

ALL SAINTS DAY

November 5, 2017

Revelation 7:13,14:

“We Feebly Struggle, They in Glory Shine”

- I. *What'S a Saint?*
- II. *The Point.*
- III. *We Sing.*

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Revelation 7:13,14.

Dear Friends in Christ,

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions... Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated..." (Hebrews 11:32-37, portions)

And there you are: A brief history of the church's struggles through the centuries, and, ultimately, pointing to this one; a strong reminder that Jesus' words, ***In the world you will have tribulation***, are not past tense.

This is, of course, **All Saints Day**. This is not only a day of remembrance of those of the past who fought the good fight of faith. This is a day we consider our path. David said it, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." It's the journey our brothers and sisters of the past made. It's our journey now and with that in mind....

WE FEEBLY STRUGGLE, THEY IN GLORY SHINE

I. What's a Saint?

Are you a saint? Am I? What is a saint? The word means to sanctify, to make holy. It's what God has given us: faith in Jesus Christ. Though still sinful and struggling with sin, saints on earth are those holding on to the Word of God: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works..." (Eph. 2:8,9)

Again, we identify saints as believers who have entered heaven and believers who are still on earth. Concerning the saints who have entered eternal life, Matthew reports, after the death of Jesus, "The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised..." (Matt. 27:52)

Concerning the saints on earth, Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans, "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 1:7) Luke writes, in the Book of Acts: "Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda." (Lk. 9:32)

Our post sermon hymn is a standard for All Saints Day: "For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest." It's printed out because we're singing the version from what many of us know as "the old red hymnal"; specifically The Lutheran Hymnal also known as TLH. I have stated in the past that I prefer this version because it is more orderly for the congregation.

I want to direct us to the words of the 3rd stanza: "Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold, Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old And win with them the victor's crown of gold. Alleluia...Alleluia!" There are a couple of words in that stanza that nudge the heart and kick our earthly comforts: *soldiers* and *fight*. The Holy Spirit has the Apostle Paul write to the church, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." (Eph. 6:11)

The schemes of the devil. That statement must be connected to "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm." (Eph. 6:13) And this: "...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one." (v.16) I'm sure you can connect the dots. *Soldiers and fight!* Christianity isn't an easy

walk to a comfortable life with this world, and then you fall asleep and go to heaven. It's an earthly battle with an unearthly, evil foe - one who seeks to kill and eternally destroy God's people - one who is vicious, vile and filled with lies! The one who seeks to vilify Christians and drag them to hell. Satan. And the question is: What's the point?

II. The Point.

The point is made in these words of our text:

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (vv. 13,14)

I'm sure you caught the word "tribulation." We must understand that the tribulation is where we are now! There is no rapture in the sense that the church will be spared the closing conflict of Satan's war. Jesus stated:

"For then there will be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short no human would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short...For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." (Matt. 24:21-24)

Isn't it obvious? False christs and false prophets will attempt to, as Jesus said, "lead astray, if possible, even the elect." This is during the great tribulation. "For the sake of the elect (going through the great tribulation) those days (will be) cut short." This points to the short season mentioned in Revelation 20. In the opening of that chapter John talks about the binding of Satan for a thousand years; symbolic of the New Testament era. Satan is bound, can only go so far, while the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world. But then, we're told, "he must be released for a little while." (Rev. 20:3b) The short season. The end. Satan on a rampage. I believe as he is now!

The point is that we will be part of "the ones coming out of the great tribulation." Ones who, as John writes, "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Note also the correct use of the present tense in the ESV translation: "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation." and not "These are they who have come out..." Coming out includes all the saints; past, present and future!

III. We Sing.

And so, we sing: "O blest communion, fellowship divine, We (the saints presently on earth) feebly struggle, they (the saints now in heaven) in glory shine; Yet all are one in thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!"

We, still on earth, gather here as sinners; none better than another, all equally susceptible to terrible struggles with the flesh and falls into sin. The early church father, Augustine, said it well, "There is no sin committed by a person which could not also be committed by someone else."

At the same time, we gather here as saints; people made holy by the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. How glorious and comforting are the words given to us by the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:7-10)

As we think of the multitudes of the faithful and, among them, the many martyrs of the past who have entered heaven, and as we think of those who are now entering and will enter eternal peace and rest - which includes the little band of people gathered here - the words of the 7th stanza touch and lift our souls: "From earth's wide bounds, from oceans farthest coast, through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host, Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Alleluia, Alleluia!"

And though we may remain here a little while longer we do so with Scripture's admonition in front of us:

...seek the things that are above (friends, that's the issue!), where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4)

Now we feebly struggle, but on that Great Day we will in glory shine. Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. God give us the strength to endure!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott