

SAINTS WE ARE

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ September 4, 2016



Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³ And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴ These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. ⁵ No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. (Revelation 14:1-5)

I call out to the Lord and he answers me from his holy mountain,

This week I came across a study that involved children and marshmallows. Each of the children were given one marshmallow. They were told if they didn't eat their marshmallow for five minutes, they would get a second one. What do you think the study found? The study found that most of the children, even when promised with a second marshmallow if they waited, ended up eating their first marshmallow. The enticement of gratification now was stronger than the enticement of greater gratification if they waited. This test later found that those who were unable to delay gratification as children also tended to suffer from a lack of impulse control. For instance, even though it's prudent to save for retirement, let's spend money on what we can have now.

This psychological test gives a great insight into our world of instant gratification. How often do we see that in our world? Our commercials all promote it from the car leases at low prices, the payday loans to buy what you want now. A phrase I've often chuckled at is, "buying stuff with money you don't have, to impress people you don't like" otherwise known as "keeping up with the Jones.'" But can there be any spiritual truth that we can learn from delaying gratification? There certainly is, and that's really what the apostle John is talking about this morning in the book we call Revelation. But this delayed gratification is not something that we choose, but rather something that is chosen for us. It is the delayed gratification of being saints. Because SAINTS WE ARE:

1. Chosen by God
2. Standing on Mount Zion

(1)

Mount Zion is the final mountain we will climb in our Mountaintop Experiences, and what a glorious mountain it is. It's a glorious mountain because it's a picture of heaven. It is a mountain that is found in the last book of the Bible, Revelation. And being the last book of the Bible, it tells us about the end. Not just the end of a book, but the end of the world. And since the end of the world has

not yet come, it gives us a prophecy, or a promise from the mouth of God of what will happen. It's not what will happen if we do or don't do this, it's a promise completely independent of our decision. And the promise that God gives us on this most glorious mountain is that SAINTS WE ARE.

I think most of us have a picture in our minds of what a saint is. If you have any knowledge of the Catholic Church, you know that they have a lot of saints. There are also a number of churches called "Saint Paul" or "Saint Peter" or "Saint James." Or we may think about modern day saints – like Mother Theresa. Maybe there is a particular person in your life whom you would consider a saint. Generally speaking, we consider saints to be really, really, really good people. And if I would take an informal poll asking people here if they think they are a saint, I'm pretty sure that no one would (publically) admit to being a saint.

Some of us might claim to be pretty good people, but not saints. That's because we know there are improvements that can be made in our lives. We know that we could treat our family better, we could try harder on the job, we could watch the words which come out of our mouths a little better. But other than that, I'm pretty good. But being "good enough" doesn't make us a saint. In fact, "good enough" may be "good enough" for us, but it's not "good enough" to get into heaven. Because God demands perfection. It takes perfection to be a saint.

Unfortunately, the Bible is also very clear that not one of us is perfect. Not one of us can claim to be without sin, not one of us can say they have done nothing wrong. So maybe this means we can't claim to be the saints standing up on Mount Zion, the picture painted for us in Revelation. I mean look at how they're described: they don't defile themselves, no lie was found on their lips, and seriously, the singing, maybe you don't even like to sing. After all, there's only 144,000 of them anyway, so what are the chances that I'm in that number.

Well I can tell you for certain based on what I see out here, none of us deserve to be in that number. If God were looking for the number of perfect people that have ever lived, he wouldn't be able to find one, let alone 144,000. Does this mean that God lowered his standard of saints? Some would like to believe that, but we cannot make that mesh with the rest of Scripture. God does not judge on a curve, he's perfect.

Instead of judging on a curve, God did the only thing he could do, send his own son Jesus to die on the cross. This is what we focused on last week at Mount Calvary. It is Jesus' blood that covers all of the lies, all of the impurity we have thought and done. It is Jesus the lamb who is standing on Mount Zion who makes us saints. But this is not a position we apply for, it's something we were chosen for.

This is one of the most misunderstood concepts in all of Scripture. Normally we think about us choosing to be a believer, us choosing to follow Christ, when in fact the only reason we can do that is after God has chosen us. Did you catch what John said in Revelation? **"they have been redeemed/bought back from the earth,"** and **"they were purchased from among men."** SAINTS WE ARE because we have been chosen by God. Just like orphans don't get to choose their parents, we don't get to choose our God. When Jesus was walking on the earth he said the very same thing, **"You did not choose me, but I chose you."** And so instead of trying to figure out why Jesus chose us, or why he didn't choose everyone, we should rather be thankful and grateful that he has chosen us.

This is what the entire book of Revelation is all about. It was written during a time when Christians were being heavily persecuted by the Roman empire, and at a time like this, Christians may have been wondering if it was all worth it. There may have been many that thought giving up on their Christianity might be the best idea. But then John, through the inspiration of God, wrote to these believers and gave them this wonderful hope. I've often told people the two word theme for Revelation is "Jesus wins." This picture we have in Revelation 14 is a perfect example of that. The lamb of God, Jesus Christ is standing on Mount Zion triumphantly. But he is not standing there alone, he is standing there with those whom he has chosen. And just like Jesus' description of a lamb is a picture of what he has done, so also the 144,000 is a picture to talk about his church.

It is God's church, believers of all time who are included in that number. And they will have the name of Jesus and of God the Father written on their foreheads, indicating that we are his possession and that nobody can take us from his hand. What a wonderful promise from God that SAINTS WE ARE chosen by him.

(2)

Since we have been chosen by him, we have a higher purpose. Since we have been chosen by him, we will stand on Mount Zion. In the Bible, Mount Zion is referring to heaven. It is on Mount Zion that we will stand with our God. Heaven is described in a number of different ways in Scripture, here's it's described like a loud waterfall-like sound of harps playing and songs being sung. Even if you don't like singing, or don't think you're a good singer, this is not meant to be seen as a bad thing, but as a very joyous thing. And that's really what each of the writers of the Bible were trying to bring out, heaven will be wonderful. So whether you imagine heaven as a beautiful concert hall, a championship parade, or a peaceful garden, heaven will be infinitely better than that.

That is what is coming for us believers, because Jesus wins in the end. Sometimes it can be tough as a Christian to look forward to that when we're dealing with our lives and problems down here. But remember the marshmallow test. Who is ultimately better off, the ones who gratify their cravings now, or those who wait? Eating the one marshmallow now is like living purely for the joys and pleasures of this world – doing what we feel is good – whether that be materially, sexually, or spiritually. And boy does that marshmallow look tasty. But if we wait, if we don't indulge in our sinful, selfish nature, we are rewarded with the two marshmallows, which in this analogy is the glories of heaven.

We're in that waiting game, and sometimes it can be tough. But we need to remember to keep our eyes on Mount Zion. When we do that our perspective changes. We know the outcome, so we don't need to worry. There were several times when I was watching the Olympics where I found out the outcome before they played it on TV. And when I saw the races on TV, I wasn't on the edge of my seat like I would have been, because I knew who was going to win. What makes for anti-climactic television, makes for comforting lives as believers. We know how our story is going to end. But instead of making our lives anti-climactic, it gives us a greater sense of purpose.

In no better place is this found than in the last few verses of our section. There, John writes, **"They were purchased from among men, and offered as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb."** How does this show that we're special? In the Old Testament, before Jesus was born, the Israelites were required to make a multitude of sacrifices. One of their sacrifices was called a "first-fruit" offering.

This was when the first portion of the harvest was collected and sacrificed to God. This first part of the harvest was used for a heavenly or special purpose. The rest of the harvest was used for food, essentially an ordinary purpose.

As believers, we are being offered for a special purpose. Our lives are special, our lives have meaning. So everything we do in this life gives glory to our God. **"Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God."** This not only takes place when we glorify God with our mouths in worship, it not only takes place when we make time for him in his Word, but it takes place when we are the best husbands and wives we can be, when we are the best sons and daughters we can be, it takes place when we are the best employees we can be, and the best citizens we can be. One story I really love is one about a shoemaker. A Christian shoemaker is not a good Christian by putting little crosses on his shoes, but he is a good Christian by making the best quality shoes he can. So also with you. We do this, not so that we might be saints one day, but because we are saints right now. For we have been chosen by God, and we will stand with him on Mount Zion. Amen.