

Happy Mother's Day
Message for May 9, 2026
Scripture: John 14:15-21
Title: How do we know?

Welcome

Announcements (Your choices are...)

Giving Options- Verde Valley Sanctuary is the special offering, ways to give...etc. Learn to Knit/Crochet Group Wednesday May 13th at 10AM-Atrium; Men's Coffee Tuesdays at 7:30AM; United Women of Faith Women's Luncheon-Sailing with Jesus, Tuesday May 19, at 11:30AM in Verde Hall; We need Cookies. We need hospitality volunteers for July through October. See Diana Smith. No help... no cookies; Mountain View Scholarship Applications in the foyer-due June 1.

Fellowship of Love

Song

Call to Worship

L: Gather us in O God.

P: Amidst fire and storm, make us whole.

L: Bring us into your presence, Holy One.

P: From suffering and pain, save us.

L: Shelter us in your loving arms, Precious Lord.

P: On the highways of life, guide us.

L: Make us your disciples, Great Spirit.

P: As we worship this day, lead us home.

Unison Prayer

Holy flame, burn away our fears and regrets, that our spirits may shine like burnished gold.

Refiner's Fire, purify our lives like precious silver, that our hearts may glow with holy love.

Forge the truth, mold us into vessels of compassion, that our lives may reveal your glory.

Amen.

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

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Offering/Song

Scripture: John 14:15-21 NRSVue

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Sermon: How do we know?

The question of whether you are "saved" is a question that many of the greatest theologians have wrestled with. Even some of our lesser theologians have wrestled with the issue. Last week I briefly mentioned a very famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". This was written by the preacher Jonathan Edwards during the first great awakening in early American history. Jonathan Edwards taught that being saved was a "radical supernatural transformation of the heart...where God grants a sincere saving faith that united the believer to Christ and produces joy in God's beauty." A key aspect of this idea for Jonathan Edwards was that salvation wasn't just an intellectual assent but also a heartfelt change.

This is reflected in Methodism's history with the story of John Wesley's experience at Aldersgate. When at a reading of Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Romans, Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed." The technical theological term we would use here is assurance. Wesley felt assured in that moment that he was saved by God's love and grace. I just shared two very different, but perhaps complimentary, views on what happens when someone is saved. Yet this is worth wrestling with more. I think most of us struggle to some extent with how do we know that God loves us? How do we know that we are doing and believing the right things? And how can we experience that salvation?

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I began looking for answers to this idea, and don't worry we'll get to the bible passage soon because if you can't tell, I think the answer lies in Jesus' words; not in what we are told by others about their experiences. Let's turn to a lesser theologian and see what they have to say. Now I am turning to someone who is very theologically shallow and has built their reputation on their father. I am also turning to this person's point of view because I think many people have these ideas so engrained in their minds that they still somehow miss what Jesus actually says in our passage today. Yes, I'm deliberately holding back on who is saying this because I want you to see what the issues are first.

As I was looking I saw that this particular theologian has "Four Pillars of Salvation." The first pillar is "God Cannot Lie!" This idea is built on the thought that says the bible only says what God wants it to say. This is a very shallow understanding of the bible, humanity, and God. No matter how high of a view of scripture you have, you have to acknowledge the human influence in the writing of the 66 different books, and how those books often have different purposes. And they don't always work in unison with each other, either.

The second pillar is "Jesus Paid it All." This relies on a theological idea that Jesus' work on the cross was substitutionary atonement. That's a fancy theological word for "someone needed to die for sin, and Jesus did it, so we don't have to." This, however, is not the only way to see the work of the cross. If we go in to the scriptures we see that in the Book of Revelation that Jesus is identified as the lamb who was slain...wait did I just prove their point? Nope! Not at all. He is the lamb who was slain but is *alive*. In other words, it is the victory of Christ over death and sin, not as a replacement punishment. The view expressed by this theologian is a very recent view, at least in the scope of church history. John Calvin and to some extent Martin Luther are the ones who developed this idea. I just quoted revelation that is significantly older than them.

Our third pillar is "The Great Convincer." To put it shortly it's that the Holy Spirit will come and tell you what you are doing wrong as well as make you feel better for being saved when others aren't. This pillar is wrong for a number of reasons, but I'll come back to that in a bit, because our passage deals with some of this.

The final pillar is "New Life in Christ." We know we are saved when we act like Jesus. This theologian uses our scripture today to prove it. He states that "We know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." In other words, we may be certain that we know Christ as we see within us a desire and willing obedience to God's word." Let's take a look at why this is problematic.

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This passage today is a part of Jesus' farewell discourse. It feels like a jerky passage when we read it because the words in the Greek are a bit unwieldy in English. What Jesus is saying here is that when he is no longer with the disciples (which includes us, by the way,) then he will send the Holy Spirit to be with us. The word used to describe the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete. This word is very difficult to translate and in different versions means different things. It can mean advocate, helper, partner, and friend among other things. Most often it is translated as advocate because the original Greek implies a legal assistant who will come along side and help you.

With all of this confusion around the Paraclete, we are left trying to figure out what Jesus is trying to help us understand about him being no longer physically present. There is one thread, and this is why I chose to speak about how we are saved because I believe that the question of salvation is a difficult one. If we believe you have to mentally agree then what do we do with those who don't have the mental capacity? If we believe it is a feeling that you must have, what does it mean when the feeling goes away? If you don't believe that happens, Mother Theresa wrote about it extensively in her journals or you can look to "Dark Night of the Soul" by St. John of the Cross. The thread we have here is that we are not alone.

In the lesser theologians' view the Holy Spirit's role is to be the lawyer. A lawyer convicts you over what went wrong. Can you see how this fits in well with the idea of God being a judge and Jesus being a sacrifice? You have to have someone **prosecute** you. This is not what this verse is saying. Jesus tells us, he is sending the Holy Spirit to walk along side of us and to guide us, not to tell us what we are doing wrong. Instead, to come along side and walk with us giving advice, comfort, and direction.

In pillar 4 our theologian says that this passage is about us obeying God's word. I love that phrase, because I've never heard it said where the person didn't have a spin on what that means. In fact, the person offering us this theological advice does backflips to interpret Jesus' words "it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven." You see this passage is about following Jesus' commandments. Jesus says in verse 21 "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me..."

These words of Jesus are not about the bible and faith in what the bible says. These words are about faith in what *Jesus* says. If you love Jesus, you will follow Jesus' commandments. What are Jesus' commandments according to John, you might ask? In John 13:34 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved

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you, you also should love one another." So, if you love Jesus you'll keep his commandments, which is to love one another.

The Holy Spirit comes not for us to be obedient to Gods' word but to be obedient to Christs' commandment to love others. So how do we know if we are saved? What saving grace can you experience? It is if you love others, with no limits or expectations put on that love. Now I know some of you are curious who I've been arguing with in this sermon today, before I say their name know that I love this person's father and although I have disagreements with his father on some theological points, I respect his ministry. But Franklin Graham, whose ministry these pillars come from I fear is doing more harm than good.

Our call is to love others. If you love Jesus you will follow his commandment, you will love others. I prefer this to all of the other options we've talked about today. Mental assent to faith, emotional assent, both are important in their own ways, but ultimately if we are not about sharing the love of Christ because he loved us, are we really saved? This may seem a little harsh for some. Our scripture today ties us to the idea of salvation being about doing what Christ commanded us to do. Love others. (Period.) Not to what some people try and twist that love to mean. Go and love others. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer/ The Lord's Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song

Goodbye