

## The Feast of All Saints Matthew 5:1-12

The Feast of All Saints is a great day to talk about heroes. Christians need heroes. The world no longer has heroes. They have idols. The world has always idolized men. The Panthéon in Paris, France is a beacon of this kind of self-worship. Now with the talk of idols in sports and entertainment, there is at least some honesty that the worship of men is idolatry. These are not the kind of heroes we need. We need Christian heroes. Heroes who have gone before us in the faith and won the prize of eternal life. That is, they suffered all to remain faithful to the Lord in all manner of dire circumstances. These heroes come from three realms: the Bible, history since the time of the Bible, and your own family.

I love how Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller describes our heroes:

“The Christian hero is not the person who has obtained all that he or she desires in this life. Our heroes are not those who have gained the entire world but lost their soul. Our heroes are not those who have achieved a great degree of worldly success or notoriety. Our heroes are those who have fought the good fight and kept the faith, and who have finished the race. Our heroes are those who have stood against the wiles of the devil, who have stood against the wild beasts of the world and the flesh. And having stood, our heroes are those who have died the blessed death.” (A Martyr’s Faith in a Faithless World, pg. 14)

I hope the question “well, what about Jesus?” has come to your mind. I hesitate to call Jesus a hero. Not because He’s not heroic, but because He is so much more. He’s the Savior of the world. He did what we could not do. Or any man born in the likeness of Adam. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to our Father who art in heaven. He also offered up His life as the one-time atonement for the sin of the world. It is impossible for us to live a life of obedience in our flesh thanks to original sin.

And since we are not spotless, we cannot even pay for our own sin to God, let alone anyone else's sin.

But Jesus is fully God and fully man. Since He is fully man, His obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross, counts as perfect righteousness before His Father in heaven. Adam didn't do it. You cannot do it. But Jesus did it. He faced real temptation, suffered agonizing pain, and was betrayed and abandoned even by His beloved apostles. But Jesus was unflinching in His mission. He was undaunted in the face of danger you and I cannot even imagine. He was resolute even when sweating blood from the stress. And he prevailed against all odds. Satan and the world and His own people were against Him, but He prevailed victorious! When Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, then everything needed for your salvation was done and accomplished. And because He is God, His work counts for the salvation of the entire world! When you remember your baptism, you can have confidence that everything needed for your salvation is already done and is delivered to you freely. You don't live like a Christian to earn your salvation, but you live like a Christian because you already have your salvation.

Jesus gives a beautiful description of how you are blessed in Him. And it is truly the stuff of heroes.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The world, and your old man, are rich in spirit. They demand that God accept them on account of their good works and good intentions. They invent and demand their own ways to heaven. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many." (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven. He gives sight to the blind, restores movement to the lame, cleanses lepers, gives hearing to the deaf, raises the dead and preaches good news to the poor. (Luke 7:22) Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him. (John 14:6)

The baptized are poor in spirit. They know they have nothing to offer God. They despise their own works with regards to salvation. They trust in the works of Jesus. They know that the kingdom of heaven is given to them as a gift through faith alone on account of grace alone for the sake of Jesus alone.

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

The world doesn't like to mourn. It seeks after fame, fortune, and fornication. It rejoices in no-fault divorce, abortion, and aberrant sexual behavior. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many." (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus mourns when His dear friend Lazarus dies. Jesus mourns over the impending destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70: "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:42)

The baptized mourn over their sin. They mourn over the destruction their sin has caused in the lives of their neighbors. They are comforted with the forgiveness of sins. They are comforted with the resurrection of their Lord because they know His victory over sin, death, and the devil is finished. (John 19:30)

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

The world despises the meek. It rejoices in the survival of the fittest. Power and strength are the currencies of the world. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many." (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus came humbly, mounted on a beast of burden. He "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him." (Philippians 2:6-8)

The baptized are meek. They know that they are no better than anyone else. They know their salvation is a gift based on Christ's merit and not their own. God will exalt them and they will inherit the new heavens and the new earth. They are ridiculed for having a "pie in the sky" mentality. The baptized know that there are glimpses of the new heavens and new earth here as they sojourn in the wilderness but they remember that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9)

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

The world hungers and thirsts for self-righteousness. It rejoices when good is called evil and evil is called good. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many." (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus hungers and thirsts to do His Father's will. He speaks His Father's Words. He does what the Father wants Him to do. To know Jesus is to know the Father. (John 14:8-11) To know the Father is to know righteousness.

The baptized hungers and thirsts for an alien righteousness. They despise their own righteousness and hunger and thirst to see Jesus. They know that to see Jesus is to see the righteousness of God.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

The world despises mercy. It rejoices in reward of self and in the punishment of others. It rejoices in cancel culture. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many." (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus is merciful. He takes God's righteous wrath against sin and satisfies it on the cross. (Isaiah 53:10-11) He extends His mercy as a gift through water and Word. "God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our savior." (Titus 3:5-6)

The baptized reflect the mercy of their savior. They know where mercy is found and gladly extend that mercy to others.

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

The world despises the pure in heart. It does everything it can to ruin the pure in heart so it can feel good about its own wickedness. “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many.” (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus is pure in heart. “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) Because Jesus is the pure, unblemished Lamb of God, His sacrifice for sin atones for all sin. Yours and mine.

The baptized know they are given a new heart. Their heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:25-26) Therefore, they approach the throne of grace with boldness because they see a God who is for them and not against them. (Hebrews 4:16)

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

The world despises peace. It wants what it wants and will do whatever it takes to get it. It doesn't care what mayhem it causes or who it destroys. “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many.” (Matthew 7:13)

Jesus is the Peacemaker. He is the Son of God. He makes a way for peace not through violence done to others but by violence done to Himself. “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:17)

The baptized know the peace of God. They are given peace through the forgiveness of sins and faith and are made children of God. They live the way of peace and tell others where that peace may be found.

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The world hates being persecuted but it revels in persecuting others. Ever since Cain killed Abel, the world has persecuted Christ and His Christians. It will continue to do so until Christ returns in glory and all will bend the knee and confess that Christ is King. But those who persecuted Christ and His Christians will be thrown into the outer darkness where they will suffer eternally.

The baptized are persecuted. They confess their Lord and are persecuted for it. They call sin, sin and the call grace, grace and they are persecuted for it. They know the world hates them because it hates their dear Lord. They have no illusions that faith in Jesus will solve their temporal problems or make life easy. They also know that their reward will be great in the new heavens and the new earth. "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:14)

You are baptized. You are sons and daughters of God. You were buried with Christ into His death. You are raised from the dead in His resurrection. You have newness of life just like all the saints and heroes who have gone before you in the faith.

Let us look to the heroes of our faith. Let us look to Joseph persevering in the midst of betrayal from those closest to him and the hostility of a foreign people in a foreign land. Let us look to David clinging to the promises of God even though many in Israel were aligned against him. Let us look to John the Baptist who was called to live in the wilderness and who proclaimed Law and Gospel in the midst of hostility leading to his beheading. Let us look to the saints in our family who have come before us and remained steadfast unto the end.

But most of all, let us look to Jesus who is the "founder and perfecter of our faith." (Heb 12:2) Continue to look to Him and cling to Him no matter what your old man, the world, or Satan throws your way. He will not forsake you nor abandon you when things get tough. And He will bring you to that great cloud of witnesses in heaven before the throne of our Father in heaven. He is so much more than a hero and He makes your life heroic in Him.