

Assurance of Salvation

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation and the assurance that comes with it.

Duration: 38:03

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 4:4-5

Topics: "Assurance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the topic of salvation and the different ways people believe they can earn it. He emphasizes that salvation cannot be earned through good works or by living a good life. Instead, salvation is a gift from God that is received through faith. The speaker emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's word and the assurance that comes from knowing that God cannot lie.

Transcript

What we're going to speak about this morning I did not learn at Harvard Business School. I had to lay all that at the foot of the cross and follow the Lord Jesus. Would you turn with me please to Romans chapter 4 and verses 4 and 5, just two verses.

Romans chapter 4 and verses 4 and 5. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Remarkable two verses of scripture, they comprehend so much.

The words that I have just read to you are the words of God. If the Lord should lean down from heaven and you should hear those words audibly, they would not be any more the word of God than they have been as you read them in your Bibles today. If this chapel had a sign out front and it said, God speaks here every Sunday morning, some of your neighbors would think you had lost it.

But it would be absolutely true, because every time the Bible is read, God speaks. And what he says in these two verses is very crucial, and some of it is very surprising too. I don't know if you noticed it when we read the verses.

It's very important. You know, everything in the area of faith and morals, everything in the spiritual realm is either truth or man's opinion. Do you ever think about that? Everything is either truth or man's opinion.

You say, well what is truth? That's what Pilate said. He said, what is truth? Truth is what God says about something. And man's opinion is man's idea of things.

The trouble with man's opinion is, you know, which man is right? There are so many different opinions. If you don't believe it, just read the To The Editors column in Time magazine or your daily newspaper or something like it. And I mean, you just become dazzled and confused by the variety of human opinion.

But you know, truth is static. Truth is the same down through the centuries. And in this book we have truth.

And Lord Jesus said that, didn't he? Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth. I tell you friends, it's great to have an authority you can plant your feet on and know that it's absolutely true.

There was a young man and he was delivering a scholarly discourse in this whole area of faith and morals. And another young fellow in the audience raised his hand and he said, what is your authority for saying that? And the young man said, I don't know. Give him credit at least for being honest.

He said, I don't know. Very, very embarrassing. So I'd like to emphasize that before we start.

When we read these verses, we're reading what is absolutely true. No question about it. You say, why? Because God can't lie.

God can't deceive. God can't be deceived. If God says it, it's true.

And God says the words that we read here. Now, this has to do with the whole subject of salvation. Can I be sure of heaven? How can I be sure of heaven? What's going to happen when I die? Is there any way that I can have positive assurance that I will go to heaven? That's the general subject here.

In devising a plan of salvation, there were only three possibilities available to God. And two of them weren't possibilities at all, as we'll see. There were only three possibilities.

First of all, you're saved by works, by what you do. Or as they say, by living a good life. Secondly, you're saved by your character.

Or certainly, he just gives salvation as a gift. I can't think of any other possible way in which salvation could ever be devised. I try, I rack my brain, but no.

It's got to either be by works, by human merit, that's character, or just receive it as a gift. And it says in this first verse that we read, verse 4, Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. In verse 4, you have the wrong way of salvation.

In verse 5, you have the right way of salvation. They're just put in contrast here. The first verse describes a man who's working for his salvation.

He's going to earn salvation by good works. And incidentally, that's what most of the people in the world believe today. It's the greatest heresy that has ever entered the human mind.

Salvation by works. You see, as Dr. Ironside used to say, there are only two religions in the world. You say, oh now, come on McDonald, I can think of more than two.

Well, you can think of more subheadings, but you can only think of two. Most religions in the world teach that you're saved by doing certain things. By doing certain things.

And that covers the gamut, really, pretty much the gamut, of religions in the world. They say salvation by works. And verse 4 says it's not the right way.

To him who works, the wages work. You work for wages. This is not gift.

This is wages you earn. The wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. What do you mean by grace? Well, grace, as we know, is unmerited favor.

But when I think of that word grace, there's another word that's closely connected with it, and I cannot divorce the word from grace, and that's gift. Grace is closely connected with the idea of a gift. To him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt.

In other words, if you were to work and gain your salvation by those works, God would be indebted to you. The difference, God isn't indebted to any of his creatures. That rules that out.

It rules it out very carefully. This is, first of all, an impossible way of salvation. And I'll tell you why.

First of all, the word of God condemns it. It says there's a way that seems right unto a man, but the ends are the ways of death. God's requirement is absolutely perfection.

It says the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. It says all have come short of the glory of God. What does that mean, all have come short of the glory of God? Well, the glory of God is the standard of his perfection.

It has to be that way. God couldn't say, well, do the best you can. It wouldn't be God if he said that.

God would say, well, if God said, just be moderate in your sin, but don't go the full length. That wouldn't be God. God couldn't say that.

God demands perfection. That's the glory of God. And, of course, we all fall short of that, don't we? We can't produce perfection because we're born in sin and we're shaped in iniquity.

We sin every word, every day in thought, word, and deed. Also, if we were to gain salvation by works, that would lead to boasting. Can you imagine what heaven would be like if people were saved by works? You'd be up there and you'd be boasting about the measure of your good works and how you had lived a clean life and you had done everything perfectly.

And I'd be saying, I wish he'd keep quiet so I can tell about my works. That wouldn't be heaven. That wouldn't be heaven if you have boasting like that.

Paul tells us in Romans 3 that on the true way of salvation, boasting is excluded. He said, why is boasting excluded? Because the Lord Jesus does all the saving and we just receive it as a free gift. We just receive it as a free gift.

When a person is saved, if a person were saved by works, he'd never have assurance of salvation. He could never know he was saved. When I say the following, I'm not saying anything against these dear people, but in a recent edition of the New York Times, Cardinal O'Connor of the New York Diocese said, he said, I cannot say at any particular moment that I'm sure of heaven.

He said, the Pope cannot say at any particular moment that he's sure of heaven. He said, Mother Teresa cannot say at any particular moment that she's sure of heaven. Why would he say a thing like that? Because the idea is salvation by works.

And if you were to be saved that way, you could never be sure. You could never be sure you had done enough good works or the right kind of good works. But if salvation is by a gift, you know it, because you know when you've received a gift.

That's a marvel of God's wonderful way of salvation. And also, there'll be no security. I might think, well, right at the present time, things look pretty good.

But what about the future? There would always be the sword of Damocles hanging over my head, ready to send upon me if I flopped, if I failed, if I fell to the ground. No security under that program. But you know, the worst thing about salvation by works is that it's insulting to God.

Why? Because God sent his son 2,000 years ago down to the world to finish the work of salvation, to provide a plan of salvation for us. And on the cross of Calvary, he cried, It is finished. What did he mean by that? He meant that everything that was necessary for your salvation and mine was accomplished there on the cross of Calvary.

Wonderful. And so when I try to do something, I'm adding to a finished work. My father used to be a furniture finisher, and he could match the grain on a tabletop, and it looked pretty good when he got through.

Now, supposing one of his clients came along and started with a little sandpaper to add to my father's finished work. Maybe he had a chisel and a hammer, you know, and he was going to just add to that finished work. It would ruin the whole thing, wouldn't it? Or supposing I was invited down to the White House.

Don't hold your breath, I won't be. But supposing I was invited down to the White House for a meal. I go in there, and I mean, it's just absolutely luxurious.

The finest china, the silver, the silver and the food. Man, really something. And I enjoy it, you know.

And then at the end of the meal, at the end of the evening, the president shows me, he comes to the door with me, you know, show me off the premises. I reach into my pocket, and I say, well, now, thank you very much, Mr. President. I really appreciate your hospitality, your gracious hospitality.

And I reach into my coin purse, and I take out a dime. And I say, now, just to express my appreciation, I'd like to give you this dime. He was doing that in kindness.

He was doing that as a gift of grace. And here you go, you try to pay for it with a dime. You know, that's what people do.

When people try to merit salvation by their work, they're really insulting God. The Lord Jesus finished the work there. You say, what do you mean he finished the work? Well, in some marvelous way, God took your sins and my sins, and he placed them on the Lord Jesus.

All our iniquities were placed on him, and he paid the penalty for your sins and mine there. I tell you, it's wonderful. Who was he? I'll tell you who he was.

He was God. He's the one who is the upholder of all things by the word of his power. He's the ruler of the universe.

He's the one who controls it all. He's the one who keeps the stars in their courses. The one who numbers them all.

He has a name for all the stars. He's the one who can heal the brokenhearted. He's the one who died there on the cross of Calvary for you and me.

Don't think of him just as the carpenter of Nazareth or the man of Galilee. He's more than that. He's God incarnate.

God manifests in a body for the deities. We're not to come along with our measly little dime and try to add to that. What do you say? If he died for all of your sins and all of my sins, then we're all safe.

Well, that's not as easy as that. God doesn't want to populate heaven with people who don't want to be there. The gift is offered freely to all, but it has to be received.

It has to be received. Years ago in the time of President Jackson, there was a man condemned to death for a crime. He was going to be put to death, and just before he was to die, a pardon came from the president.

And they rushed into his cell with a pardon. And he said with utter contempt, he said, I'd rather die than accept a pardon from President Jackson. Well, that threw them into a tizzy, and it had to go back to the law courts again.

And they went to the Supreme Court. And you know the Supreme Court said, a pardon is just a piece of paper. It has to be accepted to be valid.

You know that's true. The gift of life, the Lord Jesus offers the gift of life, has to be accepted. Now, to him who works, is the reward not counted as grace, a gift, but as debt.

God is indebted. You work, God is indebted to, but God can't be indebted to any of his creatures. Notice what it says in verse 5, but to him who does not work.

Wow! That is a shock, isn't it? I mean, that goes against everything that man generally believes. If you don't believe it, just take a sheet of paper, a pad of paper, and go out with a pencil, and go down any street in Lawrence, and say, what kind of people go to heaven? And then start tabulating it. And what's the answer going to be? Good people go to heaven.

It's not what my Bible says. My Bible says, sinners saved by grace go to heaven. Our friend Jim McCarthy stood in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, and he did exactly that.

And only one, one young lady, red hair, said, the only one who said it, to him who doesn't work. Dear friends, if you want to be saved, stop working for your salvation. Stop working for yourself.

What else does it say? To him who does not work, but believes, but believes. What does that mean, but believes? Belief has to do with faith, doesn't it? Some time ago, ex-president Bush fulfilled a secret dream that he had for many years. He had been in the war, and he had jumped a parachute out of a plane, and he wanted to do it again.

And so, very recently, he went into a plane, and he was all rigged up with the parachute, and when the plane was at the proper altitude, he jumped. I want to tell you, that was an act of faith. He committed himself spirit, soul, and body to that parachute.

It really was an act of faith, wasn't it? And fortunately, the parachute was a good one. Fortunately, the parachute was a good one. When I was in the Navy, we had a parachute rigger, and he was an alcoholic.

How would you like to jump with a parachute that had been rigged by an alcoholic? They did. They did. And, you know, that's really something.

And people can do that, and they can't put their faith in the Lord. Isn't that a kick? They can do that. People say, Oh, I wish I had faith like you.

Listen, the faith you have all the time, you get on that highway, you don't know who the people are. If you have faith that it's going to be all right, you can put your faith in that. The trouble with man is not his mind, it's not his intellect.

And the people who are not saved are people. The Lord Jesus said, You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they that testify of me, and you don't want to come to me. There's nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ that makes it impossible for anyone to believe in him.

He's the most credible person in the world. If you can't believe him, tell me, who can you believe? There's no risk in believing in Christ. Absolutely no risk.

Just as President Bush jumped with that parachute, when you place your confidence for heaven fully, when you commit yourself to him, I'll never forget years ago, I was at a summer camp, and one day I went down by the shore, the lake there, and I said, One of the regrets of my life is I never learned to stand here at the edge. And he said, Just have your toes at the very edge. I could do that.

And he said, Okay, now lean forward and touch your toes. And then he said, Now, move over into the water. He said, Move over into the water.

And the third time he said, And I was ashamed to stay any longer. And in an act of desperation, I moved over into the water. My hands went out in front of me.

I stayed up there. It was a total commitment of myself to the water. Dear friends, when you do that with the Lord Jesus, that's what this verse says.

Remember, it's God that's speaking. To him who does not work, you abandon any thought of working for your salvation or deserving your salvation. Just abandon any idea that you could ever be saved in that way.

To him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies. Believe in the existence. No, it's not even the demons believe that God exists.

But the idea is to believe that he sent his sons. To believe that he paid the penalty, the eternal penalty, that by accepting him, God writes your name down in the book. Believes on him who justifies.

What does that mean? Justifies. Well, to justify means to reckon righteous. Not to make righteous, but to reckon righteous.

It's a pardon. When you're pardoned, well, the record is still there, but you've been pardoned from that crime. It's better than forgiven because the record is still there.

When God justifies it, there never had been a charge against you. That's pretty wonderful. When you believe on him, God sees you in Christ and accepts you on that basis.

This is the way of salvation. I've often used the illustration, some of you have heard it before, when my father was a kid, he used to work with sheep. Oftentimes happened at lambing time that a sheep would have a lamb and the lamb would die.

And it happened oftentimes with a big flock that a sheep would have a lamb and the sheep would die. And my father was left with a sheep without a lamb and a lamb without a sheep to give the orphaned lamb to the sheep that doesn't have a lamb. How would it work? Because that sheep knows it's not her.

She won't let that sheep come near her. She'll kick it away. I'll tell you what he does.

He takes that dead lamb and they skin it. And they take that skin and they just put it over the living lamb and just tie it with a couple of pieces of string. And then they nudge it over to that sheep.

Close the head and it is with us. When we trust the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God henceforth sees us in Christ on that basis. Really wonderful, isn't it? He's given all these illustrations in nature to make it very vivid to us.

To him who justifies the ungodly. This is interesting, isn't it? The first shock we got was in the beginning of this. To him who doesn't work.

What kind of people are saved? People who don't work for their sins. But here it adds something to that. To him who justifies the ungodly.

The only kind of people that can be saved. I often think of a story that Gene Gibson likes to tell of a Christian worker. He was talking to an elegant lady about her soul and about her soul's salvation.

She was very refined. She was very cultured. She wore the finest of clothes.

And he came to this word, ungodly. He said to her, Would you mind if I just wrote on this card the word ungodly and just pinned it to your dresser? And then of course he brought this verse before her. To him who justifies the ungodly.

What does that mean? It means that's the place we have to take. We have to acknowledge the fact that we are ungodly. That we have sinned against God.

And we're not worthy for his salvation. We have to repent of those sins. We have to do an about-face.

You know, before we're saved, our backs are to God and our faces are toward sin. When we repent, we turn that around and our faces are toward God and our backs are toward sin. To him who justifies the ungodly.

This is what it comes down to. Am I willing to acknowledge that I am ungodly? That I don't deserve salvation? But am I willing to receive it as a free gift? It says his face is accounted for righteousness. What does that mean? Well, in the simplest possible terms, it means that when God looks down and he sees a

person repenting of his sins and putting his full trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, he justifies that person.

He writes that person's name down in the Book of Life. He saves that person. That person is born again.

And I like to emphasize when I come to a verse like this, that justification takes place in the mind of God and not in the nervous system of the believer. It's something that happens in heaven. You say, well, how do you know it happens? You don't feel it.

It's an emotional experience in your life. It doesn't have to be. It wasn't in mine.

It was just a simple acceptance of a simple offer of salvation. Now, isn't that pretty wonderful? Somebody here might be saying, boy, it sounds like what you've been saying that you don't believe in good works. Well, of course we do believe in good works.

But good works follow salvation. They don't lead up to it. They don't contribute to it.

But they're what follows salvation. What is the first good work that a person can ever do? John chapter 6. Please turn to John chapter 6. Here the Lord Jesus is speaking to unbelieving people. And the word works comes up in the conversation.

And they come to him and they say, you know, what good work shall we do that we might inherit eternal life? See if I can just find the verse here. What is it? 28. Thank you.

They said to him, verse 28, what shall we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said to them, this is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent. The first good work that anyone can do is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You say, well, what about all my gifts to the United Fund up till that time? Well, it's good.

I mean, it's good in our sight. It was nice of you to do it, but it doesn't earn you salvation. The first thing you have to do is believe in his son.

From then on, anything you do for the glory of God is a good work. But that follows salvation. Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2. Just turn to that for a second.

There you'll see the proper perspective, I think, in this whole subject. Verse 8. For by grace, that is undeserved favor, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Get it? Not of works, lest any man should boast.

But here's the other side of it. For his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. It says we're not saved by good works, we're saved for good works, or unto good works.

Good works are not the root, good works are the fruit. Good works are not the cause, good works are the result. And you know, after you're saved, as I say, whatever you do for the glory of God, for the good of others, it counts with God as being a good work.

And so you have this wonderful truth set forth so clearly here in Romans chapter 4 verses 4 and 5. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. But to him who does not work. You know, as you go away from here today, if you're not a decided Christian, I just wish those words would ring in your mind.

To him who does not work. Lay your head down, down at Jesus' feet. Stop trying to earn salvation by being a good guy, by doing the best you can, by doing good works.

To him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Now we often say you don't have to do anything for salvation. All you have to do is believe.

And that sounds like a double talk, doesn't it? You don't have to do anything. All you have to do is believe. Well, the explanation of that is this.

Faith is not a meritorious act. When we say you don't have to do anything for salvation, we mean you don't have to do anything meritorious. You don't have to do anything that counts as brownie points with God.

That's what we mean, meritorious. Now, faith is not a meritorious work. You can't, for instance, pat yourself on the back and say, nice going, McDonald.

Pretty clever of you to believe in Jesus. No, I'd be foolish not to. I'd have everything to gain and nothing to lose by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the most sane, sensible, rational, reasonable. So faith is not a meritorious work. It's a work that's not a meritorious work.

Repentance is not a meritorious work. It's a work. It's not a meritorious one.

I don't keep honors to myself by repenting. Actually, I just lay myself in the dust when I repent and acknowledge that I'm ungodly in the sight of God, even if I might not be in the sight of my friends, I'm ungodly in the sight of God to be saved. Now, salvation is a gift.

What do you do when somebody gives you a gift? You accept it and you say, thank you. That's the way it is with salvation. God is saying, well, come, repent of your sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I'll give you salvation as a gift.

You receive it, you're saved. How do you know you're saved? Because the Word of God says so. John 5, 24, Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who hears my word, believes in him that sent him, has everlasting life, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.

I know I'm saved because I have trusted Christ and the Word of God says I'm saved. These things have I written unto you, that believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. I mentioned Cardinal O'Connor, I mentioned the Pope, I mentioned Mother Teresa.

God says you can know that you have eternal life. Not if you're trying to get it by works, but if you receive it as a gift of God. And so the problem, the question today that we face is, if you're here and you're not a decided Christian, what are you going to do about it? It's marvelous, isn't it, to think that if a person is here, he knows he's a sinner, and he's willing to go God's way, he could walk out of this place, a new creature in Christ Jesus, and know that he's born again.

I'm going to ask you to do something. If God has been speaking to your heart, maybe as a result of a long time of going through soul trouble, and you'd like to come down afterwards, just sit in one of these seats over here in the corner, and have us pray with you. We'd like to do that.

We'd like to pray with you. Or if you're here and you've wandered away from the Lord, your heart is cold towards the Lord, and you'd like to come down and pray with us, do that. Or if you're here and you're going through some crisis in life, some sorrow, maybe some sickness, maybe the death of a loved one, and you'd just like to sit down and have somebody pray with you.

There are a lot of us here that would be just glad to sit down with you. These fellows here will just clear that place over there, and there'll be plenty of place to stay. Don't worry about the meal.

Long line. But wouldn't that be nice, be great to just have you come forward today, and nobody will notice. Just come down.

Nobody's going to button up, sit there and pray with you. Would you like to do that? We'd like to have you do it. We're going to pray, and then we're going to give thanks for the food.

But the meeting isn't over for anyone who really would like spiritual help. Father, we thank you for the simplicity of your word, the simplicity of the way of salvation. We don't have to work for our salvation.

We don't have to merit it by a character. We can receive it as a free gift because of the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf at the cross of Calvary. Perhaps there is someone here today, Father, and you've been convicting by the Holy Spirit, convicting that person of sin.

Maybe that person is ready to make the great decision today. We pray that that might be the case. Others here are going through forms of soul trouble, difficulty, heartache, sorrow, whatever it might be.

We pray that you'll give them the grace just to come forward and that we might be able to pray with them and that they might know the strength, the grace of the Lord Jesus. We want to give you thanks for the fire of every living creature, for the beauty of the food that they eat.

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