

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Be Sure

Part 3

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 05.02-03.09

Go ahead and find a seat and as you do, I want you to take your Bible and turn with me to Luke, chapter 10. If you did not bring your Bibles, there's one in the chair back in front of you. Page 869 will take you to the text that we are looking at. Page 869 is Luke 10. This is our third week of studying the exact same passage and, by now, I'm hoping that you have a fair understanding of the text as well as an appreciation for taking it slow as we go through word by word to what's going on in this interaction between a lawyer or what we learned to be a scribe in Jesus who asks Christ the crucial question of life. And that is how, "Can you be sure of your eternal destiny?" That's what we've been working on over the last couple of weeks. Now if you're joining us for the very first time, I'm going to go back through the text to get you caught up to where we're at in the story. But we've been working our way quite diligently. We've been doing some extensive study on the background, the characters, the meaning of the words and why Jesus was asking or answering the questions in the way he was doing. And we've been doing that to drive us towards this weekend which is inherently designed to be extremely practical for you. You've been doing this study over the last two weeks; now we bring it into the practical realm—how can we apply it to our lives?

So for those of you who are joining us for the first time this week, let's go back to the text and I'm going to quickly review where we've been and then we're going to transition and see how we can apply it. It's Luke, chapter 10, verse 25. The story is of a man who comes before Jesus; the text says: And behold a lawyer. Now we've already learned that this lawyer is actually not a civil lawyer or a criminal lawyer but one who is an expert in the law, most likely a scribe. Someone who would work closely with the religious teachers of the day, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodions, people like that. A lawyer stood up to put him to the test saying, "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" And there's our question—that's the key question. And Jesus turned and said to him, "What is written in the Law?" And you notice that the word, law, is capitalized; that's because, what did we learn? That points back to a specific reference of the law or a specific aspect of the law called, the shama which is like a compendium of the law. It whittles the entire Old Testament, the entire law of God down into one or two main points and sentences. He says, "What is written in the Law?" How do you read it or how do you recite it? Without even thinking, this Jewish scholar of the Law says rhyme and meter, recites it from memory, he says: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind and neighbor as yourself. That is the shama. Why was he able to recite it so quickly? Because he has been reciting it since he was a child and because he recites it every single day as he goes to the temple. He knows the law.

Question: Why would Jesus answer a question with such an obvious answer? Why would Jesus take this expert of the law back to the law? What did we learn last week? We said that there is a purpose with God's law? That the law of God should bring us to the end of ourselves. We should look at the Ten Commandments; we should look at the six hundred thirteen laws; we should look at even the shama: To love the Lord your God, with all your

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heart, soul, strength and mind; and say I cannot do that. It should bring us to the end of ourselves. And what did we say about the law? We said, well, the law will ultimately lead us to something other than the law, faith in Christ. It will lead us to understand the specific natures of our sin and it will lead us to an understanding that we're held accountable to God because of our sins. So the law only can do one thing, it brings us a sense of emptiness. I mean, we cannot be fulfilled by attempting to keep the law. I believe this is where Jesus was trying to lead this man—to come to the point of himself. We're saying, I know the law; I know it inside and out but I can't keep it.

In fact, look at verse 28 as we continue with the story. And Jesus said to him, you have answered correctly, do this and you will live. I want you to underline that passage—and you will live. Because that goes back to Leviticus 18:5 which is an Old Testament reference that basically says, if you're going to live by the law, you need to keep the law, that's how you will live. He's quoting Leviticus 18:5. Now that's going to become important in a moment so just kind of file that away. But do you hear what Jesus is saying? Jesus is saying, you answered correctly; you're right! If you're going to make the law your standard, the law of God your standard, then love God perfectly. If you're going to be sure of how you inherit eternal life, then do what you just answered to me absolutely perfectly without error—love God with your whole heart. Now I think again Jesus has taken him to the point where he would say, yea, but I can't do that so what's next? And so we now come to verse 29, the pivotal point in the story. We now come to that place where we're wondering, what will he do? How will he respond to Christ?

But before we get there, I just want you to take your Bibles and turn just a few chapters with me to Luke, chapter 18, to another story that's a parable that Jesus uses to teach the importance of coming before God completely like we've just sang in the song, "Undone". It's a parallel between two people, a Pharisee and tax collector. Now that has linkage to our story because it could have easily been between a scribe and a tax collector. The idea is that Jesus is saying that there are two types of people in my parable, my story. There's those who are self-religious and there are those who know they are completely undone—they've come to the end of themselves. In fact, verse 9 says, he told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. He's telling this story so that those who trusted in their own righteousness of following the law would see how utterly useless it is when you attempt to come to God through self-righteousness. He says in verse 10: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus, God...listen to this...this is a great prayer... "God, I thank you that I am not like other men." Can you imagine? Come to God...I'm so thankful, God, that I'm not like everybody else. And it's the idea that I'm above everybody else. You know, extortionist, unjust, adulterers or even like...then he points to someone specifically, even like this tax collector. I'm so glad that I'm not like him; I fast twice a week, I give a tithe of all that I get, yada, yada, yada, on and on he goes, embellishing himself. The parallel then begins in verse 13: But the tax collector standing far off...why was the tax collector standing far off? Well, it's likely this tax collector was standing

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outside the temple, outside the synagogue. He wasn't allowed in the synagogue. You've learned a little bit about tax collectors in the past. They were Jews who were basically thought as infidels against the nation because they were collecting taxes against their own people. They weren't even allowed to go to worship. So the parallel: Here's this tax collector probably standing on the outside would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breasts saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And Jesus says, "I tell you, this man, went down to his house justified rather than the other."

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He's saying, self-righteousness will get you nowhere in the eyes of God. If you think that the law will take you to God, you're mistaken. The law should bring you to the point that you're completely undone. It should bring you to the point that you say, I am not worthy before God. Will the man in Luke 10 come to that same place? Well, look at verse 29. This is the turning point. Jesus has just said, you have answered correctly, you will live but he...this is the man, the lawyer...desiring to justify himself. Stop right there! We really don't need to go any further. That one statement tells everything we need to know about his heart. Literally that phrase could be translated, desiring to justify himself to mean proclaiming himself righteous. Here's the scene: Here's this man, he's in the temple. He's listening to Jesus teach. He stands up; he asks him a question about eternal life. Everybody in the place would have wanted to know, what's the answer? Everyone would have leaned in waiting to hear what Jesus answered. Jesus takes this man to the law; the man recites it, rhyme, meter, perfectly. Jesus says, do this and live. And he sews it up in his own mind. He says, I've got that...boom...I'm done. I've got that. Knowing that there's a crowd around him, doesn't want to belittle himself, so what does he do? He proclaims himself righteous. He's standing before the Creator of the world. He has the opportunity to get his question really answered, instead, self-pride takes over. I've often said to people, it's not the lack of understanding the gospel that keeps people from faith; it's the lack of understanding our own depravity, our own sinfulness that keeps us from God.

Here's a prime example. What we would have loved to have read in verse 29 is that this man fell to his knees and said, "Master, I cannot keep the Law, what next?" "What do I do next?" And you know where Jesus would have taken him? Jesus would have taken him to the exact same place that he took hundreds of other people through his ministry. He would have taken him to the central concept of the New Covenant, the reason for His life, the reason for His death, the reason for His existence on earth as a man. He would have taken him to the exact same place over and over again that he did with hundreds of others. Just as an example, turn with me to John, chapter 6. Every chapter in the book of John reveals why Jesus came. Every chapter in the book of John teaches us the answer to the question, how do I inherit eternal life? How can I be absolutely sure? I'm not going to take you through every chapter so just let me take you through a couple. Jesus speaking in John, chapter 6, right after he fed the five thousand, he said, "I'm the bread of life" which by the way is a parallel to what was going on. He's seated on the hillside beside the Sea of Galilee. A boy has brought a little sack lunch, some sardines and some bread. Jesus turns

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that into a miracle, feeds all these hungry people who had come out to listen to him. And he says, look at that bread. He says, "I am the bread of life." I will sustain you for life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever, what does the text say? Believes in me shall not thirst. That's the focus of Christ's ministry. How do you have eternal life? By faith in Christ who kept the law, not in your attempt to keep the law.

Let's go over to the John 7:38. Let me just show you this again. He says, "Whoever believes in me as the Scriptures has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." One of the things that you need to understand about Old Testament, New Testament era; one thing you need to understand about the region, water is essential. Towns are built around their water source. Water is a word picture Jesus often uses. When people are thirsty, they're thirsting for water. And he's saying, I'm going to give you something to drink that will never have you thirsty again. How do you get there? He says, "whoever believes in me". Again, it goes back to faith.

Turn over to John, chapter 11, verse 25. This is shortly after the death of Lazarus. Before he raises him from the dead, Jesus makes a profound statement. You hear this at funerals all the time. John, chapter 11, verse 25, Jesus said: I am the resurrection and the life, whoever...what does it say...believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Does that sound familiar? Sure it does because that's the exact same phrasing that we looked at in Luke 10:28. Jesus is saying, you don't get life through the law. The law will bring you to the end of yourself. You receive eternal life through faith in me; that's how you have eternal life. In fact, if you want to have a one or two sentence statement about how do we have eternal life, how can we be sure, you go to one passage, Ephesians, chapter 2. Ephesians 2:8 will take you to the one set of verses that tells you how to be sure about your eternal life. And it's exactly built off the theology that we just went through with just a few verses in John. That it originates through faith in Christ; that it is only by faith. It's always by faith in Jesus Christ, not the law. Look at what Ephesians says: For by grace...what is grace? Grace is favor that God lavishes upon you without any merit of your own doing. You receive grace not by works of the law but as a gift; it's unmerited favor. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing, it's the gift of God. Do you see the latter half of verse 8? How do you get faith? Do you get faith because you choose to have faith? No! You have faith because it is a gift from God. God gives you the faith and so salvation is only of God; it's always of God. Verse 9: Not as a result of works or you could say not as a result of the law so that no one may boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. And why did God have us? Which he prepared beforehand that we should walk in Him. He wants us to walk in Him.

So here's the question. The question for you is then, well, how can I be sure? The answer: By faith. Follow-up question. How can I be sure I'm a person of faith? You see, that's what we've been driving at. Last week I said, I want you to be very careful not to assume that you know the answer to the question. Don't assume you know the answer to the

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question, how can I be sure about my eternal life? Because up to this point, I bet ninety percent of what I've said, most of you have heard before and you could recite yourself, you know. So that makes us not that far unlike the man who came to Jesus who asked the question, "How can I inherit eternal life?" And Jesus led him down a path and it's as if his brain shut off and he says, ah, I got that covered. He sincerely thought he was right but he was sincerely wrong. That's the last place we want to be. We don't want to be sincerely wrong when we think we're people of faith. So what do you do about that? Well, Paul says in II Corinthians, he says: You need to examine yourself whether or not you are in the faith. You ought to test yourself. Isn't that ironic? Don't we go through our life testing all kinds of things? We test our car to make sure it's running. If we hear something's wrong with our car, we take it to a mechanic. We test our bodies to make sure it's running right. If something doesn't feel right, something's not right, what do we do? We go to the doctor; we go to the hospital. We do what we need to get it running right. When was the last time you tested your faith; you put your faith up against a test?

Now look again at Ephesians; you should still be there. There are three propositions that I don't want you to miss. This is how you test your faith—three propositions. For it is by grace, through faith, for good works. It is by grace, through faith, for good works. Now say that with me. By grace, through faith, for good works. OK, half of you are awake. Let's say it again. By grace, through faith, for good works. That's the right order. You move this out of order, you mess up your theology. So you should ask yourself, am I a person who really has reached the end of himself and says, "I can't get to God by keeping rules." I break them too easily; I break them too quickly. I need God's grace—step one.

Step two, well then, am I a person that embraces faith in Jesus who has completed the law, who lived it perfectly? Do I have faith in Him for my salvation? Step three: Well, then, is that working its way out in my lifestyle? And there's the rub. You see, many people get through the first two steps but then they never test whether their faith was genuine by looking at their works. I'm not saying you come to faith, you have eternal life by your good works; I'm saying that you come to faith by faith alone but it's never a faith that lives alone. There's always this outpouring of your faith; that's your lifestyle. So how do I test that? James gives us a great little chapter, James, chapter 2 that takes us through just an easy evaluation of whether our faith is genuine. Turn there with me, James, chapter 2. Towards the back of your Bibles right by the book of Hebrews, James, chapter 2. We're going to look at five things very quickly and then we're going to wrap up.

First, we're going to look at a few things that faith is not. For example, faith is not just talk. Faith is more than talk James says. Look at verse 14 of chapter 2. It says: What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can that faith save him? Do you see what the text says here? It says if someone says he has faith, James is saying that this man is coming to him and saying not that he has faith but that he says he has faith. A lot of people say they have faith. What is James analysis of that? That if you just talk faith, that it's really just cheap faith. And that it really isn't authentic faith.

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He says, I want to see something produced by your talk. I want to see it lived out in your life. The way this works out at least for me, people will come to me...usually it's an elderly woman who is concerned about their children or their grandchildren. And she'll speak to me of a time when this person had faith in Christ but then since then has just lived their life like however they've wanted to live it. And she'll ask, "What do you think about their faith?? Well, is it real? The text tells us the answer to that. That real faith is more than just talk; it's not just a momentary time where you commit your life and then go and live your life however you want apart from Christ. That's not real faith. That's just cheap faith. That's just talk faith. Faith has to have a back end to it where you can see life change. You say, yea, but isn't that judging someone. No, no, listen. You know what judging is? Judging is when you look into someone's motives. This is not judging; this is just looking on the exterior of their life and saying, "Is there any fruit that is being produced in their life?" So the first test is, do you do more than just talk faith or is that all there is to your faith?

The second thing James says is, well, faith is also more than talk; it's more than emotions too. Faith is not just about your emotions. I remember very clearly a person coming to me; they've since left the church. And they said that, we really don't get involved in church anymore because I don't cry anymore when I come to the service. Literally that's what this person said. I really didn't know how to respond. In other words, are you coming to the service just so that you can have an emotional jolt for that particular day? Because if that's the case, then you have a very shallow faith. In fact, this faith will ultimately get you to verse 15. James says: If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and want, of you being the idea that "one of you" who says they have faith, one of you says to them, "Yea, go in peace, be warm and filled without giving them the things they need for their body." "What good is that?" James says. Do you hear what...hear what James is saying? James is saying if you're so wrapped up in your own emotionalism that when you see what really needs to go on in someone's life, when you see a need that you can meet and you choose not to do it because it really has no bearing on who you are, it doesn't meet your emotional needs, do you know what'll happen? You'll just kind of bypass them, skirt them. You'll never have a desire to meet their needs.

Third thing is faith is more than talk, more than emotion; it's also more than intellect. Verse 17: So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead. By the way, that is the central topic of James, chapter 2. He says that same thing. Faith by itself is dead. He says that three times. Verse 18: But someone will say, you have faith, I have works. Let's debate. That's what he is saying. So let's make this about intellectual concept; let's debate. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I'll show you my faith by my works. He says, let's talk about it. Many times people get involved in faith because it's an intellectual rush.

So we've got faith is more than talk, faith is more than emotion, faith is more than intellect. Faith is also more, number four, more than belief, simple belief. You say, how does that

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work out? Well, look at verse 19. James says you believe that God is one, you do know well even the demons believe and shudder. Their belief is so real that they see God and it makes them bristle. The idea is that it makes the hair on the back of their necks stand out. I never even knew that demons had hair but it makes their hair stand up. Why? Because their belief is so real in God but tell me this, is it a saving faith for demons? No! You see, it's easy to have simple belief but James says that doesn't necessarily mean that it's saving faith.

So how do you have saving faith? We go right back to Ephesians. Listen! Fill the blanks in. Faith is more than talk, more than emotion, more than intellect, more than belief, faith is by grace, through faith for good works. And how does James end this? He gives us an illustration. He takes us to Abraham. And you know what we know about Abraham. Abraham is "the" patriarch of faith. God comes into his life, tells him to go into a highly pagan, Canaanite nation. He says that's where you're going to start a nation. And by the way, you are going to have a son. Abraham, being an old man, thought this was impossible. He has a son; his name is Isaac. Then God comes to Abraham and says, I want you to take Isaac, your son, and I want you to take him up to the hill, lay him on the altar like all the other pagans do and their pagan religion who sacrifice their sons and daughters, and lay him out and I want you to sacrifice him. Now think about this! Abraham was given a promise by God; the promise is you're going to be a great nation. The promise is going to come through Isaac who is going to have Jacob and who is Jacob? Jacob is the father of the nation of Israel. Without Jacob, there is no Israel; without Isaac, there is no Jacob and Abraham is now told by God to sacrifice Isaac. Why would you do that, God? In fact, a part of me wants to think, "God, I don't even want to think that you're that kind of God that you would ask someone to give up their own son." Can you imagine that? I can't even imagine that. Why did God ask Abraham to do that? James tells us. It was something far more than the moment. He says, "Do you want...verse 20...to be shown, O foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?" You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness and he was called a friend of God. Do you remember the end of the story? God tells Abraham to take Isaac up to the altar. Abraham does it and just as he's about ready to sacrifice his son, he sends an angel who says, "Stop, do not do that! Put the knife away. I wanted to see your faith alive."

How do you know for sure that you have eternal life? It's by faith; it's by faith alone. It's always by faith alone, but listen, your faith will never be alone; it will be accompanied by a lifestyle. Is your faith...does it pass the test of James 2? You need to be sure. But that's between you and God. I only can give you the tools of evaluation of how to examine yourself. Now you have to make sure; you have to be sure. And that's my prayer for you. That you will study these passages diligently and examine your life. Let me pray with you. God, I pray that today is the day that we will look into our lives and not be so brash or

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callous as the scribe who came before your Son, filled with self-righteousness and left with self-righteousness. Rather may we look carefully at what your word tells us. Thank you that we can be sure as people of faith that our salvation will accomplish eternal life, that we will see you face to face. Thank you also that our faith coming from you will reap a dividend of good works that will be a lifestyle, that will be more than talk or emotion or intellectual pursuit, more than just simple belief but it will be by faith, by grace through faith for good works. May we see that living in our lives and, if it isn't, may we re-examine the faith that we proclaim in you. May we come to the end of ourselves so that we meet the beginning of you. In Jesus' name. Amen.