

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong. Alleluia, Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blessed. Alleluia, Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on His way. Alleluia, Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
And singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: Alleluia, Alleluia!

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All Saints Day and The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King Celebrations: An Un-Protestant Season?

ALL SAINTS Day and The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King are not generally held or recognized in your typical evangelical Protestant congregation. The Protestant tradition is known for the remarkable distinctives within so many denominations of the faith, and, as a norm, we do not tend to emphasize our common roots or identity in Christ. We are diverse in our views and customs, identifying ourselves from Baptists to Pentecostals, from independent congregationalists to tightly woven synods led by bishops and committees, in the main we are a Bible-centered kind of people. As a general rule, we as Protestants don't put a keen focus on remembering or referring to the saints of old, or groups that worship and preach that are dramatically different from us (or, at best, we focus on those key leaders who spawned our own tradition or denomination). We are



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known for our reaction to perceived error, and our determination not to follow any person, group, or doctrine that cannot be defended from Scripture.

The lectionary text for this year's *All Saints Day* celebration is Psalm 149, which I have given the theme *Honor for All His Godly Ones*. Nothing is more important than affirming our place in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. This year's passage affirms our legacy and destiny as God's assembly to praise the Lord, to exalt him as our Lord. *All Saints Day* is a call, a cause, and a conclusion for the people of God – living, dead, and yet unborn – to show forth the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2.8-9).

A Time to Respond to His Call to Praise

Ps. 149.1-3 – Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! [2] Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! [3] Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

In a real sense, the purpose of urban mission, church planting, and justice in the city is to gather together a people who will praise our God through the Lord Jesus Christ. From the time of the Fall, the Father has been gathering together a remnant of humanity who will belong to him forever in a new heaven and earth, who will show forth his praise in their assembly. The singular acclamation of God's people is crystal clear in Scripture: *Hallelujah!* This phrase is used some 23 times in the Psalms as the shout of praise to the Lord from his people. A host of reasons for praising our God is offered in the Psalms. For instance, hallelujah is employed as an affirmation of the coming gathering of his people (Ps. 104.35 – Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!), and as a recitation of the unanticipated blessing of God on his own (Ps. 113.9 – He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!). It is a charge given as a final



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anthem and cry for all creation to extol the name of our God (Ps. 150.6 – Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!). In the NT, hallelujah becomes the joyful shout of the redeemed in Christ, pronounced with gladness and rejoicing at the soon-coming marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19.6 – Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns). Hallelujah is the native tongue of those who have been rescued by Christ, who one day will dwell with him in the New Jerusalem.

Notice in this passage in Psalm 149 how the writer calls the people of God to give the Lord joyful praise, to offer it in the midst of the assembly of the godly. The redeemed throughout the ages are called to offer worship to God, to sing to him a new song (“Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!, v. 1), and to do so with gladness and rejoicing (“Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!, v. 2). The people of God, delivered from the power of Satan, hell, and death, rescued from the effects of the curse, and heirs of the promise of God’s salvation to Abraham are to rejoice in God with dancing, with tambourine and lyre (“Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!,” v. 3).

One day the people of God will be gathered together in one place, all of us, from every era and epoch, from every place and country, from every kindred, tribe, people, and nation. There together we will never leave the side of our Master, but will be that set apart remnant of humanity who will belong to Christ forever. What will be our duty, our job, our task, our blessing? We will worship and praise our God! *All Saints Day* provides believers a wonderful opportunity to remember the saints who have gone on before, as well as thanking God for his people worldwide. Together, living and dead, we share the hope of being a single flock and family one day in an



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unbroken circle of love and light, worshiping and serving our God as his own forever more. *All Saints Day* is a time to respond to the call to praise.

A Season to Rehearse the Cause of Our Praise

Ps. 149.4-6 - For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. [5] Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds. [6] Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!

Furthermore, in verses 4 through 6 the psalmist gives the redeemed the cause of their praise: “For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation,” v. 4. We ought to remember the saints, and affirm the coming reign of the Lord Jesus Christ because the multitude of the mercies of God leads us to do so with gladness. Scripture everywhere declares God’s delight in the welfare of his people (Ps. 35.27 – Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, “Great is the LORD, who delights in the welfare of his servant!”). We praise the Lord as his saints, his holy ones, made acceptable in the Beloved through his shed blood. We remember his goodness to all of us, from the beginning, and the numerous acts of his steadfast love and faithfulness that has been, is, and will always be so great towards us (Ps 117.2 – For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!). Redeemed by blood, we are born again to praise, remade for the sake of declaring God’s mercies, a people set apart to glory in the Lord and his marvelous works.

The people in the cities of America and the world must embrace the Gospel, the Good News of God’s love in Christ, an everlasting love which has become our stay and our hope (Ps. 147.11 – but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love). God has not abandoned the city; the Gospel is given for the poor’s deliverance, the



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captive's freedom, and the prisoner's release. God has not left us without hope and direction. Amazingly, the Scripture says that he is fond of his people; he rejoices over us with an intense, burning passion, similar to a young man wooing a young woman. Look at Isaiah 62.5:

For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

What a picture of love, wonder, and blessing! Our God is not aloof and uninterested in his people. Rather, he delights in us, longs to be with us, is guarding us in his providential care, and commanding his mercies for us in the midst of life's trials. In an incredible text, the prophet Zephaniah even suggests that this love and delight is so strong for us that he, the Lord God, even sings over us:

Zeph. 3.17 – The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Truly, as Psalm 149.4 details, the LORD takes pleasure in his people and adorns the humble with his own wonderful salvation. Redemption is not some legal, abstract, distant act done officially and over. It is the ongoing providential care and love of our God for his redeemed, all of them, from the least to the greatest, of every era and every place. The people of God belong to him, and he delights in them. Through the Lord's favor, our work is established (Ps. 90.17 – Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!), and through his mercies we are clothed as his priesthood with salvation and joy (Ps. 132.16 – Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.) Indeed, the promise of the Messiah, God's anointed One, bringing joy and life to his people has been fulfilled in the life



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and ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. the inauguration of Jesus' ministry at Nazareth in Luke 4.16-18, where he quotes the famous text of Isaiah 61):

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

In Christ, we are clothed with garments of salvation, robes of righteousness, and the jewels of his bride (Isa. 61.10). We are the very people of God, called by his Spirit, called to praise, the holy catholic Church in communion together, possessing the high praises of God in our mouths and the two-edged sword of God's Word in our hands (Ps. 149.5-6). This day of remembrance beckons us to recall God's saving work for his people throughout the ages, and to rehearse his wonderful deeds done in song and blessing with praise and affirmation. During this day of rejoicing and recollection we both confess the mighty person of the triune God, and acknowledge his works, the redemptive acts which culminate in his saving acts in Jesus Christ for the world. Truly, we gladly affirm as with the psalmist "For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods" (Ps. 96.4).

As the people of God we were born to praise and to wield the truth of the Word of God, that Word that both penetrates and works God's will in the human heart (Heb. 4.12 – For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the



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heart.). This Word is the same power that proceeds from the mouth of him seen in John's vision of our Lord: Rev. 1.16 – In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

This psalm details the reason for our praise. Our God, full of love and covenant faithfulness, has kept his prophetic promise and sent his Son into the world to redeem for himself a people of his own possession, who are his people in every place. Every little assembly of the Lord Jesus, from the huge mega-church to the little hard-to-identify storefront church, where Christ is truly worshiped and glorified is an instance of this great forever family of God, called out of the world, called into the Kingdom to worship, and praise, and honor the Lord (1 Pet. 2.8-9). During this season of the Church Year, the celebration of *All Saints* and the *Reign of Christ the King*, we affirm the truth of God's covenant love with his people, and his promise to gather them together to praise and delight in the Lord. This is our hope and our future, our destiny and our blessing.

An Occasion to Relish the Conclusion of Our Praise

Ps. 149.7-9 – to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, [8] to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, [9] to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones. Praise the LORD!

Finally, this season of the Church Year is our opportunity as urban disciples of the Lord to affirm the end of all things, under the reign of Christ, our Lord and King. The world, with its crippling waste, vicious cruelty, and wanton immorality, will not hold in its current form forever. In the judgment to come, God will finally exact vengeance on the enemies of his people. However it may seem, our Lord will return and fulfill the promise of God to judge this world and to establish a Kingdom which will never end, where his enemies will receive his ready answer and reply to their disobedience: Deut.



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32.43 – “Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people’s land.”

One of my favorite scenes in John’s amazing Apocalypse speaks of One who comes from the realms of glory with the his holy ones to finally see that justice is done in the earth:

Rev. 19.11-16 – Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. [12] His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. [13] He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. [14] And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. [15] From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. [16] On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

What a terrifying and yet glorious vision of him who is Faithful and True coming to finish and consummate God’s work accompanied by his army of holy ones from on high! This vision makes plain that regardless of the present state of disarray and oppression in the cruel cities of this world, the promise of God is sure that one day (hopefully soon) our Lord will return, and will establish finally the perfect rule of God in this world. The Word is unequivocal that the legacy of his holy ones is to both rule and reign forever with their Lord. As Psalm 148.14 suggests, a horn (a symbol of authority and blessing) will be raised up for the people of God:



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He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise the LORD!

How can it be, but the Apostle Paul affirms that the saints of God will be co-regents with Christ in the new order; they will actually judge the world, and even angels!:

1 Cor. 6.2-3 – Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? [3] Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

As those united to Christ by faith, who have identified with him in his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, we will also be given the honor to actually reign with our living Lord in the Kingdom to come. Interestingly, to the overcomer in even Laodicea, that proud and worldly assembly rebuked by our Lord in Revelation – even to him or her will be given the right to sit with our Lord on his throne, and to rule:

Rev. 3.21 – The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

What better evidence can be given to us of the importance of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting in the city? Who can possibly fathom the glory and honor to be bestowed on the lowly saints who believe and serve Christ in the inner cities of America and the world? In light of our place and position in the plan of God, how can we fail but to redouble our efforts and seek to share the Good News of Christ with all our neighbors in the city? In every community, on every block, in every household, the very ones for whom Christ died dwell.



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Never forget the reason for your labor, and the conclusion of our work. God is gathering a people who will reign with his Son forever in a new heavens and new earth. Do you know it? Can you sense it? Will you join us in gathering the final sheaves of the harvest into his barn?

Conclusion: Protestant Feasts, Too?

As I said before, neither *All Saints Day* nor *The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King* are generally celebrated in our Protestant churches. Yet, at the core of our Christian faith, there is the hope that one day all the saints will be gathered together unto Christ, and that he will reign as Lord forever in a regenerated heavens and earth. Our ministry in the city is not in vain; soon and very soon our Lord will return in power, and bring his people to his side, and they will never leave his presence again. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb awaits all who believe in him, including the saints of the inner cities of the world.

By faith in the risen Lord reserve your seat, and make invitation to everyone you know everywhere you can. Let's gather in the final numbers of the redeemed from the darkest corners in the most hurting cities of the world. His Word is faithful, God will accomplish his work, gathering his own to himself till the end.

Affirm this season the old Black Gospel chorus which contains the biblically sound, heart-moving truth of all the saints of all the ages: "*Soon and very soon, we're going to see the King.*" Since the beginning of the Church, all believers have served in the light of this living hope of gathering together as one (*All Saints Day*) and seeing the risen King, the Lord Jesus Christ, reigning from his throne (*The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King*). This is my hope, too.

Maybe *All Saints Day* and *The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King* are truly Protestant celebrations, after all. ■



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**The Season after Pentecost (Kingdomtide):
Remembering the Saints, Exalting the King**

As city disciples constrained by our hope in Jesus Christ, we celebrate *All Saints Day* as a time to remember those heroes of the faith who have come before us (especially those who died for the gospel). The living Christ is now seen in the world through the words and deeds of his people (John 14.12; Heb. 11; Rev. 17.6). Also, we affirm in our celebration of *The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King* our confidence that Christ will return and finish the work he began on the Cross, to judge the world and save his own. As those called to display the glory of God to our neighbors in the city, we unashamedly testify of the certainty of our hope, the day when the risen Lord Jesus will return to earth to establish his Kingdom, to put down war and sin, and set all things right, under his reign. *Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!*

Rev. 11.15 – Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Rev. 19.6 – Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.”

Titus 2.11-14 – For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.



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Biblical Principle of the Season

During this Season after Pentecost, beginning with the *All Saints Day* celebration, we acknowledge the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of the ages, all the redeemed who have been bought for God through the blood of Christ, and the hope of their gathering together before the Lord at the Second Coming of Christ. As both Lord and Christ, he will return visibly in power and glory to establish God's Kingdom of light and life in this world. According to God's holy promise, the saints of Christ will dine at the marriage supper of the Lamb, a feast of love and communion with the risen Lord and Savior himself. *The Feast of the Reign of Christ the King*, the last Sunday before Advent, anticipates the day when Christ will reign supreme, and the saints of God will never again leave the presence of their Lord.

Rev. 5.9-13 – And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” [11] Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” [13] And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

An Example of This Season's Teaching: Paul's Prayer for the Whole Church

Eph. 3.14-21 – For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened



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with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



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