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Pentecost 08 –July 31, 2022

“For All The Saints”

Read: Colossians 1: 1 - 14/ Memorize: Colossians 1: 9

So when you hear the word “saint” what picture comes to mind? Is it a person in a white robe with a halo? Is it someone with a pinched look of suffering on their face?

It probably won’t surprise you that, because Paul wrote a large section of the New Testament, he often used the term. He uses it to refer to followers of Jesus. We notice the saints Paul is writing to seem to have the same warts, problems and struggles, as we do. They experienced the same doubts and struggles; had personal disagreements to work out, along with family problems and church issues.

In our text for today Paul uses the word saint three times. As part of the opening address in verse 2; with reference to love for all of the saints in 4 and thanks to God for the inheritance of the saints in 12.

In the New Testament the believers are referred to saints translated from the Greek “hagious,” which means holy ones. God is also called the Holy One. So the saints, the “holy ones,” are not called because they are perfect, but because God has chosen them to be His people.

The saints were joined in the church which comes from the word, “ekkeslia” which means to be called out or set apart. If you have faith in Jesus you are a saint. You are called out and set apart for the mission that Jesus gave the church, to make disciples.

It is not based on our individual worthiness or effort, for none of us would qualify on that basis. When I say none of us I mean even Martin Luther, Mother Theresa; not even Billy Graham. So how do we qualify for sainthood? We come to it by faith in Jesus.

By faith in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we are called to be saints. But we have to embrace another idea here. The saints are not limited to those who are living right

now. As saints, we are joined to all Christians who have ever lived and ever will live. Everyone who follows Jesus at any time or place is a saint.

Why was Paul writing this letter? Was this a church he had begun? You might think that because Paul started a lot of churches, but he didn't begin the church at Colossi. One of his partners in the Gospel, Epaphras, founded the church. It's not clear, but seems likely that Paul never met God's people in Colossi.

Why did he write to them? We hear the answer in verse 4: "We have heard of your faith." He might never have been with them, but he had heard of them. It's likely that they had heard about him too but only by word of mouth; now on paper.

Why does he write the letter? He wants to encourage them and tell them he's praying for them. He's giving us an example of something we also can do, which I am remiss in. I don't often pray for saints in other congregations. I may do it on an occasion, but it is not part of my regular prayers. Here's an important issue Paul is teaching us. We may not know all the saints around the world, yet we can still pray for them.

So how can we pray meaningfully for people that we don't know or have any idea of their circumstances? Perhaps, that's exactly why Paul wrote to the Colossians. It can give us a model of how to pray for those whom we don't know. This is not the only reason, but I think Paul's teaching us a great deal about prayer in the verses we're looking at today.

He also may be setting us an example. Paul, the great theologian, who certainly knew how to deal with big theological issues is, first and foremost, Paul the apostle. He was serving God by serving others. Paul believed he was sent by God to pray for God's people. We would do well to follow his example!

Here are four specific items of prayer in our selection: giving thanks for the Colossian's faith and love in verses 3 & 4; asking that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in 9; lead lives worthy of the Lord in 10; that they might be strong, endure and joyfully give thanks to the Father in 11 & 12.

Did you notice something? Paul's not telling them to pray for physical things like food or shelter nor blessings for families. He doesn't even say they should pray that the church will grow. Instead, he gives thanks for the evidence of faith and love that he has heard about. He prays for growth in knowledge, good works and perseverance.

It's not that it's bad to pray for physical things. We all have physical things we do and should pray for. Could we ever forget Jesus taught us, "Give us this day our daily bread." How much more physical can we get than that. But Jesus was concerned about more than just our physical needs. Paul was a follower of Jesus and reflected all of His concerns.

But for whom should we be praying? If we follow the Great Commission charge, we want to pray for those locally, then look beyond our local area to our region. Yet, we can't stop there either. We need to be concerned for the whole wide world that desperately needs to know Jesus.

Let us pray for the people of Ukraine and all undergoing trial. Let's not forget those who are enduring poverty and oppression. Pray for the hungry, the homeless, the lost and abused. These are all urgent needs, but they are not the only needs.

Paul wants us to see that there are spiritual needs among God's saints that we should also be lifting up in prayer. We should be lifting the saints up as we rejoice and give thanks for all who are seeking to make God known. Let us pray to live lives pleasing to God. We pray that they and we might endure whatever challenges we might be facing or will face.

At the time Colossians was written, the big persecutions had not begun. So, for what was Paul asking them to have endurance? To help them overcome the false teaching that was already occurring in the church. Paul doesn't want them to be misled from the faith they had been given in Jesus. He wants them to remain strong in that faith! That's the kind of endurance and patience he prayed for them.

The challenges have not changed for us. There are those seeking to mislead the faithful. There is false teaching, violence and persecution and many forms of suffering. Those are reasons to pray for the perseverance of the saints, that we might remain faithful in the face of these things. We can pray for encouragement and strength to help carry all through the challenges that are faced.

But there is also one other thing we want to remember. These are not one-off prayers. We pray for the saints once and think we're done. In verse 3 Paul told them he is always praying for them. He comes back to that theme again in 9. It's not just coming to church, hearing the prayers and considering them done. It's what we continue to pray about in our daily lives. The bulletin can lead us to some concerns for

prayer each week, but we also want to remember the ones written on our hearts, which God is speaking to us.

Here's one of the things we gain when we pray beyond ourselves. We will be challenged and changed by those prayers. It will broaden our outlook on the world and our personal concerns for others. It will lead us to pray for both physical and the spiritual needs because all problems, at their root, have spiritual implications.

May we demonstrate our love for the saints and our mutual inheritance, by giving thanks and offering prayers to the One who has redeemed us and "brought us into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son." When we pray for others to grow in the knowledge of God, to live in ways that please God; to persevere, we are also challenged to do so ourselves.

Here's your question: How will you use prayer to touch more people for Jesus?