

Sermon for All Saints Sunday

Text: Revelation 5:1-10

Preached on 11-04-2007

Introduction:

At funerals I often hear people say that death is natural. There is nothing to fear. There is nothing to hide from. There is nothing to worry about. When you're dead, you're dead. All suffering is at an end! What a lie! Death is not normal. There is nothing natural about it. It's awful. To see a loved one waste away from cancer or some other disease without being able to do a thing about it is horrible. To see the body of a child laying on a gurney in an emergency room, dead from a car accident is ugly. The only people who can call something like that natural and good are people who are living in complete denial of the ugly reality known as death. The Bible says that, "**The wages (or consequences) of sin is death**" (Romans 6:23). If all people eventually die and the consequence of sin is death, then that must mean that all people are horrible, wretched sinners. Otherwise nobody would die. But people do die! It is an ugly, unnatural thing that God never intended for His creation.

As ugly and unnatural as death is, John paints a beautiful picture of countless *dead people* now standing together and singing a *new song*. This vision makes it obvious that these believers, these Saints of Heaven, find great joy in singing about what Jesus had accomplished for them and where they now are as a result. As we commemorate our loved ones who have died in the Lord, we too find great joy not only in what Jesus accomplished for them, but also for what He HAS accomplished for you and me. That is why we also can sing...

Theme: The New Song of the Heavenly Saints!

Part I: Sung to the Lamb who was slain in the past

Part II: Sung to the King who controls the future

Part I: Sung to the Lamb who was slain in the past

When John speaks of this *new song* which was sung by the Saints in Heaven, we are reminded that, hundreds of years before the time of John, the Old Testament psalmist had also spoken of a *new song* when he wrote, "**Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him. The LORD has made His salvation known and revealed His righteousness to the nations**" (Psalm 98:1-2). In his vision, the Apostle John heard the Saints in Heaven singing this *new song* of salvation. In this song they too spoke about the salvation and

righteousness that Jesus brought to all people.

These words are a clear confession that they were once lost to God. Because of their sins, they had not deserved to be in Heaven. They deserved, instead, to be lost forever in Hell! The more we are convinced of this, the more we will be able to recognize just how sinful we are. Then, and only then, having been crushed by the full weight, severity, and seriousness of the Law, will we be able to fully appreciate the song of the Saints: **“Because You (Jesus) were slain, You purchased men for God with Your blood” (v. 9)**. Whereas these heavenly Saints deserved to die eternally, they are now singing eternal hymns of praise to the Lamb of God, who took all their sins away and made their salvation possible. He did so by being slain in the past.

Application:

This *new song* of praise and thanksgiving ought to be a source of heavenly comfort and joy for us every day of our lives. Especially considering how our lives get filled with problems, frustrations, anger, bitterness, and creed – just to name a few things. No matter how big or petty our problems are, however, they are all insignificant when compared to the biggest problem facing us all: SIN. What makes sin ugly is the fact that it results in death. My job as your Pastor, therefore, is not to pat everyone on the back and tell them how wonderful they are. All that will result in is giving you a false sense of security, thinking that you are good enough to get to Heaven. But you are not good enough! None of us are! There is nothing wonderful about us! We are petty, nit-picky sinners who deserve to die and go to Hell! That is our greatest problem and there is nothing beautiful about it!

God could have left us Hell-deep in sin. BUT He didn't! He sent us Jesus, **“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)**! Because the Lamb of God was slain for us, we are now considered to be Saints in God's sight. As we were powerfully reminded of at last Wednesday's Reformation Festival, it is not our work-righteous acts (or good deeds) that make us Saints in God's sight. It is the holy, precious blood of God's own Son spilt from the cross. That blood has washed our sins away, making us Saints in every sense of the word. As holy Saints, our sins ARE forgiven and Heaven IS ours! That gives us the joy, peace, and confidence of knowing that one day we will be reunited with our loved ones who have died in the Lord. Once in Heaven, we will raise our voices with them to join in singing a song that will never get old.

Transition:

But we don't have to wait until we are in Heaven to join in singing *The New Song of the Heavenly Saints!* In addition to singing to the Lamb who was slain in the past, we can also join in singing...

Part II: Sung to the King who controls the future

Earlier in this chapter John had spoken of a scroll with seven seals (**Revelation 5:1**). This scroll is one of the prominent features in the book of Revelation. It is not easy to understand at first. Close attention to the context, however, helps us see that this scroll holds information about the future. It contains the record of what is going to happen to our world in times to come. Whereas human history books tell us what has already happened in the past, this scroll might be called a *future history book*. This becomes clear in the next chapter, when the seals of the scroll are opened one by one and John sees some of the events that the future holds in store.

When John first mentioned this scroll, he said that no man in Heaven or on earth or under the earth was found who was worthy enough to open its seven seals. Just as we have no right to open a sealed letter that is addressed to someone else, so no angel, no human being, and no demon has the right to open this scroll of the future. Only Jesus has the right to do so. That is why the Saints of Heaven sang to Him, **“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals” (v. 9)**. What does this all mean? Simple! There is no more emphatic way of saying that Jesus is in complete control of the future and all that it holds.

Application:

As we face the uncertainties of our future, God's power seems ineffective at times. The world will always be filled with crime, violence, corruption, greed, and just plain unsatisfied people in spite of our best efforts and most fervent prayers. We will continue to get in trouble, be disappointment, and face one frustration after another. With all these things mounted up against us, we can't help but get down at times. But God's power and authority is not seen in these constantly shifting and changing circumstances. God's power and authority is seen in the resurrection! When Jesus rose victorious over death and the grave, we gained a guaranteed stamp of approval that God the Father accepted Jesus' payment for sin in full. Nothing more needs to be done! Nothing more could be done! Jesus has done it ALL!

Now Jesus is once again at the right hand of God. While we may not understand why everything happens as it does, we know that Jesus has everything under His control. So whatever problem the future brings, we can be sure that Christ has the power to make it work for our eternal good. In every frustration, dead end, or personal defeat, we can find our greatest comfort in Christ's complete control over future events. So let Christ unlock those seven seals of future history. The world will be different as each seal is broken open, but the name of Christ is written in bold letters on them all. His ruling power will dictate what happens. So no matter how unpleasant or painful our present circumstances may be, we can trust that Jesus is a King who holds our future in the palm of His hands.

Conclusion:

What the Saints are doing in heaven, we do every Sunday here in worship. With Jesus' death on the cross came our ransom from the very depths of Hell. That is why in every one of our worship services we confess our sins and speak of the forgiveness earned for us by the holy, precious blood of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation makes it clear that even in Heaven God's people, the holy Saints, will never grow tired of speaking of this and rejoicing in it.

Just as the Saints in Heaven sing of their salvation in Christ day and night, so also their joy and excitement can be ours every day of our lives. As we turn to God's holy, inspired Word again and again, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit and compelled to sing a *new song*. Whether we're singing about our salvation (1) accomplished in the past or our about our salvation (2) yet to come in the future, we too can sing *The New Song of the Heavenly Saints!* Amen!