

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of October 18, 2009
"I Was Almost Persuaded"**

[Today's message addresses and answers the question as to whether we are secure in God's love or whether God can drop us if we're not perfect.]

[Topics: Fully Persuaded; Full Assurance of Faith; God's Faithfulness; Eternal Life]

Excerpt: Are you persuaded of your salvation and of your standing with God? Are you persuaded of what God is doing in your life and your future with him? Are you convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt?

Over the years, pastor Glen has had many people, especially towards the end of their life get to a point and ask, "My life's about over and what if...? And are you sure?" It's not important that the pastor is sure, it's more important that the person is sure.

At a time when we are facing end of life issues, we often ask, "Oh God where am I?" Or maybe we've sinned in a bad way and we ask, "Oh God, did I blow it? Is what I did forgivable?"

Just this week, pastor Glen had a man show up at his house after he called him. He found us on our web page. This man has experienced total wreckage in his life these past few years. And he was so concerned about where he was with God. In his conversation with pastor Glen, he talked a lot about how much he loved God, how much he wanted to serve God and how much he didn't want to do the things he did. And he asked, "Did I blow it?"

Through the years others have asked pastor Glen if their baptism was valid. They asked, "Did I really know what I was doing?" If any of you would tell pastor Glen that you really knew what you were doing when you got baptized, you'd be a liar. None of us knew what we were doing except that we would get wet and the minister would say a prayer afterwards.

In 1966, when pastor Glen was a teenager, a new country song came out, "*I Was Almost Persuaded*" written by Glenn Sutton and Billy Sherrill. It was first sung by David Houston. And then George Jones recorded it along several others. It was really a top country hit. It was #1 on the Country Hit Chart for 9 weeks, the longest of any song.

The song is about a married man who, goes into a tavern and has a couple of beers. And a young chick catches his eye and he starts dancing with her. And as he's dancing with her, he sees the reflection of his wedding band in the bar room mirror. And he decides he needs to go home to his wife. He sings the lyrics, "I was almost persuaded."

You know, sometimes the enemy likes to come along and makes us feel almost persuaded. We shouldn't feel almost persuaded. We should feel fully persuaded, fully convinced. Because if we aren't fully convinced, how can we fully convince others?

And if we're not fully convinced how can we live our lives, if we think, "Maybe God forgave me, maybe our baptism was valid, maybe this and maybe that"? You don't

realize the number of people who contacted pastor Glen about a week before they were to be baptized and told him, "I don't think I can do it."

And when asked, "Why not?" they responded they didn't know if they could be faithful or live up to the Christian calling. We'll talk about this today, because Satan can have us convinced that we are almost persuaded. We need to look at the wedding ring and say, "Let's go home and find out what God has in mind, what's he saying to us and what's he offering us?"

In **Hebrews 10**, the writer is quoting from the Old Testament, where God is saying, **17) "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."** So God is telling us that he won't remember our sins any more, no matter what they were. **18) "And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin."**

And so that's the context leading up to **verse 19** where the writer of Hebrews says that God is going to forgive our sins and when he does we don't have to repent our selves to have a good relationship with God because Jesus took care of that for us.

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus," You see, it's not because of who we are, but rather it's the blood of Jesus that allows us to enter into the very throne room of God, to the Most Holy Place. We need to be convinced of this because as it flows over and through us, then we can also be convincing to others that they can be too. And so we can invite them into that relationship with God.

20) "by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body," Now the old curtain was a significant portrayal of the Old Covenant, meaning you can't have access to God except through the high priest. But now we have an open curtain, because it's through Jesus Christ that we can enter into the presence of God. Again, it's about Christ's body and not about us.

21) "and since we have a great high priest over the house of God," Now the author of Hebrews is saying three things: we can come in confidently because of the blood of Jesus; we have a living way in now through his body – he become flesh to live with us; and he is our high priest sitting at the right hand of God.

22) "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart – almost persuaded." No that's not what it says is it? It says, **"let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,"** We should have full assurance in faith, through Jesus Christ shouldn't we?

"having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." We have to accept that we are cleansed from a guilty conscience. But we must accept that. And you know what, for many of us, our conscience kills us, because we don't let Jesus do his work. So our conscience gets the best of us and we start feeling – like I'm such a sinner.

Now we can acknowledge we were sinners, no question and that we still are sometimes. The apostle Paul said that he was chief among sinners but he didn't let that hold him back with his relationship with God. He was fully persuaded that he had been cleansed. And so we, too, need to live our lives, fully assured of what God is doing for us.

23) "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

So we hang on to the hope that God has given us to be fully persuaded. And the last part of this verse emphasizes that it's not about us; it's not about whether we are faithful. It's God who is faithful.

When we come to baptism, it's not about can we make a commitment to go all the way. Most of us can't. We're just entering in what Jesus did. We want to die with him, because it's about HIS faithfulness.

And Paul wrote in **Phil. 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** But we too often turn it onto ourselves, as well as quite a bit of Christianity, who say it's up to what we do.

Pastor Glen talks about a good black pastor friend he has in Spokane. He's a great person and a bishop in his denomination. One day they were talking about salvation and what happens just before you die and whether you are safe or not. He said that if a person sinned the moment before he died, he would go to hell!

Pastor Glen then asked him, "Are you telling me that if you see a car coming down the street and you know because it's going so fast that when it hits you it would kill you and you have a bad attitude about that, you're going to hell as a result? And he said, "You got it." So then pastor Glen, asked him, "What are you going to do?" And he answered, "Well I won't do that."

So his idea was that it depended upon him. It depended on whether he made the right or wrong choice in that last split second before that car crashed into him. Is that what Jesus is expecting of us or are we holding unswervingly to the hope, because he IS faithful, because what he's done in our life? It's about God's faithfulness, not ours.

In **John 3:14**, we read, "**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15) that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**"

Jesus was to be lifted up on the cross as well as out of the grave and in the ascension.

So what happened in the desert? A great plague was upon Israel. People were dying. God answered Moses' question about what could he do, by telling him to wrap a serpent around large stick and hold it up. And that everyone who looks at the serpent will be healed or saved. All those who turned around and faced that serpent survived that plague.

In the same manner, Jesus said that he would be lifted up and everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. So those who turn and look at Jesus lifted up on the cross as well as being lifted up as he ascended to heaven and believe in him will have eternal life. This eternal life is being poured into them. As we turn our eyes to him, Jesus acknowledges that.

Then **verse 16** says that God so loved the world that he offered this to the whole world, not just to a few. He offered it to the whole world and said, "Any body who comes, can be a part of this."

John writes a lot about this because John wants us to be assured that Jesus is going to do it in us. **John 3:35, "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands."** There's this huge loving relationship within the trinity. And that's what God invites us into.

And it's this relationship that God sends us out into the world to invite others into. We need to tell others that Jesus made possible this relationship. We need to ask others, "Would you enter in and become a part of it?"

One of the reasons we find it hard to evangelize is that we think it's a duty. We are supposed to tell people, instead of inviting them into a relationship. We need to tell people that they can become a part of what God is doing, because Jesus has opened the door for them to become a part of that. That would be more natural to us.

Many of you have invited people into your family. Why? Because it's natural, isn't it? When we experience that relationship we have with God, it's easy to share that relationship with others. How can we explain to others that they are forgiven, if we aren't feeling it? You have to feel forgiven in order to help others feel forgiven.

36) "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life," Now we need to be reminded that eternal life doesn't just involve how long you live. There's more to it. Eternal life is the life of God, the life of the trinity – that loving, caring, glorious life in us, as human beings, through the Holy Spirit. It's God's life in us is what eternal life is about. Eternal life is about God living in us. And with that comes immortality, which means we will never die.

So, as we come to acknowledge the Father and because the Father loves the Son and we acknowledge Jesus, we HAVE eternal life. The verb is past tense in the Greek. It's done. We have eternal life and God doesn't take it away.

"but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." They remain out of relationship with God. They remain in the results of sin. They remain in all those things that are bad as a result of turning away from God. And so they remain in that until they choose to respond to Jesus Christ.

And hopefully most will still respond some where along the line. This isn't a permanent situation. So if work with them, care for them, and love them, hopefully they will turn their hearts to Jesus and no longer reject him.

John 5:24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has [past tense] eternal life and will not be condemned;" When you believe in Jesus, the deal is sealed – not because of how good you are, but because of what Jesus did.

And that should impact how we see life, and how we see the people around us, and how we relate to others. It should also impact us how we respond while teaching children's church, or doing any other type of ministry. That's because we've got the life of God in us and we want to share it with others as we serve members in the congregation. In everything we do the life of God flowing should be flowing out of us.

"He has crossed over from death to life." All this happened 2000 years ago when Jesus went to the cross. And it was finished. Jesus didn't say, "It's almost finished, because I've some other things yet to do." No, he said, "IT IS FINISHED." It's done. He had accomplished everything needed for our salvation except for us to say, "Thank you. Yes, please. I'm sorry I've been walking away from you. Let me walk with you. And I'm going to depend on your faithfulness. I'm going to depend on who you are."

Here's a quote from our denominational President, Joe Tkach's October's letter. *"Our salvation doesn't depend on us, it depends on Christ. And Christ has already secured it and raised us with him."* So when he was raised out of that grave, all of humanity was raised as well. All we have to do is to respond to it.

Our salvation does not depend on us! It's not about whether you have a bad attitude in a car wreck just before you die. It's about what Jesus did in forgiving us. A bad attitude isn't going to keep us from being in a relationship with God.

Mr. Tkach goes on. *"When our confidence is in Christ himself, who is our life, instead in our own faith or obedience, then our hearts can truly rejoice in peace, for he alone is our salvation."*

Now let's go back to the baptism question. Pastor Glen has known numerous people who were baptized by various denominations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Is it about how well they knew what they were doing? Or were they in the right church when this happened? It really doesn't matter, because baptism is entering into Christ and saying, "I believe in Christ." End of story. It's not a matter of does a person need to be re-baptized? Now if you were baptized in the name of "Great Mother Earth," you might want to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Also God isn't concerned that you didn't get wet enough when you were baptized. The person was coming to Jesus and saying that he wanted to receive him. Now if someone says I was baptized when I was a baby, and now I want to be re-baptized as an adult, that's fine. But baptism is not about us, even though we tend to make it about us.

Mr. Tkach goes on to say, *"It seems we have such a hard time resting in Jesus alone for our salvation."* You know that Martin Luther said, "In faith alone, in Christ alone." We say that, yet when it comes to the crunch, we say, "Yes, but it depends upon me on how well I do."

Mr. Tkach continues. *"But Jesus wants us to know that he has already defeated the powers of sin and darkness, and that he has already forgiven us and made us clean."* Jesus did that 2000 years ago in Jerusalem. It's finished, even though we may not feel it right now. It is still true. And Jesus will not stop doing whatever it takes to help us come to believe it.

In **John 14:6**, Jesus said, "**No man can come to me except the Father draw him.**" And in **John 3:16**, it says that the Father is drawing everyone. And Jesus says, "When he draws them, I will raise them up at the last day."

This is Jesus speaking, the King of the Universe. And when he says something will be done, it will be done. He, who is faithful, promises to raise people up at the last day. We will succeed because it's not about us. It's about him. And we can be fully persuaded that it's Jesus doing it.

Here is a Christian version (*Almost Persuaded*) of the Country Western song, *I Was Almost Persuaded*. It was written in 1971. Notice the words.

Almost Persuaded

1. "Almost persuaded" now to believe;
"Almost persuaded" Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say,

“Go, Spirit, go Thy way,
Some more convenient day
On Thee I’ll call.”

2. “Almost persuaded,” come, come today;
“Almost persuaded,” turn not away;
Jesus invites you here,
Angels are ling’ring near,
Prayers rise from hearts so dear;
O wand’rer, come!
3. “Almost persuaded,” harvest is past!
“Almost persuaded,” doom comes at last!
“Almost” cannot avail;
“Almost” is but to fail!
Sad, sad, that bitter wail—
“Almost,” but lost!

That’s very depressing. It’s worse than the country song. It’s saying, “So close. I really wanted to believe in him, but I didn’t quite get there, so I’m lost.” At least the guy in the country song went home. He figured out he was making a mistake. But this Christian guy doesn’t get to go home. This one is “almost but lost.”

Is that what’s God doing? “Well, you got close, you got so close in believing in me, but you’re going to hell.” That’s not what it’s about. It’s about that Jesus took care of that and will you come and acknowledge that.

Now we know that there are people out there who say, “Not now God.” And God says, “That’s OK. I can take care of that. I’m bigger than that.” Have you ever thought of the fact that to even say to God, “Not now” means you believe in God? Now you may not believe what he did for you, but you have to believe that he’s out there.

At the end of John’s first epistle, after he’s been talking about how much God loves us, what God is doing for us and how God is taking care of us, he writes in **1 John 5:1**, **"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well."**

Now he says in **verse 13**, **"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God"** Yes, it’s important to do that. We must come to the place where we say, “I acknowledge what Jesus has done for me.” We didn’t find Jesus, although a lot of people say they did. No, the truth is that Jesus found you and you finally figured it out. Scripture tells us is that it’s his goodness that leads us to repentance. It’s his grace that brings us to the place where we respond.

Finishing **verse 13**, **"so that you may know that you have eternal life."** And in the book of Revelation, John also brings out the same points, showing that whether tribulation or beasts or false prophets or even Satan himself comes against us, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus because he will bring you through it. We are secure in Jesus Christ.

So John is saying that he wants you to KNOW that you HAVE eternal life. May we be fully persuaded. And this is the confidence we have in approaching God if we ask

anything in accordance with his will, he hears us. Now we're not talking about Rolls Royces and Cadillacs. He's talking about the spiritual things of life that we need to accomplish what he sent us out to do.

Now here is John writing, at least 40 years after Jesus' death, that we have confidence that Jesus will see us through. Now John's been on the Isle of Patmos and has had lots of terrible things happen to him along the way. Every one of the other apostles is now dead, most of them martyred. And he's saying we've got confidence that God answers our prayers, that God's giving us what we are looking for.

We need to have that kind of confidence especially when we're facing death or other kinds of serious issues. If we've got a hesitant questioning spirit, that will rub off on others. But if we have assurance of God that we fully persuaded of what he's done for us, we can offer that to others. They will see that in our lives. They will experience that from our lives.

They will be able so see that we have confidence, not arrogance. You can tell them that you are fully persuaded. You know you have eternal life. You know that the life of God is dwelling in you. You know that Jesus has accomplished for you what you need to live in eternity. And he offers that to all humanity.

Key Scripture: 1 John 5:13, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

General Group Question: Have you had any doubts about the security of your salvation? Please give a brief example. Do you think this way now? Why or why not?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. In whom do we have confidence to enter into God's presence (Heb. 10:19-21)?
2. What happens to the guilty conscience of those who put their trust in Christ (Heb. 10:22)? Why is this important to us?
3. Who has begun a good work in us and will carry it on to completion (Phil. 1:6)? What does this tell us about our salvation?
4. What is the purpose of Jesus being lifted up on the cross (John 3:14)?
5. What are some of the qualities or characteristics of eternal life?
6. How does one cross over from death to life (John 5:24)?
7. How does one know if he or she is born of God (I John 5:1)?
8. Are you fully persuaded that you have been given eternal life and that it can't be taken away? Briefly explain your answer.

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