

Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come. Amen.

SAINTS, OPEN YOUR EYES TO GOD'S GIFTS!

Ephesians 1:18-19a | The Festival of All Saints | November 1/4, 2018

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people [or saints],¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Jesus

In the name of Jesus, our Savior, my dear fellow saints:

Which comes more naturally, complaining or giving thanks? It's so easy to see all the bad things that happen and to forget about the good. Someone has expressed this in a kind of poem called *Thank You, Lord*.

Thank you, Lord, for these dirty dishes; we have plenty of food to eat.

Thank you, Lord, for this pile of dirty, stinky laundry; we have plenty of nice clothes to wear.

Thank you, Lord, for these unmade beds; they were so warm and comfortable last night.

It goes on that way for several more verses, but you get the picture. When it comes to our physical circumstances, it's good to step back and get a fresh perspective. We are blessed.

It's the same when it comes to our spiritual circumstances. We are saints, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, holy in God's eyes through faith in him. But that doesn't mean life in this sin-filled world is easy. In fact, just being a Christian brings

hardship. Jesus said, **"You will be hated by everyone because of me"** (Matthew 10:22). Jesus also said, **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me"** (Luke 9:23). Being a Christian means enduring the world's hatred and bearing the cross of suffering and self-denial.

But that's not all it means. There are some perks to being a saint, some advantages, if you will. Of course, that's an understatement. As believers we enjoy unimaginable blessings from the hand of a gracious and generous God. As we celebrate the Festival of All Saints, the Apostle Paul prays that we would see those blessings. **SAINTS, OPEN YOUR EYES TO GOD'S GIFTS**. The list of blessings that God gives to his children are uncountable, but our text points out three of them today. We saints enjoy (I) a sure and certain hope, (II) a rich and glorious inheritance and (III) the incomparably great power of our God. Let's dive in to our text and revel in these gifts.

I. A Sure and Certain Hope

Our text is part of a prayer that Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus. First, he gives

thanks for the Ephesians faith in Jesus and their love for all their fellow saints. Then he prays that they would grow in knowledge and wisdom through the Word. Finally, in our text, he prays that God would open their eyes to see the great blessings that God's grace has given them. Actually he prays that **“the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.”** He wanted them to see, not with their physical eyes which can mislead, but with the eyes of faith.

What do we see with our faith eyes?

Sadly, sometimes nothing because we fail to use them. We see only with our physical eyes. We see that the car is in the shop, the bills are piling up and the checkbook is nearly empty and think God isn't keeping his promise to care for us. We see the people in our lives and how they use us and hurt us and take us for granted, and we wonder if God even notices. We see all the pain and suffering in this world, the hardship and want, the violence and exploitation, the division between people even in our own country, and wonder why a loving God allows it all to keep happening. We look in the mirror and see a failed parent, an unfaithful spouse, a lousy friend, a target for bullies and we feel worthless. If we keep our eyes focused on these things hopelessness will smother us.

Dear saints, open your eyes, your faith eyes, and you will see that life is not hopeless. On the contrary, a gracious God has called us to a life of hope.

Hope is a funny word in English. We use it

when we are uncertain about something. *I hope it doesn't rain. I hope that cute boy texts me. I hope the Packers win.* But we are uncertain about the weather, about that boy, and about our favorite football team. We just don't know how things will turn out.

As believers we know how things will turn out. We know what Jesus did to make sure things will turn out well for us. We know about his miraculous virgin birth which made him our substitute. We know about his obedient life, a life which counts for us as if we lived it. We know about his sacrificial death and his holy blood which washes away all our sins. We know about his glorious resurrection which seals his victory and secures our eternity.

And so our hope is sure and certain. In spite of our sins, we hope that Jesus will receive our Spirit when we die –and he will. We hope that on the last day Jesus will raise us with glorified bodies – and that's just what will happen. We hope that we will stand before him on Judgment day, pure and holy and unashamed – and we will. Such is the power of his love and the certainty of his promises. We have hope. And so with confidence we look forward to a rich and glorious inheritance.

II. A Rich and Glorious Inheritance

An inheritance is unearned, a gift from someone who loves us, bequeathed to us in their will. Imagine being the heir of Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, whose current net worth is more than \$100 Billion. That's nothing. The inheritance God has in

store for his saints goes far beyond money or anything money can buy. Money gets spent, and the things it gets spent on wear out. But, as Peter tells us, God has in store for us **an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you** (1 Peter 1:4). It's bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus, secured by his resurrection and just waiting for your entrance into glory. Your reservation in the mansions of heaven is confirmed!

We could say a lot of things today about this eternal bliss. We could talk about joy and peace and rest. We could mention freedom from pain and suffering and sorrow. And all of that is, of course, true. But today I want to mention another aspect of heavenly glory: We will be united with all the other saints to praise our God forever. Our text talks about the **"glorious inheritance in his holy people."** It could also be translated the "glorious inheritance among or with the saints". All of the great heroes of the Bible, all of the great Christians of history, all of our dear, departed Christian loved ones – we will be together with them in glory.

Don't you wonder sometimes what that will be like? Wouldn't it be fascinating to take a walk with Moses or Abraham, Peter or Paul? Wouldn't it be interesting to sit down for a beer with Martin Luther? (Somehow sharing a beer with him seems like the appropriate thing to do.) Won't it be amazing to embrace your grandma or your husband or your mom? I for one can't wait to see my dad again. And just think: you won't disagree or argue or fight

with any of these people. In perfect peace and unity with them, you will bask in the presence of your Savior and praise him forever. That's what most amazing of all. In heaven we will see Jesus face to face. We will see him as he is (1 John 3:2). As Job tells us, we will gaze on him with our own eyes (19:27). How our hearts yearn at the thought!

III. God's Incomparably Great Power

Well, we're going to have to keep yearning for a while. We're not in heaven yet. We still have crosses to bear. We still have work to do in our Savior's name. But we don't do this alone. Jesus promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age as we carry his gospel to the world (Matthew 28:20). God promises never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). On the contrary, he gives us his presence and his power. Our text refers to his **"incomparably great power for us who believe."** Notice: God's almighty power is used *for us*. **If God is for us, who can be against us?** (Romans 8:31).

Imagine that the President of the United States, the leader of the free world, was your personal friend, in fact, your best friend. He thinks the world of you. He would do anything for you. Imagine what having such a powerful friend could do for you. Imagine the perks and opportunities such a relationship could bring.

That's nothing. Jesus told Pontius Pilate: **"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"** (John 19:11). God is the one who gives power to earthly rulers. And he's the one who takes

it away. Nothing compares to his power. This the God who called the universe into existence by the power of his Word. This is the God who caused a virgin to give birth, water to become wine and a dead man to come back to life. This is the God who rules over history causing all things to serve the good of his people. This is the God who through his powerful Word and sacraments creates and sustains faith in the hearts of his people. The psalmist Asaph marvels at God's might: **You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples** (77:14).

God uses that power for us. He watches over us. He cares for us. He provides for us. He protects us. He commands his mighty angels to guard us. Again, just how powerful is he? A little later in this same letter Paul tells us that our God **is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine** (3:20). We can't even fathom what God can do. His power is beyond our imagination.

That power is at work for each of us. The empty checkbook? God can handle it. That relationship on the rocks? God can fix it. Your broken heart? God can mend it. Your guilty conscience? God can sooth it. Your anxiety and depression? God's got that too. He can make these problems go away, or he can give us the strength to endure them. Either way, God's got this.

Back in the 1990s the slogan of American Express was "membership has its privileges." It sure does. By God's grace we are members of the Holy Christian

Church, the Communion of Saints. We have a sure and certain hope. We look forward to a rich and glorious inheritance. And the Almighty God is powerfully at work for us. Dear saints, open your eyes and rejoice in these blessings. Amen.

S.D.G.