

## Secure Love

*Listening to the Apostle of Love*

By Steve Viars

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 5:13-21

**Preached On:** Sunday, October 26, 2014

### **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

One of the marks of a follower of Jesus Christ is that he or she is developing a lifestyle of praise. Do you agree with that? It's almost like the backdrop or the canvas on which the story of their life is being written is increasingly authentic praise to God and at some point praise becomes almost as spontaneous as breathing. Now, I realize you may say, "Ah, but that sounds kind of pie in the sky. I mean, what does that look like on a day-to-day basis?" Well, that's fair. It's not long after a person like that when their eyes open in the morning and they start rehearsing some reason to thank or to worship their God. They say things like, "This is the day which the Lord has made. I'm not going to complain in it. I'm not going to fuss about it. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." That's the sound of praise. Or standing in awe that you can wake up secure in your relationship with God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross and you are amazed by that. You are praising him. And sure you still have to handle all the mundane tasks of the day so you still have to take a shower, I get that, because we don't want smelly praise. You still have to brush your teeth, we don't want bad breath praise. I mean, you still have to do the normal things that you do with and for your family every day but for followers of Christ, there is this backdrop of praise. I believe that if we're growing, if we're maturing, that that approach to life over time, it just becomes more solidified. It becomes more intensified so we sound more and more like the Psalmist who said things like Psalm 70:4, "Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You," now hear this, "And let those who love Your salvation say continually," there it is, "Let God be magnified." Or Psalm 104:34, "Let my meditation," it's even what's going on in my heart, a part of me that no one can see, "Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the LORD." Or Psalm 34:1, "I will bless the LORD," here is it, "at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Are you thinking about your last week? Are you thinking about a lifestyle of praise illustrated in these verses? Psalm 40:3, "He put a new song in my mouth." That follows, by the way a discussion of being raised up out of the miry pit if you know that great Psalm. "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear And will trust in the LORD."

That's then one of the reasons that Sunday becomes so important. Please tell me you love Sunday. And why is it that people like us would love Sunday? It's because a worshipful lifestyle throughout the week generates a growing desire to want to be together with the Lord's people on his day. So we consider this the first day of the week, huh? Sunday, the

Lord's day where it's a natural and growing desire to want to praise our God with his people together. That's why so many of the great worship songs both old and new emphasize this very idea like maybe the most obvious one, the Doxology, from the Greek word "doxa" or praise or glory.

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

It's a lifestyle of praise. Now, please tell me as you've been driving around the last couple of weeks and seeing all these fall colors that that has elicited from that heart of yours and from that mouth of yours reasons to praise God. Is that true? You weren't just driving around thinking about your problems, huh? In light of your own puny strength? Please tell me that you were putting whatever you were facing in the backdrop of reasons to praise our God. I was traveling with three pastors from Kenya on Thursday and we happened to go by just a beautiful tree and one of the pastors said, "Wow, God is magnificent." Bam. That's exactly, exactly right. It's like Psalm 69:34, "Let heaven and earth praise Him, The seas and everything that moves," even the trees with the leaves that you have to rake. You're praising God for that too, aren't you? "Everything that moves in them." Yeah, that's the sound of a worshipful life. That's a life of praise.

Now, frequently our worship hymns are focused on the Gospel. Praising God, not for nothing, there is substance to our praise. Praising him for the death, burial and resurrection of Christ like this great one, "Praise him, praise him, Jesus our blessed Redeemer." Boom. That's all we would have to say, "For our sins he suffered and bled and died." Do you believe that? Does that give you a reason to praise him? "Our rock, our hope of eternal salvation. Hail him, hail him, Jesus the crucified." That, by the way, adds a very important piece to this puzzle that I'm trying to lay out here this morning and that is: our praise is not forced. It's not manufactured. It's not disingenuous. It's a natural and spontaneous response to our Lord's marvelous character and deeds.

With that in mind, please open your Bible now to 1 John chapter 5. That's on page 187 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. We're concluding this morning this verse-by-verse study we've been doing all fall on the epistle of 1 John entitled, "Listening to the Apostle of Love." There is no question that that is the theme of this book typified even in simple statements like 1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us." Which confirms, by the way, this theme I've already been trying to lay out that our love, our rejoicing, our praise for God is not manufactured. You see, we love why? Because he first loved us. It's the natural response to God's attributes and to his works if we're thinking correctly. This study has been part of our annual theme this year "Loving Our Neighbors" and I hope we would all say authentically that we realize we have a long way to go when it comes to even understanding in this culture in which we live what does it really mean to love our neighbors? What does it mean to do that wisely and what does it mean to do that well? I

think learning from the apostle of love has given us a gold mine of truth to consider and apply as we try to love our neighbors in a way that pleases the Lord.

Well, these last verses in the book tell us about secure love. Secure love. Honestly, after the death of one of our faithful deacons this week, Kevitt Brown, knowing also that a number of men and women in our church family on both of our campuses have had loved ones die but die in the Lord in many cases recently, but this week after Kevitt die, I can't think of anything I would rather talk to you about more than 1 John 5:13, to think about the beauty and the wonder and to rejoice and praise him because it's true, in the secure love that we can find in our God. 1 John 5, beginning in verse 13, "These things I have written to you," now note that, I have written to you. It's in a book, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may," what? "Know that you have," what? "Eternal life." What happens as a result? Note the argument. "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." Secure love. Now before I park on that, that's what we're going to spend the majority of our time this morning, some of you may know that there are a few more verses in this book that can actually be a bit problematic so what I'd like to do is that I just want to read them and we're going to clear them away. I want to make a few comments about what they may mean because I don't want you to think, "Well, around Faith, they skip the hard stuff." No we don't. We plow into the hard stuff, right? Because we believe we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us and we believe that he can teach us even things that are challenging so we don't skip things around here. So let me get this, hit it quick and then we're going to come back to the main point this morning about reasons to rejoice because of God's secure love.

But listen to this, verse 16, "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this." What? Don't pray for that kind of a person. "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin leading to death." Well, the obvious question before the house is: what is the sin that is leading to death? You have to acknowledge this, I mean, everybody I think would agree with this: John doesn't say. John does not go on to develop exactly what he means so whatever position you hold on this if you have one, probably ought to be carried with at least a modicum of theological modesty, right? But there are at least two possible answers that come to mind that surely would be true with the sweep of the Bible so whether or not that's exactly what John had in mind here, it certainly could be and it's certainly also taught in other places in the word. One would be this: the sin that leads unto death is speaking about men and women who have repeatedly rejected the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. That's clearly articulated throughout books like this and as a result, now hear this, a person who has repeatedly rejected the good news of Jesus Christ can actually get to the place of the horrifying condition described in the book of Hebrews as being beyond repentance. Think about that. And Hebrews 6 would even, this is amazing, Hebrews 6 would use the word "impossible" to describe a person like that and their ability at some point in their life to repent. Not because God would not forgive them

if they would but because their heart is so hardened to the Gospel, therefore, they are beyond repentance. Think of that. Therefore, it's impossible for such a person to repent and as a result, that then could be the sin leading to death. Again, I don't know for sure if that's what John meant here but I certainly know that that condition is possible which is why I just have to love you enough as a pastor to tell you that if you've not yet trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, don't follow the misguided notion that you can just always repent anytime you want and God is somehow obligated to constantly draw you at the same level of intensity that he is today. Wrong. Wrong. Make your calling and election sure while you have the opportunity to do so. There is a sin leading unto death.

The other possibility is that John is talking about people who have reached a place of disobedience where God chooses to remove them from the face of his earth. I realize you say, "Boy, you're happy today, aren't you Pastor Viars?" Well, my job is to teach the whole counsel of God. That's my job. I think I ought to do my job if I'm going to pick up a paycheck. By the way, you've got a job too. No paycheck involved but you've got a job too and that is listening to all the word, huh? So this very well may be talking about people that God has removed from the face of his earth, a sin leading unto death. That certainly occurs. Just ask Ananias and Sapphira if that could happen. Remember, even in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about abuses at the Lord's table that were because some had been so disrespectful of the Gospel, they had been so disobedient to the Lord and so uncaring, in that case, toward those who are less fortunate, that some are ill and some have fallen asleep which is a biblical way of saying some have died. Now again, we can never know in a given situation whether that's what's actually happened but the fact that it's even possible is another in a long list of reasons to choose to live to please the Lord every day.

Now, you can chew on that this afternoon. That's a good little something for you to do this afternoon to keep yourself out of trouble but let's come back now to the main argument of the text. We're talking about this concluding focus on secure love and I'd like us to spend the rest of our time thinking about three reasons to passionately praise our God. Friends, if what we're studying in this text is true, we've got reasons to wake up every day, every day and praise and worship our God. The first is the possibility of having assurance of our salvation. If you have never committed a verse of Scripture to memory or if you've not memorized this one, I want to highly recommend that you do so. It's 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." Every one of those words is precious and every one of those words is important.

Now, let's back up contextually for a minute. Think about the relationship of that verse, 1 John, the epistle of 1 John 5:13 and the way the Apostle John ended his Gospel. Don't get those confused. The fourth book of the New Testament in chapter 20, verse 31 when he said, "But these," the things he wrote in the Gospel, "but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." On the one hand, those two verses sound similar, don't they? But on the other, they are clearly different because they have a different purpose. We could say it like this: the Gospel of John is evangelistic. It's written to encourage men and women

who have not yet chosen to become Christians to do so on the basis of the evidence. That's why it's such an effective evangelistic strategy that's been used by generations where when there's a person who has not yet placed their faith and trust in Christ, to just encourage them, "Read through the Gospel of John." "For the purpose of," John 20:31, "but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." I would encourage you if you've not yet come to a place of trusting Christ, that would be a great thing to do is to read through the Gospel of John even this week.

Well, 1 John is different, isn't it? Because John now is speaking to people who he believes have believed in the name of the Son of God so that they might know that they have eternal life. He's wanting to strengthen a Christian's assurance. Now, why did that matter contextually and what does that mean for how it would affect people like you and me today? Remember this: John's readers are facing attacks from a group of people who left the church and are suggesting that they have special knowledge. That's why they were eventually known as Gnostics from the Greek word *gnosis*, believing they had special knowledge that undermined what the apostle said about the person and work of Christ and negating what the Scripture said about obedience to the commands of God. Those are the issues and so John says, "I've written this book to re-emphasize the Gospel regardless of what the false teachers are telling you." That's why there is so much of an emphasis in this book about sin and I realize you might say that we live in a culture that doesn't want to hear about that. When the culture stops sinning, we'll stop talking about it and when we stop sinning, we'll stop thinking about it as well. So John has spent a lot of time focusing on the baseline of the Gospel regardless of what the false teachers said about the power and penalty of sin along with the beauty of our Redeemer, along with our need for a Mediator between God and man, our need for a propitiation or the sacrifice, the perfect Son of God, Jesus Christ the righteous. That's why the previous verses in this chapter spoke so clearly about Jesus' precious blood. Some people in that day didn't want to hear about that and some people in our day don't want to hear about that. All that would have deeply contradicted the heresy of these false teachers. So even in a book about love by the apostle of love, there is still a strong stand for sound doctrine.

That's also why John focused so clearly on the importance of keeping the commands of God. We saw that over and over in this book, not as a means of salvation but as an evidence of it unlike the lawless ethic of the false teachers. Does it sound like anything today? Antinomianism, "I do not want to hear any commands of God," and that was true of the false teachers of that day and so John has said repeatedly, "A person who genuinely knows Christ is going to have a guarded stance toward obeying the commands of God regardless of how they feel." So John's point is don't be threatened by these false teachers who are trying to elevate themselves and discredit your salvation. That's the key issue. What am I going to do in a college that is trying to ridicule my beliefs and undermine my salvation? John says, "Because of what you've chosen to believe, what you've chosen to stake your life on regarding the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ," and, and because there is clear evidence of an increasingly obedient lifestyle due to the power of faith working in your heart and life, you have every reason to have greater assurance of your salvation regardless of those who might want to attack

you. "I've written these things to you who believe on the name of the Son of God that you might know that you have eternal life."

It might not surprise you, I had to deal with a bit of blowback because of what I said last Sunday from the previous verses in the Scripture along with a few comments I made about the Supreme Court's recent non-decision. Well, it's the exact same issue. I mean, people calling me or calling us names on Facebook. Seriously? Simply because we choose to be a Bible-believing church? Well, here's part of today's message: praise God that your assurance is not based on the ever-changing opinions of men. Praise God that the assurance of your salvation is not based on the ever-changing views of this culture. You understand, our world system and I'm not talking now about the globe nor am I talking about the world of people, I'm talking about the world system in a 1 John 2:15 kind of way: our world system is ever-learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth and that's not a compliment. That's why you want to base your assurance, come back to the main argument of the verse, that's why you want to base your assurance on what are the first seven words in verse 13? "These things that God has written to us." The big point is: rejoice because the Lord put it in writing. That's it.

"These things I have written to you." You see, haven't we all learned this? Get it in writing. Right? We've learned that lesson, some of us the hard way, huh? Get it in writing. If somebody's going to do work in your house, get it in writing. If somebody's going to do work on your car, get it in writing. Get it in writing so there are no questions later, right? We have all learned that the easy way and we've learned that the hard way. That's why our tech people will tell you this, I'm a bit obsessive. I know that's a complete shock to some of you but I'm a bit obsessive about certain things. Here's what one of them is: archiving emails. I have one of, if not the largest email accounts of our 175 employees at this church. Do you know why? Because I like to have it in writing. That's why, talk to anybody who's ever been with me on a long distance airplane ride, when I'm flying across the coast or if I'm flying to another country, I use that time to get into my laptop on airplane mode and I go through and I sort all my sent emails, all my received emails. In fact, if you've ever sent me an email that has any kind of content, I'm not talking about just the easy ones like, tell me how much you love me, that kind of stuff. I mean, we all know that. I don't need to remember that but if there is any kind of content of where you said something that you were going to do or something you believed or I said something back to you that I was going to do that I believed, guess what? I've still got it and do you know why? I've learned this over the years because I'm an old guy. When I started here my hair was jet black. I've been doing this for a while and one of the things I've learned is keep it in writing because it's amazing how faulty, I'll start it this way, my memory can be. That's not the only way I want to construct that sentence but I'll start there. It's just amazing. Isn't that right? And it's just really helpful and it's amazing how many times I remember a story in a particular way and I pull out one of those emails in writing and, man, did I have it wrong. The way I remember it is just incorrect. Or the way I remember it is exactly right and that solidifies my intensity on a particular subject. It's amazing how many times I've been in conversations where people absolutely swear, "Here's what I said." Just let them go. Let them go. Then sometimes it's, "Let me show

you this email. Let me show you exactly what you said on that particular day. My dear friend, I love you enough, we have it in writing."

There is nothing like the importance of having it in writing. Well, come back to what John is saying at the beginning of this passage. Rejoice because the Lord put it in writing, "These things I have written to you." Here's what that means: the more you study the word of God cover-to-cover and I assume, by the way, you've spent some time doing that this week, huh? Is there a little spot on your nose right now where it's been in the Bible? Just a little bit rough and raw right there? I hope so and the more time you spend in the word of God cover-to-cover, the more confidence will grow in the centrality of the Gospel and your amazement at the redemptive plan of God from Genesis to Revelation will increase. In fact, you'll find yourself as you're studying the word pausing in your heart the way the Apostle Paul did after contemplating a particular aspect of the doctrine of salvation in Romans 11 and just spontaneously praising like this, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor? Or Who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him," you see, Jesus be my center. Paul got that truth about the Gospel from what was written down, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." What aspect of the wisdom and the knowledge of God was Paul referring to? The answer is: what had been revealed to him in the sacred writings both prophetically and what God said he would do and actually in the record of what subsequently occurred and it had been written down and therefore was a basis for his assurance for which he could rejoice.

Last weekend we were up in Elkhart celebrating my mother-in-law's 80th birthday. Just a delightful time with Chris's family. One of my favorite memories from last weekend was when one of my nephews, had the privilege of watching these nephews and nieces grow up. They were just kids and now all of a sudden they are married and they have kids so one of my nephews came up with his young son and he said, "Tell Uncle Steve your memory verse." I'll tell you, those are some of the most precious words you could hear out of a family member. "Tell Uncle Steve your memory verse." My nephew and some of their other family members attend a great church together up in the Elkhart area and my nephew's son, he's just a little guy, he can barely talk at all, already learning verses from the word of God. I thought, "There's a wise parent right there." He's just a young man himself but he's already looking for opportunities to help his son hide what's written, hide God's word in his heart and I hope that soon that little guy places his faith and trust in Christ and, you see, his assurance will grow because of what has been written and as his young life develops, he'll have reason to cultivate a lifestyle of praise because God was willing to put in writing what is involved in knowing him.

Now, we can also rejoice this morning because the Lord wants you to know that you know that you know. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know." You realize what that means is that God does not want you to doubt your salvation, friend, he wants you to know for sure. By the way, in the spirit of full disclosure, every so often we have someone give a testimony during our

time of folks coming into the membership of the church and they'll say that I came up with that phrase. You've probably heard some folks say that from time to time. "That's Pastor Viars' phrase." Some of our old time members just kind of shake their heads because we know that Pastor G., our former senior pastor, used to say that all the time so I got that from him, okay? Full disclosure and I should probably go on while I'm just on this little trail and say: if you ever hear me say anything that's pithy or memorable or kind of clever, assume I got it from someone else. Okay, can we just assume? Can we just assume that? But rejoice that the Lord wants you to know that you know that you know.

Commentator John Stott said it like this, "That you may know. Eidotai from the Greek word oida means both in word and tense not that they may gradually grow in assurance but that they may possess here and now a present certainty of the life they have received in Christ." Boom. And rejoice. They had been unsettled by the false teachers and become unsure of their spiritual state. Throughout the letter John has been giving them criteria: doctrinal, moral, social, by which to test themselves and others. His purpose is to establish their assurance. This letter is to assure, another translation, you that you have eternal life. I would encourage all of us today, what a beautiful day by the way, huh? I would encourage all of us today and this week to spend time thinking the Lord that he designed the salvation process to be something you could know for sure and in these days of uncertainty on so many fronts, you've got Ebola or not. In fact, you should have seen me walking through town this week with these three Kenyans. It was like the Red Sea was parting. You know, it was just amazing. Absolutely amazing. Ebola. ISIS. Isil, etc. etc. Aren't you glad in the midst of all of that that if you know Christ you can say things like Paul said to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded, I am convinced that he is able to keep, to guard, which I have committed and trusted to him against that day." Doesn't that make you want to break out into song? We've got a hymn on that one. If you're not careful, I'll break out into song and empty this auditorium. But how great it is, I know whom I have believed. I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

That means we can rejoice because the Lord provides, what? Eternal life. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." What's important to note here is that John doesn't say that you'll eventually have eternal life in the future. Note the grammar. It says that if you've trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, you have eternal life right now. John MacArthur made that important distinction, "Eternal life involves far more than merely living forever in a chronological sense." It's really important to understand that. "The essence of eternal life is the believer's participation in the blessed everlasting life of Christ through his or her union with him. Jesus defined," now hear this, "Jesus defined it in his high priestly prayer to the Father, this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

You know, that's one of the benefits of being involved in a church family because we have the opportunity to see the fruit of eternal life being lived out right around us. Not in a way that causes us to ultimately praise the recipients but to praise the giver. We've already mentioned a couple of times that our brother Kevitt Brown passed away on



Friday evening. Kevitt was a faithful Deacon. He and his family served so well in so many ways: served in the children's ministry for many, many years; served in our Hispanic ministry for many, many years. Again, as a Deacon and deacon's wife. Many of you have been impacted by Kevitt's life and Kevitt's testimony for sure. I genuinely believe that there is such a thing as saving faith and there is such a thing as living faith and there is such a thing as dying faith. I believe all of that is wrapped up in this term "eternal life" that is given to us by Christ and we saw that lived out this week. Kevitt's been struggling with cancer for 12 years. 12 years, but it's amazing how well God allowed him to suffer. In fact, his cancer doctor said to her nurses recently, "I've seen a lot of people struggle with cancer obviously. If I ever get cancer, I want to handle it like Kevitt and Sarah have handled it." On Monday, the doctors came in and after doing the test, Kevitt had been having a rough time and said, "Listen, humanly speaking, it appears that within hours or maybe days you are going to be dying." And so I had an opportunity to talk with Kevitt and Sarah that night. It was a fascinating conversation because Kevitt didn't want to talk about the pain, Kevitt didn't even want to talk about Kevitt. He kept wanting to talk about me. He kept wanting to thank me for being his pastor and rehearsing various reasons why he was thankful and I kept trying to get him off of that part of the conversation but that's just the kind of guy he was. Because he had eternal life, because God was giving him dying faith, he wanted to use some of his remaining breaths to say thank you to people that he loved.

A lot of folks came in on Tuesday and spent time with him late into the evening. I visited him Wednesday in the morning and Kevitt actually had me in stitches laughing. You have to be careful, at least I feel like in a situation like that, I want to be respectful. I understand the pain and the grieving. I don't want to go in and start making jokes with my dry sense of humor and so I went in what I thought was appropriately respectful of just the setting and Kevitt is cracking jokes on Wednesday morning. He tells me, he says, "You know, they told me I was going to die and so I assumed Tuesday night I was going to die." He said, "I woke up Wednesday morning and my first question was, am I dead?" How can you talk about this so matter of factly? And then he said, "I'm fairly sure I'm not because I feel so good." So he said, "I opened up my eyes and I feel really good." He said to me, "Pastor Viars, tell the church people to stop praying for me. I'm supposed to be dying. I feel good." Now, I don't even know how that even sounds when I say it disrespectful, I'm just telling you what he said. He was that lucid. He was enjoying life even at that point where he and his pastor and some of his family members are yuck yukking it up in the hospital room and two days later, he is in the presence of his Savior.

I need to pause for sure and just ask you a couple of important questions. Do you have assurance of your salvation this morning? Do you know that you know that you know that you're on your way to heaven? And listen, did you hear what I said earlier because it's in the text? Don't make the mistake of thinking, "Well, I can always get around to that. God is somehow always obligated to give me another day. God is always obligated to draw me at the same level of intensity that he's drawing me now." Friend, if you don't know Christ, I would encourage you to run, not walk to the cross and I would encourage you to admit your need and place your faith and trust in him now. If you have some questions that need to be answered, jump into this Intro to Faith class that starts

Wednesday night. It's an open Q&A. You can ask any question about the Bible, any question about Christianity. We'll do our very best to talk with you about it. If as a result of hearing what we're studying this morning about the possibility of knowing for sure you've actually trusted Christ this morning, I want to encourage you to tell somebody that "if you'll confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Some of you know I love you but I've got to pastor you before your heart gets too hard. Some of you are so stubborn you won't tell anybody. Tell them. Tell them. It would be the best news you could possibly give your wife,. The best news you could possibly give your hubby. The best news you could possibly give your kids or your loved ones. Tell them. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord while you have the opportunity to do so. Christian friend, I would just ask you: are you in the habit of praising God regularly? Because he's designed the salvation process to be something that you can know for sure. Let's be busy and rejoicing in that, huh?

Now get back to the text, what's the next part of the argument? What would be the natural result of this kind of assurance? The answer is confidence. The confidence that we can have in Christ. It's a Greek word "parrhesia." It's a very important concept in Scripture. I'm not talking about being arrogant. I'm not talking about being proud or condescending but we're talking about biblical confidence. Now, here's what I want to do and I'm going to do it quickly but this word is used in several other places in the New Testament that can help us know what it does it mean to be confident if I really have assurance of my salvation? Here's one of them, it's John 7:13, "Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews." The word "confident" is not there but the Greek word "parrhesia" is. Which one do you think it is in that text? Yeah, the word "openly" which means if we have assurance of our salvation, there is going to be confidence and we're going to live for and proclaim Christ openly. You see, the more assurance you have that eternal life is available through trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, the more bold you're going to be in your witness for him. Do you have confidence?

Listen, at your workplace and your neighborhood, at the games, etc., everybody else is talking about their thing, right? They are talking about their passions. They're talking about their joys. They're talking about their heroes. They're talking about what they like, what they love, what they believe. Well, if they can be free to do that, why can't you be free to do that? Because often what's being discussed is no more consequential than the latest episode of last night's sitcom or yesterday's ballgame. Why not look for opportunities to confidently speak of your Savior. Paul said it like this, "Now all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us," here it is, "the ministry of reconciliation." You're not going to do that unless you're confident. Namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ. Does that describe you? Are you confident in Christ? It's the opposite of the phrase we sometimes find in the Bible "melts with fear." Is that what happens to you anytime there's an opportunity to speak for Jesus? Your confidence disappears and your assurance deserts you? It's like at the end of the Wizard of Oz. Remember that scene

where the water is thrown on the wicked witch, "I'm melting. I'm melting." You want to see a picture of her right now, don't you? I know that, of course you do. There you go. There you go. That's how some Christians are when it's an opportunity to speak for Christ. "I'm melting. I'm melting." You say, "Pastor Viars, you don't say it as good as she does. Well then fine, here's her. "You cursed brat. Look what you've done. I'm melting. I'm melting. Melting." Yeah you needed that just before Halloween. That could happen to a Christian, huh? She's still melting but I've got to get going. Instead of being open and honest and upfront about your faith, you're melting.

Here's another use of *parresia*, it's a passage that speaks about the raising of Lazarus. You may remember Jesus explained to the disciples that Lazarus had fallen asleep and the disciples say, "Well, that's okay, he'll wake up." And so Jesus had to say to them plainly, same word, "Lazarus is dead." You see, we live for and we proclaim Christ plainly. The stronger your assurance that a person can really know for sure that they are on their way to heaven, the more you want to make the Gospel plain.

Here's another use of our word, it's on Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost. "Brethren, I may confidently," there it is, "say to you regarding the patriarch David, he died and was buried." What does that mean? He's saying, "Look, we checked his tomb. His bones are still there so we have settled convictions." That's part of this confidence. "I've checked this out. I've thought it through. I'm staking my life on this."

He is a fourth use, two chapters later. "Lord, take note of their threats and grant that your bond servants may speak your word with confidence." You see, we're willing to stand up to a little bit of heat. We're willing to take some blowback for our beliefs. We're not talking about being mean, not talking about being arrogant. We're not talking about looking for a fight. But on the other hand, we're not going to be ashamed of the Gospel.

Here's the best one for sure. Romans 4:23, "Now as they observed the confidence." You see, they had assurance of their salvation so they possessed confidence. "As they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and," here it is, "began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." In other words, it's apparent to others that the ultimate source of our confidence is the resurrected Christ.

Put all that together, the emphasis of the Bible is: confident people are upfront; confident people are plain; confident people have settled convictions; confident people are willing to stand up to pressure; and confident people most importantly perhaps, it's a sign of them knowing Christ. And I would just ask you this morning: is your life characterized by biblical confidence? Is it becoming more and more Gospel-centered because you really believe that there is a gift that can be accepted that will result in assurance of our salvation.

I want to thank the many of you who have already signed up to serve in the Living Nativity. You've been a huge help to us and why would people do that? It's because they want to confidently proclaim Christ.

One last reason for rejoicing in this text is the blessing of answered prayer. "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." It assumes, of course, that we're asking according to his will but the more I have a lifestyle of praise, the more he is my center, the more likely it is that what I ask him for is going to be in line with his will anyway. We can have confidence that even our prayer requests please him. He said that earlier in the book that if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God and whatever we ask we receive because we keep his commandments and we do the things that are pleasing. What we ask are things he would want to say yes to.

Think about this, church, and I'm going to be talking to you about this a lot, Lord willing, in the next month when we talk about the stewardship of our heritage but do you realize that the last 50 years in a lot of ways have been example after example of answered prayer? We prayed for a greater and more effective approach to outreach in our community and God gave us things like the Passion Play. He gave us things like the Living Nativity. Answered prayer. We prayed for a Christian school and God gave us one. Answered prayer. We prayed for greater community ministries and God has given us that for sure. Answered prayer. We prayed for a more comprehensive ministry to girls in need and God gave that to us. We prayed for more effective ministry to Purdue on the west side and God gave that to us. We prayed for a seminary and God gave that to us. We prayed for a more effective ministry to seniors and those houses are going up. God gave that to us. I'm saying that we ought to be the kind of people who rejoice. We ought to have a lifestyle of praise and because of the assurance of salvation, because of the confidence we can have in Christ and because of the blessing of answered prayer.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, thank you for the way this marvelous book has ended and Lord, I pray that we would march out of here more in love with you than ever and more determined to live a worshipful life because of all that you have done and all that you are. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*