

Sermon Text for November 26, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Genesis 12:1-3, Romans 11:22-24

“Once Saved, always saved”

I pray you had a blessed Thanksgiving, that you ate too much, slept too little, and found yourself outside for most of the beautiful days that we had this weekend. The Bronkemas got together for their yearly Friday Thanksgiving, we went to my brother’s house in West Chester County, New York, a little town called Pleasantville. When we get together everything becomes competitive so we played football and then had a soccer game followed by a marathon knockout game in basketball. We all gathered around the Thanksgiving table, 21 of us, and ate and enjoyed being a family. At one point of the meal my brother John looked at me and said: the kids are getting to be adults, aren’t they? What a blessing to be together in a family.

My mom wasn’t able to make it so we made her on the phone guess which grandchild, and son, and daughter in law each one was on the phone as we passed it around the room. You know each of our families has been on a different journey, but we are still and will always be Bronkemas. Nothing can happen between us, among us, or outside of us that can change that status. Once a Bronkema, for better or for worse, always a Bronkema.

We enter into a season in the life of the church calendar that is the end of the season which marks the beginning of a season. The year ends today with what is called Christ the King Sunday. It is a Sunday that we recognize the Lordship and the reign of Christ in our lives and in the world. It is an important Sunday because it draws us back from wondering who is in charge in this world to being reminded that Jesus is charge in this world. From there we enter into the Advent Season which is a season of preparation for the coming of Jesus into the world as a baby, a baby who becomes our king and our Lord. As a family whose last name is Christian and first name is Presbyterian, we fully recognize that although we may change our first name, we are still claimed by God as His child.

That status of being a child of God does not change. As we say today that Christ is king of our lives we also say that no matter how much of a prodigal son we are, God still calls us and claims us within his covenant. Once we are saved, once we are claimed, once we are a part of this family called disciples of Jesus Christ, we cannot lose that status no matter how far we run from God. Today we are going to affirm that together. It is an important time of year to affirm that because it is also one of the most stressful times of the year for families. It is a time when financially we feel a bit pinched, it is a time when emotionally we might feel drained because the

holidays just do that to us. It is a time when we are the most joyful and thankful. As a result, it is a time to be reminded that once we are saved we are always saved. Let's read what Paul has to say about that.

READ SCRIPTURE

This is our last Sunday in Romans as we enter into Advent next week. We will begin another series which is called The heart of Christ. We will be looking at the Christmas story in each of the four Gospels, which is a bit difficult since two of the Gospels don't have the birth of Jesus, but we are going to make it work. Today we find ourselves again in chapter 12. We find ourselves again getting a basic lesson in theology from Paul. He speaks about those who were originally part of the covenant that God had first established with Abraham. In our first Scripture for this morning we read about how God established that covenant with Abraham and what the stipulations and the parameters of that covenant were.

I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, I will bless those who bless you, all the families in the earth shall be blessed. We see a covenant that God has established with His people from the very beginning that revolves around the grace and the Lordship of Almighty God. God is the ultimate king because he has the power and the might to bless you, he can control all things so that you will be blessed. He doesn't say, I'll try to help you out as much as I can as you go through life. I'll what I can. No, since God has created the heavens and the earth then he promises, and is able to promise, that he will make Abraham great, and he does, that he will bless him, and he does. God doesn't make promises that he can't keep. If he says I have claimed you as my child, that claiming, that promise and all that comes with it, is encapsulated with that promise.

This is how God's covenant begins with his people, so when Paul in Romans 11 talks about a tree, he is speaking about the covenant that has been established between God and His people. This covenant is eternal and forever. But look at these verses closely in Romans 11 and see if you don't sense a meaning that might imply that if you don't tow the line, if you don't, what does he say in vs.22, continue in his kindness, then you will be cut off. There seems to be an implication that even if you were a part of this covenant of God, if you persist in unbelief then you will also be cut off. How do we explain this in these verses?

Let's look at a couple other verses that tend to lean in the direction that you can actually lose your salvation. Look at Hebrews 6:4-6. Now this seems really quite clear that those who once were saved if they turn their back on God will inevitably find their place without salvation. I'm supposed to be bringing you to the place where we can stand upon the assurance of our

salvation, not doubting it. But there is more. Look at I John 2:19, here it tells us that those who turn their back on the faith have no place with us, in fact, they didn't belong with us anyway.

We need to be aware of what is going on when these Scriptures are being written. A mosque explodes and those inside are massacred in Egypt with over 300 lives taken, simply because they are worshipping their God. A church is targeted during worship and dozens are killed. During the 1st century if you were a Christian this was a daily occurrence. You were targeted because of your faith. When you drove to church today you didn't have to think about the way that you came to church to make sure no one was following or knew where you were going. When you parked your car you parked as closely as possible, because you didn't have to worry about people seeing you or your vehicle in front of the church. They aren't going to target you today because they know that you are one of us.

When we were in Russia – starting a Bible study - . This is the reality in many settings across the world. When that is your reality and person who is one of us turns their back and joins the other side. When a person within your fellowship then joins the Romans to target you and to wipe you out, you are going to say that when a person leaves the fellowship they have no eternal part of us. The approach by the author of Hebrews and I John is that those who have turned their back on us and no longer are disciples of Jesus Christ, they are putting our community at risk. Do not have any relations with them.

We are no longer in that reality. As a result when we read Paul say in vs.23 that even those of Israel will be grafted back in, we are able to read it as an understanding that God will not leave out those whom God has chosen and those whom God has preordained to be His children. We've already seen that he has done that for all of us.

I think it is important to understand Scripture as being consistent in God reaching out to those who have strayed and run away from him. Do you remember Peter in John 21, this is the same Peter who did what to Jesus on the night before his crucifixion? I do not know this man. Three times Peter denied him, Peter betrays him for everyone to see. But Jesus brings him back into the fold and asks him if he loves him. The rehabilitation of Peter, the betrayer of Jesus is legendary for us to rely upon in the assurance of our salvation.

We see other Scriptures that remind us that we cannot flee from the presence of God, even if we turn our backs on him. Look at Psalm 139, even if I make my bed in hell, you are there. Did you hear that? Or what about what we already read about in Romans 8:28-38 where we see that nothing can separate us from God? Do you know Ephesians 1:13-14? We have all been marked with the seal of Christ the King, our King. Once we are marked with that seal then

we are pledged with an inheritance that can only mean eternal life. Once we are saved, once we have been claimed, even if we go to hell itself, God has a claim on us. I'm not making this up, it is in the Bible.

So today, as we look toward these next few weeks ahead of us and all that has to get done, let's not lose heart. Let's be encouraged by the ending of this church year with the full recognition that God is king and we are merely the clay in his hands. Our lives, all of our lives, are in His hands. As a result, when we read in Scripture that God has claimed us for eternity, let's not ever wonder if that is really true. If God is going to keep his promise that once we are saved, we are always saved. Go home and enjoy this time of year with your families, with your loved ones, with those who are special to you, and don't ever wonder about your status before God. You have been chosen, and so you are His. Amen.