

'Who am I as a Christian? I am a saint'

Reading: **Philippians 4v10-23**

Prayer

Clare Crockett was just thirty-three years of age when she tragically died after the school she was working collapsed in Ecuador as a result of a 7.8 magnitude earthquake striking on 16th April 2016. Clare belonged to the 'Home of the Mother Order' of the Roman Catholic Church, and in November last year she began her journey to sainthood within the Roman Catholic Church. Now in order for her- or anyone else- becoming a saint, the Roman Catholic Church stipulates the following five steps must take place...

1) Wait a while. The process to make someone a saint cannot normally start until at least five years after their death. But this waiting period can, in some circumstances, be waived by the Pope.

2) Become a Servant of God. An investigation can then be opened to see whether the person lived their life with sufficient holiness. Evidence is gathered, and if the case is accepted the individual is called a Servant of God. This is the step that Clare Crockett is presently at; she has become a 'servant of God'.

3) Show proof of "heroic virtue". The department that makes recommendations to the Pope on saints scrutinises the evidence. If the case is approved, it is passed to the Pope who decides whether the person lived a life of "heroic virtue". If so, they can be called "venerable".

4) Verify a miracle The next stage- be-at-i-fication- requires a miracle to be attributed to prayers made to the individual after their death. Incidents need to be verified by evidence before they are accepted. After beatification, the candidate is given the title "blessed".

5) Canonisation. This is the final step in declaring a deceased person a saint. To reach this stage, a second miracle normally needs to be attributed to prayers made to the candidate after they have been beatified.

It's difficult to give an exact total as to how many saints the Roman Catholic Church recognises. Some sources put the figure as high as 10,000+; while other sources put it as low as 810. Regardless of how many saints Rome insists there are, it is clear from the teaching of Scripture that there are far more than the suggested 10,000. I say that because every Christian in the world is a saint. The word 'saint' has come very far from its original sense so that it is no longer representative of its Biblical meaning. We are accustomed to confine the word 'saint' to someone who towers above their brethren in holiness and manifests godliness and devoutness. However, God uses this term to speak of every Christian; all true believers in Jesus Christ are saints. While the Roman Catholic Church looks for their saints to be the source of miracles before they are deemed saints, the Scriptures teach that a saint is not the source of miracles but the object of a miracle; the miracle of the New Birth.

The biblical term 'saint'- a term that appears some 101 times in Scripture in either its plural or singular forms- means 'holy one, set apart one, separated one, sanctified one'. The meaning of the term 'saint' highlights the character/nature that we the people of God are to exhibit in our lives; as saints we are to be a holy people. We are to be holy in our words, we are to be holy in our works, we are to be holy in our walk, we are to be holy in our ways. According to 1 Peter 1v15+16 God's people are to be a holy people; we are to live lives that are separate from sin and separated unto God for holy use. I trust we are!

Matthew Henry said, 'All Christians must be saints; and, if they come not under that character on earth, they will never be saints in glory'. What Mr. Henry was saying was if we are true believers in Jesus Christ, it will be manifested down here on earth that we are saints. And if it's not manifested down here on earth that we are saints, then we cannot expect to be saints in Heaven. Our sainthood begins on earth when we trust in Christ. We are saints now; we are not waiting to be made saints sometime in the future.

In preparing for tonight's message, I thought it would be helpful if I looked at all 101 references where the word 'saint/saints' appear in the Word of God; and that is what I did. Tonight, I want to give you a summary of my findings when it comes to a such a study. In no particular order, let's think about...

1. The saving of the saints

Not all who live in this world are saints. In fact, we are either a saint or a sinner. In salvation God has been pleased to separate a people unto Himself to make them saints. In Romans 1v7- when writing to the believers in Rome- Paul refers to all of the Christians in Rome as 'beloved of God, called to be saints'. I would submit to you this evening that the calling Paul writes about is the calling that we come to experience in the gospel; the effectual call of the Spirit of God unto Christ.

The Christian is one who has been sovereignly called, savingly called, unto Jesus Christ for salvation. We did not issue to ourselves the call unto salvation; God issued that call to us. He called and we came. We have been called **‘unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord’**. **Application**

Child of God, do you remember the moment when God called you in the gospel? What a moment that was; for it was then that we passed from death to life, from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy.

When God called us unto salvation, He called us to be saints; He called us unto holiness, He called us to a life that is markedly different from the worldling, He called us away from sin and unto righteousness and holiness. Holy God calls His people to holy living. The saint of God is to avoid all that is sinful; but that is only half the story. The saint is one who is to pursue after holiness and righteousness. There must always be this balance between the negative and the positive aspects of the Christian life; avoidance of sin, embracing of righteousness. **Illustration**

The story is told of a minister who tended to major on the negative ‘thou shalt not’ aspect of the Christian life without any reference to the positive. On one occasion the minister was asked to lunch by a member of his congregation. After lunch the farmer asked him if he would like to meet his donkey. Not wanting to offend his host, the minister agreed. Wondering why the farmer was so insistent on him meeting the said animal, the minister plucked up the courage to ask the farmer, to which the farmer replied, *‘Because my donkey is a Christian’*. The minister retorted, *‘No donkey can be a Christian’*. *‘Well according to your sermon this morning it can be’* came the farmer’s reply. *‘You see my donkey doesn’t swear, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco or work on a Sunday, so I reckon that according to your sermon it must be a donkey’*. The minister got the message.

Beloved, God’s call in salvation is not merely a call that is to see to the putting away of sin from our lives; it is also a call to holiness and righteousness. Don’t mishear me; there are things that we should not do as saints; but there are also things that we should do. God has saved us and called us to saints; His holy ones. May God help us to be the holy people He wants us and saved us to be.

In the second place, think with me about...

2. The security of the saints

The security of the saints is a theme that appeared a number of times when I familiarised myself with the various references to the saints of God in the Word of God. I want to read a number of those verses to you, because I believe they will help the one who struggles with the assurance of salvation. In...

- Deuteronomy 33v3 we read, **‘Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand; and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words’**. Note where the saints of God are said to be; they are in God’s hand. Now, do you think God is going to allow His saints to fall from His hand especially when we read this in John 10v28+29, **‘And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand’**? If you think that, then you would be better worshipping in a church that teaches that a Christian can be saved and lost. Listen, I’m in God’s hand- you’re in God’s hand- as a saint of God; He loses none whom He holds in His hand.
- 1 Samuel 2v8+9, **‘He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail’**. God is said to keep the feet of His saints; it’s a phrase that again points to our security in Christ. God keeps the feet of the saints in His ways, where He has guided them; He keeps them in the paths of faith, truth, righteousness, holiness and in the way everlasting: He keeps them from falling; for though they are liable to fall into sin yet they will not fall totally and finally.
- Psalm 37v28, **‘For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off’**. David wrote these words; the man who committed great sin in the eyes of God, and yet the Holy Spirit inspired him to pen the words that the LORD **‘forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever’**. Can you imagine what those words would have meant to David? I can. I can picture tears of gratitude rolling down David’s cheeks as he thought on his ways and how God had not forsaken him after he had sinned so grievously with Bathsheba.
- In Psalm 97v10 we read again of the security of the saints, **‘Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked’**.

- Proverbs 2v8 speaks of how God preserveth the way of His saints, 'He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints'.

Our security as saints comes from our union with Jesus Christ. In our reading this evening, we read about saints who are 'in Christ Jesus' in v21; 'Salute every saint in Christ Jesus'. This is our position as saints- we are 'in Christ Jesus'- and from that position we will- and we can- never fall. **Application** Child of God, your union with Christ guarantees your eternal security. God has pledged to keep His saints; a promise that He is making good on each and every day and will continue to do so until the last day when the saints are gathered unto Himself.

Consider, thirdly...

3. The singing of the saints

Singing rather than sighing is to be the mark of the saints of God. As God's saints have we not grounds to shout and sing in light of all the Lord has done for us? I believe we do. We are encouraged to sing in...

- Psalm 30v4, 'Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness'.
- Psalm 149v5, 'Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds'. **Bible Illustration** When Paul and Silas found themselves in Philippi's prison- having been beaten and put into chains- they still sang praises unto God at midnight. **Application**

And here we are- free people- and all we seem to do is moan, gripe, complain and grumble. To be honest its wearisome. Child of God, put a song into your mouth rather than some complaint sing unto the LORD. Sing of His greatness, His grace, His goodness. Sing of His majesty, His mercy, His might. Sing of His power, His pardon, His perfections. As those who have been chosen, blood-bought, called and set apart for God we should offer the daily sacrifice of praise to Him for all He has done, is doing and is yet to do for us.

I need to run through these next five points very quickly. Think with me about...

4. The sentiments of the saints

Various sentiments/feelings are highlighted in the Scriptures that the saints of God ought to possess. The saints of God are to...

A. Love

- They are to love the Lord first and foremost; Psalm 31v23, 'O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer'.
- And then they are to love the saints; Colossians 1v4, 'Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints'.

B. Fear

The saints are to be marked by a reverential fear for God; Psalm 34v9, 'O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him'.

C. Joy

God's people are to be a joyful people. At times life's trials and troubles can take that joy from us, but when we come to remember that our joy is not found in our circumstances but in Christ Jesus then we can be a joyful people. **Bible Illustration**

What was it that the Queen of Sheba remarked upon when she observed the courtiers in Solomon's palace? It was their happiness; 1 Kings 10v8, 'Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom'. **Application**

Should we- who served a greater King- not be a happy people? Psalm 132v9, 'Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy'. Psalm 132v16, 'I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy'.

Fifthly, we read in the Word of God about...

5. The strife with the saints

The devil has no love for the saints of God; in fact, he is on a war footing with them. In both Daniel and the Revelation we read about Satan's striving with the saints...

- Daniel 7v21, 'I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them'.
- Revelation 13v7, 'And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations'. **Application**

Beloved, Satan's declaration of war against the saints calls believers to vigilance, faithfulness and arms- in the face of adversity- assured as we contend with him of Christ's ultimate victory over the devil and all that is evil.

Think with me about...

6. The sympathetic ministry God exercises toward His saints

God sympathetically identifies with the needs of His saints. He comes at times and speaks peace into our hearts when fears are that their height. In Psalm 85v8 the Psalmist wrote, 'I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly'. God speaks peace to His saints. He spoke peace when we first trusted in Him; and He continues to speak peace into our souls as we travel through this turbulent world. One word from the Lord quietens all that troubles our hearts. No deed is needed, only a word from the God of peace.

On a number of occasions, the Word of God speaks about...

7. The supplication for the saints and of the saints

The saints of God are a supplicating/praying people.

- Ephesians 6v18, 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints'.
- Revelation 5v8, 'And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints'.
- Revelation 8v4, 'And the smoke of the incense, *which came* with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand'.

The final thing to note concerning the saints is...

8. The Sovereign of the saints

Writing in Revelation 15v3, John testified- concerning those who had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark- that, 'And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints'. The title 'King of saints' is ascribed to God by those who will triumph over the beast. **Application**

To this King we gladly bow the knee and submit to His good governance.

While Rome confers sainthood on a select few from her ranks, God has made all His children saints. Happy is the thought, that soon we the saints below will join the saints above. But until that day comes, let us live up to our name as His saints; let us be God's holy ones.

Let's pray.