

“BLESSED ARE THE SAINTS OF THE LORD”
I John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12, Revelation 7:9-17
October 31 & November 1, 2020

Today we celebrate Communion together, so as you listen to this service, I ask you at home to prepare elements for yourselves so that we might join together in the Lord’s Supper at the end of the sermon. For those of you here today, the elements are there in your pews.

“He was the most wanted criminal in all of Saudi Arabia. He was not wanted for robbery, or murder, or rape. He was wanted for being a Christian pastor and for leading a large secret church in the Saudi Arabian capital city.

“Without being charged, Pastor Wally was taken from his home and into a room with three men. There he was slapped, kicked, and punched. The most painful abuse was the lashes on the bottoms of his feet. When the lashing was done, his hands and feet were the purple color of eggplant.

“In the midst of that pain, the torturers ordered Wally to stand. ‘I cannot,’ he told them. Every square inch of his feet hurt, and there was no way to support his weight. ‘Please just allow me to kneel.’ The torturer refused.

“While the three men beat him, Pastor Wally prayed for them. His prayers reminded him of a verse, *‘For He will command His angels...they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’* (Psalm 91:11-12). In spite of his feet, Wally stood straight up among the men. They were shocked that he could stand after such a beating.

“I was standing on the hands of God’s angels,’ Pastor Wally later said. ‘They could not see angels, but I felt that they were there to help me stand.’

“Some people seem to send their guardian angels into overtime. Like Pastor Wally, they are constantly on the edge for Christ with a prayerful witness and a daring spirit. Still we might imagine that some guardian angels have time on their hands, assigned to Christians who do nothing to further the kingdom. While Pastor Wally’s situation was unique, his prayer should not be. Sometimes we must stand on the hands of God’s angels in order to be faithful to Christ. Do we exude that type of fervent

desire in our workplace? In our homes? In our school? Wherever you find it difficult to take a stand for Christ today, ask God to send His angels to give you a lift.”¹

I share this account with you today because we celebrate All Saints Day, November 1 each year. It is a day that we take the time to remember all those who are standing up for the Lord Jesus Christ and boldly and unashamedly live a witness to the power and majesty of the Lord God Almighty. It is a time where we can remember all those throughout the world who have, and are, suffering great persecution because they have chosen Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, tenaciously living according to His Word, and refusing to accept or follow anyone or anything else. No matter what the world demands of them, no matter who it is that demands their allegiance, these faithful claim and live for Jesus Christ as their number ONE in their life. They refuse to give up their faith, and they exercise that faith wherever they go and to whomever they are with.

What is it that drives these individuals to have such conviction to the Lord Jesus Christ? I John 3 comes to play in this. The faithful of the Lord know how much God the Father loves them. They know that as they believe in and trust in Jesus Christ, they are now children of God. So as children of God, they live each day according to the Father’s commands, follow His teachings, and demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ as the best they know how. They live differently than the world around them because they belong to God, not to the world. And these faithful know that to be called by the name of Jesus Christ is to become like Jesus in every way. And that is why persecution comes.

But let me share with you an additional part of Pastor Wally’s account. “As the beating continued, Pastor Wally continued to pray for his Saudi torturers. He prayed, ‘Lord, anything can happen here tonight, but please, don’t allow them to take my life.’ In the midst of his prayers, he was reminded of verses that say that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

“Thank You for allowing me to be Your temple,’ Wally prayed. ‘I believe that You don’t want a temple that is ruined and abused by the enemy, God. You want a temple that is glorified and full of

¹ (The Voice of the Martyrs, *Extreme Devotion*, [Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2001] pg. 319)

Your splendor. I am claiming a complete restoration of my body, Lord. No matter what these torturers do, I pray that You will be glorified all the more when I am completely healed. People will not see a trace of what these torturers did to my body.’

“Pastor Wally’s back and legs were beaten with a cane, and his hands and feet were bruised almost beyond use. Finally, they returned him to his cell when they were too tired to continue torturing this Christian. Wally prayed for hours and then fell into a fitful sleep during which he sensed God’s presence and healing touch. When he awoke, his hands and feet were healed. He felt no pain from the beatings. Wally was overwhelmed, for God had healed him.

“Did Pastor Wally go too far when he prayed in faith for his healing? Did he take advantage of Scripture in his brazen request? The evidence would seem to suggest that Wally did none of these things. In fact, Pastor Wally simply took God at His word. Many Christians would benefit by doing more of the same. Yet we cannot take God at His word if we do not know it. Pastor Wally was able to recall encouraging verses in the time of need because he had spent time in Scripture. Many faithful Christians who are beaten are not instantly healed, but God uses our testimonies whether or not we are healed. Are you able to recall God’s Word when necessary? Do you know more **about** Scripture than you **actually know the** Scriptures? Tell God that you are ready to take Him at His word.”²

You see, when we live our faith, it flies directly in the face of the unbeliever and exposes the sin in their life. People don’t like to see how sinful they are, and when we live lives that are in conformity with the ways of God through Jesus Christ, the drastic difference exposes that sinfulness. So the people living by the ways of the world do their best to silence the voice of true followers of Jesus so that they don’t have to face their sinfulness, and they can continue to sin without their conscience beating up on them. If we are all the same, then no one is put off or offended by the actions of another. But when Christians practice and live their faith through good works and faithful living, others become offended and troubles begin.

² (Voice of the Martyrs, *Extreme Devotion*, pg. 321)

That's why Jesus gave us His great encouragement and reminder of the way it works when He presented the Beatitudes to all of His followers. Matthew 5 jogs our memory to the fact that to be blessed is to be different than how the world sees and thinks and lives. When we put our complete trust in Jesus, it will mean becoming an enemy of the world but a friend of God. As we come to recognize how truly needy we are spiritually, we begin to open up our hearts to the guidance and direction of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Now the Holy Spirit will never invite us or guide us or tells us to do anything that is against God's Word. This Book we read called the Bible is God's Word, given to us so that we might continue to live in His will and in His way. Nothing in this Book is wrong! Everything in this Book is true! So when we begin to read the Bible, and live according to the teachings and commands of the Bible, it will transform our lives and get us moving in the direction of the ways of God the Father Almighty. Only through reading and comprehending and obeying this Book will we find how much God loves us, how much He has sacrificed for us in order to allow us back into a relationship with Him. Only this Book, the Bible, will tell us of the love of Jesus that made Him want to make it possible for us to be with Him for all eternity. Only this Book, the Bible, shows us how Jesus lived a perfect life for the Lord God Almighty here in our presence so that we might do the same as we follow Him. This Book, the Bible, tells how Jesus removed our reproach from God by taking our sins upon Himself, paying the price for that sin by giving His life for us on the cross, shedding His own blood and dying to eradicate the lasting judgment upon us, thereby freeing us to be able to stand in God's presence with rejoicing.

The teachings and history in this Book, the Bible, reveal to us how spiritually poor we really are so that we might gain the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3) as we seek His help. This Book, the Bible, allows us to see that when we mourn the sinful nature that we find ourselves in and turn to find Jesus' help, God provides us with His great comfort (Matt. 5:4). This Book, the Bible, demonstrates to us that it is not the proud who will be given the earth for their enjoyment, but those who humble themselves before the Lord God are the ones who will inherit it (Matt. 5:5). This Book, the Bible, invites us to see

that hungering and thirsting to do what God desires is what will satisfy us to the fullest (Matt. 5:6). This Book, the Bible, discloses to us that it is those who have mercy upon those around them who will themselves find mercy in their own lives. The rude and crude people will only receive what they give out, but the merciful will receive mercy (Matt.5:7). This book, the Bible, demonstrates that purity of heart and mind enables us to see beyond this world to see God, Himself (Matt. 5:8). Those living filthy and sinful lives never see God. Until they come to the point of realizing their need for the Lord Jesus to forgive them, they are completely blinded to anything of God. This Book, the Bible, teaches us that it is beneficial to seek peaceful resolution to the problems of the world so that God might look at us and proclaim, “That’s My girl! That’s My boy!” (Matt. 5:9). This Book, the Bible, delights to show us that when we live according to the ways of God, persecution will come to us, yet that is the only way for us to gain the Kingdom of heaven, living as God desires us to live despite cruelty or abuse from others who are not believers (Matt. 5:10-12). This Book, the Bible, is our instruction manual in how to live in order to receive God’s favor. By living according to this Book, we proclaim ourselves to be people of God, and the people of the world will not recognize us, nor will they respect us; but God does. So it is living by this Book, the Bible, that God identifies those who are His.

And we see this in the New Testament lesson of Revelation 7:9-17. Listen to the distinguishing characteristics of those who belong to God, who can stand before the Lord God Almighty at the end of time. (READ Revelation 7:9-17)

Here in this vision of the Lord given to John the Apostle, God allows him to see the ones that “qualify” to stand before Him in celebration before His throne. They is a large crowd without number. They are from every place on the face of the earth. And regardless of where they are from, they are all wearing the same spotless clothes, having been purified by the blood of Jesus Christ, in whom they have put their faith (Rev. 7:9). These are the faithful throughout all time and they are gathered together before the Lord God because they have refused to recant their faith in Jesus Christ. They have persevered through all sorts of trials and struggles in order to remain faithful to Jesus. They continue to

lift up the Lord God as the One who deserves their full allegiance, and they thank the Lord for all that He has done.

So who might some of these folks have been? What did they do with their lives? How did they live as saints? Well, we sang about that in our second hymn, did you recognize some of them? Doctors, queens, shepherds and shepherdesses, soldiers, priests, ones slain by wild animals. They are all around us, those who live faithfully by the Word of God in order to let the world see the difference that Jesus makes in the common, ordinary life of one of His servants. We can find them in school, on the streets, in the stores, in church, along coastal areas, or even next door. But all of them lived patient, brave and true lives, toiling and fighting and living and dying for the Lord they loved and knew. It was Jesus' love that made them strong, and they followed what was right for Jesus' sake all of their lives.³

Painters, carpenters, stewardesses, bank clerks, auto repairmen, people in business, people in sports, people in politics (yes, even in politics), scientists, ferry boat captains and crews, construction workers, police officers, soldiers – people of all walks of life, doing all kinds of jobs that make the world a better place, all of them staying true to their faith in Jesus Christ in order to make a difference in the life of another so that they might come to know the Lord, too. You don't have to be a pastor to be a saint, but you do need to maintain and practice your faithfulness to the Lord.

Like Pastor "George" from Russia. He was interrogated for practicing his faith in a closed country, yet he could not keep silent. He wanted others to know the joy of living for Jesus. "Pacing around the small room of the church, the Russian captain nodded towards the cross on the wall. 'That's a lie, you know,' he said. 'It's just a piece of trickery you ministers use to delude the poor and make it easier for the rich to give you money. Come on now – we're alone. Admit to me that you've never really believed Jesus Christ was the Son of God.'

"Pastor 'George' looked at the cross and then smiled. "Of course I believe it. It's true."

"I won't have you play tricks on me!" cried the captain. He drew the revolver from the holster at

³ (*I Sing a Song of the Saints of God*, words by Lesbia Scott, 1929, and music by John H. Hopkins, Jr., 1940.)

his side and held it close to the minister's body. 'Unless you admit that it's a lie, I will shoot you.'

"I cannot admit that, for it would be a lie," said 'George.' 'Our Lord is really the true Son of God. Shooting me will not change that.'

"The captain flung the revolver to the floor. The pastor was surprised when the soldier grabbed him by the arms with tears in his eyes. 'It's true!' cried the captain. 'It is true. I believe, too. I could not be sure men would die for this belief until I found it out for myself. Oh thank you! You have strengthened my faith. Now I, too, can die for Christ. You showed me how.'"⁴

The world can see the difference in those who are diligent followers of Jesus Christ, and they desperately want to know if faith in Him is worth dying for. You see, to have a Savior that we are ready to die for means that we have a reason to live for, too. Jesus is the One who gives us purpose, who allows us to experience real life, and who provides us the way to gain eternal life beyond this temporal life here on the earth. Without Him there is really no purpose to life, no meaning in this short existence, and nothing that the world has can ever give to us will satisfy the longing and hungering in our heart.

So when a person finds Jesus, and claims Him as their Savior and Lord, they experience the great joy that only Jesus can give. And when that person lives for Jesus and proclaims Him as their Savior in the words they say and in the actions they make, it gets people's attention. Some will become interested in having that same joy and purpose in their life, but some will become angry and will seek to destroy the one who lives with that hope and joy. Some are put off by faith in anything or anyone else beside themselves, and they will do whatever is necessary to silence those examples.

In my devotions this week, I came across a fantastic message from Oswald Chambers in his book, *My Utmost for His Highest*. He says, "We have the idea that God rewards us for our faith. It may be so in the initial stages, but we do not earn anything by faith; faith brings us into right relationship with God and gives God His opportunity. God has frequently to knock the bottom board out of your experience if you are a saint in order to get you into contact with Himself. God wants you to understand

⁴ (*Extreme Devotion*, pg. 346)

that it is a life of faith, not a life of sentimental enjoyment of His blessings. Your earlier life of faith was narrow and intense, settled around a little sun-spot of experience that had as much of sense as of faith in it, full of light and sweetness; then God withdrew His conscious blessings in order to teach you to walk by faith. You are worth far more to Him now than you were in your days of conscious delight and thrilling testimony.

“Faith by its very nature must be tried, and the real trial of faith is not that we find it difficult to trust God, but that God’s character has to be cleared in our own minds. Faith in its actual working out has to go through spells of unsyllabled isolation. Never confound the trials of faith with the ordinary discipline of life, much that we call the trial of faith is the inevitable result of being alive. Faith in the Bible is faith in God against everything that contradicts Him – I will remain true to God’s character whatever He may do. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15) – this is the most sublime utterance of faith in the whole of the Bible.”⁵

Unswerving faith in Jesus Christ is what makes a person a saint of the Lord. Young or old, rich or poor, male or female, whatever nationality, whatever color, whatever language – those who put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ, and follow His ways and live their life as an example of the love of God for this world to see, they are the saints of God!

By God’s grace, I ask that Jesus helps you to become one of the multitude surrounding the throne of God. By God’s mercy, I hope that you might receive the Holy Spirit of God to so boldly live your life that everyone sees the difference within you – Jesus living inside of you. By God’s calling, I pray that you would be one of the saints of the Lord, for His glory, and for His honor.

Jesus calls each of us to Himself, reminding us that He died and rose again so that we could live through Him. This bread reminds us that His body was broken for us, enduring the punishment that we deserved. This cup reminds us that His blood was poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins. Take, eat – take, drink. Let Jesus be the Lord of your life in every way, for every day of your life.

Father, thank You for Your great love for us. As we commit our lives to You once more, give us the courage to live our life in honor of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus. Let us live for You, let us die for You, so that in all things, we proclaim Your Good News to the world. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

⁵ (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, [Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Books, 1963] October 31)