

## Written Copy: 1 John 3:7-10 “What is a Saint?”

All Saints Day Sunday  
Sunday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Text: 1 John 3:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

### The text's intent

To differentiate between children of God and children of the devil. Children of God are called into His family and made His obedient children by the gift of the Holy Spirit who creates and sustains faith. Through this faith we know who Jesus is and how He desires us to live in obedience to the will of the Father as expressed in His commands. Jesus declares us to be this even though we do not always act like it. Through the means of repentance the Spirit continues to cleanse us and make us those obedient children, with the end goal of becoming like our Savior body and soul when we see Him as He truly is on the Last Day. Those who are not children of God are children of the devil. They live in lawless disregard of the ways God wants them to live in order to please themselves. They have no desire to repent and change for they see nothing wrong with how they live. The devil wants all people to see their life in this way, but Christ came to destroy this work of the devil, sending His Spirit who shows us our sin and then shows us our Savior. Thus those who live lawless lives to please themselves are children of the devil while those who live lives of repentant faith, which generates loving obedience to the Father and loving works toward one another are children of God.

### Focus Statement:

While we do not act like saints, like God's precious children, that is what we are declared to be by faith in Jesus' work of salvation. He earned the right for us and gives us that standing by faith. He places within us the Seed, which is the Holy Spirit who germinates and grows saintly people whom He teaches to practice loving obedience to God's commands and do works of love for one another.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

While we may confess Christ forgives all our sins, we struggle to see ourselves as saints, those who have been adopted into God's family and declared sinless. We still see our sin, hear John's admonition that those who practice sinning are of the devil, and doubt what Christ declares us to be.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Do not be deceived by the devil's lies that you are not good enough because you sin. Do not be deceived by his lie that you can live to please yourself because of grace. Live knowing that right now you are the saints Christ declares you to be, and on the Last Day will be body and soul unto life everlasting

### Subject Sentence: You are declared now to be a saint through faith

## **Introduction: Who Do We Consider to be Saints?**

Our Opening Hymn began with us singing: *“For all the Saints, who from their labors rest, who thee by faith, before the world confessed”*. So, the question must be asked, “Who are these Saints? “And “What does it mean to be a Saint?”

Well, who do you consider to be a saint? Who do you picture in your mind? We sometimes equate saints with those who, religiously speaking, have their walk of faith together, those who set an example for us by the way they lived out their witness for Christ. One example is St. Stephen from the book of **Acts 7:58-60** <sup>58</sup> **Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.** <sup>59</sup> **And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."** <sup>60</sup> **And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.** Stephen refused to stop preaching about Jesus being the Lord and Savior, and he died with Jesus' name on his lips

Then of course there is that fellow mentioned here as Saul. He would later have his name changed to Paul. That's St. Paul, who was the Church Planter extraordinaire of the New Testament. The Epistles he wrote are read in worship throughout the year. He started out as a persecutor of the Church but was called by Jesus to be His witness to the world. He is the saint who suffered persecution, shipwrecks, wrongful imprisonment, and finally martyrdom at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero. There is St. Matthew who was the human writer of our Gospel Lesson today. Like Paul he didn't start out as a saint, he was quite the opposite: a tax collector. He is one of those men who worked for the enemy, the Roman government, getting rich off over taxing his own people. But all that changed when Jesus' called Him to be a disciple, and then after the resurrection sent him out to be an Apostle, an ambassador of the Gospel message. Church tradition says he ended up serving in Ethiopia where he was arrested for preaching the Gospel. He was laid out on the ground, impaled spears, and then was beheaded.

What can we gather from these two examples? It appears that a saint didn't always live a saintly life but was called to faith and then shared the Gospel Message until they were martyred for doing so. Being a martyr means being willing to die for one's faith. It is the ultimate witness to how important Jesus Christ is to that person.

Perhaps there is someone in your life that you regard as a saint? Maybe a family member who was an example of a true Christian in their dedication to worship, reading Scripture, prayer, and doing good works for others. Perhaps it was someone who had the kind of family that had it all together; they were always in Church with smiles on their faces, their kids never acted up, they always had a kind word for you. Who were those "saints" we recognized at the beginning of the service? They were all people who had died in faith.

Looking at all these examples you might conclude that the bar is set pretty high when it comes to sainthood. It takes an unswerving dedication to the Lord in one's life, suffering through persecution, and in many cases, it seems you have to be dead to be considered a saint. Perhaps that's because we recognize that the deceased are no longer sinning. That seems to be the most important consideration in sainthood, no more sin in the person's life.

## **Are You a Saint?**

So, let me ask you, would you ever consider me to be a saint? Now before you answer perhaps you should talk to the Elders or to Carey, or to my wife. Talk to those who deal with me on a regular basis, on the good days and bad days. For all the good work I may do as your Pastor, there are definitely those times when I act rather unsaintly.

What if I told you that not only am I a saint, but you are one too? Would you respond like the Nurse's Aide at my morning antibiotic infusion last Thursday morning? She knows I'm a Pastor. Her ex-husband was a Pastor at a Baptist Church. She often will ask me, "So, what are you preaching on this Sunday?" I told her the title "What is a Saint?" She asked me what the answer was. I told her that she was a saint. She said I better go back and work on that some more. The more I talked with her the more I realized she wasn't just being modest; she genuinely did not see how I could call her a saint. How about you? Would you ever refer to yourself as a saint? And if not, what is standing in the way of you calling yourself that? Perhaps the same thing that was standing in her way: sin.

Think about that confession we all spoke at the opening of this service, that we all are "**A poor miserable sinner who justly deserves God's present and eternal punishment?**" Or as one of our other confessions states "**we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition.**" That is what stands in the way when I think of myself as a saint. And the Apostle John would seem to agree with me. **1 John 3:10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.** There are plenty of times in my life when, instead of doing what is righteousness, in other words doing the things that God approves of because they fulfill His commands, I'm engaged in sinning. I'm doing what pleases my sinful selfish heart instead of what God tells me I am to do. **1 John 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.** There is a great definition for sin: lawlessness, disregard for God's law, which is His express will of how we are to live as His creatures the life He has given us. Your confession earlier shows that you are in the same boat as me. That seems to stand as evidence against attaining a current status of sainthood.

## Why You Really Are a Saint

But you really are a saint! That is what I am calling you today. You! Yes you! You are a saint. Hear the words of **1 John 3:1** **See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.** See what kind of love the Father has given to you! A love that turns sinners into saints, into His precious children. What other people could be welcomed into the holy Heavenly Father's family other than saints? When did He give this powerful love to you? In your baptism, and every time after that you heard the Gospel Message. This is the love that moved Jesus Christ to climb onto the cross and take all your sins from you and be the sacrifice that atones for them. He died to erase them from your account before God, and His resurrection stands as proof that your account stands paid in full. There is nothing more that is required of you to be considered His precious child, His saint in good standing.

"Yet how can this be?" you ask. From an earthly point of view you have a split personality religiously speaking. You are what Luther called a "Saint and Sinner at the same time". Now we sometimes view this as a kind of off then on-again situation. Sometimes the saint part of you is switched off and you sin with wild abandon. Then the sinner switch is turned off and the saint switch is activated. Now you are what you were not just a minute ago, a saint. If this is how you view things then your hope and prayer is that Christ returns when the saint switch is activated, and not when the other one is turned on. But that is not what the Apostle John is calling you.

He is writing to a Christian Church very much like this one. **1 John 3:2-3** **<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.** Do you hear the emphasis here? **Beloved, we are God's children!** When? **Now! Right now!** Even though you struggle with sin daily, just like the Church in John's Day did.

That's why he opened up his Epistle with these familiar words from **1 John 1:8-9** **<sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** He knows they sin. To say that you no longer do because you are a so-called saint is to deceive yourself. But here's the key, if we confess to our merciful Lord what we often act like, a sinner, we have His sure and certain promise that we have been forgiven and cleansed completely, not just some unrighteousness, but from all unrighteousness. All those lawless acts you and I have committed have been washed away in the waters of baptism, powered by the blood of Christ. **Now! Right now!** You stand forgiven and cleansed, with no sin that anyone, not even the devil, can accuse you of before the judge of the universe, who is Christ, your savior. This is not just Jesus overlooking your lawlessness. It's not Jesus giving you a free pass. Those sins are gone. He sees you as the

saint He declares you to be by faith, the saint His death and resurrection has made you to be. He sees you as the precious child that the Heavenly Father has called you to be. Welcome to sainthood in this lifetime!

## **How to Live Like a Saint**

Now that you understand you have been clearly declared to be a saint, how should you live? That is the subject of our text. **1 John 3:8 <sup>8</sup>Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup>No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.** A saint does not make a practice of sinning. What does he do instead? He practices living in obedience to God's will and desire. A better way of translating this verse is that a saint does not continue to practice sin. Think about a football player. If he is a wide receiver, he works on catching the ball thrown to him from his quarterback every time. Even though he sometimes drops the ball, or it slips through his fingers, his goal is to catch it in his hands and run with it, every time. The baseball pitcher practices throwing strikes. While he sometimes misses the strike zone that is not his goal. His goal is to throw strikes with every pitch and strike out every batter. Our goal as Christian saints is to hit the mark of obedience in all that we do or say every day.

But of course we often miss the mark of obedience. By the way, missing the mark of the perfect obedience to God's will is the literal definition of the Greek word translated as sin. We miss the mark, but that is not the goal we have in our hearts. Our hearts have been changed by the call to faith. God's seed, the Holy Spirit abides in our heart, creating in us that desire to obey that is stronger than our desire to please ourselves and thus sin. When we do miss the mark, and the Spirit points that out, we respond in repentance: that Gospel fueled attitude to change, knowing that Christ has forgiven our sin and is moving us to pick up the ball and try to hit the mark again.

We may commit sin. We may at times miss the mark, either unintentionally or at times on purpose. We may decide that we know how to throw the ball better than the way our coach has taught us to. We may decide that it would be better to live to please the desires of our heart than to obey Jesus. The devil might even encourage us to try something new, to listen to and obey our sinful hearts. When we do so, we miss the mark, we sin. Then the devil will tell you how badly you messed up. He will tell you that you are the farthest thing from being a saint, from living as a child of God. He tells you that God is ready to give up on you.

But listen to what the Apostle John is telling you: “**The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.**” The devil is a liar. And Christ’s death and resurrection given to you by faith destroys any power he has to accuse you of being anything but a forgiven saint, one declared to be a child of God by Christ Jesus Himself. One who lives with a new desire in his heart, to no longer make a practice of sinning, of missing the mark, but instead to practice hitting the mark of obedience. And when you fail in your practice, know that Christ hit the mark dead bullseye ever time, and gives that credit for His perfect obedience to you.

## **Conclusion**

Our opening hymn says: “For all the saints, who from their labors rest.” Who are these saints? They certainly are the renown men of the past like St. Stephen, or St. Matthew, who gave the ultimate sacrifice of their lives to serve our Lord and Savior. They are people you’ve known in your past that demonstrated how a life lived out in obedience works better than disobedience. But no matter how saintly these men lived, they needed to hear and confess same confession that you and I did to begin this service. And they lived believing and holding fast to those words of Absolution. And through the work of the one who declares those words to be true, they and we are declared to be saints, declared to be precious children of the Heavenly Father. He was at work in them and is at work in you constantly cleansing us from all unrighteousness. Not just the specific sins you remember and confess, but even those you can’t remember. All of them.

He has sent His Spirit into your heart as the Seed that plants and grows the faith that declares you, right now, to be a child of God, a saint. He keeps you in that faith so that there will come a day when they will sing about you too as being one of the saints who from their labors rest. One who is no longer practicing righteousness because you are resting with Jesus, waiting to be made truly and finally perfect body and soul when you stand before Him on the Last Day. Blessed are the sinners who are made saints, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Amen.