

The Feast of all Saints

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[0:00] Father, today we pray and thank you for your gift of the glorious inheritance of the saints.! We thank you for your calling before time began. We thank you for the redemption of the saints within the sun.

We thank you for the sealing now and this day of the Holy Spirit. We ask you to be with the message to follow. May you speak through it. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen. This is the hardest sermon of the year to preach because of the time change.

You have a little man in your head that has already said, I think he should have wrapped up about an hour ago. Finding a television station to watch in our house is a difficult thing to do because we have such a wide range of ages within our house.

Of television watching age we have from 6 to 38. So the favorite network in my household is the food network. We especially enjoy the contest shows where aspiring cooks get bizarre ingredients and a time limit to make new dishes.

[1:35] Ingredients like stinky tofu, beef tongue, haggis, those kinds of ingredients. So anybody else likes watching the Food Network or is it just us?

Yeah. Just you. There's a newer show that we've been watching that they released I think a couple months ago called Cooks vs. Cons. Has anybody heard this show?

Okay. John's got me here. He watches this show too. So basically they take two professional chefs and two proficient amateurs and put them into a cooking competition.

And the judges watch these four and try to decide who is a professional cook and who's a cop, who's an amateur. And for a professional cook, there's just some practices that can't be duplicated until you've spent years working in the kitchen.

So you watch, somebody can do an even dice. Professional cooks clean up their workspaces as they cook, which is something amateurs tend not to do. I mean, I love cooking.

[2:42] It's one of my favorite things to do. But if you put before me something to butcher or a fish to play, you're going to realize real quick that I'm not a cook, I'm a con.

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 1. So we read verse 15 and we see, He has heard of their faith and their love towards all saints.

In other words, their practice was consistent with who they said they were. Brothers and sisters, please understand that this combination of faith and love is not a given within the church.

There are many cons out there who focus on knowledge of biblical facts, for instance, and abandon their love from one another. Paul writes for this very reason in 1 Corinthians, If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Similarly, there are those who have walked away from the deposit of faith and trusted to them. And the foundation found within Scripture and the creeds, who have become apostate, claiming the only thing that matters is that we love one another.

[4:35] I'm sure as the history with the Episcopal Church would show, we've known a few that have gone down that path. Neither imbalance is the proper expression of a true believer in Christ.

Paul here views faith paired with love for fellow believers as a spirit-filled response to the doctrine that he has laid out in the first half of this chapter.

The salvation of a sinner and his placement in Christ, By the way, the phrase in Christ or in him is used over 35 times in Ephesians. The salvation of the sinner is spoken of as a blessing, as described as an action from every member of the Trinity.

Here in Ephesians, we find true triunity. All three persons of the Godhead in perfect harmony, working in perfect love.

Beginning in verse 3, we see God the Father, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[5:50] And when did he do this? He did this before the foundation of the world. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

Why did he do it? According to the passage here, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious name. With perfect foreknowledge, I might add, this speaks to the greatness of God. I preached to you today as a man who has actually adopted the sons, so I understand a little bit about the adoption process. And I can say with absolute surety that in my fallen state, I didn't have complete foreknowledge of the process that came in front of me.

It's the same as it is for every parent. I think it's one of the unspoken graces of parenthood that we don't have the knowledge of what's in front of us.

Just as it is with any human father, I don't have perfect foreknowledge, perfect love, or holy will.

This means that as a father, I fail regularly.

[7:17] My responses are sinful, selfish, and angry. My children fail as sinners, and I fail them as a sinful father. But what do we find here in God our Father?

Do we understand what Paul is trying to say here? God has complete foreknowledge of those he's going to call as sinners. This means that God knew every nasty thing you would say, every blasphemy you would utter, every disgusting thing you would do, every act of hate you would commit, every transgression of his holiness.

What kind of father would honestly look upon the full evil of a person, and still choose that person, and then perfectly redeem him, and forgive them of all their sins?

Then bind themselves to him as sons for all eternity? Only a perfect father. Only a perfect father.

Because this speaks to a divine, inexhaustible capacity of love.

And God's ability to purpose and execute on his plan. That speaks to his unlimited power. No wonder as we look at this text, Paul writes this to the glory of his name.

[8:50] So the calling came from God the Father before time began, and according to his will. And as the choosing of the Father came before the foundations of the world out of eternity passed, the redemption of the Son comes at a set point in our past.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoptions as sons.

We can look back and say, definitely. In other words, that at a set point in time, for sure we know that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Jesus, the beloved, redeems us by his own blood and obtains forgiveness. Look at verse 7. And in verse 9, we see that Jesus is the mystery of God's will.

This echoes the exact name for Christ used in Colossians chapter 2. A mystery which set forth a revelation of God's plan.

[10:01] Now the word here, mystery, is a little different than we think of it as English people. We think about Agatha Christie or murder she wrote. But that's not what's meant here.

It's the idea that something spiritual and invisible was made visible in front of us. Something was revealed to us. So what does it mean that Christ was a mystery?

From the human perspective in our past, bound as we are by the limits of time, there is a point where God's salvation to us was just a promise.

But then that promise took on flesh and dwelt among us as the God-man Jesus. And we see here today, time-bound as we are in 2018 at Trinity, that the mystery is not yet fully revealed.

Paul tells us that God will yet unite all things in heaven and all things in earth within himself under Christ. That's the ending of the section that Ray read earlier. And that brings us to today.

[11:10] The Holy Spirit, the third part of the Godhead, binds us to God the Father in Christ. The Spirit, the Spirit whose ministry in this age, according to the Gospel of John, is to convict those outside of Christ, those of the world, convicts the world of sin and judgment, is the same person that seals us in Christ to the Father as children.

And as adopted children, we no longer fear the rejection of our Father. We no longer fear eternal darkness. So here I stand, here you stand.

God called us to be his adopted children before time began. God became man at a set time in the past to pay the price for our sins and make it happen. And God himself is the guarantee of our full inheritance until the time we take possession of it.

So now you may be wondering, why are we covering all this material on All Saints Day? That was the introduction, after all. Were we supposed to go off on a theological exploration about the roles of the Godhead within salvation, just to pass some quiz at the end?

Well, see, here's the thing about Paul. He can't separate his doctrine from the consequences of what he teaches. What we just looked at serves as the foundation for his greeting to the Ephesians. [12:42] He turns from the role of God's calling of sinners, and then looks to the placing of those sinners within the body of the saints. Let's go back to verse 15.

It begins the verse saying, for this reason, some translations will say, therefore. That looks back to what we just examined. Therefore, two things, because I have heard of your faith in Jesus, because I've heard of your love for all the saints.

And then we get so thrown off, because we come here thinking we've found a model of a perfect church. We can just figure out what the Ephesians got right, what secret handshake they had at the door, what order they had their liturgy in, how they elected their church officers.

I think somehow we can make the necessary changes to recapture the glory days of the early church. And here's where we get it wrong.

We look at Ephesians 1, chapter 15, and we see the words, your faith and your love. And we assume that the Ephesians who possess this faith and love are somehow responsible for it.

[13:58] But considering that Paul says, therefore, and looks back to verses 3 through 14, then he gives thanks for their faith and love, which is a proof of the grace from the earlier part of the chapter.

Consider what we just examined. Who is responsible for our adoptions as sons and daughters?

The only persons who take an active role in our salvation is the Father who calls, the Son who redeems, and the Spirit which seals.

As Jonathan Edwards would say, and has been quoted from this pulpit before, I probably can have Caleb finish this quote for me, but the only thing we contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary.

Therefore, we can look at Ephesians and agree with Paul and safely say that if God is the active author of our salvation, then he is the source of our faith and love.

[15:13] This should not surprise us in a book where in the very next chapter we are going to read that by grace are you saved through faith, and not of yourselves, it is the free gift of God.

This is why he mentions them in his prayer, because his prayer is a praise to God for his gift to the church. If you look in 2 Corinthians, Paul does a very similar thing to another church body.

And he writes that that church is a letter from Christ, and written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. Here in Ephesians we see the same thing.

Paul has recognized that Christ is the physical representation of God's purpose made real. And the expression of love and faith in the body of the saints is the manifestation of God's salvation within the world.

After all, how does the Bible teach us that the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus? Our love for one another.

[16:29] This is a key point. While Paul is praising the Ephesians' faith and love, he is not praising the Ephesians.

He is praising God, the source of this new life. And for that reason, he picks up and launches again into a praise of our triune God.

In verse 17, we read again that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him. And we continue reading on into verse 18.

We see that it is God who enlightens the eyes of our hearts. I really love that phrase. I wish we used it more. I don't know what context we would use it in, but I just love that idea.

That imagery. We continue reading and we see that God makes us to see three things. I'm going to read this out of order because I'm going to focus on just the last point that I mentioned.

[17:36] We see three things. The hope we are called to. Praise that we see and understand and perceive the hope we are called to. The greatness of his power made real in the gospel of Christ.

And finally, for us today, the riches of his inheritance. Look at the end of verse 18. Where is God's glorious inheritance found? In the saints.

Obviously, we focus on this last point today because today is the feast of all saints. And sadly, the application of today's passage will be a little sharp.

It may be bitter medicine. It may be bitter medicine. I have been a weekly attender of church for nearly 37 years now. I know some of you have me by a little bit.

I'm looking at you, Ray. I'm only 38 years old, Cammy. I know what churches can be like.

[18:51] Let me be honest. We as a church today in the Western world will come to a holiday like today. And we'll speak glowingly and with admiration of the saints of the past.

Telling you what tradition you're from. Maybe it's St. Francis. Maybe it will be Moses. Maybe it will be St. Paul. Maybe it will be the missionary Jim Elliot, who has mass occurred in South America. Maybe you look back and speak fondly of Augustine. And on and on and on. But in our week-in, week-out relationships with each other, we wear on each other and do not love one another as we ought.

I know that Trinity has this problem because I attend here and I have this problem.

What kind of love for the saints was Paul referring to in verse 15? Certainly not the reverence of saints in glory. Because how would that have been a visible demonstration to that present world about God's act of salvation in the world then?

[20:08] It had to have been the ongoing love of each other. Saints joined together in ongoing ministry and emphasis. Why is it that we are so willing to see God's working in and through the saints of the past and overlook their sins and faults, but then grumble and complain and gossip about the saints we worship alongside with every Sunday?

Are we cooks or are we cons? Does our treatment of one another match the profession of our calling?

And don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that if I come to work day on Tuesday and Tom Newman drops a sledgehammer on my foot and I curse and yell at him that I must not have been saved to begin with.

That's not what I'm saying. But my concern is Paul's concern. That's what all of Ephesians is about. Live a life worthy of your heavenly calling.

Our conduct in this life must match the salvation which God has given us. And it will be inevitably reflected in our love for one another.

[21:31] In today's world, there are many men my age, I have heard this I don't know how many times in the last five years, that profess a love for Jesus but a hatred of the church.

These two views are not compatible. We cannot love Jesus and then despise the very thing he gave his life for. Within the life of a parish, despising other saints reflects a profound and dishonoring lack of understanding God's role in salvation.

This sinful practice is not an act of faith. So many times in cases of church conflict, we try to adopt worldly methods of resolution.

For example, if we get frustrated with other church members, we'll say this, and I've probably said this to my wife and she's probably said it to me. Well, just think about so-and-so's good points. Consider their redeeming qualities. Maybe somehow those good works will outweigh the scale of their negative qualities on the scale of justice.

[22:50] But that misses the point. Paul's already told us that none of us as saints have any redeeming qualities. I don't love you because you deserve it.

And I don't deserve your love because I've done nothing to earn it. Instead, faith reveals the worth of the saint is found in the fact that the Father called him from eternity past, that the Son was crucified for his redemption, and that the Spirit seals him until the future glory is revealed.

And that changes our daily life with one another. Where is my worth found? The Son of God poured out his own lifeblood on the cross for me.

Try to measure the value of that. The community of the saints is the glorious inheritance of the Godhead, but they certainly did nothing of themselves to earn this standing.

I close with a harsh warning, but it's not mine. It was written by the Apostle John. He who has ears, take heed and listen.

[24:08] For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who is of the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love, that Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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