

11/2/08 – Copper River Sermon

Revelation 7:2-17

2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea:

3 "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. 5 From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, 6 from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, 7 from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?"

14 I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come 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 spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

1 John 3:1-3 1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12 1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

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

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

SERMON TEXT

Hebrews 12:1 **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

INTRO - When I was confirmed I had to make a speech, like all the other Confirmation students at First Lutheran in Gainesville, that day in March of 1967. I talked about my faith, and even about possibly becoming a pastor. After the service my grandfather came up to me. He was visiting from Easthampton, MA. My grandfather told me, "I'm proud of you. I hope you do a better job of keeping your promises than I have done." First of all, that surprised me. My grandfather was a man who was active in the church, was at our house regularly, and showed he believed in God. He was not perfect, but neither was I. The emotion in his voice that day communicated to me, his grandson, that Christian faith and life was not just something he talked about. For my grandfather Christian faith and life was at the very core of his being.

I. Did you see the encouragement in our sermon text?

A. Hebrews 12:1 says, **1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by SUCH A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.**

1. You see, the chapter before this verse tells of many great men of faith in the Bible.

A. It tells about Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many others.

B. It points to their acts of faith and uses their faith to inspire the Hebrews in their faith and life.

2. It says that it is only by faith that men can please God, and these men, and women, are people whose example of faith can help us.

B. But, my grandfather is just one of those who had an impact on my life, and whose example continues to give me encouragement. My parents, my grandmother, the father of my best friends in Florida, my two pastors, have influenced me as a Christian, and continue to encourage not only my faith, but my Christian life. That doesn't even include the great examples of Scripture, like David, or Peter, or Paul.

1. Please close your eyes and think with me for a minute.

2. Think through your life. Who has influenced you through their faith and life in ways that help you to trust in God, to live for Him? Name some of those people in your lives.

3. Which Biblical characters have inspired you in your Christian life?

II. Now consider again Hebrews 12:1.

A. **1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by SUCH A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.**

1. The example of others is intended to help us in specific ways.

2. We are to throw off sin, that entangles us and keeps us from living for God.

3. We are to persevere in the Christian life.

B. You see, when we trust in God to see us through our trials, when we trust in God to forgive our sins, when we show our trust in God by the way we live, this can be, and whether we know it or not, perhaps is an inspiration and encouragement to others.

1. Our faith can be a witness to God and encourage our children, our neighbors, our workmates.
 2. Our faith and life can be a witness to other Christians.
 3. Your patience, your kindness, your love speak louder than words.
- C. Today's Gospel lesson points us to the blessings that come through faithful behavior.
1. But the Gospel lesson stops at verse 12.
 2. Matthew 5:16 says, **16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**
 3. Is your faith and life an example that will cause others to praise God and help them in their faith?

III. I remember an incident with my grandfather where he was showing me a picture in his wallet of my brother and sister and I. The plastic over my brother's face was discolored and had turned brown. As a young 7 year old I made an ignorant racist remark about my brother. My grandfather scolded me and told me never to say that again. As an adult I shared that with my uncle, my grandfather's oldest son. He was surprised. He said my grandfather was a prejudiced man.

- A. You see, the problem with our life being an example to others is that we are sinners.
1. Our good works are supposed to be an example to others, but too often our lives show selfishness, a lack of love, pride, lust, greed.
 2. Our example is faulty and will not always lead others to faith.
- B. But, the writer to Hebrews does not just call on us to remember the human witnesses of Scripture, he also calls us to **2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**
1. We remember the faith of other fallible and sinful men.
 2. But, we remember the love, the sacrifice, the cross of Jesus.
 3. And, fixing our eyes on Jesus, we can admit our sin, because of the forgiveness of Jesus.
 4. No example of people is perfect, but Jesus love and sacrifice not only gives forgiveness to others, but shouts God's love.
- C. The greatest example we can show is often one of humility. When we admit our sin, and trust the forgiveness of Jesus, it points others, not to ourselves, but to Jesus.

CONCLUSION - Today is All Saints Day. It is the day we remember the faith of those who came before us. I thank God for the Christian example of many from my past. But, these people were sinners, who ultimately trusted Jesus. I pray that God may use us, may use you, to point others to Jesus through our faith and life and repentance. Amen.