

“Called as saints.”

John 15:1-14

15 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

*12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.
13 "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14
"You are My friends if you do what I command you.*

Good morning. Welcome to Lighthouse Bible Church.

So here's what happened to me this weekend.

All week I have been preparing to teach on John 15:1-17. I prepared a recap of last Sunday. Then I wrote the rest of the message.

Then starting Saturday morning, something happened. It's happened before. I had the urge to keep studying, even though I thought I was done with the message.

But little by little it became clear that the Lord wanted me to go in a different direction from what I had originally prepared.

So I have!

Here's what happened. I kept going over my notes and again and again I wrote "and here's our version of this". Meaning the body of Christ.

/So the Lord nudged me, indicating it was time to take a break from verse by verse to make sure that we don't lose sight of who we are in Christ.\

We begin today in John 15 verse 8

8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Let me ask you a question:

/Which would you say is greater: being a disciple or being a member of the church, the body of Christ?\

I'll give you a moment to think about it.

Answer: A member of the body of Christ. And it's not even a close call.

/The saints have a far higher standing than any disciple. \

/Disciples followed Jesus on earth.

Saints are in permanent union in the Resurrected Christ in heaven.\

Here are the facts:

/The word "disciple" doesn't appear in the Bible after the book of Acts.\

The last time that the word "disciple" or the word "disciples" is used in the Bible is in Acts 21:26. After that, it disappears. It's never used again.

If you don't think so, I encourage you to check it out for yourself. Grab a concordance and do a search in the New Testament for the words "disciple" or "disciples".

/Paul never uses the word in his epistles. Not once.\

/Members of the church, the body of Christ, are never referred to as disciples.\

Look at the very first chapter of the Bible after the end of Acts.

Rom 1:7

7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

/Paul refers to the believers in Rome as saints (not disciples).\

It's Paul's favorite form of address when he begins his letters to the Gentile churches.

/See for example: 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; and Colossians 1:2. \

/We are not disciples. We are saints!\ And that is a far far better thing.

And yet: here's a sad thing. You will seldom if ever hear or read about these facts in Christian circles – or even behind pulpits.

Even though it is right in front of us in black and white.

This shows you the power of the herd mentality even among (or perhaps especially among) Christians. Correction: saints!

So let's get cracking.

Here's the gist of what I am trying to get across with today's teaching:

/The facts about us as saints are far greater than the possibilities which existed for the disciples as they listened to Jesus that night.\ More glorious. Fuller. Richer.

/I am going to teach you about a New Testament word. The word is “mystery”.\

Now in the Bible words have meanings that can be quite different from the same words in secular usage.

So when I say mystery I don’t mean anything like , say, a Sherlock Holmes novel.

/”Mystery” has a very specific and clearly defined meaning in the New Testament.\

Col 1:25-27

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Some people like to come up with their own definitions and I do that sometimes myself but there is no need to do that here.

It's crystal clear what the word "mystery" means according to Colossians 1:26:

the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

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/In the New Testament epistles, a mystery is truth in God's word that was hidden from past ages and generations (from Adam, the nation of Israel, during the public ministry of Jesus) but is now manifested to the saints.\

Now, here in Colossians 1 we also have a specific revelation :

Colossians 1:27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

/God made known this rich glorious mystery to the Gentiles - Christ is in them!\

Now we turn to the book of Ephesians chapter 3:

Eph 3:1-10

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

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Now this is simply marvelous. Marvelous!

/Hidden from disciples in the past – revealed to the saints in the church!\

Notice to whom this mystery was revealed: the least of all saints – the apostle Paul!

This is the marvelous grace of God at work.

/What is the content of the mystery now revealed here in Ephesians 3?\

Eph 3:6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

/Jews and Gentiles together on an even footing - fellow heirs and fellow members of the body of Christ!\

Unprecedented! New things have come! Fantastic things. Mind-boggling things. Things never dreamed of or imagined before Paul begin his ministry to the Gentiles.

/The facts about who we are as saints now are far greater than the possibilities which existed for believers before Christ ascended into heaven.\

As we close, I want to show you one using a passage in John 15 as our takeoff point.

By the way, this is a VERY rich and rewarding subject but it does require you to accept the fact that /the church is a unique creation with unique promises, facts, blessings, and privileges.\

Importantly, the church is not Israel. It has not replaced Israel. The church is heavenly (whereas Israel is earthly).

John 15:14-15

14 "You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

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Now this is a wonderful thing. A really wonderful thing. Jesus calls the disciples His friends. And they can consider themselves His friends if they do what He commands them. Which is a distinct possibility as we've seen!

/Yet, yet, as great as it was to be called a friend by Jesus, we saints are far far more intimate with Christ.\

/We are MEMBERS OF HIS BODY. Do you see that?\ [Ephesians 5:28-32]

/And this is a fact. God did it for us and it's permanent and requires nothing of us.\

As is the case for many other things that He has made us to be.

I've just given you a taste of this tremendous subject. There are many many things about us - members of the body of Christ, saints by calling- which are far more wonderful than anything the disciples had before the church age began.

I'll leave you with a little homework assignment if you want to know a little more.

/Read Romans 7:4-6, Romans 8:1-4, Galatians 5:22-23.\

Or simply take home a copy of “What it means to be a Christian” over here in the bookcase to my right. You can find it also on the home page of our web site.

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