

Saints are holy people. To be holy means to be set apart by God. By giving you faith in Jesus, God has set you apart from this world. While this Tuesday will mark the climax of another great political battle in our country, God has set us apart for something much greater. As the world strives for an earthly kingdom, God has given us his own kingdom. This sets you apart. This makes you holy in this dying world. Whether you have a lot of authority in this world or you have very little authority, what sets you apart is that God has given you the right to be called his child through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with a series of blessings to his disciples. These are called the Beatitudes. They describe what it's like to be holy while living in this sinful world. To be holy doesn't look glamorous in this earthly life. It doesn't feel glamorous either. This is because you don't find your salvation in the things of this world. You don't find your comfort in the things of this world. You don't find your eternal blessing in the things of this world. If you did, then you would try to make the best of your time here without any thought of what comes after this life.

To be holy means to have hope. You have hope for what is in the future. You look forward to Jesus returning. Then you will see him as he is, and you will be transformed to be exactly as he is. And you have this hope – you look forward to this great blessing – because you presently have it all through faith. Jesus says that those who believe in him have eternal life. Eternal life is not only something we wait for in the future. It is what we have right now through faith in his promise. His words are Spirit and life. If you have his Word then you have eternal life. The kingdom of heaven already belongs to you. Even though you still feel your sin in your natural desires, even though still must face death, even though you don't experience great powers, even though you seem to lack righteousness, even though you still need God to be merciful to you, even though you still feel impure desires in your heart, even though you live in a world of violence, and even though you are insulted and attacked in this life, God's kingdom presently belongs to you. Your sins presently are not counted against you. Death is already defeated for you. You presently have the gospel of God, which is the very power of God to salvation. You presently stand righteous before God through faith in his Son. God's mercy endures presently, even as it will endure forever. By faith your heart is presently purified by the blood of Jesus, which has established peace for you even now. And God presently defends you and speaks well of you.

If the kingdom of heaven is already yours, then you can bear anything in this life with the assurance of what is coming. If you presently are God's child, then you can be confident in the inheritance stored up for you on the last day.

So in these series of blessings, Jesus talks about future blessings. Those who mourn will be comforted. Those who are gentle and meek will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst to be righteous will be satisfied. Those who are merciful will find mercy. Those whose hearts are pure will see God. Those who make peace will be called God's sons. But these future blessings are sandwiched in between a present blessing. Those who are poor in spirit and those who are persecuted presently have the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them. It is their present possession. This is the very foundation of holiness. It is having what God gives in Jesus Christ. It is possessing what Christ has won and promised by his bitter suffering and death.

Those who are holy in this life are poor in spirit. That is to say, they are completely impoverished in themselves, and they find their true wealth in the rich compassion of Jesus Christ their Savior. They recognize the poverty of their sinful nature. And even when they consider any earthly wealth they have, they count it as nothing in comparison with what they have by faith.

Those who are holy in this life also mourn. They presently mourn, but not like those who have no hope. You mourn for a completely different reason than those of this world. Sure, on the outside, they seem the same. Everyone mourns at death, after all. But those who are holy mourn because they know the true cause of death. They mourn as those who know why Adam and Eve were barred from the tree of life. And they live in a world that constantly denies and ignores the existence of sin and God's judgment. But they also mourn with hope. Because they know that Christ has opened up the way to the tree of life. So they have something to look forward to when they mourn. They have confidence in Christ that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Even as they presently know the comfort of Christ in his kingdom of grace, they look forward to his coming glory when they will be fully comforted inside and out.

Those who are holy in this life are gentle and meek. They don't take themselves too seriously. That is to say, they count others more significant than themselves. Why? Because they know that their true power is something they could never have earned. Jesus has promised to share his inheritance with them. They are going to own everything. So what's it to them if they lose an inheritance or two in this life! Let the sons of this world have their reward for a time! The saints wait for something much greater. So while the saints may look meager and unimportant for not constantly pining after attention in this life, their hope remains steadfast in the new heaven and new earth prepared for them in glory.

Those who are holy in this life are always hungry. They're always thirsty. They hunger and thirst for righteousness. They know they stand righteous through faith in Jesus, and they know that Christ and his Word is the only source of their righteousness. Otherwise, all they see around them and within themselves is tainted with sin. They are tired of carrying around this sinful nature, and they long for the day when everything in them will perfectly match what they have in Christ. They aren't satisfied with self-righteous and sanctimonious facades. They strive to do what is pleasing to God. Knowing that God is pleased with works done by faith in Christ is the only thing that satisfies them. And they will be satisfied completely on that day when all their thoughts, feelings, actions, and words will be nothing but righteous.

Those who are holy in this life are merciful. They know that they deserve God's wrath and that God has had pity on them. The great thing about God's mercy is that it is new every morning. If God has been merciful to you, then you can be confident that he will continue to do so. So those who are holy are mindful of this when others fall into sin. When they forgive those who sin against them, they look forward to the day when God, who placed all their sins on his Son, will embrace them once more.

Those who are holy in this life are pure of heart. Their hearts have been purified by faith. Their consciences have been wiped clean by the blood of Jesus. So they can do their work in this life with the confidence that they are serving the living God whom they will one day see face to face.

Those who are holy in this life pursue peace. They try to put fires out before they flair up, because they know that only God has the right to bring fire to the earth. And he has set his wrath aside and established peace by the blood of his Son. Those who know this peace learn from God himself to seek reconciliation with one another. And even though they often find that people don't want to be reconciled, that people choose hostility and even violence over peace and reconciliation, they continue to imitate their Father in heaven. They find rest and peace in the Son of God who has made them one with himself. So as they serve the Prince of Peace, they have this confident hope. They will be called sons of God.

Those who are holy in this life are persecuted for righteousness's sake. They aren't persecuted for their own sake. They aren't martyrs for their own cause. When they are insulted, lied about, attacked, and slandered, it is because of Jesus. It is because of what they presently possess. They don't fit in with the world. Sure, they strive to live at peace with all people as much as it depends on them. But they don't value the things of this world like the world does. When you care more about the kingdom of heaven than you do about the United States of America, then expect to meet opposition. When you care more about what God's Word says is right than about what your professor, peers, or H.R. departments say is right, then don't be surprised if you draw some ire. But you are in good company. Those prophets who came before you were treated terribly by those who loved the glory of this world more than the glory of Christ. And Christ himself was persecuted beyond all people. So if you are counted in this company, it's certainly reason to rejoice.

Saints are different from those set up by this world. They are counter-cultural in the dying culture of this age. Saints fight against temptation. They don't move in with their girlfriends, get drunk with unbelievers, sue their brothers, slander, steal, and cheat. Saints still have their sin in this life. They still fall into sin out of weakness. This again is why they are poor in spirit, they mourn, and they desire mercy. But those who are holy in this life do not walk and live habitually in sin. If you find that you are doing these things, then stop it. Stop it now. Repent of your fornication, your drunkenness, your jealousy, greed, and deceit. Look to something better. Consider your future. Consider what Christ has laid up for you. And remember whom you belong to.

When you are tempted to go along with the crowd and act like a common worldly person who doesn't know Jesus, then keep this in mind as well. You aren't the only one God has called to be holy. You have other saints who are fighting the same temptations. You have a host of saints that have gone before you, who didn't cling to the pleasures of this world, but they died treasuring the one thing needful. Be encouraged by their faith, because it's the same faith God has given you. They had to repent of sins too, just like you. They took comfort in the mercy of God given in Jesus Christ, just like you. You don't have to go through this alone. God has put you in good company here in his church. Take advantage of that. Christ, who redeemed us from this evil world, will be with us. And he will continue to bless us. Amen.