

## WHY IT'S HARD BEING A SAINT – REVELATION 19:1-9

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<sup>1</sup>After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, <sup>2</sup> for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” <sup>3</sup> And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.” <sup>4</sup> The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” <sup>5</sup> Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!” <sup>6</sup> Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup> Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) <sup>9</sup> Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ ” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Have you ever been called or aspired to be a saint? Think about that for a moment. Perhaps there was a moment where a grandma called you a saint for saving her cat, or maybe you had a parent or a friend you grew up with who you hoped you could be like because he seemed almost saint-like. When you start thinking about it more, you realize how difficult that is – to be a saint I’m talking about. Many people think being a saint is about doing things right all the time, holding yourself to a higher standard than others. Sometimes it’s too hard to do, so many give up before they’ve even tried. Some even look at saints as the holy rollers, they’re doing so much good that they don’t have any time for fun. This is reflected in the Billy Joel song *Only the good die young*, he’d rather “laugh with the sinners, than cry with the saints.”

Really, isn’t that the contrast that people set up? If I’m not a saint, then I’m a sinner. And really, that falls in line fairly closely with what the Bible says. As Christians, we know that we are to strive to be saints, but not the saints that have no fun whatsoever, but the saints that get to heaven. And today, we’re going to talk about the saints, and not just those Catholic-recognized saints, but Biblical saints, saints inside of you and me. Maybe you noticed on the cover of your worship folder the heading – Saints Triumphant Sunday. But we’re not just talking about the saints because the worship folder says so, but because the Bible says so. And we will answer the question WHY IT’S HARD BEING A SAINT.

I think most of us have an idea in our mind as to what a saint is. Generally speaking, a saint is considered someone who doesn’t think of themselves, who does what is good for others, and is generally a good person. And so when we think about saints, we can think about the great heroes of faith from the Bible – the patriarch Abraham and King David, Saint Peter and Saint Paul. We might think about a pastor,

priest or preacher whom he looked up to growing up. Maybe we think of our little old grandma as a saint. I'm sure the common theme between all those people, is they would tell you they don't deserve to be called saints, they recognized their weaknesses all too well.

Maybe that's the first hard thing about being a saint, it's such a high standard to live up to, being good all the time. It's like getting 100% on not only one test, but to continue doing that throughout the whole year. It's tough enough to hit perfection once, let alone again, and again and again. As hard as we might try to be a saint, it's a tough to do – we are confronted by our own weaknesses. In fact, it seems like the harder we try to be good, the more we see how not good we are.

Another thing we might associate with saints is triumph – like what we call this Sunday – Saint's Triumphant. There's this inner voice inside of us that associates doing something right with being rewarded. If you share your toys, mommy will be happy. If you return a missing wallet, you can get a reward, or at least a thank you. If you do your job well, you get promoted. We triumph for doing things well or saint-like.

But once again, you don't have to look around too long to wonder where all the triumph is. When I share my toys, that just means I have less toys to play with. When I return a missing wallet, it isn't as much of a reward as I was expecting. And I've done my job well for the last three years and haven't gotten noticed. I don't feel triumphant. We are all taught to play by the rules, and yet it seems to be the ones not playing by the rules that feel more triumphant than we are.

Finally, a third reason WHY IT'S HARD BEING A SAINT is because, quite frankly, I don't feel like a saint all the time. I still have that sinful nature inside of me that enjoys slacking off, that enjoys ill-gotten gains, that finds all sorts of excuses to not go to church or open my Bible. I don't feel like those saints we heard about in our second lesson from Revelation. I know I'm supposed to want to go to church, I know I'm supposed to want to read my Bible regularly, I know I'm supposed to be happy about going to heaven, but most of the time I don't feel like it. I get home from church and it seems like the same old same old. These are reasons WHY IT'S HARD BEING A SAINT, because I don't feel like I am.

It's this precise revelation we need to come to as we look at the lesson from Revelation once again. In fact, this is the only place in the New Testament where the Hebrew phrase "Hallelujah" is mentioned. It's a phrase that means, "Praise the Lord." See why these saints are saying "Hallelujah." **"Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments...He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."** Then a little later, **"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!"** And finally, **"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb."**

Being a saint isn't all about how we feel, being a saint isn't about what we've done, being a saint isn't about feeling triumphant. Being a saint is all about being invited to the wedding supper of the lamb. The lamb of course is Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his body for us on the cross. It is his righteousness which we wear. Revelation describes it this way, **"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear (these stand for the righteous acts of the saints)."** This is not God's way of saying the acts of the saints save us, but the righteousness that is credited to the saints by the lamb.

And perhaps this is the most difficult reason WHY IT'S HARD BEING A SAINT. Because we are wired to think we have to do something to get to heaven. It's hard to give up this thought and really let Jesus take care of it. It's something that can easily affect our thinking – take for example this short story I read recently:

*A lady had recently been baptized. One of her co-workers asked her what it was like to be a Christian. She was caught off guard and didn't know how to answer, but when she looked up she saw a jack-o'-lantern on the desk and answered: "It's like being a pumpkin." The worker asked her to explain that one.*

*"Well, God picks you from the patch and brings you in and washes off all the dirt on the outside that you got from being around all the other pumpkins. Then he cuts off the top and takes all the yucky stuff out from inside. He removes all those seeds of doubt, hate, greed, anger, jealousy, etc. Then he carves you a new smiling face and put his light inside of you to shine for all to see.*

*It's our choice to either stay outside and rot on the vine or come inside and be something new and bright."*

*Maybe you'll think of that next time you see a pumpkin. May God bless you and touch your heart today.*

Did you catch it? It's a great description of what being a Christian is all about. The lady says how it's God who picks you from the outside and brings you inside, but then all of a sudden she says, "It's our choice to either stay outside...or come inside." Nothing about being a saint is left up to us, it's all about what the lamb has done. It's the lamb's invitation the banquet, it's the lamb's gift of clothes we wear.

**"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" "These are the true Words of God."** Nothing could be truer. So what we might look at as being so hard, being a saint, really isn't. Being a saint triumphant is about what God has already done for us. And we rejoice in what we now know – our Lord almighty reigns, we rejoice that we have been invited to the wedding supper of the lamb. This is something you are now, this is someone you are now – a saint triumphant.

The only hard part we have left about being a saint now is waiting for our triumphant bridegroom to appear. Like the wise virgins from the gospel this morning, they were watching and waiting for the bridegroom, prepared even though they did not know when he would come. They stayed watch, and they had brought enough oil. So we too must wait. We don't know when the heavenly bridegroom will come – either at the end or at our end. And while we're waiting we have the great privilege and responsibility to share our sainthood with others.

We have been given the task by our Lord Jesus Christ to spread his message near and far. We accomplish the "far" through our offerings, which go to support missions and ministries that we may never see. We accomplish the "near" when we tell others what being a saint is all about. We tell them that our sainthood is certain – not because of three certified miracles – but because of the life and death of Jesus for us. We can tell them that same robe of sainthood is waiting for them too, where they can join us in praising our God for his victory.

We can confidently proclaim this message because we know it is not only true, but it is truth – the truth that Christians are already saints. It is a truth we will never get tired of hearing. It's like when I'm reading books to my daughter Grace at night. Each night, she has her favorite books she likes hearing. She would want me to read them multiple times in one night if I would. But she doesn't get tired of hearing about them. May our faith be like a child. May it never tire of hearing the all-important message for us. May it never tire of being the saints God has called us to be. May it never tire of singing "Hallelujah!" to our Almighty God. Amen!