John 19:30; Passion Reading: Mark 15:16-47 March 25, 2015

**Are You Sure You Are Saved?**

People have a lot of different answers. But basically there are two: “Yes” and “No”. “Are You *Sure* You Will Be Going to Heaven?” Many people will answer “No.”

People have reasons for saying they are not sure they will get to heaven. Some people are honest enough to look at their lives and see that even though they knew better, they sinned. Some have sinned very badly. Another person can look at his life and see that for years on end, he was extremely selfish. He always did what he wanted, demanded much of others and offered nothing in return. A person like that, with enough integrity, might just feel uncertain about his salvation.

Other people might have a pretty good stockpile of good works. She doesn’t drink or use bad language; she doesn’t cheat on her taxes; she helps the poor and all that. But she knows that she has not done all she could. And when life takes a tough turn and the kids get rebellious and work seems to be a twenty mile long dead end, the foundations shake. She is not really all that sure that God is pleased and heaven her destiny. The best such a person can say is, “Maybe I am saved.”

Other people have been *taught* by their church that you can never really be sure that you are going to heaven. God begins the work, so they are told, of getting you to heaven. But it is like a “some assembly required” gift. God gives you the nuts and bolts, but you have to spend the rest of your life putting it together. If you follow the directions just right, you have a chance of getting to heaven.

These are some of the reasons people aren’t sure about heaven. All of these reasons have a similarity. All of these leave us with an uncertainty. It doesn’t bother us too much when everything else is going along well. But when the anxiety increase, that uncertainty becomes a distress that won’t go away.

Five hundred years ago Martin Luther confessed his great fear of not making it to heaven. For decades he was not sure of his salvation. He always doubted. Yes, he tried hard. He worshiped several times a day. He gave away his wealth, he studied God’s Word. But he could never be certain that he had done enough. Taking God’s Word more seriously than most of us, he lived in constant fear of the fires of hell. He feared the thought of eternal burning. He named this uncertainty of heaven as *monstrum incertitudinis*. That is Latin for, The Monster of Uncertainty. *[Could do research here to find psychological tests which prove that the greatest human fear is the fear of the unknown.]*

What monster is that? It is an old-fashioned kind of monster. It is no Cookie Monster or Grover, but the kind that woke you up crying when you were a child; the kid of monster that makes you jump in your seat at the movie theater. The Monster of Uncertainty says you can never be sure you have done enough to get to heaven.

That Monster of Uncertainty is why Jesus spoke the words of our reading: ***“It is finished.”*** These were not the words of a dying broken man who had played his cards wrong. He was not saying, “It’s over. I tried, but it is over.”

This Gospel of John introduces Jesus as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (1:29). Jesus himself says he came *“not to condemn the world, but to save the world”* (3:17). Jesus said, his great desire was *“to do the will of him who sent him”* (6:36). The Gospel of John beats that drum repeatedly: Jesus came to do something, to save the world. And in the nineteenth chapter, it reaches its climax with these words: ***“It is finished.”*** His mission is completed. Our salvation is accomplished.

His death paid the penalty we owed. His acts fulfilled the good deeds we left undone. ***“It is finished”*** means that everything has been done for our salvation. Every Christian can and should feel confident saying, “Yes, because of what Jesus did and said there on the cross, I am certain of my salvation.”

This perhaps is not a perfect comparison. So only follow it as far as I say. If a person achieves a doctorate in one subject or another, that person holds that degree to the end of his or her life. It is a status. He does not have to keep on studying or anything else. So too, salvation is a status. It is not a process. Salvation is a gift which is given full and complete, even while we are living. No assembly required.

But can we really be sure of that? Some tell us that actually it is a virtue to be uncertain of salvation. Some assert that God does not want us to be sure. We are reprimanded that it is the height of pride to be sure. Maybe God really doesn’t want us to be so certain of his love.

That is why Jesus said, ***“It is finished.”*** He said it so that we would *know* that he has completed the work of salvation. He *wants* us to go to him in a time of doubt and find peace and assurance.

Let’s look at it this way. Who is the person you most love? I am not asking a rhetorical question here. I am asking a real question. I am going to give you a second to think about this question. And if you don’t want to put one name in that blank then put four or five. Whom do you most love? Do you ever want that person to doubt your love, to worry about your love? Would that not be an insult? Then why do you think God wants us to doubt his love? Do you think God wants us to worry that maybe he does not love us?

Only a selfish, manipulative person can *want* you to be uncertain about his love. That one you have listened to whispering in your ears, “If you tirelessly serve me, then you will perhaps be pleasing to me, and maybe you might get into heaven” – maybe you thought that was God whispering in your ear. It really was Satan. It is Satan who is the Monster of Uncertainty. It is he who wants you to despair and have no certainty in Jesus.

When we say, “I am not really sure if I am saved,” maybe unintentionally, we are painting God to be the evil stepmother of the *Cinderella* story. There is God saying, “Sweep the floors, mend the clothes, wash the dishes, weed the garden, draw the water, cook the meals—and then, just maybe, I will be happy with you. But I doubt it.”

But Jesus says, ***“It is finished.*** Stop your work. Rest. I have done everything. You are saved.” And we can collapse in his arms and trust him.

Just after Jesus’ death, John wrote, *“These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”* (20:31). And if you still doubt that, go to 1 John 5:13: *“I write these things to you who believe… so that you may know that you have eternal life.”* He did not say, “So you might have eternal life.” He said, *“so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

In all the other uncertainties and “I don’t know’s” of life, there is one certain thing for every believer in Jesus Christ: We are sure of my salvation. Amen.

You can be sure of love, without taking it for granted. That is a risk that God takes. But love taken advantage of does not hurt God, but only the one who takes advantage of because that love turns to sand in their hands.

What is finished? All the work that needed to be done for salvation. We woke up late and found that all the work was already done. Anything that could have kept us out of heaven has been removed. Don’t do anything, just believe it.

It was a monster invented by the Catholic Church. Like a monster under the bed to a child, the Catholic Church said that could never be sure that you would get to heaven. The Catholic Church taught that we are sinners – so far so good. They said that by nature we are sinful people who could not possibly be saved. We still agree. But they said that God had to light the spark of faith in each of us, and that each of us is responsible to complete the work that God has begun in us. He only put the first building block in place, and we were responsible to put the rest in place ourselves so that we could be saved.

It is that question when one asks if you will be saved and you say, “I don’t know.” Most of the time you can live with that monster because it isn’t all that close. But at times when death brushes up close to you, then it can fill one with terror.

That is the sort of monster Martin Luther was talking about. It is that monster that can cause a Christian to say, “Maybe