

Title: Don't Stop Believin' pt.2
Text: 2 Timothy 2.19-21
Theme: Perseverance is an evidence of gospel fruit
Series: 2 Timothy
Prop Stmt: The assurance of our salvation is experienced as we live in faith-driven obedience.

While the book of 2 Timothy was written primarily to Timothy who was providing leadership to the influential church in Ephesus, the message of this book is for the entire church. This is the last letter that Paul wrote before he was executed. He is concerned, and rightly so about the purity of the church, knowing that the church in Ephesus was already dealing with people who were either not living according to the gospel they professed, or they were attempting to change the beliefs of the gospel. There were several guys in particular that the entire church knew about, they had created problems in the church and as such they had to be dealt with. That is hard. That is hard on the congregation, it is hard on the leadership. In encouraging Timothy in the midst of carrying out this burden of leadership, Paul says in 2.19-21. (read)

This is where we were last week. Last week's sermon dealt with the relationship between our assurance in Christ and our call to endure. It touched a nerve (in a good way) with many of you. So I am doing a follow-up message this morning in hopes of 1) providing some further clarification and 2) providing some help to those of you who struggle with this, or who are trying to help those who do.

When a professional baseball player signs a multi-year, multi-million dollar contract, he is set for life. If he then relaxes and starts to sluff off, the fans are understandably irate. Your contract should not be the reason for laziness, it should be a motivation for excellence. There is a similarity to a person becoming a follower of Christ. Becoming a follower of Christ is called conversion. Conversion has two aspects to it: repentance and faith. Repentance means to turn from my sin (in attitude and action) and faith means to trust in Christ (attitude and action as well). When I became a follower of Christ, I repented of my sin and trusted in Christ and that launched me into a life that is characterized by repenting and believing. A follower of Christ is someone who continues a life of repenting and believing. Therefore, the encouragements to keep believing and the warnings about sin, make sense because the authenticity of my conversion is going to be demonstrated in a life that is characterized by repenting and believing. If I look at my conversion as a baseball contract that give me the freedom to quit worrying about sin, or where I do not need to cultivate my faith, I have a wrong view of what it means to be a Christian and may misunderstand the gospel and not really be a believer.

Last week I covered the promises of eternal life and security to every genuine believer and I reviewed some of the warnings that the Bible gives to those who professed faith in Christ but do not endure. We looked at the tension between those and concluded that the promises are there to encourage faithfulness and the warnings are there to do the same thing. A genuine believer will look at the promises of eternal life, NOT AS A LICENSE TO SIN, but with overwhelming gratitude for God's grace to keep us because he or she

knows that we cannot keep ourselves. A genuine believer will also look at the warnings and realize that sin is serious and will not be complacent with it.

We looked at the 3 elements of saving faith: Intellectual awareness, personal belief, and personal surrender. We noted that all three are necessary for genuine conversion and the fact that many people know the content of the gospel, believe that it is true, but have not surrendered their life to Christ. They like the gospel, they are emotionally moved by it, but they do not yet really trust in it, like God intended. Finally, we looked at the nature of regeneration and the fact that faith is ultimately a gift from God. Therefore, I cannot make someone believe. Genuine faith is a working of the Spirit of God in the life of the unbeliever.

1. **The setting is often ripe for false conversions.**

A. **The desire for security.**

Warranties and insurance policies can be wonderful things and are designed to bring us assurance. If your car breaks down and is under warranty, the theory is that you can take it to the dealership who will fix it, and you will be on your way without any additional cost. That is very appealing to us. If you pay for the appliance insurance through your utility company, then, again, if your refrigerator, furnace or AC unit malfunctions, you make a call. They come out and fix it, or replace it all at no additional charge. We do not like risk and try to find ways to avoid exposure to it.

So, when we are told that if you become a Christian, that you will never again have to worry about going to hell, will never be punished for your sins, and can forget about having a guilty conscience, and not only that, but God will always be looking out for us, we think, “Whoa! Such a deal!” Right? How much does it cost? Nothing! You’re kidding me! No, really it doesn’t cost you a thing. Jesus did it all. Just become a Christian. Hey, why not? I can pray a prayer, become a Christian and check that off my bucket list. Make reservation for a place in heaven. Check!

B. **The desire for the salvation of others.**

At the same time, we want people to come to faith in Christ. We want them to become fellow Christians. If you understand the implications of the gospel, you want your friends to be genuine Christians. You want your family members to be genuine Christians. So, if someone expresses an interest in Christ, you want them to believe and your motivation for them to become a Christian can sometimes cloud your discernment. All of this has contributed to our vulnerability to finding a formula or a process for faith.

A mom told me that her 2-year old daughter had trusted in Christ. I told her that I was skeptical but the mom told me that her daughter is very smart, and very spiritual and that she indeed had come to faith in Christ. That mom obviously wanted her daughter to be a believer, prayed for her daughter, talked with her about Christ, all of which were good things, but, the bottom line was, her daughter was not a believer.

C. The priceless value of salvation.

The truths of the gospel deal with the most important issues of life and therefore they are vulnerable to being imitated or exploited. If you have something that someone else wants, you have leverage over that person. If you have a boat and other people want to go fishing, chances are, those people are going to be nice to you, right? But, do they really like you, or just your boat? I read the story of a guy who was driving to a job interview and cut another driver off, and then flipped him the bird and threw a few other choice words his way, only to get to the job interview, and discover that the man he had cut off was the conducting the interview. The guy looking for the job said, "I really do not need to even have this interview do I? The man said, "No."

If you are hiring, you have something that people want. If you have tickets to the Tigers game, or tickets to Cedar Point, or tickets to a timeshare, you have what people want. What if you have eternal life? The history of Christianity is full of people who try to manipulate others in order to get eternal life, as well as those who supposedly have it, promise to share it with others if they will do them a favor. This started way back in the early days of the church.

When the gospel was first preached in the city of Samaria, a man named Simon saw the power of the gospel in Philip's life and in Peter and John. Simon wanted that power. He realized that this was where the real power was and he wanted it. In fact, he offered Peter and John money for it. In that moment, Peter discerned that although Simon had professed faith and was baptized he was not a genuine believer, but had professed faith in Christ in order to get in on the action. He wanted access to that power and was willing to do anything to get it. Peter exposed Simon for what he was and challenged him to repent.

So, on the one hand there are people who want people to be Christians but whose good intentions cloud their discernment in presenting the gospel. There are also people who want the perceived benefits of the gospel, but who do not really want to follow Christ. The combination has resulted in many false professions of faith. The church is always vulnerable to this. Plus, we tend to believe people, don't we? After all, we are believers and we love people. One of the marks of love is that it hopes. When you tell me something, I really want to believe you and people will take advantage of that and lie right to my face. False professions have always been and will always be a problem for the church. Some people will profess faith in Christ because it will make Grandma happy, but not because they really believe. Some people will profess faith in Christ because they are desperate for help. I asked a gal one time how she became a follower of Christ. She told me that her mother was about to have some serious surgery so she went to the chapel in the hospital and prayed to God to take care of her mother and she felt as if God told her that her mom was going to be fine. Now, all of that could be true. However, she had no concept of her sin, of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, of repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. All she knew is that she was desperate for her mom to make it through surgery. There are plenty of "fix my mess" conversions.

There will always be opportunities for false professions of faith. They tend to be more prevalent when it is culturally acceptable and expected to be a Christian. False professions are generally reduced during times of persecution and adversity. Therefore, there is a great need for discernment and in fact the NT emphasizes a call for discernment on the part of the church.

2. **The NT emphasizes a call for discernment.**

For example, look at verses 20 and 21. I will explain these in more detail next week, but the obvious meaning is that a vessel that is set aside for honorable use is a description of a believer. A vessel that is set aside for honorable use is one that cleanses himself from what is dishonorable. This is a familiar theme throughout the NT. If you are holding on to a sin in your life and you are not actively engaged in fighting against it, you cannot claim to be a Christian.

A. **Discernment is needed when we are presenting the gospel.**

Jesus healed a lot of people and he fed a lot of people. Did all of those he healed and fed become genuine followers? No. They followed him as long as he was giving them what they wanted, but when Jesus called for them to surrender their lives to him, most of them went home. We have had our members go on medical mission trips. In many cases, teams of medical personnel go into remote regions of the world that have no access to healthcare and these teams provide mini triage stations. Hundreds of people will come to be treated and in the process of being treated, they will be exposed to the gospel. Caring for the body and the soul of a person is a wonderful and powerful reflection of Christ. And I am grateful for these teams. Now, what if these teams set up the triage station in such a way, that before the people could see the doctor, they were told that they first needed to trust in Jesus? You see the problem don't you? Chances are, just about everyone who would come to get treatment would say they believed in Jesus. The team could go back home and report that hundreds of people were converted and then go on to the next place and the next place and keep doing the same thing. That would be disastrous. Or, the teams, knowing the danger of false professions and realizing the nature of genuine conversion, could use the presence of the medical personnel to expose people to the gospel with the help of believers and churches that are in the area who would follow up those gospel conversations with those people. The first scenario sounds a lot more successful, but in reality the second scenario will reveal genuine gospel fruit.

When we present the gospel, we need to be careful that we do not give false assurance. The authenticity of one's belief will be seen in their faithfulness over the long haul, not in tears of emotion in the moment. I love the fact that so many of you are actively sharing the gospel with others. I am hearing more stories from you about people you are sharing Christ with than I can ever remember. I pray that this will only increase. Being aware of what saving faith actually is, will guard us from giving false assurance.

B. **Discernment is needed by those who profess to believe the gospel.**

The Bible promises eternal life to every person who trusts in Christ. How do I know if I really trust in Christ? There will be evidence. What kind of evidence? Well, the book of 1 John was written for this purpose. 1 John 5.13 says, “*I (John) write these things (the book of 1 John) to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*” God directed John to write that book because he wants us to know whether or not we have eternal life. Knowing that you have eternal life is not only possible, it is good. It is important. So, you can know. And the message of this little book is this: There are essentially 3 evidences of saving faith that will assure you that you have saving faith. 1) A genuine believer will love God. 2) A genuine believer will love the people of God. 3) A genuine believer will obey God’s commands. These three evidences are critical because we are vulnerable to self-deception. That is the nature of sin. Sin causes brain damage. I am vulnerable to self deception.

Look with me at 1 John 1.5-10 (explain)

With that in view, let’s look at 1 John 2.1-6

Our aim is not to sin, but we will not realize that aim until we are with Christ. I do not want to sin, but I do and when I do, I am grieved by it and am comforted by the fact that I have an advocate – Jesus Christ. However, if I claim to know Christ and I refuse to obey his commands, then I am a liar. I am lying to you, to God and to myself. Again, one who lies is not only deceiving others, but he ends up deceiving himself. John writes these things because self-deception is a serious issue. That is why I need you. I need your involvement in my life. I need you to warn me when I start going sideways. I am prone to be full of myself and to think that I am ok, when I am not okay. We sing about that, don’t we? “Prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” There are days when I don’t feel like fighting the battle. There are days when I wish it wasn’t so hard. There are days when the wind is out of my sails and I feel stuck. I need the church and so do you. And if you are going to be helpful to me and if I am and the rest of us are going to be helpful to you then...

C. Discernment is needed by every member of the church in order to care for one another.

1) Caring for those who struggle with assurance.

Last week I told you about Sally and Bruce. I was also informed that Sally and Bruce are very dated names (apologies to our Sallies and Bruces). So, this week let me tell you about Emma and Jackson.

Emma lives with the fear that she is not really a believer. She hears people talk about the moment when they came to faith in Christ and Emma isn’t really sure if she can tell you when. You see, Emma has prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior, what seems like thousands of times. She has this nagging fear that she didn’t use the right words, or that she didn’t understand everything at the time, or that there was some ounce of unbelief, or some level of wrong motivation. When she reads the words of Jesus who says that there

will be many who will one day stand before him and he will say “depart from me, I never knew you.” She is terrified that this will happen to her. Emma is tempted not to believe the promises of God. She is tempted to believe that the promises of God work for everyone else but her. What does Emma need? She needs you. She needs brothers and sisters who will help her look at her life and look at the Scriptures.

By the way, some of you are friends with Emma and you don’t know that she struggles with this because all you ever talk about are clothes, kids, food and the weather. Emma struggles with depression and she needs you to ask her about her soul. And Emma, when somebody asks you, you need to be humble enough and honest enough to tell them. This is why God has given us a church and this is when we really become a church.

Most of you know an Emma and you can help Emma. You can help her by looking at the evidences of belief in 1 John and pointing out those evidences in her life. If you know Emma well and you know that she loves God and you have seen her love others and you have seen her live in submission to God’s commands, and you know that this is direction of her life, you can and should point out this gospel fruit in her life. Emma needs your encouragement. She needs to know that those warnings are not for her. But Jackson needs to know that they are.

2) Caring for those who give no evidence of spiritual life.

One of the most chilling things that I hear is when someone says, “Look, I know what the Bible says about that, but I’m going to take my chances.” Jackson is like that. He knows that adultery is wrong, but he hasn’t been caught yet. Giving up his favorite sin is just too much work. Jackson does not need to hear that “it’s okay, we all have issues.” Jackson needs to hear 1 John 2.4. He needs to hear people tell him the truth that a genuine believer will fight sin. A genuine believer is not sinless, but a genuine believer cannot remain complacent about sin in his life. Jackson needs brothers and sisters who will be honest with him and tell him that they can no longer tell him that he is a follower of Christ. You see there is a huge difference between sinning and being okay with it and sinning and being grieved by it. If I use the promises of God’s forgiveness as reasons to sin, then I am misusing those promises. God promises to forgive us when we confess our sin to him. Confess is not simply admit that I did it, confess (homologeō) means that we say what God says about our sin. Confessing my sin is not simply saying “my bad” or “Yup, that was me.” Confessing my sin is agreeing with God that my sin is repulsive. My sin is polluted. My sin is grievous. My sin is contaminated. My sin is evil and sickening. Confessing my sin is not taking it lightly but is being overwhelmed by it. Jackson needs to be warned that he cannot follow Christ and hold on to his sin. He needs you to pray with him and for him to take the Word seriously. He needs you to ask him if his sin is worth going to hell for? He needs you to ask him if he thinks he really knows Jesus, because right now, his life doesn’t look that way.

I’m fully aware that what I have just described is foreign to many of you. You have never really asked anyone about their soul, and part of that is probably because no one has ever really asked you about yours. Talking with others about your spiritual growth is off

limits, but it shouldn't be. Beloved, if we are not actively engaged in caring for one another at a heart level, we are really missing the mark. You see, the church is not to simply be a place where people are pleasant and polite. We are to actually love one another. We are to actively bear each others' burdens. I can't bear your burden if you won't tell me what it is. But, when you share your life with another and others with you, then we will no longer be a bag of marbles, but instead will be a bag of grapes.