

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN END TIME – SAINTS TRIUMPHANT

Origin of Our Core Values

A series of meditations on God's Word for Saints Triumphant and Veterans Day

Integrity First

"An Airman is a person of integrity, courage, and conviction. They must be willing to control their impulses and exercise courage, honesty, and accountability in order to do what is right even when no one is looking."

Integrity is a firm, complete, undivided adherence to a moral code. It's demanded as a core value of the US Air Force, but it's also demanded by God. How's your integrity before him? How well do you adhere to God's moral code? Is it undivided adherence, that nothing gets in the way between you and your duty to God? Is it mostly loyal most of the time, that more often than not you are adhering to God's moral law? Is it an integrity of try, that you honestly try to live complete adherence to God's morality even though you recognize that you fail a whole lot of times – both when people are looking and when they aren't? Is your integrity one of comparison, that yours is better than most of the people in the world, or, at least, what you can see of some of the people?

You can at least say that your integrity is greater than that of the historical people of Sodom and Gomorrah, right? These cities and these people who were flourishing around about 2000 B.C. have long become synonymous with the words sin and judgment. The Bible tells us that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were arrogant, overfed, unconcerned about others, didn't help the poor, did detestable things, sexually immoral things, perverted things. You and I have more integrity than that, right?

That's what the Israelites in Isaiah's day, around about 700 B.C., thought. What a shocker, then, when God calls them "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah." What were they doing that showed their complete lack of integrity? They were just going through the motions of worship, doing it because they had always done it, doing it kind of arrogantly, thinking that God should be happy with what they offer and make their lives more blessed on account of their lip service.

But while they did their mindless, formalistic worship, they also oppressed people, took advantage of orphans and widows. They turned the other way when they saw people going hungry. They manipulated the courts, bribed them, to serve themselves and pervert justice for others. They did detestable things, sexually immoral things, perverted things. If you want a snapshot of how bad it got, read Judges 19. God was right in his judgment. The Israelites had no integrity, like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

God sees our hearts too. He knows that they are divided, that sometimes we just go through the motions of worship, distracted by so many other things. Sometimes we take advantage of people to benefit ourselves while not being fair to them. Maybe hidden in your closet of sin is detestable sexually immoral sin. Even if we step back and say that we haven't committed Israel's or Sodom and Gomorrah's sins, we still have not lived always at all times with integrity first, especially before God.

But God is settling the matter for the Israelites and for us. He is coming to wash us so that we are clean from all of our sins. Jesus, the Son of God, God himself from eternity, took on human flesh and blood and lived integrity first, having an undivided heart for God, a complete commitment to fulfilling his mission for God, a strict and total obedience to every single one of the 10 Commandments all the time for his whole life. Jesus lived integrity first to then put his integrity in us. This gives us integrity first before God, integrity still today as we rely on God washing away all our blemishes and making us clean.

This makes us want to do right. This makes us want to abandon our sin, control temptations, flee from evil, combat evil, to live in accordance with God's Word even when no one is looking. We live with the core value of integrity first because God has lived it for us and put it in us, as prophesied by Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:10-18 (NIV)

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not

listening. Your hands are full of blood! ¹⁶ Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. ¹⁷ Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. ¹⁸ "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 478 on page 8, "With the Lord Begin Your Task."

Service Before Self

"An Airman's professional duties take precedence over personal desires. Every Airman is expected to have the discipline to follow rules, exhibit self-control, and possess respect for the beliefs, authority, and worth of others."

If there was any doubt that our failures in integrity were done away with, God gave us the specific words in our second Bible reading for today: Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (verses 13-14)

For the Old Testament Israelites, this is why God was so upset when they just mindlessly went through the motions of worship. God had given him their form of worship with all the sacrifices and offerings in order to point ahead to how he himself would sacrifice his life into death, shed his blood, so that his people, all people, would be cleansed.

But were these people in the book of Revelation cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, of Jesus Christ, because they persevered through all their trials, because of their discipline to follow rules, because they exhibited self-control, respected the beliefs, authority, and worth of others? No. It was Christ who served us first to change us, cleanse us, to give us his integrity.

Christ served others, including us, before himself. He did his duty over his personal desire. When in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed that God the Father would take his cup of suffering away from him, that he wouldn't have to endure the cross. But he also prayed that the Father's will be done. The Son with his integrity faithfully chose to go through the cross to serve us, to pay for our sins, to shed his blood to wash us clean and rescue us from this great tribulation.

Christ's service before self doesn't stop at the cross. Here, in this vision of heaven, we see God continues to serve others ahead of himself day and night throughout eternity. He gives us food to eat so that we never go hungry. He gives us the living water of himself to drink so that we will never be thirsty. He provides us shade to give us comfort that the sun will never beat us down and make us weary. He personally wipes every tear from our eyes and obliterates death so that we never experience it again.

Since Christ served us before himself, we are changed. We are washed clean with his blood. We are given his integrity. We then follow our duty as soldiers of the cross, that we follow God's rules, that we exhibit self-control over our sins, that we respect others because we know the price of the service that God paid for them. We serve others before ourselves because Christ did that for us.

Revelation 7:9-17 (NIV)

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" ¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, 'they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 523 on page 10, "God of Grace and God of Glory."

Excellence in All We Do

"An Airman strives for continual improvement in self and service in order to propel the Air Force further and to achieve greater accomplishment and performance for themselves and their community."

You and I, we have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. Though our sins, our lack of integrity, our service of self before others, were like scarlet, we are now pure and perfect, white as freshly fallen snow. God has put his integrity, his full life of undivided, total dedication to God's moral code, on us. In Christ, we rightly believe and say that we are perfect now. There is nothing we can add to what God has done for us.

With these great riches of the forgiveness of sins, of being credited with Christ's integrity, God rightfully expects us to make good use of them until the day he returns on the Last Day, Judgment Day, and takes us to be with him forever, serving us day and night. That's the point of Jesus' parable that we are about to read.

Here on earth, we are all given different amounts of wealth, different talents in differing degrees, differing amounts of time. In Romans chapter 12, we hear that some have a gift from God in preaching, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. If you can't find something in that list of gifts that you can do to some degree, you need to look at that list again. Since he has already made us perfect in his sight, God expects you and me to strive for and live in excellence in all we do.

Take a look at your gifts. What can you do excellently in preaching, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy? Where can you strive to use your gifts in excellence: at home? At work? At church? Out in the community?

God gave us gifts to be used. Let's not bury them in the ground and devalue them. Don't treat your gifts like I did with stickers as a kid. Knowing that stickers were a one and done use thing, I would hold on to them until I found something that I would have for a long time so that I could enjoy the sticker for a long time. But, I often never found that lasting thing, and so the stickers went unused. Let's use God's gifts in excellence.

And if you need some specific direction on your gifts and where they can be used specifically within church, talk to Faith York. This month she started a brand-new position: Member Ministry Coordinator. She is going to be reaching out to you to find out what you think your talents and your time availability are and then help guide you to use them.

God has served us in all excellence, achieving the greatest accomplishment of paying for the sins of the whole world and living a perfect life for us all. Being made complete by his excellent service, we strive to faithfully use his gifts in all excellence, just as he taught us in this parable.

Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV)

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' ²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 537 on pages 12-13, "Onward, Christian Soldiers."