Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

While I was at seminary, I went with a minister to visit an elderly member of our church who was in a hospice. She was born into a Christian household, had professed her faith, and meant it, taught Sunday school, baked meals for those in need, arranged flowers in church, etc. All who knew her saw her as a godly and devoted great-grandmother and sister in Christ. But she was dying, and she knew it. And as we talked with her, she took hold of the minister’s arm and cried out, “Pastor, I am scared. I don’t know if I will go to heaven.” And her eyes were full of tears! She lacked what is called the assurance of salvation. And this begs the question, doesn’t it; we have been considering the doctrine of election in recent weeks, but can a person know for sure that they are an elect child of God? Can we know for sure that we will be welcomed into heaven? And if this can be known, then how? By what means can we have the assurance of salvation? And of course, this is intensely personal for each one of us, for if we can know that we are elect, then the question is: Do you know if you are an elect child of God? So, that is a key part of what we will consider today.

And the reality is that large parts of the wider church reject the idea of the assurance of salvation. In fact, I was talking to a believer during the week who is part of a church that rejects the idea of the assurance of salvation. They describe it as believing ‘**once saved, always saved**.’ And they think it is a terrible thing to teach, because it will surely produce what they call ‘lazy Christians.’

Let me illustrate their concern: Imagine that you are a part of a squad of 25 players in a mixed gender soccer team. And only 11 get to play each Saturday with 6 substitutes, so 8 miss out, altogether, each week. But then imagine that the coach says that Bob and Mary will be in the playing 11 every week, but the rest of you will have to earn selection. Who do you think will work harder at practice: Bob and Mary or the rest of you? Well, obviously, it will be the rest of you. Because Bob and Mary know that their place on the team is certain, they can just take that for granted; they do not need to train hard. It’s basic human nature, isn’t it.

And that, in a nutshell, is the main objection of many Christians to the idea that a person can know for sure that they are saved; it removes motivation for godliness. So, we will also need to see if this is a legitimate concern.

Well, **our text is the opening part of Peter’s second letter**. And the particular problem addressed in this letter is false teachers who were causing great damage in the church. And one aspect of their false teaching was that believers cannot sin; that sexual immorality and drunkenness, etc, is not a problem. So, Peter opens his letter by reminding believers of their duty to grow in godliness. And this passage helps us by making three things clear: First, that God Does Want His Elect to be Certain of Their Salvation, Second, How We Can be Certain of Our Election, and third, What the Lifestyle of the Elect Looks Like.

1. So, first of all, let’s see that **God Does Wants His Elect to be Certain of Their election**.
   1. I am going to read through verses 1-4 and I want you to listen to the words I emphasize. In **verse 1**, Peter addresses his letter to “*those who have obtained a faith of equal standing to ours*…” In **verse 3**, he says of God, “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*…” In **verse 4**, he says, “*By which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption*…” What do all those emphasis words have in common? They are in the **past tense**. Peter was certain that the believers he wrote to had these things; that they had obtained and had escaped, etc. And one of these things, from verse 1, was that they had obtained “*a faith of equal standing with ours*,” meaning of Peter and the other Apostles. So, we can infer from these words that Peter knew for sure that he had genuine faith; that he was an elect child of God, and he also believed it of the other Apostles, and he believed it of those he was writing to. So, already, we can see that God does want His elect to be certain of their election and salvation.

* 1. And if you drop down to **verse 10**, Peter says, “*Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election*.” Now, we use the word ‘**confirm’** in three ways. And confirm can mean to make doubly certain, to provide additional proof, and to strengthen. And all these things are in view here.
     1. All of you, I am sure, will have bought or booked something online. You put in your credit card number and your address, etc, and you press pay now or book now. And the little circle starts turning around for a few seconds and then you get a message that says purchase complete or booking complete. So, it’s done. But then you often get a dialogue box that asks you if you want **a confirmation email**. So, you enter your email address and click send. Well, is that email really needed? Is your purchase somehow unreal or uncertain without that email? No, it is not. The purchase or booking is real. But getting that confirmation email makes it doubly certain, and verifiable, and it strengthens your assurance.
     2. Well, in the same way, if we can *confirm* our election, then our election is already real, and we can know this.
  2. And we can know the certainty of our election according to **other Scriptures** also:
     1. Here at Avondale, we are working through **1 Peter** in our morning sermon series. And Peter addressed his first letter to “*those who are elect*,” or “*God’s elect*,” as the NIV puts it.
     2. In **1 John 5:13**, we read, “*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life*.”
     3. In **Luke 10:20**, Jesus sent 72 out to preach and heal. And when they returned, expressing joy, Jesus said, “*Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven*.” He wanted their greatest joy to be the assurance of their election, as it should be for all believers.
     4. And earlier we read those words of **Job**: “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me*!” What a beautiful assurance of salvation!
  3. And brothers and sisters, our passage in 2 Peter is the living word of God to believers in every age. God does want His elect to be certain of their election and salvation.

1. So, let’s turn our attention, secondly, to what God says to believers about **how they can be Certain About Their election**.
   1. As we have seen in recent weeks, God has a “**Book of life**,” in which is written the names of all His elect ones. It is referred to several times in Revelation. Well, this Book is with God in heaven. So, any volunteers to take a trip up to heaven for us? And when you get there, you can use your smartphone to take photos of the pages of the Book of Life, so that when you get back we can all see if our names are in it! That’s a silly suggestion, isn’t; it. That is just not possible. As one author put it: “The means [of knowing for sure that we are elect] is not by climbing to heaven and examining God’s Book of life. No such access to the mind of God is … available.”
   2. So, what means for knowing that we are elect *are* available to us? Well, the first and best means is the **unchanging promises of God in Scripture**. Look at **verse 4**: “… *by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature*…”
      1. One song that pretty much every child who grows up in a Christian household knows is ‘Jesus loves me.’ And many of you will know the simple words: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”
      2. And the Bible tells us so in places like **Romans 10:9**: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*.” That is a promise of God for believers.
      3. **John 3:16** says, “F*or God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.” That is a promise of God for believers.
      4. And in **Romans 8:38-39**, we have those much loved words of Paul: “*For I am sure that [nothing]… in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*.” That is a promise of God for believers.
      5. And the reason why the promises of God are a sure foundation for the assurance of our election and salvation is the God who made the promises! In **Malachi 3:6**, we read, “*For I the LORD do not change*.” And do any of you know **Isaiah 40:8** off by heart? “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever*.”
      6. So, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” maybe a simple children’s song, but it is also a profoundly beautiful truth – we can be certain about our election because of the unchanging promises of God in the Bible.
   3. But we see a second way to be certain of our election described in **verse 11**. How do we confirm our calling and election, according to that verse? By “***practicing these qualities***.” And the qualities in view are the ones mentioned in **verses 5-7**: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. And these are what our Canon’s article calls “the unfailing fruits of election.”
      1. And we all know **how** **fruit** **works**, right? When you see an apple hanging on the branch of a tree, what does it tell you about that tree? It is an apple tree! And in the same way, if you see the fruit of election in yourself, then you can be sure that you are elect.
      2. And so, to those whom God has elected in Christ, He gives the Holy Spirit to live within them. And it is the Holy Spirit who leads them to receive the gospel and respond with repentance and faith. So, repentance and faith are the firstfruit of election worked by the Holy Spirit. And at the heart of repentance and faith are a hatred of sin and a love for Jesus. Do you see these in your heart?
      3. But I am sure all of you, including you boys and girls, will know the other **fruit of the Spirit from** **Galatians 5**: “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control*.” If you see “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control*” in yourself, you can be sure that you are elect.
      4. And another Book of the Bible that is about the unfailing fruits of election is **1 John**. If you have ever worked through 1 John in a sermon series or a Bible study, you will know that a key aim of John was to give believers an assurance of their salvation. And the way that John does this is to have believers take a test. And it’s **a test that has nothing to do with cotton buds and nostrils**! It is a three part test: First, do you love the commandments of God and try and keep them? Second, do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? And third, do you love the truth about Jesus Christ being the Son of God and your only hope of salvation? And if you examine yourself and see these three things in your heart, then, says John, “*You may know that you have eternal life*.”
         1. And just to be clear, this is not in the sense of, If you do these three things, you *will be* saved, but that if you have been saved, you will do these three things. These things are the *fruit of* election and salvation.
   4. Now, in relation to what we have just said about the assurance of our election and our godly attitudes and behaviours, it is important to note these words in our Canon’s article: “The elect in due time, though in various stages and in different measures, are made certain of their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation.” As one author comments, “[The assurance of salvation] does not always come to individual Christians at the same speed or with the same clarity. Some have a weaker and some a stronger sense of assurance.” Indeed, even those of us who would claim a strong assurance of faith today will surely have experienced very real doubt, at times.
      1. And there are **many different causes of doubt**.
         1. Doubt can come because of an attack of the evil one.
         2. It may be because of a particular trial or hardship that weighs down heavily.
         3. It maybe because of physical or mental or emotional stress.
         4. It maybe because we are spiritually immature in our understanding of salvation.
         5. Comparisons with other believers can raise doubts if we do not see that spiritual maturity comes with time and spiritual discipline.
         6. And even being raised in the church can be a cause of doubt. For this is all that such a person has ever known, right? Is this really the truth or am I just keeping Mum and Dad happy? Have I been brainwashed? Are other religions or Atheism right, maybe?
         7. But perhaps the most common cause of doubt is our own sin and guilt – how could God possibly love me, who has done this, *again*?!
      2. Well, one author said this about doubt, which I believe is really helpful: **Doubt is not the same as unbelief**. It is possible to have a strong faith in Christ while still feeling a sense of doubt. Unbelief is a *denial* of important points of doctrine; doubt is *uncertainty* about those doctrines. So, it is not sinful to struggle with doubt, if it prompts you to turn to the Lord and to seek Him.
         1. And so, the first thing to do with doubt is to **pray**: Spirit of God, take away my doubts and give me certainty.
         2. And in relation to sin and guilt, think of the Apostle Paul in **Romans 7**. For there, the same man who said in Romans 8 that “[*nothing] can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*,” said, What I want to do, I do not do, and what I do not want to do, this I do! “*Wretched man that I am. Who will set me free from this body of death?*” But do you remember what he said next? “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord*!” In his guilt and doubt, Paul confessed his sins and rested in in the unchanging promises of his unchanging God! And you must do the same.
         3. And brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, that really is the remedy for all doubt – **Look to the promises of God and the God of the promises, *in Scripture***. For example, remember the three most wonderful words that Jesus spoke from the cross – “*It is finished*”! There is nothing you *can* add or *need to* add to the work of securing your salvation! So, confess your sins, and rest in the unchanging promises of your unchanging God in Christ Jesus!
2. And that brings us, thirdly and lastly, to **the Lifestyle of the Elect** that is described in our text.
   1. And we can be brief here. As we have seen, Peter wrote these words to those he viewed as elect of God. And the whole thrust of these opening verses is encouragement for believers to grow in godliness. In **verses 5-7**, we see that believers are to “***make every effort to*** ***supplement*** [or add to]” their faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. And from **verse 8**, “*if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*.”
      1. What Peter is saying here is: Of course the elect will want to live a godly life! As those who have been rescued from the hell they deserve, they will want to show their thankfulness in how they live. And to be more and more certain of heaven, they will want to see more and more of the unfailing fruit of election. The very idea that the elect will be indifferent and unthankful is unthinkable!
   2. And there is even more encouragement to grow in godliness in verses 11 & 12. For there we see two outcomes that are the result of living this way:
      1. **Verse 10** says, “*If you practice these qualities, you will never fall*.” And this does not mean that you will never experience doubt or give in to temptation; what it does mean is that the believer can be spared a disastrous coming to grief.
         1. The image in view here is that of a **horse** on a narrow, up-hill trail – one hoof follows the other, and there maybe the occasional slight stumble, but not a dramatic tumble down the hill-side.
         2. Now, such is God’s amazing grace, that even dramatic tumbles off the hill-side by believers are recoverable, through repentance and faith. And there are many examples of this in Scripture, like Abraham and Moses and David and even Peter himself.
         3. But the Christian life **can also be a life of steady progress in godliness**. And surely, we all want that. Yes?
      2. And **verse 11** says, “*In this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ*.” And again, this is not saying that by our obedience we earn heaven. We are saved by grace alone. What it is saying is that every effort we put into godliness and obedience as we walk the narrow pathway to heaven, will be **richly rewarded** in heaven.
         1. And the image here is that of an **Olympic champion** arriving back in his home city. Does he have to sneak in through a back gate? No! He is carried on the shoulders of the people right through the main gate and up to the town hall where he is rewarded with praise and prizes! And so, it will be for all God’s elect who have poured themselves out in thankful and sacrificial and obedient living!

So, congregation, God does want His elect to be certain of their election. And we can know this from the promises of God and the fruits of election that we see in ourselves. And the lifestyle of the elect *will be* a life of thankful, sacrificial, and obedient living.

And all I would add to what has been said about assurance is something you have heard me say many times, for every look at yourself, take 10 looks at Jesus!

And may you not be like that elderly sister on her death bed who lacked the assurance of salvation. May you instead be one who says, in faith, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Amen.