



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for The Festival of All Saints

November 3, 2019

For All the Saints

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The Church's tribulation began the moment of her birth. God, the Father of an Infinite Majesty, brought forth the Church from the tribulation and suffering of His own dear Son. Born of adversity, through the suffering and death of Jesus, the Church stands this side of heaven in a realm that has always been and always will be hostile to her. She receives the scorn of the world because she speaks of "foolish things," for the message of the cross, the wisdom of God, is, to those who are perishing, foolishness.

Still, the Church speaks the truth of God's Word because to do otherwise is to deny herself. You expect those outside the church, that is, outside of Christ, to reject the truth, because the things of God are spiritually discerned, as Scripture says; they're revealed to a person only by the Holy Spirit working through the Word. But, the Church faces a special hardship when the message of the truth is rejected by those within the Church. We are increasingly confronted by those who bear the name of Christ, yet believe that doctrine – the truth of God's Word – is of little importance, in fact, they consider it a hindrance, an impediment to the Gospel, and therefore insist that it be cast aside for something they consider



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more “appealing.”

“Relevance” is the catchword these days. People demand that the Church be more “relevant” to the needs of the people. Of course, here relevance is defined, not by the objectivity of God’s Word, but by the sinful hearts that demand it. The Church faces hardship because she knows that what she delivers to the saints is of eternal relevance, though sinful hearts often consider it archaic. The truth is, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is always contemporary because the sinful soul always cries out for redemption, for reconciliation with God. When the Church preaches and teaches Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the world, she cannot be more relevant, she cannot be more contemporary!

The Church prays for the world, and by her prayers the world is preserved. But, even the Church’s prayers, though they shield the world from judgment, are a source of the world’s scorn. The Church is loathed and mocked when she falls to her knees because, in doing so, she awakens the conscience of those whose knees have yet to bow to the One before whom every knee will one day bow and every tongue confess.

Rejected by those she’s been called to love and serve, the Church longs to find her rest, especially when the “strife is fierce and the warfare is long.” Like the psalmist, she gazes heavenward and cries out “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” In a tumultuous world, the Church, this bride of Christ, this one born out of adversity, struggles to persevere as she listens to and believes the Word of God. By God’s strength, ultimately, she holds on in faith, hope, and love for that day when her tribulation will finally come to an end.

The Apostle John was certainly no stranger to tribulation. Actually, no one in the Church in his day was a stranger to tribulation. During the latter part of the 1st century, when John wrote this book that we call The Revelation, the Church was facing a tremendous struggle. Eleven of the twelve disciples had already been martyred for the faith. St. Paul had been beheaded outside of Rome. The Temple in Jerusalem had once again been destroyed. The Roman Emperor Nero had unleashed his fury upon the Church, as did Titus and Domitian after him. The great fear of Christians in John’s day was not simply whether they would live or die, but whether they would finally win the victory in Christ Jesus their Lord. Oh, sure, God’s promises were the enduring source of their hope, but the events of their time seemed to suggest otherwise.

And so, in our text, he looked, and there he saw those who came out of the great tribulation. He saw the Church at rest! He saw the Church in her victory, her robes made white in the blood of the Lamb! The hymn hadn’t been written yet, but had it been, the angels would have been pleased to sing it. “The golden evening brightens in the west; Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest; Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Then there breaks a yet more glorious day: the saints triumphant rise in bright array; the King of glory passes on His way. Alleluia!”



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We've come here today, though we are still living in the great tribulation, to celebrate the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. Today is All Saints Sunday and we've come here to hear again the voice of the One who has loved us unto death, even death on the cross. On such a hallowed day as this, a day to remember the saints who've gone before us in the faith, we can only pray: "Oh, may your soldiers, faithful, true and bold, Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old and win with them the victor's crown of gold." We can only hope that our fight for the cause of the Gospel, and for the sake of Christ, will equal that of those who've gone before us. We can only trust that we will, in faithfulness, endure this great tribulation into which, we, the Church, have been born.

The great cloud of witnesses serves, even now, as both our example and our inspiration. The noble army of martyrs inspires us. Abraham, who believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, points us to the certainty of our righteousness in Christ. Moses, "who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin," moves us to stand up and to lift our heads under temptation's awful assault (Heb. 11:25). The prophets "who were stoned, who were sawn in two, who were tempted, who were slain with the sword" give us a conviction unmatched by any other army that has ever marched into battle. And yes, that one in our own lives, who has gone before us in the faith, that one we dearly loved and continue to love, that one who fought the good fight, and who has now finished the race, inspires us to hope and believe.

We can hope and pray that our fight will equal that of those who've gone before us in the faith. But finally, our hope is in Christ, and in the victory that He has gained for those whose robes have been washed in His own blood. Our hope is in the certainty of heaven and in the promise of a happy reunion with those who've gone before us in the faith. Our hope is in the rest that will come to us when our Champion calls us out of this veil of tears, to His side in Glory. When that day will come we don't know, but that it will come we're convinced beyond all doubt, for "the golden evening brightens in the west; soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest; sweet is the calm of paradise the blest."

Stephen Bayne, in his book *What Future for Christianity?*, wrote "In the future, the most important test of the Christian church may not lie in the wisdom of our planning or the skill of our preaching, but in the plain, stubborn, devoted commitment of people like ourselves, who are not wise enough or good enough to deserve the name of Christian but who resolve to follow Christ in everything that we do."

Beloved, ours is still the road of tribulation. It's the mark of a soldier of Christ. We put on the whole armor of God, for we recognize that with might of ours the victory cannot be won. We put on the whole armor of God, that "we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." We gird ourselves with "truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness." And, yes, with thankfulness and joy we wear that robe, that white robe that Jesus has cleansed with His own precious blood.



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“Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits upon the throne will dwell among them.”

Thanks be to God, we have a place with them. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen