



Sermon

All Saints: 30th Oct 2022

Who is a Saint?

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Ephesians 1:11-23

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Tuesday will be All Saints Day. What is that about? The book "For All the Saints," is an official publication by our Church. Its article on All Saints Day says:

In the New Testament "the saints" means all the believers who are dedicated to God. As such, the word has connections with the dedicated believers of the old covenant.

In the Christian tradition particular honour began to be paid to exceptional examples of the Christian way, especially those who died for the faith, the martyrs. So the word "saint" came to describe those who have become officially recognised by the church as in some measure fulfilling their call to be saints. In the seventeenth century an Anglican theologian Jeremy Taylor wrote:

The memories of the saints are precious to God, and therefore they ought also to be so to us: and such persons, who serve God by holy living, industrious preaching, and religious dying, ought to have their names preserved in honour, and God be glorified in them, and their holy doctrines and lives published and imitated.

The article continues:

The feast allows us to express our sense of communion with all those who have gone before us, whether known or unknown, who have witnessed to their faith in Christ.

If you were to ask someone what they thought a saint is, how would they respond?

Many would probably say someone holy; someone who has done extraordinary things; a very special person; someone who has done nothing or very little wrong.

However, the Bible has a different understanding. From the book of Acts through to Revelations we see followers of Jesus being referred to as saints. And these weren't special followers of Jesus - they were everyday Christians. Christians like you - so in God's eyes you are a saint.

But you say, "Hold on a moment - the person sitting next to me can't be called a 'saint.' In fact, how can I be called a 'saint', I sin?"

Well every person here sins. In fact, every Christian has sinned and in God's eyes all sins are equal. So if you have ever cheated on your tax return, talked about someone in a bad way, sworn at someone, then God sees you as no better than the person who has committed adultery or committed murder. All sins separate us from God. Being perfect isn't a criterion to be classed as a saint. You see many of the people referred to as saints in the Bible had problems, they sinned. And not just in small ways.

Instead let's get God's perspective on what a saint is. From Romans 1:7, "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." Or from the Epistle to the Ephesians:

1:1 "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus."

2:19 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people (saints) and members of God's household..."

6:18 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

In 2003, I visited an Anglo-Catholic parish in England and when they came to the intercessions, the intercessor prayed like this -

"We pray for St Peter, St Andrew, St James, St John, St Matthew, St Luke, St Mark, St Anthony, St Mary, St Martha, St Cyril, St Ambrose, St Augustine, St Paul, St Timothy, St Titus, St Joseph, St Nathaniel, St Stephen, St Chad, St Margaret, St Mary Magdalene, St Philip, St Jerome, St John the Baptist, St Matthias, St Nicholas, St Patrick, St Simon, St Jude, St Thomas Aquinas ... and, and, and..."

– all recited very quickly, on and on and on. At first, I wondered what he was doing until I realized, he was trying to pray for all the Saints. It was an attempt to be literally obedient to this instruction, "pray for all the saints." He and his tradition thought that Paul meant all canonized Saints rather than all Christians – your brother and sisters in the Church.

Being a saint does not start with what you do - it starts with God saying, "I love you. I call you to live your life for me." When did you first experience this? And how do you experience it now? When you read your Bible; when you worship; when you share God's word with others; when someone comes and helps you; when you love others, without grumbling and without conditions. Being a saint requires that we trust God and are exposed to His love.

So what do we do about sin? The term in the New Testament translated "saints" is simply the adjective "holy." To be holy is to be sanctified or set apart for God. How is this achieved?

Paul records that when Jesus commissioned him, he told him to go to the Gentiles, "... to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."¹ Did you hear that? "... so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Paul wrote of Gentiles becoming "an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."² He wrote to the Corinthians, "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."³ The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to "the blood of the covenant that sanctified [a believer]..."⁴

Do you notice that all the work or doing is on Jesus' part? We are made holy by faith in Jesus and his work of salvation. He shed his blood for our salvation; we are given his Spirit when we are born again. Through this salvation we are sanctified or made holy.

All Christians are sinners who have trusted in that saving work of Jesus. When we do that we are forgiven of our sin and declared by God to be holy. We were sinners because of our actions - we are saints because of what God is doing. Saints in other words recognise that they rely on Jesus' death on the cross for their eternal future.

So let's explore a couple of passages that highlight what it means to be saints.

¹ Acts 26:18

² Rom 15:16

³ 1 Cor 6:11

⁴ Heb 10:29

Daniel 7

Our Old Testament passage from Daniel makes mention of saints or holy ones. Daniel remember was a Jewish youth who was taken prisoner to Babylon when the Babylonians conquered Judah. He was trained for the Babylonian civil service and rose to prominence being the prime minister under the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar and remained in senior positions in spite of changes of emperor and conquests.

In today's reading he was given a visions of powerful and frightening beasts. He asked what this means and is given the interpretation that they are kingdoms to come. Then in verse 18:

But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it for ever--yes, for ever and ever.

In the end, the saints or holy ones will receive the kingdom for ever and ever. There is a greater kingdom than the world powers he was being shown, which is eternal. The long term good news is that God's people will possess the kingdom God gives forever. There is a good ending to the story!

Ephesians 1

The Letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul from Rome in 60AD. It was a large church he had built up with three years of teaching ministry.

Here too, we find the how of becoming saints. Look at verse 13. Paul is referring to Ephesians who are gentiles – that is non-Jews. He wrote that they were included into Christ when they heard the message of truth, the gospel of their salvation. When they believed they received the gift of the Holy Spirit which was promised and sealed them as now belonging to God.

It is the same for us and all generations. When we hear the message of salvation in Jesus and believe we are included into Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is as a guarantee of the promised future. The Spirit is like a down payment of what God has promised to us.

As Paul continues in verse 15, he tells of his prayer for the Ephesian church and for them to understand what it is for them to be in Christ. He prays for revelation for them - and by extension for us too – revelation in our inner being, our spirit so we may know God better. Revelation of three things: the hope to which he has called us, the the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. H – I – P: HIP: Hope, Inheritance, Power.

1. The **hope** to which he has called us. We are already called into this hope. Hope is positive expectation of something future. Biblical hope is sure and certain not wishful thinking. It is the blessed hope of eternal glory. Our ultimate future has been changed from destruction to glory, from death to life. Just as we heard from the reading from Daniel the end of the story is good, very good. God's people will reign in God's eternal kingdom.

2. His glorious **inheritance** in the saints/holy people. Actually, close grammatical study and Old Testament background shows this is God's inheritance of us! To quote the NIV Application Commentary: The revelation of who God really is and enjoyment of him will take place when God inherits his own people. His glory will then be made manifest.⁵

3. His incomparable **power** for us who believe. The hope and the inheritance were forward looking. The power is for now as well as into the future. Paul wants us know what great divine power is available for us who believe. What is that power? It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead all the way up to being enthroned in heavenly realms above all other authority.

If you have believed in Jesus as the Son of God and your saviour, God declares you holy. He forgives you and washes you clean of your sins. He gives you the Holy Spirit and the hope of glory – the eternal future with him. He makes you part of his inheritance – the Church – the bride of Christ. He gives us together – the

⁵ Snodgrass K., 1996, *The NIV Application Commentary – Ephesians*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p74

Church – his power – the power that is so great it raised Jesus from the dead to the height of authority and glory.

Jesus commissioned him to open the eyes of the Gentiles to believe and be saved. Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be opened to see these truths. So let us keep praying for that opening of eyes of our hearts to perceive these revelations.

Each of us have benefited from saints. Because saints are people who point us to Jesus and what he has done for us.

A minister was talking to a small boy about a stained glass window. The boy asked who the person in the window was. The minister said it was a saint.

The boy replied, "so a saint is someone that the light shines through."

Who has shared God's love with you? They are a saint. With whom do you need to share God's love?

May God's light continue to shine through the saints you know onto you, and may it shine through you onto others.