

All Saints Day
November 1-2, 2008

“What They Were and What They Are”

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Where are they now? Have you ever seen that feature in the newspaper, magazines, or TV? I always find it interesting to see those people we have not seen for a while and to discover what they are doing now. Our lives move on and time moves quickly. As we see these features we may respond, “Oh I remember him (her), I wondered what ever happened to them.”

In our text, we have something much greater than a famous local athlete, performer or political figure. What St. John opens for us is a picture of the courts of heaven. What we see there are the saints of God who have gone before us into heaven. They constantly praise God in His heavenly courts and they have received the goal of their faith, the salvation that God has promised to them.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to meet those saints? In addition to meeting our Savior face to face like the epistle lesson points out, whom would you most like to meet? Would it be David? Would it be Job? Would it be St. Paul? Who would it be? We have all talked in Bible studies about going up to certain Biblical figures and asking them questions because we want to know first hand what their life was like and what moved them to do what they did. Maybe we want to talk to them about their faith. Those are just Biblical figures; this is not to mention other Christians throughout history.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. We don't worship saints, but they are an example to us in our lives here on earth. We are all saints because our Savior redeems us. These people do not only worship God in heaven, but they served Him here as well and we learn-

WHAT THEY WERE AND WHAT THEY ARE

- I. The saints of God live in His presence**
- II. The saints of God are assured of forgiveness**
- III. Living water is the source of their joy**

I.

A. One of the elders addressed St. John with this question: “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where did they come?” Verse 9 had given us a picture of the unnumbered saints in white robes that were praising God. The elder knew the answer, but asked John anyway. St. John answered him: “Sir, you know.” The elder answered him: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

We know the Lamb to be none other than our Savior Jesus Christ. White is the symbol of purity. Through Jesus’ sacrificial death for us, we are pure in the sight of God. When we think about saints in heaven, it is all too easy for people to think that all people become this way and are all going to heaven. The saints in heaven are saints because they were first saints on earth. As such they went through difficult as we all do. St. Paul spoke in the book of Acts: “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) Because we are sinners living in a sinful world there will be struggles and trials for us.

B. The saints serve God in heaven; again they did that on earth as well. The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews contains a great listing of what have been called “The Heroes of Faith”. Towards the end of the chapter the writer says that their nature was that they were those “of whom the world was not worthy.” They were different people, cut apart from everyone else in the world.

Living in the presence of God is the mark of His saints of all times and places. The Bible contains stories about them and they exist in the church today as well.

II.

A. What troubled the people of God during their lifetime bothers them no more. God shelters them as they are in His presence. It was He who said: “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Hebrews 8:12) That was an assurance they had while they lived on this earth. It goes without saying that it is one that you have too. No matter how great your sins are, God forgives them and forgets them for the sake of Jesus Christ.

The burdens of this life are now gone for these people. Hunger and thirst are no longer an issue for them, nor is the sun with its scorching heat. Later on this epistle John says: “For the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4) Many is the time that I have stood with you at the casket of a loved one where this truth has been shared for your comfort and for mine as well

B. As we live out our lives on this earth we hold to these promises of our faith. We know that the world has its share of troubles. We have sorrow, illness, and difficulties of many types. We know that through all of these that God was with us and will continue to do so. None of us knows what lies ahead of us in the future. As the old saying goes. “We don’t know what the future holds, but we know Him who holds the future.”

In this text we are given a wonderful and beautiful picture of that. I have sometimes used this as a reading at funerals and on several occasions have used it for the sermon text. We can be assured of forgiveness and life forever with God in heaven because of what Jesus has done for us!

III.

A. When I was at the St. Louis seminary several years ago, I purchased a copy of Dr. Lewis Brighton's commentary on Revelation. Since I knew him, I thought I would go to his office and have him inscribe it for me. He wrote: "The victorious Lord in Revelation is the Good Shepherd." St. John says: "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd."

The shepherd is the image God uses to describe his care for his people. In Biblical times, kings saw themselves as shepherd of their people. What does a shepherd do? He feed the sheep, he leads them to water so they can drink, he protects them from danger, and in all this he is leading them. This does not happen in a forceful way, but rather in a caring way. That is why this term is also synonymous with the pastoral office.

The greatest shepherd of all is Jesus. He is the one who is spoken of here in our text. He leads the saints to living water. It is the same living water he promised the woman at Jacob's well and in other places in the gospels. With the idea of springs of living waters is that there is a lasting supply.

B. Our text ends: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Tears are part of all of our lives at death, frustration, sadness, and hurt. Look what we have to look forward to in heaven! There will be constant rejoicing because this world's problems will be gone.

The saints on earth were God's children and served Him. They are now in heaven before the throne and serve him as well. As we worship we worship with them as well. This day we will remember those who have joined the courts of heaven in this year. Do you wish you could still see them or worship with them. Well, you can't see them, but we still worship together with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. In Jesus' name. Amen.