

“How Do I Know if I am Really Saved? What Does that Even Mean?”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, and welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be here worshipping with you. If this is your first time here, or your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you. We hope and pray that you will find our church community friendly and Godly. We are beginning today what will be a seven part series where we will be studying the difficult questions that we have as Christians. The past few months we handed out sheets with twenty-nine questions on them, with an additional space for a write-in question. We took the top seven most requested questions, and going in order from least requested to most requested (of those top seven) we set up the plans for the next month and a half. In your bulletin you can see what those questions are. If you had a write in question, or if you were hoping for us to look at other questions beyond what those are that were most voted, don't worry. Over the next few years in between sermon series we will answer every one of these questions, including the write in questions. So keep your eyes peeled. With all that being said, we dive in today with a very commonly asked question “How do I know if I am really saved?” Following that up with “What does being saved even mean?” Both of those will be answered, at least in part, this morning.

In our first reading this morning we looked at one of the last books of the Bible. Written by the Apostle John, somewhere near the end of the 1st century, it is a book focused in large part upon the question of salvation. All throughout this book that theme of salvation, specifically salvation only through Christ, is hammered home. 1st John 2:2 says

“and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” Similarly 1st John 3:18-19 says “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and assure our heart before Him.” There are a myriad of other examples we could use, but the focus all throughout this short letter is that we are saved by Christ and can know this for sure by His effect upon our lives. Knowing this, our reading from chapter five fits in perfectly.

1st John 5:1 says “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.” That child born of God in question is Jesus. Being “born of God” means to be a part of His kingdom... in effect salvation. It is saying that those who love the Lord’s Son Jesus are redeemed by Him, and are what we would call “saved.” If you aren’t sure what it means to be saved yet, don’t worry, we will get there. But for the moment, 1st John 5 is answering for us who is saved. 1st John 5:4 says it for us very clearly: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world... our faith.” Our faith, beloved congregation, in Christ’s saving work is what allows us to overcome sin. It is this faith that we hold that saves. This faith, by the way, is not without base... it is much more akin to trust. A good illustration helps us to understand what kind of “faith” we read about in scripture.

Using an example from a guy named John Lennox, our faith in God is a lot like the faith I hold in my wife. I have faith in her, and I trust her. Some of you have heard this story before, but it is worth hearing again from a different perspective. A few years ago I was in a major car wreck. On highway ten up in the cities we had a quick stoppage in traffic, and while I was able to come to a complete stop, the kid behind me didn’t even tap his breaks. I was completely stopped with my foot

on the break, and this kid hit me going at least 45mph, if not closer to 60. I was all banged up, concussed, and in general a wreck myself. Who was the first person who I called? It was my then-fiancé, Rhianna. I had faith in her that she would pick me up, help me get home, take care of me when I couldn't take care of myself, etc. I had that faith in her because I knew her, I had evidence that I could trust her, and I knew that she loved me. To be honest with you, up until that point engagement had been really hard, and we (as many couples pre-marriage do) had been arguing more than usual. That didn't change the fact that she loved me, nor did it change the fact that I loved and trusted her. Beloved congregation, that is the sort of faith that saves. That is the sort of faith (trust) that we place in Christ. There is evidence that God is there, that He loves you, that He is worthy to be trusted. Don't forget that He went to the cross and died for you. Even if you haven't had the greatest of faith in the Lord lately, know that He loves you and is worthy of your trust. That trust in Him is what saves. That love of Him is what saves.

1st John 5:10-13 reads "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." What this is saying friends is that it is only through that faith in Christ that our salvation is secured. "This life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." Often we will ask questions about salvation because we want to desperately believe that those nice people in our lives who we love (coworkers,

grandparents, a child, friends, etc.) will not be held accountable for their sins even if they don't call upon Jesus. The reality is there is no other way to salvation other than through Christ. Good actions, other religions, charity, etc. do not earn us salvation... because we cannot earn it. We will touch on this much more over the next month and a half because we will talk about heaven and hell throughout this series. But regardless I want to leave you with at least one encouraging thought in this realm. The criminal on the cross next to Christ was saved by placing his faith in Christ even in his final moments... we don't know how the Lord may work in ways we don't understand before someone passes. Knowing that the Lord loves everyone enough to die for them and wishes that none should perish, we should feel confident in knowing that the Lord can save any who call on Him. We should be confident in placing the eternity of our loved ones in His hands, knowing that He is good, and just, and merciful. We will revisit this later, so if you still have questions do not fret. But now that we have answered the question from 1st John about "Who is saved?" (those who call upon Jesus and place their faith/trust in Him) the next question is equally important: "What is salvation?"

Our second reading for today is likely a familiar one for anybody who has had a loved one pass recently. John 14:1-6 in particular finds its way into many funerals, and this is appropriate because it reminds us of where we go when we pass if we call upon Christ. However, salvation is not what people often think it is. People usually equate salvation with going to heaven when we die. While salvation does mean we will go to heaven following judgement, there is actually so much more to it than that. Believe it or not, salvation is much more grandiose than just heaven instead of hell. Salvation, truly, is being in communion with our Heavenly Father forever... the very thing we were created for.

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” When we read this scripture we usually focus on the dwelling places part. We recognize that as heaven. We recognize that as “the great ice fishing shack in the sky,” or something like that. That’s good, that is ok, but the more important piece is “I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” You see, the beauty of salvation is that it means that the Lord comes and brings us with Him. For those of you who are lonely, if you call upon Christ, then you are lonely no longer. For those of you who feel out of place in this world, you feel that way rightly so... you belong with the Lord. All of us were made to be with our Creator, we were made to be with Him in His full glory. We honestly cheapen salvation if we think only about that magical “heavenly” place... because usually people don’t ever think about the Lord being present there. There are many times where I have heard people talk about their loved ones being in heaven without honestly even considering God... know that it is not heaven without the Lord. If you think about the story of Adam and Eve, they were with the Lord fully in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world. Sin separated them, and it separated us... until Jesus restored us through His blood.

Another misconception is that salvation only occurs after death. The truth is, salvation doesn’t start when you pass, it began when Christ entered your heart. (Another word often used is “justified.”) The Holy Spirit, God dwelling within us, comes as a result of trusting in Christ. Eternal life in God’s presence comes as a result of trusting in Christ... and it comes here and now, although it is revealed in its full glory in heaven.

In looking at these truths from both of our readings, we should know that if we place our hope, our trust, and our faith in Christ, if our lives are centered around Him, then our salvation is secured. We should know that being saved is more than just about us “going to heaven.” Being saved is about having an eternal, personal, relationship with our Creator that begins from the moment we allow Christ into our hearts. With that in mind, we should know that our salvation is in essence shown by our works. We are not saved by our works, but our salvation is shown by our actions. This is the final piece from our readings today, coming from John 14:12-15. “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

To put it succinctly, an individual who places their trust in Christ will follow His lead in word and deed. We who call upon Him will be doing things He has called us to do. We will step out in faith and share this truth with others. We will be strengthening our personal relationship with the Lord by reading scripture, praying, and asking Him to do His will. We will be keeping His commandments, proving that we do love Him. Do we fail, sure, and we always need to remember that we do not earn our salvation... but we also should recognize that we have been called to not stay the same in our Christian walk, but to always be growing closer to Him.

In conclusion, where are you at this morning? Are you a part of Christ’s kingdom, redeemed by His blood? If you place your trust in Him, then know that your salvation is secured, that you have eternity with your

Lord to look forward to, which has already started! If you do not yet place your faith, your trust, your hope, in Christ... would you like to? He earnestly desires your heart, and went to the cross to make it so. As it says in Romans 10:13 “for whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” If you have not yet done so, I invite you this morning to call upon Him, and to prove that you do so by coming forward and professing your faith in Christ.

Closing Prayer