

Rev Shaun Arndt
Sunday, November 6, 2022
Hebrews 11:32-40
Saints Not Worthy

To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, to Jesus be the glory. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Years ago, the Rolling Stones, known for living a rock star life, sang a song with the refrain: “*You’ll never make a saint of me.*” Sometimes you hear an expression like this: “*Oh what a saint she was to put up with all that trouble he caused!*”

So goes the common, but Biblically inaccurate idea that saints are superheroes who live such good and holy lives they earned the right to be called saints.

Now it is true that the word saint means ‘holy one.’ But that means none of us—certainly not this preacher—none of us can be saints based on our efforts. After all, the Bible makes it clear that all people are born sinful and fall short of the perfection God requires and that includes those whose names usually get a St. in front them, like Saint Peter or Saint John. They, like us are **saints not worthy** of the name.

The same is true of those Old Testament saints whose lives are mentioned in our second lesson: **Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel.** These verses come at the end of what is sometimes called the heroes of faith chapter of the Bible, where the author of Hebrews speaks about the lives of many famous Old Testament believers.

Now it’s true all these Old Testament saints did great things: **By faith they conquered kingdoms, carried out justice, obtained things that were promised, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edges of the sword, were made powerful after being weak, became mighty in battle, and caused foreign armies to flee.**

These verses flash dozens of Bible History lessons before our eyes. **Gideon** routing a massive army with just three hundred men, **Barak** leading his army away from the one advantage they had on a hilltop to charge enemy chariots in a valley, **Samson** taking on scores of Philistine oppressors with his bare hands, **Jephthah** winning the victory for God’s people, **David** striking down Goliath, **Samuel** the prophet speaking God’s Word in a dark time for Israel.

Daniel surviving the Lion’s Den, **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego** walking out of the fiery furnace unburned... **Elijah** and **Elisha** confronting unbelieving kings and even raising the dead, and the list could go on as long as the 39 books of the Old Testament of the Bible!

But if you read all those Bible accounts, you’ll notice there is something conspicuously absent in this brief look at the lives of these saints: *their sins*, including big shocking sins the Bible tells about.

Again, there isn’t time to mention them all, but we could speak of **Gideon** going about the work God gave with fear and hesitation, a flaw he had in common with **Barak** who had to be scolded by the judge **Deborah.** Throughout his life **Samson** acted like a spoiled brat. **Jephthah** made a rash and improper oath. **David** fell into sins of adultery, murder and pride.

Without a doubt, like all the rest, these are **saints not worthy** of the title. Just like you and me, they entered this world with hearts corrupted by sin, the same reason we too fall into sins of pride, selfishness and lust. And so we too can be hesitant to do the right thing when we doubt God's promises. Aren't there ways we have broken God's commands that make us glad our names and our sins aren't recorded in the Bible like theirs!

So how can we speak of them as **saints** or holy ones? And how can we dare speak of ourselves as **saints?!?**

1 Peter tells us how: **You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

The **saints** are **not worthy** by what they do, but only by what God has done! It is the Lord who creates saints by calling lost sinners like **Gideon, Barak, Samson, David**, you and me out of the darkness of sin and unbelief and into the **marvelous light** of faith in Christ.

Jesus, God the Son who was born of Mary is the only human being to actually live as a saint, holy and blameless in all He did, the perfect life He credits to us!

On the cross, Jesus suffered the punishment and paid the price that takes away the sins of **Gideon, Barak, Samson, David**, and you and me. Jesus' holy blood removes every sin – our big failures that weigh us down as well as the ones we didn't even realize.

That is true of **Gideon, Barak, Samson, David**, you, me and all who trust in Jesus as the Savior. Because of Jesus, our countless sins are not counted against us, just as those Old Testament believers' sins weren't mentioned in Hebrews!

When God looks at the believer in Christ, He sees only the perfection of Jesus. Therefore, all who trust in Jesus, are **saints** of God, **holy ones** – because they have been clothed with Jesus' righteousness and cleansed in His forgiving blood!

And so we hear this: **All of these were commended... by faith.** All those saints in our reading deserved to be condemned just like us because of their sin, but instead God commends, praises them for the good they accomplished as His believing people!

And that too was all **by faith.** It wasn't **David's** or **Gideon's** own power that won the victory but the promises God gave them, the promises their faith hung onto to give them courage, the promises that God kept so their faith did not disappoint them!

Now here we need to remember the often repeated Bible truth that we cannot claim the credit for our faith, but as Ephesians says we are saved **by grace--through faith—and this** (the faith too!) **is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God** (2:8-9) Or again in Corinthians: no one can say, **“Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit** (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Just marvel at God's goodness. We have the status, the identity of **saints** only because Jesus died for us and the Holy Spirit gave us faith in Jesus. We can only do things that are pleasing to God on account of His promises and the faith He has planted in us that is eager to follow His Word. So all our good is from Him, and yet He still **commends** us for it, praising the things His people do out of love for Christ, a love we only have from Him in the first place!

What an awesomely powerful reason from the Gospel for us to daily fight against our old sinful nature and follow God's Word all the more, relying on Him to equip us to live as the saints He has made us as He builds us up through His promises in Word and Sacrament!

And it's all the more important to rely on the promises and power of God's Word to build up our faith when we remember how our lesson reminds us things won't always be easy for God's saints in this world, just as the saints of old experienced:

Still others experienced mocking and lashes, in addition to chains and imprisonment. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were tempted; they were killed with the sword; they went around in sheepskins and goatskins, needy, afflicted, and mistreated.

Some of the saints of old suffered death as a result of their faith in Christ. Others experienced insult and mocking and hardship. **Jeremiah** the prophet was tossed into a muddy pit for a jail. **Zechariah** was killed with stones. Many of **Elijah's** fellow prophets were killed by the **sword**. Again the list could go on.

In the same way, Jesus did not promise we would take up a carnival as we follow Him in this world, but that we would take up a cross. Saint Paul said we **must go through many troubles**.

And maybe we think of those things, or the difficulties we are facing, or the possibility that we could lose our lives out of faithfulness to Jesus and we start to wonder, would I be able remain faithful?

Well dear friends, that's asking the wrong question! The right question is will the Lord who sustained the saints of old through all their troubles also help and sustain us until eternal life?

And the answer to that question is absolutely yes, the Lord who brought us to faith is also able to keep us in faith as He comes to encourage us in the promises of His Word, just as He did for the saints of old, carrying them through dark and difficult days.

And then, listen to this amazing statement: **The world was not worthy of them**. The saints of old were **not worthy** of the world's mistreatment, just as you don't deserve the things you suffer as one of God's people. After all, we are saints on account of Christ, and He didn't deserve what He suffered, and so neither do his people.

And so the Lord says here: **the world is not worthy** of you. Indeed, you are **worth** far more than all the world, you have a value greater than all the gold and silver in the universe, for the price Jesus paid to make you His own was no less than the blood of God, the Creator of all!

And so as these verses promise, the Lord will bring you to something far more deserving of the price He paid for your forgiveness. Since on account of Christ's saving work and the Spirit's gift of faith we are **saints not worthy** of this old broken sinful world, the Lord will bring us to that place where He makes everything **new**.

At Jesus' return, that final **goal** of our Christian faith, He will raise your body from the grave along with all those saints of old and bring us to live forever in that perfect new heavens and earth we heard about in our first lesson and sing about in our hymns today where there are no tears, pain, or sorrow.

There we will celebrate joy undying along with all the saints and angels, but best of all, with the Savior by our side, all because Christ alone makes us worthy! Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Amen.