

SALVATION GUARANTEED!

‡ **Positively solid (vv.18-20)**

‡ **Standing firm by God (vv.21,22)**

In the name of Jesus, our faithful Savior and friend, dearly redeemed and safely kept Christians:

Years ago National Public Radio reported on religion among Amazon Jungle tribes. As might be expected from NPR, the villains were Evangelical Christian missionaries who converted the natives from their pristine natural religion. According to the reporter all Amazon tribes had come out of the jungle to convert to Christianity at least for a while, but then some of the “independent thinkers” had gone back to their own religious culture. Listening to the sound track, you could hear them moaning in the night while they sat in the darkness trying to keep evil spirits away. The wind in the treetops frightened them.

Isn't that ironic? And sad? They chose superstition. You might say they gave up God's “Yes!” in Christ and went back to the world's emphatic “Maybe.” Man's self-made religions have many things in common including this: There are no guarantees. Do you realize that in Islam not even their religious leaders are guaranteed heaven? Only those who were closest to Mohammed during his lifetime and the suicide bombers of *Jihad* holy wars are promised a straight ticket. Contrast that with today's lesson from the God of the Bible. We can summarize it in two words: **Salvation Guaranteed!**

‡ **Positively solid (vv.18-20)**

Modern Bible scholars don't seem to have a clue what was at stake here in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. They point to verses like our text to prove that Paul was argumentative thereby implying that you could not trust everything he wrote in his thirteen epistles of the Bible. But remember that Paul never was a wishy-washy rabbi with a “take-it-or-leave-it” religion. Before his conversion to Christianity the man then known as Saul of Tarsus persecuted Christians for following someone Saul regarded as an imposter who deserved to be crucified. But on the road to Damascus when Jesus Christ appeared to that violent man, his whole world turned from darkness to light. Jesus made Saul the former persecutor into Paul, missionary to the Gentiles. From then on everything Paul did was for the good of the Gospel.

That's what his critics back in Corinth just could not understand. A couple years earlier in Ephesus, Paul had written his first letter expressing his hope of visiting the Corinthians twice – going and coming from Macedonia. But his intended one-year stay in Asia Minor turned into three years of struggle. His personal suffering for the Gospel may have included fighting wild beasts like a gladiator in the arena before he finally left Ephesus for Greece. By then Paul had only enough time for one visit to Corinth. Soon disgruntled members were accusing Paul of dishonesty.

For the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, missionary Pastor Paul could not let that accusation stand. Otherwise, people would think they did not need Paul's Gospel, the Good News that God sent His Son Jesus to save us all. And the beauty of it is that while defending his ministry in 2 Corinthians, Paul was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to teach some wonderful things about how **Positively solid** the Christian faith really is. *“As surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not ‘Yes’ and ‘No.’ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’ but in him it has always been ‘Yes.’ For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”*

Can you see what a grievous sin it is for us to worry and fret about anything? When we lie awake at night, tossing and turning for solutions to relationships and finances, or whatever, we are treating God as if His promises mean nothing, as if He's a "Maybe-God" no better than the idols of this world. Maybe something you prayed for years ago hasn't happened yet, and you're worried it never will. But my dear fellow sinner and natural born worrier, if that certain something could cost you eternal life with God in heaven, do you really want Him to give it anyway? Or if waiting a while longer means God can give something far better than you could ask or imagine, why would you want it now? Can't you see how different God's bottom line is compared to ours? A full tank and tummy, a busy schedule and passionate love life may be all this worldly nature desires, but that only proves how much we deserve for God to turn away and let us build our own happy road to hell. God has provided **Salvation Guaranteed – Positively solid** by all His promises in Christ. But until our back is hard up against a wall or we're moaning in the darkness of our sinful imaginations, we easily miss the meaning of the cross and the way it shouts God's holy "Yes!" across the ages. We need to learn these lessons in life from God's school of grace that we can neither bring ourselves to faith in Jesus, nor keep faith alive. Like Paul, we can only keep...

✠ Standing firm by God (vv.21,22)

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

If you've ever bought a house or a car, you know how a deposit works. In fact, your school ID operates in a similar way. Your parents pay the school, and the school issues that laminated plastic with your most beautiful picture for everyone to see whether you should get in line for food or enter the building. Even more so when buying a car or a house people "put money down" to show how serious they are about the purchase. Otherwise, your dream house can turn into a nightmare when someone else comes along and buys it out from under you. The deposit guarantees a good outcome.

This is what God has done to keep us **Standing firm**. He not only sent Jesus to live a perfect life in our place by never worrying. God sent Jesus to suffer on the cross for every time we broke out in a cold sweat at night because we forgot God's promises and wanted to solve our own problems. **"Do not worry"** (Matthew 6:34) is just as much a command of God as **"You shall not murder,"** or **"You shall not commit adultery,"** or **"Do not steal."** And when the Lord's Christ was nailed between the earth and sky, He hung there bleeding and dying for every murder, every adultery, every theft, false witness and blasphemy ever committed, along with every worry that ever crept across the troubled heart of man, woman or child. Such worries can turn into panic attacks or health crippling stress that is just an outward symptom of a far worse sickness in the soul. 700 years earlier the LORD God promised about the Christ as if it had already happened: **"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows....But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities: the punishment that brought us peace was upon him; and by his wounds we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:4f updated)

Why do you believe that? Why do these words bring such peace when you finally quit tossing and turning and get out your Bible? The comfort passages you've marked and memorized calm your soul because of the **"deposit"** God put in your heart when He first brought you to faith in Jesus. Remember a **"deposit"** is only part of the payment – in this case, not owed by God, but a gift He gives purely out of His gracious desire to bless us unworthy sinners. God has promised you a mansion in heaven which will never blow over in a storm or blow up from terrorists. He has promised you the full and free forgiveness of all your debts to God for sin. How do you know that you can count on Him to deliver since you never deserved such priceless hope in the first place? He gave you a **"deposit,"** a down payment better than earnest money. God put His Holy Spirit in your heart as a foretaste of heaven, like the first chocolate from a never ending box of the very best. This **"deposit"** of the Holy Spirit tells you there's no "Maybe" here, no reason to doubt or worry. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Let the wind howl in the trees. You are at peace with God for Jesus' sake. We have **Salvation Guaranteed!** Amen.