

11-03-19

All Saints Day

Rev. 7:9-17

“What Stewardship Means To Me”

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Back in 2001, when the members of this church bought this 12-acre site on Rogers Road, what did their eyes see here? A hill. Lots of trees. Rocks. Dirt. But what did they see when they looked at this hill with their eyes of faith? Could they envision anything like what we have here today? Did they see a big, beautiful church, a preschool, a children’s center, youth center, classrooms, nursery care rooms, and a busy, active, growing congregation?

The community, driving by, saw only a hill full of pine trees. But, with eyes of faith, Pastor Wagner and the church members back then could see some vision of what Hope is today. Am I right, those of you who were Hope members back then?

Today is a good day to talk about eyes of faith. Today, All Saints Day, the Bible challenges us to look with eyes of faith at what we will become, at who you really are, at where our faith in Jesus ultimately leads us.

You know, it’s so easy, it’s so natural, for us to never use our eyes of faith, to see only that which is physically right in front of us. So our focus, our attention, is almost always riveted on the things of this world, the everyday stuff of our lives. Our jobs, our families, our health, our houses, our finances, our busy schedules, our problems, our pleasures – these things demand our full attention. And these things of the world can easily consume our vision.

Today, the Bible says, we look with eyes of faith beyond the things of the world. Our God has other things he wants us to see, to notice. But not with these physical eyes. With eyes of faith.

In the book of Revelation, St. John records a series of visions that God gave him. Visions of heaven. Visions of the promised land where God's people are going. God wanted these heavenly scenes to give comfort and encouragement to Christians, back in John's day, who were suffering under persecutions. "Don't give up," God was saying, "Better days are coming. Don't lose hope," the Lord was urging, "I'm the one who's in complete control, in the end."

See, God wants Christians like us to use our physical eyes to read John's visions of heaven in the Bible, but to see with our eyes of faith at what we will become, who we really are, where our faith in Jesus ultimately leads us.

We read earlier one of these vision scenes. In Revelation 7, John records what he sees in the heavenly realms. A huge crowd, too large to count, people from every nation, from every era of time, standing before the throne of God. They're dressed in white robes, praising God with joyful songs.

And John invites us to envision this scene, to close our eyes to what's here in front of us, to see with eyes of faith what is really taking place in heaven. This massive throng of saints, people just like us who've gone through the tribulations of this world, but who've been forgiven and saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. Can you envision this heavenly multitude, with your eyes of faith today?

Can you picture loved ones in that scene? Family members, friends, relatives? The special people God put into our lives who now are gone from us? Today, All Saints Day, we see them, with our eyes of faith, as God sees them. We still miss them here. We still grieve and ache while we're here. But can you see them there, in this beautiful heavenly picture John gives us?

*"They are before the throne of God ... they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the*

*throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Can you see them there? It’s a beautiful sight!*

Now look, on this All Saints Day, with eyes of faith, at yourself, at your own life. We look in the mirror every day, and it’s not always such a beautiful sight, is it? We may fix our hair right; but we can’t get our souls right, can we? We can’t pretend we’re holy, or even close. We see all our failings. We’re keenly aware of our shortcomings, and we all fall short of the glory of God.

But today the Bible challenges us to look again with eyes of faith, even at ourselves. 1 John 3 says, *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are ... Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”*

Can you see yourself in that way? Pure, holy, saintly? We can easily see the sinners that we still are; but, today, with eyes of faith, we see ourselves as God proclaims us to be. Forgiven by Christ. Purified by Christ. Children of God because of Christ. Sinners and saints, simultaneously, because of God’s grace for us in Christ.

Yes, All Saints Day is a good day to look with eyes of faith, even at ourselves.

In truth, every day is a good day to use our eyes of faith. As Christians, we are called to put our faith to work in every aspect of our lives. Disciples of Jesus aren’t supposed to follow Jesus one hour a week, but 24/7. God wants our faith in Jesus to influence our everyday decisions, our agendas, our choices, our attitudes, and certainly the way we make use of the time, talents, and treasure he gives us.

So take a little extra time this week, and use your eyes of faith to look closely at how you're setting your priorities and managing your life. Zoom in, over the next several days, using eyes of faith, on the things you value and cherish most. Are they only things of this world, or also things of God?

Today, with those last two paragraphs, I've tip-toed into a new sermon series, called "What Stewardship Means To Me." It's All Saints Day, though, so I've kept most of the sermon focus there. But I think talking about using our eyes of faith can get us off to a really good start when it comes to stewardship. Over the next few weeks, Pastor Lew, Pastor Lineberger, and Pastor Wagner will share in a personal way how they see the Christian stewardship challenge playing out in their lives, and in ours. I think you'll love these next three sermons.

Let's close this sermon time by closing our physical eyes, and praying together.