyes of your heart to believe in Jesus and the gospel makes sense to you and is desirable to you and you jump in, it is because God has changed you and your faith, is your reaction to the spiritual life that he just breathed into the lungs of your soul. That is why I not only plead with you to believe, but I pray to God to pour out the Spirit to enable you to believe, knowing that everyone who believes in Christ will be saved and everyone who is genuinely saved will endure. I am absolutely certain that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. I am absolutely certain that salvation is from the Lord. But, my absolute certainty that salvation and faith ultimate comes from God does not lessen your need or my need to believe. In fact my certainty that God is the source of my faith is motivation to believe and to keep on believing.

Every person who has received spiritual life from the Spirit of God (regeneration) is born from above (born again) and not only believes, but is given a new heart. This new heart is the source of new affections and desires. It is the source of a new direction. But, this new direction is not perfection. I believe, but I do not believe perfectly and when I get off course, I am completely out of whack because I am not living in a manner that is consistent with whom I really am. I want to believe now. And when I give in to sin, I am miserable. A genuine follower of Christ may have moments and even times of unbelief, but they cannot continue in them because that it is not who they are. A person who has professed faith but is living in disobedience will either continue in that direction and reveal that they were never truly converted, or will repent and begin walking again in a manner that is consistent with their true identity.

Now, in the moment, we cannot always tell who has genuine faith and who doesn’t. I can say, that every genuine follower of Christ will make it home safely, but I don’t know who is a genuine follower of Christ. For example, Jesus had 12 disciples. Judas betrayed Christ, never repented and died condemned by God because he never truly believed. He followed Jesus on the outside, but he followed for the wrong reasons and the cost of following Jesus (adversity, suffering, sacrifice) revealed his real motives and he bailed out. That is exactly what happened with Hymenaeus and Philetus.

On the other hand was Peter. The night and morning of Christ’s trial, Peter denied Christ. He denied him in the moment. He wilted under the pressure of the moment, but because Peter was a genuine believer, he could not continue in his denial. Even though Peter did not believe perfectly, he could not deny the fact that he was a believer and time revealed that and Peter, in spite of how he failed in that moment and in other moments, lived a life that was marked by endurance. Judas, on the other hand appeared to be a believer, but

adversity revealed that he wasn't. In the moment Peter and Judas looked to be one and the same. But time revealed the difference.

Now, let's go back to verse 19 and see how this promise and this warning are so helpful. There were people in the church at Ephesus, just like this church who were genuine followers of Christ and those who were not, even though they professed to believe Christ. To these people Paul says, "The Lord knows those who are his and Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." When conflict arises in a church and false teachers arise and create chaos in the lives of others, it is dangerous and discouraging. This promise is a great source of encouragement.

Some people were facing adversity for the sake of the gospel and were suffering for it. They needed to be encouraged that the Lord knows those who are his. Some people were facing adversity and were feeling like bailing out because of discouragement, or because, like Judas, they were realizing that this isn't what they signed up for. They needed the warning that if you name the name of the Lord (really believe) then you need to depart from iniquity. Those who try to follow Jesus and hold on to their sin have never really followed Jesus. And God uses adversity in life to reveal what you really believe. In that sense, suffering is a gift from God that reveals the authenticity of our faith. If we only believe because it is convenient, we will never know if we really believe.

Finally, God never called us to live the Christian life all on our own. God has given you a church family to help you by encouraging you and pointing out evidences of grace and evidences of belief. In essence, membership in a local church is a commitment to watch over one another and help one another get to heaven. Your gathering today is an encouragement to others. Your prayer for others is a huge means of grace in their lives. Your conversations with others helps give needed perspective to people who are being overwhelmed at the moment. Your participation in communion is a great reminder to all of us, that we are in this together and together, by God's grace, we will make it home. The Lord knows those who are his.