

Sermon for November 15, 2015- Saints Triumphant

Hebrews 10:11-18 (NIV84)

Theme: Saints Triumphant!

- 1) *From where our Triumph comes*
- 2) *Wherein our Triumph consists*

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ¹⁶ “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” ¹⁷ Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” ¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

What image comes to mind when you hear the word “saint”? Do you think of heroic apostles like Peter and Paul? Do you imagine Mother Theresa and her selfless work among the poor in India? Maybe you think about heaven – and all the perfect people shining in glory.

But what about Bob?

“Bob?” you might say, “who’s he?” He’s a former alcoholic who, with Christ’s help, had been overcoming his addiction and sin. After finding out that his wife has cancer, he went to a bar and got drunk. The worst of it is that, while driving home under the influence, he hit a young mother of two – killing her instantly. He floods his bed with tears every night – begging the LORD to forgive him.

What about Amy? Who’s she? A young woman who got involved in the “adult” entertainment industry. Two years ago, she met someone who told her about Christ. Now she struggles with the fact that, even though she is Christian, all these pictures and videos of her former life are still being distributed over the internet – leading others into sin.

What about Kevin? He is a young Christian man addicted to internet images of Amy and others like her. When caught by his wife he repented of his sin and went to the pastor for help. Still every day is a struggle and he wonders if he will ever be rid of this powerful addiction.

What about Carla? She is an older Christian woman who just shared some juicy gossip with a neighbor. While walking home she remembered the 8th commandment and realized that she – yet again – ruined someone’s reputation with her wicked tongue. No wonder people avoid her. Can she find forgiveness for this, her umpteenth time of gossiping?

So what about Bob, Amy, Kevin and Carla – are these the kind of people you imagine when you hear the word “saints”? No? Well you should because, for Christ’s sake, that is exactly who they are! Let us meditate on this truth and, with the Holy Spirit’s help, always recognize from where our triumph over sin comes and in what our triumph actually consists under the theme: **Saints Triumphant!**

Part One: From Where Our Triumph Comes

What is a saint? According to the Bible it is someone who has been set apart by the LORD and is triumphant over all sin - completely holy and righteous in God’s sight. Only saints will be spared from hell and be given the gift of eternal life with God in paradise. If this is true (and it is) then it’s vitally important for us to know who the saints are and how to become one.

The natural inclination of man is to think that we can earn God’s favor and forgiveness on our own. “If I’m a good person,” we think, “God will have to love and accept me.” But there’s a problem with such thinking: what is good enough? Humans think that simply being mostly kind, compassionate and caring is enough for God. But it’s not. God’s Word says: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* (Mat 5:48 NIV84) *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.* (Jam 2:10 NIV84)

These passages are clear: none of us are good enough to be considered saints on our own. God demands perfection, and we are imperfect.

“But that’s ok,” some people think. “I will just offer sacrifices to God to atone for my own sin. I’ll do more good than bad. I’ll give to charity and help people. I will do all the outward things God commands in His Word – this is how I’ll get right with God!”

No you won’t. Consider for a moment all the sacrifices God’s Old Testament people offered to the LORD. “*Day after day,*” our sermon text says, “*every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.*”

Every morning and evening a Lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the people – offerings that God himself commanded – and yet none of them actually atoned for sin. Did you catch the point? It’s the same one Paul makes in his letter to the Romans, where he writes: *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.* (Rom 3:20 NIV84)

All our goodness and sacrifice counts for nothing before God. Why not? Because God is holy and perfect and we are tainted with sin. There is nothing that we can do to atone for our sins.

So where, then, can we find the perfect righteousness and forgiveness we need to stand before God? Not in our deeds or keeping of the law – that’s for sure. No, our righteousness can only be found in one place: Jesus. His one sacrifice was able to atone for the sins of all people for all time, as we read: ¹² *But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat*

down at the right hand of God. ¹³ *Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.*

Just think of the contrast between Jesus and all the priests before him. None of them were ever able to finish their work because none of their sacrifices could actually atone for sin. But then came Jesus – true God and true man. He was able to live the perfect life we all failed to live – thereby winning the righteousness we need to stand before God. He took all our sins upon himself in order to pay for them in full through his suffering and death on the cross. And for whose sins, exactly, was Jesus able to make this atonement? Was it only for the good people on this earth? No, but for the sins of all people of all time - including you and me.

On the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished,” and finished it was. Every sin had been forgiven! How do we know this is true? How do we know that God the Father accepted the redemption price paid by His Son? By the fact that Jesus rose from the dead! And not only that, he also ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Yes, when Christ comes again, his triumph over sin, death and the power of the devil will be experienced by all. But until then, He remains in heaven – patiently ruling over the affairs of this earth until Judgment day. But, when that day comes, what we are will also be seen by all – for every believer in Christ is a saint triumphant.

But how is this possible? How can I be a saint? Even though I don’t want to, I sin every single day. And my sins are not simply little things that can be ignored. They often hurt people I love. Worse than that, they are offensive to God – revealing that I don’t truly fear, love and trust in him above all things. How can any of us be saints before God when we know our sins? How can any of us sing the songs of triumph when we feel the agony of defeat in our consciences?

We can *because by one sacrifice [Jesus] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.* Brothers and sisters in Christ just think about what this verse means: By Jesus' once-and-for-all sacrifice of himself on the cross we were made perfect. Our sins are gone – forever. And to whom does Jesus apply this triumph over sin, death and the power of the devil - won for every person in world history? He applies it to everyone who looks to him in repentance and faith. Christ’s sacrifice makes such people holy – continually cleansing them from sin and renewing in them a heart that fears, loves and trusts the LORD above all things.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you remember the Bob, Amy, Kevin and Carla I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon? Now you can understand why we can think of them as saints. No matter what sins we have committed in the past, what problems pursue us in the present or temptations we will face in the future, we remain triumphant saints through faith in Christ. Now that we know from where (or better yet, from whom) our triumph comes, let us see wherein this triumph consists.

Part Two: Wherein Our Triumph Consists

Our sermon text continues: *The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:*¹⁶ *“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”*¹⁷ *Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”*¹⁸ *And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.*

From before the creation of the world, God planned a way to rescue his people from sin. He knew that, after the fall, we would never be able to save ourselves. We were lost and condemned creatures; helpless - without any hope of salvation. So what did God do? He promised to make a new covenant with us – not based on trying to earn righteousness through our works, but one in which He would both forgive all our sins and move us to truly know, trust and love Him as our God.

And this is wherein our triumph consists. Through the preaching of His Word, the Holy Spirit has put his teaching in our hearts and mind. He has opened our eyes to see who He is, and to recognize how gravely we have offended him. But he didn't stop there. By means of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit has revealed to us everything Jesus has done to save us. Having awakened faith in our hearts, the Holy Spirit has moved us to repent of our sins and believe that God forgives us for Christ sake. No matter how heavy the guilt of our sins lies on our conscience, or how the world will not let us forget our past, God forgives it all.

Just think of what this means for Christians like Bob, Amy, Kevin and Carla – or for you and me: no matter how badly the knowledge of past sins haunt us, through faith in Christ, we remain saints triumphant in the eyes of God. There is no sacrifice, not thing we must do to atone for our sins. Jesus has done it all. We are saints over whom the Holy Spirit continues to watch – instructing us through word and sacrament so that, no matter how messy our lives become because of sin, we remain God's forgiven children, – and want to live to His glory and not our own.

Brothers and sisters in Christ – because of Jesus' once and for all sacrifice on the cross, you are a saint – 100% holy and righteous in God's sight. Christ's triumph is your triumph – not just in the future, but right now. Because you are a saint through faith in Christ Jesus, you can fight the good fight against temptation and sin. God is with you and will give you the victory. Yes, even if you fall into sin, you have not lost the war. Repent and God will forgive you – all because of Christ Jesus and his work. Amen.