



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 John 3: 19-24

2011

"Freedom Of Speech"

TRANSCRIPT

We are continuing our studies in 1 John. We are in chapter 3, and in fact, we're going to finish chapter 3. Our text is verses 19 through 24, but I'm going to start reading with verse 18. We concluded with that last week, but it ties in with the passage that we consider this morning. So we're considering 19 through 24, but I'm going to begin with verse 18,

¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

²³ This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1 John 3: 18-23

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and our time in studying it together.

(Message) One of the greatest rights and privileges that we have as citizens of this nation is that which is given to us in the First Amendment to the Constitution: Freedom of speech. The extent of that freedom, how far it goes, and the ways in which it can be practiced are debated. But there's no debate that the right, the privilege of freedom of speech, is an essential part of our liberty.

But even if it were taken away and we had to meet secretly in order to express our minds, Christians still have that privilege spiritually. We can speak to God freely at any time, and there's no greater privilege than that.

Think of it. We can talk to the Lord God, we can talk to the Creator of the universe, the Almighty, who controls all things, and we can ask whatever we desire from Him. We can ask for whatever we need; we can tell Him all our problems; we can tell Him all our concerns. And we can know that He listens intently and He answers wisely. He gives help in time of need—and He's glad to do it. He wants us to do it. He enjoys it.

So why don't we do it continually? We're exhorted to do that: Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 16, the author of Hebrews tells us, "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need."

Why don't we do that? Well, there are different reasons for that, different reason that we don't avail ourselves of that great privilege and opportunity. But one is a lack of confidence. Christians sometimes doubt; they lose assurance of salvation, feel dejected, and full of self-condemnation. That can be due to a moral failure. But there are other reasons: Poor health, that affects people's outlook; some people are sensitive by nature and introspective; others have a melancholy disposition.

I've read that depression is common among the great. Churchill suffered spells of depression all of his life: He called it "black dog." Luther's word was something along those lines, it's a German word that is difficult to translate. But his biographer said it's something like 'Blitzkrieg'. He was often on the borders of despair. His biographer said that his whole life was a struggle against his depressions and a fight for faith.

In 1527, an especially difficult year for Martin Luther, he wrote, "For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost." Christ can't be lost but that's how he felt—which only shows that the Christian life is a struggle. That struggle can result in discouragement and doubts; the enemy ensures that.

Spurgeon told his students, "The strong are not always vigorous; the wise, not always ready; the brave, not always courageous; and the joyous, not always happy." So how do we deal with all of that? How do we deal with doubts?

That's where John answers here. His answer is 'Knowledge'. He begins the passage with, "We will know," and he ends it with, "we know." In fact, those two statements introduce two grounds of assurance. The first one in verse 19 and the second one in verse 24. The first is objective, the second is subjective. The first is the evidence of our life, which is the fruit of God's grace—His life in us. The second is the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

So first of all, there is the evidence of our lives that bear witness against our doubts. And secondly, there is the voice of the Holy Spirit that reassures us against our doubts. And that, very simply, is the lesson here. Doubt is crippling. It holds us back from enjoying access to God with all of the benefits that come with that. It frustrates our freedom of speech; it keeps us back from that. And in so doing, it hinders us in our growth, our development, and our effectiveness.

So John gives a solution to doubt. First by identifying the problem; identifying the trouble-maker—and surprisingly, it is 'Self'. It's our own heart, our conscience, which accuses us before God. The accusations may be true or they may be false. It may arise from a sin that we have committed or be inspired by the evil one, the devil; "The accuser of our brethren", as John describes him in Revelation 12 verse 10. But either way, in either case, it is an inner voice that fills us with self-reproach, with something that can

overcome us and defeat us so that we lose our confidence and we fail to draw near to the Lord and avail ourselves of the throne of grace and the help that's given there.

We have doubts. I think that's common to man. That's common to the believer in Jesus Christ. At some point or another, we struggle with that. And we're not to do that. We're not to let that happen. We're not to let that overcome us. And John gives two ways to defeat doubt. The first is given in the statement, "We will know by this that we are of the truth." (vs19).

So, "We will know by this..." Well, what is the "this" that he's referring to? That's what he's already explained; and he's looking back to verse 18 and the instruction to love "in deed and truth." In other words, 'By our love for other Christians we will know that we are of the truth.' Now that's not emotional love which is always shifting; our feelings are always changing. *This* is something else: *This* is deeds of love, *this* is acts of love, *this* is self-sacrifice. That is an evidence of life, because love is the fruit of the Spirit. You see that in Galatians chapter 5, verse 22, where the first virtue that's listed there is *love*.

If you think of the fruit of the Spirit, (and it's a singular there, so it's one fruit), I think of it as a cluster of grapes with many different features to it. And prominent in that cluster of virtues, that cluster of grapes, is love. That's not natural to us, it's a fruit of the Spirit. It's what the Spirit of God produces in us; and therefore it will be present in the child of God—to some degree. None of us loves perfectly, of course, but we do love.

John was telling his friends to, 'Look at that! Consider that!' Consider that for yourself: You're here. Why are you here? You want to be here, for the most part. You want to hear the Word of God taught. You want to be with fellow believers. You want to talk with them and enjoy them. You have a love for them. That love is there, not perfectly, but it's there.

And so John's saying, 'Look at that!' Don't focus principally on your failures, recall your acts of love. They exist. They show life. They show the life of the Spirit within you. It wouldn't be there apart from the Spirit of God. So if it's there, that's an evidence that you're changed, that you're a creature in Christ, that you have the Spirit of God.

Now that's a first way that John tells them, and us, to reassure themselves, for us to reassure ourselves against an accusing heart, how to quiet the heart. I've titled our lesson "Freedom of Speech," which is a kind of positive title to this lesson. But I could have, (and thought of), titling it something like "Silencing the Accuser" or "Quieting the Heart," because John is showing us how to do that. He's showing us that we can enjoy this great privilege and blessing of freedom of speech, this openness and fellowship that we have with God by doing that; by quieting an accusing conscience. And the first way he tells us to do this, look at your life, look at the fruit that's there. Specifically, look at the love in your life that you have for the saints.

Those people who were troubling this church, these heretics, they didn't have a love for the saints at all. They had left. They'd gone off. They'd gone to a new place. They'd formed a cult. They'd formed something completely antithetical to what these people were and what they stood for. That's an evidence that they stayed, that they are there. They are with these believers because they love them; and that's an evidence of the Spirit's work in them. So that's the first way in which John tells us that we can silence this accusing heart.

The second way to do that is given in the next statement in verse 20. He says, "God is greater than our heart." In other words, when in doubt, appeal to an authority that is higher than our accuser. The Lord knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows everything. Now how do we do that? How do we look to the Lord (at higher authority) to gain this assurance? We look to His Word. We let Him speak to us—and He speaks to us in the Scriptures, in His Word.

Now personal experience has its place. Use that as one of the first means of quieting the conscience. So personal experience is important. Feelings have their place, for that matter. But they are not our authority—Scripture is. That's where we learn the mind of God, that is where He communicates to us, that's where He speaks to us. And so we're to look to the Word of God. And what we learn in Scripture is that the Lord God is

more merciful toward us than our hearts are. He is more merciful toward us than we are toward ourselves.

The Bible is clear. God has known our thoughts and deeds from all eternity; still, He chose us to be His children long before He brought us into existence. Long before you had a thought or you did a deed, the Lord God knew what you would do. Long before you were created, He chose you, knowing full well the kind of person you would be. And we can know that He has chosen us because His Word teaches that it is the believer in Jesus Christ who is the child of God. He accepts us fully at the moment of faith—and all of that by God's grace.

Paul speaks of that, he speaks of that in a very familiar passage. I'll read it. Listen to what he says in Romans chapter 8, verses 31 through 34: "What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?" (vs31). That's a rhetorical question; and of course, the obvious answer is, "No one!" My heart's against me? —Doesn't really matter; ultimately, 'God is for me'. If Satan, or the world ,or friends, or whatever, is opposed to me, what does that matter, ultimately, when God is for me?

The Almighty God is for His children: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us." (vs32-34).

Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Then you were chosen by God. Christ died for you, and He's now praying for you. You are absolutely secure. And someday God will glorify you—That's a certainty!

Listen, the doctrines that Paul touches on there in Romans 8; the doctrine of unconditional election of His sovereign choice of you from all eternity—that is a glorious doctrine. The doctrine of the atonement, the substitutionary death of Christ for His people, that He took your place in the judgment and the wrath of God—that is a glorious doctrine! They tell us that God's love is more for us than our own love for ourselves, that He accepts us and never casts us off. —Believe that! Don't doubt that!

Have confidence before Him. Confess your sins and pray, but have confidence to go and do that very thing. That is the vital, earnest Christian life. It is a battle.

Look, the Christian life's a life of joy, a life of peace. That too is the fruit of the Spirit. And I don't mean to deny that, but the reality is we are in a spiritual war, and it's a constant war, and we're dealing with these things. It's a battle, and we wage that spiritual war effectively only with the Word of God: studying it; recalling the person of our Lord God, our Triune God of whom we sang this morning, and the promises of God reflecting on His person and His work.

We need to do that. Go to the Word. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Rom 10:17). If you want strong faith you will go to the Word of God, that's how you get it. You get strong faith by reading the Scriptures and studying it. That's what Paul tells us. And so we need to use that in our life. We need to take responsibility and take hold of ourselves. I'll quote James Boice on that, I like his counsel here, "The Christian must simply take himself in hand and confront himself with what he knows to be true concerning God and God's work in his life."

Let me put it a different way: "Preach to yourself." Every one of you should be a preacher. You don't have to stand in a pulpit and preach; but when in the quiet of your own room at home or in the car, and you're having doubts—preach to yourself. Go to the Word of God, reflect on it and tell yourself, "It's true. These promises are real. God cannot lie, and He cannot fail, and He cannot cast you off. He will not."

So remember the great truths of it. Remember that God is love, as John will tell us shortly in chapter 4, and He deals with us according to His love. —Which is to say He deals with us according to His sovereign mercy and grace. So we must go to Him, confess our sins, and seek His mercy; His help in time of need, in time of doubt—and He will give it. He is greater than our heart and He can silence that heart when it's accusing us.

Now that's what God wants. He wants us to have an active, real relationship with Him. That only happens where there is confidence before Him. The person who is condemned by his or her heart doesn't have an open, healthy relationship with the Lord

God;he/she shrinks back from the Lord; isn't joyful; can't progress in the faith as a result of that. Confidence is essential for that joyful, progressing Christian life.

And John shows that in the next verses. "We have..." this he says in verse 21, "...confidence before God" when our heart does not condemn us. Well, confidence is boldness. John used this same word earlier when he spoke of the Lord's return—and the *confidence*, or the *boldness*, that we should have, and we hope to have, at His return. When He comes we don't want to be ashamed, we want to have boldness, we want to have confidence and joyfully welcome Him.

But here he refers to the present, not the future. It refers to boldness in prayer. It refers to being able to turn trustingly to the LORD and enter the throne room of grace at any time to seek help in time of need. And not just that, but to praise Him for what He's done, for who He is, and to thank Him for what He's done in our lives. And the more we reflect upon who He is and what He's done, the more thankful we become—because 'every good thing we have is from Him'. And in fact, everything in our life is from Him ultimately—and for our good. That's reason to give thanks; to draw close with confidence.

So this is the kind of life that we're to live. This is what he's speaking of here, referring to 'boldness in prayer', seeking help from the Lord, and praise and thanksgiving to Him. That's freedom of speech, which is a meaning that this word "*confidence*" had in ancient history among the Greeks.

A Greek citizen, famous for democracy and participation in the politics of the city, the Greek citizen had this right: They could speak freely, they could speak boldly in public assemblies. It was a great privilege that a citizen had.—But only a citizen had it. It was denied to foreigners and slaves. But a Greek citizen had this great privilege to go to the assemblies of the city and have a voice; and to speak and to make a protest or whatever.

And that's our right as a full citizen in God's kingdom. The privilege to stand before the Lord God in prayer without fear and speak freely, live before Him with

confidence and joy. Do we realize what an unusual privilege that is, a privilege far greater than any civil or political right that a person can enjoy.

Let me illustrate that. One of my favorite places to visit is the British Museum. Not that I go there every weekend, but I've been there a few times, twice I think. You don't have to be a history buff to enjoy it for it is filled with fascinating treasures from the ancient world. The first thing you see when you enter is the Rosetta Stone—the key that unlocked the mystery of Egyptian hieroglyphics. And then you turn left to go down the hall and you come to the Assyrian section, and one of the most interesting relics for Bible students, the Black Obelisk. It's a little over six feet tall, and it has on it an image of Jehu, King of Israel.

I took a picture of my daughter standing by it and standing next to Jehu. It's not a very flattering portrait of the king. He's only, I guess, two inches long and an inch-and-a-half tall. He's on his knees with his face to the ground before the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III; and he's only one of a number of kings prostrate before the Assyrian monarch. That is how people approached a powerful king—with cringing fear; with the attitude expressed by Mephibosheth when he came before David, King of Israel, and he described himself as a “dead dog”. (2Sam 16:9).

Well, David raised up Mephibosheth, he seated him at his table, he fed him every day; and honored Mephibosheth as a member of his family because Mephibosheth was Jonathan's son. It wasn't that Mephibosheth was great in and of himself. He was a crippled boy who described himself as a ‘dead dog’. But he was Jonathan's son—and that made the difference.

God has done the same for us—not because there's anything in us that merits God's favor but because of Christ. And God has made every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ His child by the new birth: a son or daughter by justification and adoption into His family. And now we can approach Him. We can approach the Lord God with complete confidence—even boldness; day or night, at any time and God is glad to receive us. It gives Him the greatest joy to have us come to Him.

Now think of that! Even ancient kings couldn't do that with one of their own. They approached a great ruler with fear and trembling, without boldness, without confidence, afraid for their lives. But we can come boldly to God Almighty; who holds all of the kings and the presidents, the planets and the stars in the galaxies in His hand. And we can come to Him; and He gladly receives us. He's happy to have us at any moment.

John wants us to know that and to act upon that great privilege of access to God, because it is the path to blessing. He says in verse 22 that, "Whatever we ask we receive from Him..." That's an amazing statement: "Whatever we ask we receive from Him." Open access to God Almighty and answered prayer for whoever asks and for whatever they ask—that's an astonishing promise. And it's true for every Christian, not just a few; not some elite group of Christians, not the mature only, and not the immature; it's for all. Young and old, mature and immature alike, we have this privilege: that whatever we ask, "we receive from Him."

Now there are conditions but they are not unreasonable; they are what we would expect. We keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. God's not going to bless a person in his or her disobedience. That wouldn't be a blessing; that would only encourage them in that which is destructive. Not if we're in open rebellion against Him, if we're living in sin; He's not going to bless that; He's not going to answer our requests that are prayed improperly. It must be in repentance and obedience.

And John speaks of obedience in two ways. The two conditions seem to be almost identical, but there may be some difference, subtle differences. He says, "...we keep His commandments...", (that may refer to outward obedience), and "pleasing Him," pleasing the Lord, (which may refer to inner obedience or the motive of the heart behind the outward obedience). There is a readiness to obey, not a reluctance. There is an eagerness to please God in what we do, because we love Him, and we understand what He's done for us. And we want to do that, we want to obey; and so we give obedience willingly, gladly. Genuine obedience is made of both attitude and action.

Outward obedience really is an evidence of inward harmony with God. And so it follows that when we desire what God desires that we will ask for the things that please Him; and receive them because we're praying according to His will.

Now does that mean that we get everything that we ask for from God? No. But we always get what's best for us, even when our prayers are valid, because sometimes God has a higher plan. Even when it is not a selfish prayer so much, and it seems to be a prayer according to Scripture, sometimes those aren't answered because God's got something else in store for us that is much better; or a higher purpose for what He wants us to do.

Jesus, of course, is the classic example of that. As He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed that the cup of the cross, the cup of God's wrath would pass from Him. He wanted to avoid wrath because wrath is hell. The seriousness of it is seen in the garden. People live their life glibly as though there'll be no end, and they're not afraid of death. They don't know what's coming. He did, and it was so terrifying, so awful, that He sweat great drops of blood. He wanted to avoid that.

But He prayed, "If it is possible, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. But not as I will, but as You will." (Mat 26:39). Because the Father's will is perfect and the Son knew that—and He knew that His plan is always right. And so He prayed with that caveat—and of course, the cup did not pass. And we praise the Lord that it didn't—we'd be lost if it had. So Christ was crucified.

But that's how we should pray. It's how Paul prayed; he asked God to remove a terrible affliction from him, what he called, 'a thorn in the flesh'. We don't know what that is; it may have been a physical affliction, it seems to have been that. Some angry affliction that he had – maybe eye problem or something else. But it was a legitimate request and it's what we would pray, it's what we do pray. But God answered with, "No". And the reason He answered with a 'no' to that request was because that 'thorn' was good for Paul—it kept him from exalting himself. God always gives us what is for our best whether we realize it or not. He's not like the father who gave the son a scorpion when he asked for an egg or gave him a stone when he asked for a loaf.

And really, what did Paul want? What was really his heart's desire? It was that he would be able to minister effectively. He felt that this was a deterrent to that; this was a frustration in his ministry. He wanted to minister freely and effectively, unhindered by pain and the shame of that affliction. But by giving him the thorn, God answered that prayer. That actually made him more effective in his life and ministry.

Look, our disappointments are real disappointments, and our pain is real pain, our setbacks are real setbacks—and yet all of that really is a blessing. And we may not realize that now. We don't realize that now, and I'm saying that as a healthy man free of pain. It's easy to say that in my condition. But it's true, nonetheless. Whether I believe it or not, it's what the Word of God teaches and what we are to believe. God always, always blesses His children. He never holds back the best from us. And we'll realize that someday if we don't realize it now. But it's true now. So it's important that we follow God's will; it's the path to blessing.

But what is His will? What are His commandments? John answers that in verse 23—and he gives them in a single commandment. "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us." Everything is summed up in one commandment that has two parts: faith is the root, love is the fruit; the two cannot be separated. Faith in the Lord results in love for the brethren.

Now the grammar here is important, (and I don't really like to get into grammatical points, I'll try to keep it simple.) It's not complicated and it's something you've probably heard before anyway. But the grammar is important. The word "believe" is what's known in the Greek as an *aorist* tense. It's the very common tense in Greek. It's the simple past tense; and it has a punctiliar aspect, that is, a *moment in time*. It's something that we do at a *moment* of time: "believed" in a *moment*. So it happened at a *moment* that we believed.

Now the verb "love" is in the present tense, which is durative in its action. That is, it's continuous, it goes on and on. It's continual. So putting this together: Saving faith

is a single act of a *moment* that results in justification, which is permanent, and puts the believer 'in Christ' at that *moment* and forever. That faith never stops. It's not that we keep being justified, it happens once, we're placed in Christ once; and it's permanent, it's forever. But that's an initial act of faith that puts us in that relationship with Christ; and in putting us in a relationship with Christ, it puts us in a relationship with one another. It puts us in a relationship with the body of Christ. It puts us in relationship with believers—and we express our love for them just as we express our love for Christ.

You can't love the head without loving the body. You can't love our Savior without loving the saved—the sheep. You can't love the Shephard without loving the sheep. And so it is natural that we love the brethren that's constant. It's a continual expression, or reflection, of our faith because no one can love the brethren who hasn't believed in Jesus Christ. It's a fruit of the Spirit. It's a supernatural work that He does within us, and a proof that we are His.

Here, John says, "believe in the name..." The word "name" shouldn't confuse us, it's just a way of saying, "believing in the person of the name." It's a way of saying, 'believing in that person; everything about Him: who He is, what He's done.' Who is He? Well, He's the eternal Son of God who became a man.

Those heretics that were troubling this church that John wrote to, denied that—they denied the incarnation. They denied that Jesus Christ is the God-Man – fully God, fully man – the eternal Son of God who became one of us in order to die in our place. Well, faith begins by 'believing in the name', believing in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and the Son of God.

But this brings us back to the beginning; it really closes the circle of John's lesson here. 'We know that we are of the truth' by this, 'that we love in deed and truth. (vs18-19). We believe the Gospel; we believe the truth; and we love the brethren. These are objective standards, what we can examine. We know objectively what we believe, what the Gospel is, and know that we believe it. We can look at our lives and see that we love the brethren. We can see what we're doing and how we're responding; and it's evidence

of the reality of our faith. And by looking at ourselves in this way, we can have assurance and quiet an accusing conscience which causes doubts and hinders our walk with the Lord and our prayer life with Him. So again, it is essential that we calm our condemning hearts by looking at our positive deeds, reflecting on our obedience to God's Word, our love for Christians, our belief in Christ.

But John adds something to that because the fact is, our deeds of love and obedience are never perfect; and our failures feed the accusations that our heart brings against us and produce doubts. So there's a further, and really I would say, surer source of confidence when the evidence is weak. (And really, if we have a tender conscience, I think the evidence is always going to seem weak, because we're always going to regret that we don't love the brethren more, and we don't live a more obedient life; 'If I just didn't watch the Rangers so often I'd read my Bible more and I'd know the Gospel better, I'd know the full range of God's theology.'). We can always get into that self-incrimination. That's not all-together wrong to do that, by the way, but if we look at the evidence of our life, we can be a bit disappointed.

So there's another source of confirmation and assurance. And John refers to Him at the end of the verse—it's the Holy Spirit. John says at the end of verse 24 that, "We know by this that He abides in us," (that is that 'Christ abides in us'), "by the Spirit whom He has given us." Christ has given us, every believer in Jesus Christ, He's given us the Holy Spirit.

In John 14 and verse 16, Jesus promised His disciples that, He would "give them another Helper, the Spirit of truth", and 'He would abide in them and teach them.' The Holy Spirit testifies of Christ. He bears witness before the world of Christ through us, and He bears witness to us of Christ, that He is in us, and that we belong to Him. That's what Paul writes of in Romans chapter 8, verses 14 through 16, where he describes the Spirit's inner ministry, a bearing witness "...with our spirit that we are children of God." (vs16).

It's not something audible, it's not something that we hear—but we know it. He gives us a settled conviction that we are children of God; and in that way, He speaks over the accusing conscience—He silences it.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't do it apart from these tests that John sets forth in this book—He ministers in harmony with that. He doesn't give encouragement to those who deny the Gospel, for example, for those who deny that Christ is the Son of God. They may have confidence that they're right, and they may have confidence that they're right with God, but it's a false confidence if they deny the truth of the Gospel. So He doesn't give confidence to just anybody who thinks that he or she has it.

But a child of God who knows that he or she is a child of God ultimately knows that, because of the ministry of the Spirit within us; in our hearts and in our minds He gives that confirmation. This is at least one way that when our hearts condemn us, God proves Himself to be greater than our hearts, and shows that He knows more. He knows who His people are, and He lets them know. It's a knowledge, a conviction, a confidence that may come in the midst of a storm. It may come after a period of doubt and discouragement, but it comes; and we're to pray for that and expect the Lord to answer—and He will.

At the beginning of the study I mentioned Martin Luther and his struggle with depression, which was especially intense in that year 1527; it was a difficult year for him. That was a time when a group of radicals were active and trying to basically seize the Reformation by trying to push it in a different direction; trying to move it into mysticism and actually into heresy. And Luther was dealing with that. It was a strong enemy that he was dealing with. And it was a time when people were suffering for the faith when Luther, as his biographer wrote, was still sleeping in his own bed while his followers were dying for the faith. And all of that weighed very heavily on him and caused him to doubt himself, to question his faith, to question his acceptance with God.

But he came through it; he came through that spiritual storm. And it was in that same year that he wrote his great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress." That's what God is. He is a fortress for everyone who flees to Him. We may doubt that at times, but we shouldn't.

So again, we need to pacify our conscience and calm our accusing hearts by reflecting on God's Word and remembering who He is and what He has done for us; what He is doing for us; what He will do for us; and draw near to Him—He wants us to. Believers in Jesus Christ are His children and we have open access to Him. We can come to Him at any time with confidence, with boldness, and freedom of speech. That's the path to blessing. May God grant us that boldness and confidence.

But if you're here without Christ, if you've never believed in Him, you don't have that access and you should be full of doubt. In that case, doubt is good. There is no doubt about this: if you're not in Christ, if you've not believed in Him, you are lost. But also, there's no doubt that you can be found. Believe in Jesus Christ; that's the Gospel. Trust in Him. Trust in Him as God's eternal Son, as our all-sufficient Savior. Rely upon His death on the cross for your salvation. He died for all who do, and He receives all who believe. So come to Him. Every believer is saved at the moment of faith placed in Christ; now and forever. May God help you to do that. Come to Him. May God help all of us to rejoice in all that we have in Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we do rejoice in that. We thank You for what You have given us in Your Son. Left to ourselves, Father, we are what Mephibosheth said he was: 'a dead dog'. There is nothing in us that should commend us to You; and yet You in Your sovereign grace, Your unconditional election, Your eternal love, set Your love upon us from all eternity, brought us into existence and saved us at the cross, brought us to a saving knowledge of Christ. We're in Your hand and we can't be plucked out. We should have confidence in our relationship with You and draw close to You every moment. Help us to do that, Lord. Thank You for what we have in Christ. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)