

How do we have assurance?

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Date: 13 February 2022

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is in John chapter 13, 36 to chapter 14, verse 7. So John chapter 13, verse 36.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.

Peter said to him, Lord, why can't, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.

Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me?

Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God.

Believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

[1 : 02] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, you may also be. And you know the way to where I am going.

Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also. From now on, you do know him and you have seen him.

Why not I lead us in prayer? Lord, thank you that you have made clear to us where true assurance in the face of death is found, in the death and resurrection of your precious son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please would you help us to see him more clearly this morning? Amen. Now I want this morning to tell you about my friend Robin. Robin was a dear friend of mine at university.

[2 : 10] We both studied history together, which meant that neither of us studied at all. But he was far more gifted than I was. Intelligent, quirky, chatty, but a decided atheist.

He was loud, outrageous and funny. He was also very kind to me. And as some of you will know, I didn't cover myself in glory at school or at university. So I found that quite nice.

However, sadly, during my first year of university, it was devastating to hear that Robin took his own life 10 months into my first year at King's with him.

And it was, to be honest with you, at the funeral, I think, which was what was most difficult for me to process. Because I know Robin wasn't a Christian. He'd made that very clear to me. And we would all ask to sign a book that we were going to give to Robin's mum.

And I was looking through the various kind of messages that people were writing in this book. And they were things like, we know you're in a better place, Robin. We know that you're smiling down on us, Robin.

[3 : 12] And we know that we will see you again. Now, as I said, Robin wasn't a Christian. And so obviously those statements really troubled me. Where were his friends getting their assurance from to make those statements?

How do they know that Robin is in a better place? How do they know that he is looking down on us? How do they know that they will see him again? Now, I understand this is a natural comfort to think and write at a funeral.

I understand. And in fact, every year when it's Robin's birthday, which is approaching soon, people write the same kind of messages on his social media profile. But I couldn't help but think, and I still can't help but think, that they have absolutely no assurance whatsoever for those claims.

In fact, no one does at funerals like that. There is no assurance. And I want us to think this morning, how can we as Christians and those who wouldn't call ourselves Christians alike have assurance in the face of death?

Where does assurance come from? What is true assurance? What is false assurance? And how can we make sure that we have true assurance?

[4 : 30] The reason I say to Christians and those who wouldn't call themselves Christians alike is because this passage is addressed first and foremost to Christians. Jesus has told his disciples that he's returning to the Father.

Have a look with me at 13 verse 1. Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Jesus is leaving. He's leaving by way of the cross. And yet, he's told the Jews who are seeking to kill him that they will not be able to go with him. And he said the same to his followers.

Have a look with me at 13 verse 33, which was our passage last week. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me. And just as I said to the Jews, so now also I say to you, where I am going, you cannot come.

Jesus is returning by the cross and the resurrection. And he makes absolutely clear, enemy and Christian alike, you cannot come. You cannot follow me.

[5 : 36] But now Peter asked the obvious question. He understands why Jesus' enemies can't come with him to the Father, but why can't he go? You've just called me a little child, Jesus.

Why can I not go with you? Why are we being left? Have a look with me at verse 36. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going.

You cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterwards. So it seems that both Christians and enemies alike, at least Christians in the meantime, cannot go to the Father.

And so Peter is deeply concerned and afraid. He thinks if we're being left, Jesus, in the same place as your enemies, how can we have assurance? How can we have assurance that we will be with you and the Father one day?

How can the Christian have assurance that they will triumph over death and be with Jesus and the Father too? And this leads me on to my first point.

[6 : 36] And you might find it strange that on a sermon to do with assurance, we're starting with this particular point. We cannot get to heaven. We cannot get to heaven.

Because, you see, John wants to make it absolutely clear from these verses that without a shadow of a doubt, us on our own cannot get to heaven. And he does that by illustrating it through Peter.

Peter cannot get to heaven. And here we see the great motive for Peter's life. He is devastated. Devastated that Jesus is leaving him because his reason for living is summed up in Jesus.

Have a look with me at verse 37. Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. And here we see really encapsulated, I think, just how painful it would have been for Peter, for Jesus to be going away.

How could Peter live on in this life if his primary love is leaving him to die on a cross? Peter would do anything to stop that from happening. Anything so that Jesus would stay and wouldn't have to go, even to the point of laying down his life.

[7 : 46] And I don't think this is hyperbole at this stage from Peter. But this is where we see, sadly, the pathetic limitations of Peter's commitment to Jesus.

Whether or not Peter can actually see it through to give his life for Jesus. Because Jesus reveals just how able Peter is to see through that commitment in verse 38.

Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

It is such an ironically damning statement, isn't it? To begin with me, reflect on that first clause. Will you lay down your life for me? This, to the Christian, is such a ridiculous statement.

Peter has had his feet washed by Jesus and told in no uncertain terms that Jesus must be a slave for him or he will have no part with him. But more than that, it is unwittingly from Peter the most outrageously arrogant statement he could have ever made.

[8 : 53] He's effectively saying, no, no, no, Jesus, do not go. You don't need to go to the cross. I've got it covered. I can provide for you what you need. I can give my life for you.

It's not I that needs saving. No, no, no, no, Jesus, you don't understand. I'll give my life for you. It's not I that needs your death. It is you that needs my service.

I can fulfill what is lacking in you, Jesus. I can go to the cross for you. Well, Jesus reveals just how ridiculous that comment is in our next clause of verse 38.

Truly, truly, as in absolutely certainly, Peter, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times. Peter thinks he can live for Jesus in his own strength.

He thinks he can give up his life for Jesus. Jesus reveals that Peter cannot even give up his own reputation for Jesus. Peter thinks that he can give his life.

[9 : 54] Jesus thinks you can't even give up the opinion of strangers of you. It is utterly pathetic, the difference between what Peter wants to achieve for Jesus and between what he actually can achieve.

But before we're too harsh on Peter, before we think our classic headstrong Peter, remember that Peter was the best of us. He gave up his whole life to follow Jesus up until this point.

He was his most trusted disciple and closest friend. Peter is not weak-willed. If anyone was going to be able to achieve their way to heaven, it would be Peter. But here we see that even the best of us, even Peter, cannot make it to heaven.

If Peter does not have assurance, if Peter cannot make it to heaven, how on earth can anyone else? How on earth can anyone else?

And certainly, just like Peter, as I was reflecting on these words and trying to apply them to my own heart, I've fallen so far short of what I hope for my own Christian walk. If Peter fell short of his Christian walk, surely we do.

[11 : 01] In the office at work, oh, aren't you a Jesus follower? I never knew the man. At the school see you. Don't you believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again?

I said I do not know him. At the school gate, didn't you say that you were a Christian? I told you. I do not know the man. Now those might not be our exact words, but certainly, if you are anything like me, there will have been countless times when we denied our Lord Jesus, either in what we said or what we did not say.

Yes, if even Peter cannot make it to heaven, we certainly cannot. We cannot make it to heaven on our own. We have no assurance if we trust only in ourself.

And you might well be asking, Benji, you told us that you were going to be reassuring this morning. Well, so far that hasn't really happened. I thought you said this sermon was going to be uplifting.

Well, friends, isn't it just so unbelievably liberating that the Lord Jesus knows that we can't make it to heaven by ourselves?

That we set Christian New Year's resolutions and they're forgotten by February? That we promise to finish our Bible in a year and stop in Leviticus? That we leave out the fact we're a Christian or that we went to church in a conversation about our weekends?

[12 : 17] That we've fallen into that same sin just yet again and again and again? Isn't it such a relief to know that that is not a surprise to Jesus?

Jesus knew that Peter would deny him and still went to the cross. Isn't it a relief that our sin is not a surprise to Jesus? In the 19th century, there was a surgeon called Liston who was known as the really trendy title of the fastest knife in the West.

And he operated in the West End of London, shockingly. He was famously timed amputating a man's leg in under two and a half minutes. The reason for this was not because he was particularly lazy and had something else to get to, but because in a world where anesthesia wasn't a thing, speed was important to reduce the patient's pain.

The only problem with this was that he often misjudged what he was supposed to be cutting. And one famous story was where he was operating on a young chap's leg and ended up soaring through the surgical assistant's fingers.

And while speedily changing instrument, he slashed a spectator's coat. The patient and the assistant both died later from infection to their wounds and the spectator died of shock.

[13 : 30] It's the only surgery in history with a 300% mortality rate. Now, you would want to be absolutely sure if you were one of Liston's patients that Liston, and before he started operating on you, that he'd identified the right thing to cut.

It's the right ankle doctor. You would want to make absolutely sure that he'd identified the correct problem. Well, here we have absolute assurance that Jesus knows the correct problem of humanity.

He absolutely knows. If even Peter cannot make it, we can stop pretending that we can. It is so liberating to know that Jesus is fully aware of how helpless we are on our own.

The only thing he requires of us is to own it. That's the beginning of Christian assurance, to own that we cannot get on our own to heaven. And that brings me on to my second point.

Now, Jesus begins this next section in 14, 1 to 7 with words, finally, of reassurance, you'll be pleased to know. Certainly, the disciples would have needed it given just how much Peter has been put in his place.

[14:38] In fact, we are left in such a desperate position, aren't we, at the end of chapter 13. We've seen that Jesus is going away to the Father by dying on the cross. And now we've just been told that Peter, the best of disciples, cannot get there.

They cannot get to heaven. They cannot get to the Father. But this is where we see some of the most comforting and stunning words in all of Scripture. Because here, Jesus lays out what him going to die on the cross achieves for those who believe in him.

Have a look with me at 14, verse 1 to 4. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also, and you know the way to where I am going.

In other words, Jesus is saying to the disciples, if I am willing to go away, if I am willing to go away to die on a cross for you, then of course, of course I will come back to bring you to myself.

[15:48] Or to put it another way, we have seen that the cross makes the disciples little children and as little children they need a room in their father's house. Of course they do. That is the 101 of what it means to look after a child.

You do not toss them into a kennel in the garden. You give them a room. And that is exactly what the cross achieves. If Jesus went so far as to die for them, to prepare a room for them in his father's house, of course one day they will come into that room.

Now I want you to imagine to try and get this across that you're a hotel owner. Some of you might be a hotel owner here. I don't know. But you've decked out your hotel completely. Okay? This is the launch. You've paid thousands to get an indoor, heated pool, heated floors, heated seats.

Everything's heated. You've made sure the beds are from Emma or Eve or some other woman's name beginning with E. You've got the plasma TV screen in each room with access to Netflix. A stunning minibar full of gluten-free options.

Apparently that's really important. You get guests booking in and you go even one step further. You pay their bill because you're so desperate to have people come in on the first day. You pay their bill. So the first guests, they're on me.

[16:57] This is a hotel where you get to stay and you don't even have to pay. There's a slogan for you. And you have a great big launch and then as the first guest is about to put their key card into the room, you jump in the way and say, what are you doing?

No, you can't go into your room. And they say, is the room paid for? Yeah, yeah, I paid it. Is the room ready? Yeah, yeah, I set it up this morning. But my luggage is in there, right?

You took it off me. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I put your luggage in there. And there's food in there? Yeah, I stock the minibar with gluten-free snacks for you. And that's my name engraved on the door.

Yeah, yeah, I did that by hand this morning. Took me three hours. And I can't come in. No. No, you cannot. It would be ridiculous. Absurd.

And how much more so with the Lord Jesus Christ, if he is willing to prepare a room for you, for them, for me, by dying for them, of course, of course, he will bring them into that room.

[18:01] Of course, him going away to die for them will lead to them getting to be with him. It would be absurd otherwise. When I was little, and this might tell you more about me than it does about my parents, but I used to have existential crises that my parents would one day come into my room and murder me with a knife.

Those are the kind of things that I stayed up thinking about. Now, I have to hasten to add, it wasn't because they were bad parents. It was actually because they were very good parents. I actually wrote this. I didn't realize my parents would be here this morning.

Anyway, there you go. I couldn't wrap my head around how I, a child of seven, who brought absolutely no economic value whatsoever to the family, could be provided for.

In fact, I wasn't even economically neutral. I was an economic drain, quite a significant one. I actually cost my parents money. I also had regular tantrums and fallouts with my parents and they

still fed me and paid for my clothes and let me take up space in their house with my own room. My seven-year-old brain couldn't get its head around the fact that I seemed to bring absolutely no benefit to their lives whatsoever and yet they still provided for me. Children looking shifty in the room.

[19 : 14] But that entirely misses the point, doesn't it? Of course, if they gave me life and raised me and prepared a place for me and gave sacrificially over and over, it was a sign of their love for me.

Of course that love would continue even though I could bring nothing to the table. If Jesus has gone to prepare a room for us as his brother and child of his father, if he has cut a house key to our room in heaven with your name on it, if he achieved that house key with his own death on the cross for us, well we can be absolutely sure that he will give us that key.

Heaven has a room with your name engraved on it by the Lord Jesus if you have faith in him. And Jesus wants that to be absolutely clear to us in verse five to six.

Have a look with me. Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the father except through me. If you had known me, you would know my father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

[20 : 29] Jesus makes absolutely clear, absolutely clear that a true assurance is found absolutely and only in belief in him. And I'm not going to shy away from this.

This is an exclusive claim. And it means that there is no assurance anywhere outside of Jesus. He is the only way, the only truth, the only life and wonderfully the disciples now know him.

The disciples can have full assurance that Jesus going away to die on the cross for them means they will one day certainly, certainly be with him. So to conclude, how can the disciples have assurance that they will one day get to be with Jesus?

Well, Jesus just simply says, look at the cross. If Jesus is willing to go away to the cross for them, to die on a piece of wood for them, then they can have full assurance, full assurance that Jesus will one day bring them into heaven.

And more than that though, as we've seen wonderfully, Jesus knows the disciples complete and utter failure to do anything for them. This is not conditional on the behavior of the disciples.

[21 : 39] It never has and it never will be conditional on their behavior. The cross is not conditional on behavior at all. Jesus knows that the disciples cannot get to heaven on their own.

Jesus knows that Peter will deny him and yet he still, he still goes to die for him on the cross. The only thing the disciples have to do is verse six.

Believe. That Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. That's it. If they believe that, then they can have full assurance that Jesus will bring them to heaven into their very own room.

Now, I want us to return as we finish to think about my friend Robin and the things his friends wrote on that book that they gave to his mother. And we asked, didn't we, how can my friends, how can Robin's mom have assurance that he is in a better place or that they will see him again?

How can they have assurance? And the answer, desperately, is that they cannot. They don't have assurance at all that those statements are true.

[22 : 50] In fact, those statements are almost certainly not true. Robin was an out-and-out atheist and thought the idea of religion was stupid. so they have no assurance, none, for those claims about him that he's in a better place, that he's looking down on us, that they will see him again.

Atheism, as one commentator said during the light of COVID, is only a fair-weather religion. As soon as death comes, we see that it offers no assurance whatsoever and that is true.

Now, my great uncle was a minister in the Falklands and he told the story of how, as the boat moved closer to Argentina from Britain on their way to war, shockingly, his church services got more and more full until as they were about to arrive to begin fighting, nearly everyone on the boat was at church.

Ironic, because it's, but sorry, and my great uncle also said that once the boat had turned around and started to return to Britain, each service got more and more empty until by the time they arrived back in Britain there was barely anybody going to any of the services at all.

And that is ironic because it's not as though any of those men were not going to die anymore but just because it wasn't potentially as close. No, there is no assurance outside of Jesus.

[24 : 13] No assurance in the face of death, absolutely none. But for the Christian, and by Christian all I mean is someone who's accepted 14 verse 6, that is all that that requires, belief that

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, you have such assurance, such assurance.

If you know that you cannot make it to heaven yourself, and if you know that Jesus went to die for you on the cross, then you have such assurance and certainty that there is a room in heaven that has a plaque on its front with your name on it and it is for you and only you.

People in the face of death are desperate for assurance and as I said, the great irony was that as the ship made its return journey to the UK, it got less and less well attended. Well friends, can I remind us of a verse in Isaiah 49 where Jesus says, behold, I have engraved you on my palms. Little children, friends and family here, if you are in Jesus, then you are engraved on the very palms of our Lord. Engraved there because of the cross.

He cannot forget you as surely as you cannot forget your own hands. If he went to the cross for you, you are his and your future is secure. In him and him alone you have full assurance in the face of death.

[25 : 40] When we die and we all will, the Christian will be welcomed home into the arms of our father like a child returning home from a long journey.

Why don't I lead us in prayer? Dear Lord, we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus Christ that his death and resurrection on the cross means that even though death will come to us all, we have full confidence that we will be welcomed home.

Amen.