

Give yourself a moment now to soak in these beautiful Gospel verses:

“The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

“Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:5).

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Such wonderful verses.

But as beautiful and wonderful as they are, sometimes, *sometimes*, do they sound too good to be true? I mean, are there times when we know them up here [head], but not in here [heart]? Do we ever have moments when, while we believe these promises to be factually true, we still wonder if they’re really true for ourselves? My guess is, there might be occasions like that.

And why is that—why are there times when we’re tempted to doubt God’s sure and certain promises? We could probably come up with plenty of reasons—guilt and shame, pessimism, unbelief, just to name a few. It could be any of those, or all of them and more at the same time. But lately I’m starting to wonder if it’s not something else.

You see, I recently came across an interesting article. It was put out by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It talks about developmental issues for young children in foster care. Upon reading it, I was surprised to find out that 500,000 children are in foster care in the United States alone. And most of these children have been the victims of repeated abuse and prolonged neglect from a very early age. During their most formative years, just when they’re developing their most critical mental structures, these children go without ever experiencing a stable, nurturing environment in the home. And such a lack of permanency and continuity takes a real toll on them.

Some of these detrimental effects can include persistent fear and constant anxiety—never feeling safe, never being at peace. Which also means, they have an inability to form important relational bonds with others, even difficulty trusting anyone. Because they’ve been hurt so many times—over and over—they’ve learned that there’s not a single soul in the world on whom they can depend. And so for them, it can be a real struggle for love to ever enter into their lives—challenging both for them to share love as well as allow themselves to be loved. God bless them—try as they might, social workers and therapists have their work cut out for them. The damage is just so ingrained in these children that it can seem almost impossible to ever repair. These children have been scarred for life. And reading this article, it just broke my heart.

But it also made me wonder if that doesn’t speak to our situation. The Bible tells us that by Baptism we have been adopted into the family of God. At the baptismal font, you and I were born again, born from above to a heavenly Father. And baptized into Christ Jesus, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. The Spirit has been poured into our hearts and now cries out, “Abba, Father!” Which means having been brought into God’s family, we now find ourselves in a safe, stable, nurturing home—and that will never change. We have an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, it’s reserved in heaven for you and me. But true as that may be, like we pointed out before, we all have days when this is difficult to grasp.

Maybe like foster children, we also carry with us a lot of baggage. From the time we were born until now, we have little experience when it comes to the warmth of hearth and home with the Holy Trinity. Instead, we are all too familiar with

the abuse and the neglect of the Unholy Trinity—that is, what Luther frequently called the world, the flesh, and the devil. After all, who hasn't been knocked around by the world a few times? Who's not their own worst enemy—our own sinful flesh getting the better of us? And who hasn't grown up on a steady diet of lies from politicians, false teachers, and mass media—many of them puppeteered by none other than Satan himself, and we didn't even know it?

Just take a moment this morning, and think about the impact such forces have had on you over the years. What have they done to hurt you from without and wound you from within? How have they made you a kinda product of a broken home, these cruel caretakers and their mistreatment? Because of the instability and impermanency that they've put you through, have they made it so that you never feel safe, unable to trust anyone—even if it is our God, whose love endures forever? No doubt, we all might show it differently, but all of us in one way or another have been scarred for life.

But if you bear such scars today, take comfort in this—you're not the only one. You see, today is The Ascension of Our Lord, the day that our Lord Jesus—who was pierced for your transgressions and punctured for your iniquities—has now gone up into heaven. Our Savior, who felt the crushing blow of God's hammer for you as He was nailed to the cross, now sits at the right hand of the Father. His risen body, still poked through with the holes of crucifixion, now takes up space in the very presence of Almighty God.

Which means that those scars still intercede for you—they're always pleading your case, always forgiving you, and always securing your place in His kingdom forevermore. God's wrath for sin has been drained down to the last drop, the bottom is now bone-dry. The debt's been paid up for two thousand years now. The verdict's been in for quite some time—"Not guilty."

So, what Ben Franklin once quipped might be true this side of heaven, "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." But on the other side, in heaven itself, that couldn't be more wrong. Because of Christ's scars, you can count on God's promises to be ever sure, ever certain, and ever true. He will never have second thoughts, never change His mind, never go back on His Word—He can't! Not when the stigmata of our salvation never leaves His sight. As long as your ascended Lord is seated with God, those scars are ever before Him—a constant reminder of what Jesus has done for you.

Y'know, there was a time when not just us today but even the Old Testament children of God—the sons of Israel—had trust issues. To them was given the oracles of God—they knew the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; that His mercies never come to an end; that they are new every morning; great is His faithfulness. Yet, their experience was telling them otherwise. It was the sixth century BC, but the Hebrews had watched as the Assyrian Empire had wiped out the northern kingdom of Israel nearly two hundred years before. And now, right before their very eyes, they were watching the same thing happen to them as their beloved city, Jerusalem, the capitol of Judah got destroyed at the hands of the Babylonians. Their homes had been sacked, the people taken into captivity, and the city walls now lay in ruins. It sure looked as if, at best God had just forgotten about them, or at worst He'd reneged on His promises. Such scars left on their psyches told many of them, that He just couldn't be trusted.

Yet, the prophet Isaiah, had given them this mysterious Gospel promise just a couple hundred years prior. This comes from chapter 49—

Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me;  
my Lord has forgotten me."

[But] "Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.  
Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

. . . "I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." And history tells us that indeed God did not forget, but re-established them in their own land.

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The Ascension of Our Lord  
Mark 16:14-20

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You and I, we bear the scars of this life—reminders of abuse and neglect. They tell us that nothing is certain, that nobody is to be trusted. Even when it comes to God, such scars leave us with nagging doubts. But Jesus' scars say otherwise—they shout down all others, and instead scream salvation. In God's court, your Savior's scars are always speaking up, putting in a good word for you, pleading on your behalf. "I will not forget you," declares the Lord. "Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."