

“Sainted Children”—1 John 3:2-3

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Sainted Children”, is 1 John 3:2-3 → *Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Christ purifies himself as He is pure.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Have you ever known anyone who acted and spoke as if their kid could do no wrong? No matter what the situation, even with the evidence put forth clearly that the child was the instigator of the mischief, the mother or father would still come to their child’s defense and negate his guilt. While they’re defending the sainthood of their child you may be thinking, “Sure . . . this is the kid with the horns holding up the halo!” It is natural for parents to protect and defend their child’s reputation, especially if they perceive that he’s being attacked. However, it is also a danger in love to overlook your child’s sinful actions in such a way that she doesn’t need to take responsibility for her actions, confess her sins and make amends.

A casual drive around any city in our country will bring one into contact with saints. You may drive by a church named St. Anthony or St. Matthew. You may encounter a hospital or two with names like St. Alexius, St. Luke's or St. Jude's. Of course there are also many "sainted" cities, such as Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Santa Fe and so forth. Since "santa" is the Spanish word for "saint" do we assume that these cities are automatically filled with saints? A better explanation for the names could be that those who named them were thinking about a particular "saint" which had been canonized such by the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, they were thinking of Christians who had died but had lived such extraordinary lives of good works and demonstrations of faith that they deserved to be holy in the sight of God and all people. And what does one do with that mythological figure who is simply known as "Saint" . . . you know, "Santa"?

"Saint" comes from the Greek word meaning "a holy one." It is a term which the apostle Paul used to refer to the Christians to whom he wrote his letters. Here are a few examples:

- *To all those in Rome who are loved by God and **called to be saints*** (cf. Romans 1:7).
- *To the church of God that is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called to be saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2).

- *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **to the saints** who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus* (cf. Ephesians 1:1).
- *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **to all the saints in Christ Jesus** who are at Philippi* (cf. Philippians 1:1).
- ***To the saints** and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae* (cf. Colossians 1:2).

He was not referring to only certain individuals in their congregations who displayed exemplary good works and strong faith. Saints are all living believers in Jesus, the Christ, for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.

Sainthood comes as a result of relationship, not because of rewards and recognition for good works. Verse 2 of our text reveals this relationship of God's saints as also being His *beloved . . . children*. Thus, we are God's offspring, born anew into this family in our baptisms by the working of His Holy Spirit, not our works (cf. Galatians 3:26-29). As Paul addressed *God's children* as saints it was because of their connection to God's greatest act of love for sinners. Romans 5:8 says *God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. God's love for you is not determined by great, extraordinary, wonderful works and achievements done by you. Rather, His love for you extends beyond such frail works to actually give you the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. You become a saint by faith in the work

of Jesus, not by your own works.

It is interesting though, how “sainthood” is connected with death, whether it be the death of those considered exemplary Christians with martyrdom or even the death of the average person. Think about the many times you’ve experienced a person becoming a saint upon his or her death. In the midst of grieving, people will even speak in such a manner. For instance, they will make statements such as, “He was such a saint,” meaning that person had righteous external works. Some may speak about those works referring to how he **always** went above and beyond the call of duty, was **always** selfless, helping those in need with no thought to personal gain. Maybe she read her Bible **all the time**, was **always** going to church, was **never** mean to anyone, **always** able to see the bright side of every situation. Oh, to be so perfect!

John would not go that far in our text. He says in verse 2 of our text: *what we will be has not yet appeared*. Death is not the place where saints are made. Death is an enemy to sainthood (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:26) as it reveals the stinging affect of sin in our lives. All efforts to think our loved ones into sainthood based upon their works at death will not squelch the fact that *the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is God’s law* (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:56) which none of us have fulfilled perfectly. You must look in another direction to be God’s sainted children in His love.

You look to the work of Jesus for you, both **His** death on the cross for the forgiveness of all your unrighteousness in thoughts, words and deeds, as well as **His** resurrection from the dead with a new glorified body, never to die again. Thus, *when Christ appears **we shall be like Him**, because we shall see Him as He is* (verse 2). In other words, those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ will share in His holiness **in every way** on the Last Day *when He appears, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory* (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7).

Verse 3 of our text reveals the focus of your sainthood: *everyone who thus **hopes in Christ** purifies himself as Christ is pure*. Your hope of being with the LORD forever is not in the futile works and vainglory of this life, or even in death itself with the wish of being “in a better place,” whatever that means. Jesus Himself tells you in John 14:3 that He ascended into heaven to *prepare a place for you*, with the promise that He would come back *again and . . . take you to Himself, that where He is you may be also*. It’s not just “a better place.” It’s being in a perfect relationship with Him **in His presence eternally** as His beloved sainted children.

According to Colossians 1:21-23, becoming and being God’s sainted children is His work for you in the Person & Work of Jesus, the Christ. It says: *You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil*

*deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. It is only by faith in Jesus Christ that we can view ourselves and others in Christ as saints, in both life and in death. In fact, that's why being God's children now is so important to be God's children in eternity. Repent of your sins and believe in the hope of the Gospel held out to you this day in Christ.*

Thus, your heavenly Father knows you as a saint, even as His beloved child. Much like your mother and father with whom you lived know that you're no saint because they experienced your sin so much of the time, your Father in heaven knows not just your sinful actions but even your sinful heart and mind. While your parents have to search for a way to make you out to be a saint, your Father in heaven actually declares you to be a saint in Jesus because of His steadfast love for sinners such as you and me. Amen.

*May the Lord make you increase and abound in love . . .  
so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness  
before our God and Father,  
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.*

(1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)

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