

WHAT ARE SAINTS?

A sermon by Pastor Don Ginkel

1 Samuel 2:9a—Ephesians 4:11-13—Psalm 116:15 (KJV)

A lot of churches in the country are named after people like Mark, John, Peter, and Thomas. Why do we name a church St. Matthew, St. Mark, or St. Luke? Just who are and what are all these saints?

I asked a ten-year-old boy who he thought the saints were and he said, "They are the pro football players in New Orleans." Another person said candidly, "Saints are dead people." Saints are often looked upon as people who lived hundreds of years ago. They were brutally murdered or something like that, and now a church is named after them. We have stained glass windows in some churches which depict them. This leads some people to believe that saints are people who are now in heaven, and we will have to wait until we get there to be a saint.

Let's turn to our bulletins and sing a song that most everyone likes to sing. We'll ask the organist to play it through once, and then we'll sing it with gusto.

*Oh, when the saints go marching in, Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Lord, I want to be in that number, When the saints go marching in.*

Now listen closely. In both the Old Testament and New Testament the word for "saints" is often translated "holy ones." According to the Bible holy ones are made holy through Jesus Christ their Savior. So in other words, wives, your husbands are what? Holy ones, made holy by Jesus. I realize that may be hard for you to believe, but they are holy! They are saints and so are you! Can I hear an "Amen!"?

Listen to what Paul calls the Christians still here on earth: Romans 1:7, "*To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be **SAINTS**.*" Ephesians 1:1, "*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the **SAINTS** which are at Ephesus.*" Philippians 1:1, "*Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the **SAINTS** in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.*" Colossians 1:2, "*To the **SAINTS** and faithful brothers in Christ which are at Colossae.*" Please note that none of these people played football for the New Orleans Saints!

Let's go a step further. In the Apostles' Creed we confess: "*I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of **SAINTS**.*" The word "communion" comes from the Greek word "koinonia." It's a common word in the New Testament that means fellowship or a close relationship. It describes the closeness of Christians. We are united with all Christians or saints all over the world, and we are united with all the saints in heaven. Death cannot separate us from them nor they from us. We are a union of saints. This union spans the globe, and this union transcends time.

William How wrote the hymn, "For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest." He writes about this union most beautifully in verse 4:

*O blessed communion, fellowship divine, **WE** feebly struggle, **THEY** in glory shine;
Yet **ALL ARE ONE** in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!*

First, I want you to know what saints are. Here are a few words from Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:9a, "*He (the LORD) will keep the feet of His **SAINTS**.*" In other words, the Lord is saying through Hannah, "*All My **SAINTS** are in My hands!*" In Psalm 91:11 the Lord makes this promise to all His children still on this earth, "*I will give My angels charge over My **SAINTS** to keep them in all their ways.*"

Saints are well guarded people, even more closely guarded than the President of the United States. This is a rough and terrible age in which we live, and many bad things happen to many people. But God promises us that He guards the feet of His saints. That means that on my daily path, everywhere I go, I have a guard provided by my God.

God not only guards you, but He delights in you. Psalm 16:3 says, "*But to the **SAINTS** that are in the earth. . . in whom is all My delight.*" But sometimes we don't believe it. One Christian woman came to church and Bible class on a regular basis, went to all kinds of "churchy" things, and she said, "I certainly hope God approves of me." She didn't know that she was delighted in by God. A Christian father said, "After what I've been through this week, I wonder what God thinks of me now." A teenage girl said, "I don't know if God really loves me at all."

The Bible says that God delights in His saints still on earth. He made the decision of how He would feel about you and me 2,000 years ago. He doesn't remake that decision every other day depending upon our behavior. When Jesus said on the cross, "***It is finished,***" He was saying that the anger of God was no longer upon His people. He said, "I'm not angry with them anymore." Through Jesus God is delighted with us.

Let me ask, "Do you believe that Jesus suffered and died for you upon the cross?" Now what are the implications of this? They are these: that no matter how you feel, no matter what you've been through, you are a delight to God. It is not your failures that anger God. It is not your hang-ups that anger God. There is only one thing that could possibly upset God and that would be if you were to reject His only Son, Jesus Christ, as your Savior. That would upset Him. It is the saints who have accepted the Savior, who have been cleansed by Christ, whom God delights in.

Second, we need to find out what we shall become as we look into the future. Ephesians 4:11-13, "*God gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teacher; (why?) For the perfecting of the **SAINTS**, for the work of the ministry. . . . Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*"

In other words God gives pastors and teachers to build up the saints, to instruct them, to mend them, to prepare them for the work of the ministry which God has given the saints to do. Now if you are surprised this morning to find out that you are a saint, I will tell you something which

may surprise you even more: not only is every Christian a saint, but according to the Bible every Christian is a minister. Saints are learning how to function as ministers. Every saint is a minister of God. God gives us pastors and teachers so that the saints will become what they are supposed to be—ministers! This is a difficult job for pastors and teachers, but it's so important.

Some time back I attended two different churches on weekends. I sat through the whole service and coveted those beautiful church buildings. There was a lot of space and padded pews. The messages that were delivered were true, every part of them. But after I left, there was still something missing. What was it? It took me two or three days to figure it out: there was no challenge to me.

Your pastor is here to, among other things, challenge you to be about the work of ministry. He is to challenge you as a saint to minister to the needs of others. The purpose of your ministry is to give God someone He can use during the week to serve others. Be sure you are learning more and more how to be a good minister. More than anything else, on the day you became a saint, Jesus entered into your life, and until the day that God calls you Home, God desires that you be a minister. Think about that as you go about your life this week.

Third, God wants you to know what things are going to be like for you as a saint when you die. Here is His promise to you in Psalm 116:15, "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His **SAINTS**.*" Repeat it with me: "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.*" Precious means rare or highly valued. It means that something special is happening.

As we approach heaven, all saints die precious—something very special is happening. We don't die horribly, we don't die tragically, we don't die frightfully, we die precious. There is something about the death of a saint that is very special to God.

I want you to think about your death right now in the light of what I'm going to say, and see how your death will be precious to God in that moment. The Bible says:

- As a saint you are forgiven all of your sins. That is precious to God!
- As a saint you have made sacrifices to get the work done that God has assigned you. That is precious to God!
- As a saint you have honored the name of Christ. That is precious to God!
- As a saint you know today that eternal life is yours through Christ. That is precious to God!
- As a saint you can approach the valley of death with your arms outstretched ready to walk with your Shepherd. That is precious to God!

Now let's get a sense of catharsis, a sense of wrapping this up. I want you to listen closely to part of a sermon by Martin Luther on the Gospel of John. His words are precious.

Therefore just as we should not deny that we are baptized and are Christians, so we should not deny or doubt that we are holy. It would be good to impress this on the people well and to accustom them not to be frightened or scared by it. I and others, for

example, were so deeply steeped in our monkery and unbelief that I was terrified by the thought that a man should consider himself holy on earth or let others call him holy. For our thoughts floated only up there among the deceased saints and blessed ones in heaven, even though in Scripture the word “holy” is always applied to those live who on earth.

Thus St. Paul asks in nearly all of his epistles that greetings be conveyed to the saints. He says, “*All the **SAINTS** greet you*” (2 Corinthians. 13:13). And in 1 Timothy 5:10 he speaks of the widows who “*washed the feet of the **SAINTS.***” Here he employed the word “saints” freely with reference to all Christians. And in the early Christian Church it was long customary for its members to call one another saints. This custom should still prevail. For it is not arrogant on the part of Christians to call one another holy because of Christ; it is glory and praise to God. (*Luther’s Works, American Edition 24:170-171*)

Let’s pray.