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Hebrews 6:9–12, ESV

we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Colossians 1:9–13, ESV

we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.

Daniel 7:27, ESV

*²⁷ And the kingdom and the dominion
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*

Ephesians 2:18–22, ESV

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and

members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The life of a saint.

This faith family has recently lost two very precious members of our congregation.

Patty Churchill and Smokey Charbonneau. We know that they are with God. We

miss them. Their families miss them very dearly. That's what happens when

someone, after living a Christ-like life of love, empathy, and forgiveness, passes

away: they are doing just fine now, as they are in God's hands; it is those who are

left who feel the pain. Today, we celebrate All Saints day, where we remember

those who came before us in the faith and have since gone on to be with God.

But – the Bible refers to saints who are still alive. In fact, Christianity doesn't

differentiate between being alive and being dead the way our secular society

does. We don't see death as an end. We don't even see it as a true death. Patty

and Smokey are still very much alive, and all saints are alive. But, for the

moment, let's talk about saints who have passed away in the Earthly sense.

We have two pictures up here. I'd like us to all think about something:

Imagine that someday, your picture is up here. Hold that thought. Just picture

your picture on this platform. Keep that thought in your mind.

Before we talk about that, though, there is something I saw the other day that made me think – in a bit of a sad way – that some things never change. It was a YouTube video. I don't even know how I stumbled upon it. I was looking at videos about cars because I was researching an engineering issue, and somehow, I clicked on a video about young men in southern California. There were hundreds of them in an empty parking lot. They were forming a giant ring about three cars. They were classic muscle cars from the sixties. There was a Mustang, a Dodge Charger, and a car I couldn't identify. They were in perfect condition, the chrome shining, the paint gleaming. The wheels reflected light like they were mirrors. These were young men who might have been between sixteen and thirty. There were a handful of young women among them. It was a mixed group of kids, White, Black, Latino. Interestingly, no one seemed to be drinking. No one was acting drunk. But they were having a fantastic time. While the circular throng watched, the three cars did donuts at a high speed, their wheels sending up blinding clouds of thick tire smoke. I could smell it – because it reminded me of my own young adulthood. You see, I bought my first car when I was fifteen. It was a 1965 Pontiac GTO, gold with a black interior, a four-speed manual transmission, and a truly massive engine. I think I typically got about seven miles a gallon. My father managed a combined tire shop, repair shop, and gas station. I

used to take my cars there to work on. My dad's mechanics taught me to work on cars. I loved that GTO. I worked on it at my father's shop, in our driveway, in the parking lot of my high school. It was beautiful and I kept it in mint condition. The summer after my first year in college, I drove it with a friend of mine across much of the country, visiting national parks. I never did what I watched those three young drivers in the YouTube video do; I would never have risked damaging my car and I didn't have the money to spend on tires that I would ruin in one night. But I did go to almost identical gatherings, where we would check out each other's cars and some of the guys would burn rubber while doing donuts, while everyone else stood in a huge circle, watching. What struck me about the video was how a half century had gone by – and well, nothing had changed, literally. I've since learned that these gatherings are still very common in California, Texas, and elsewhere in the southwest. The only difference is that usually, the hopped-up cars are modern cars, not classics, like the ones I saw in the video.

In the video, everyone cheered and laughed while the three cars went in chaotic circles, sliding crazily all over the parking lot, barely missing each other, and barely missing the people standing in the circle. Well, barely, until one of the cars did indeed hit a spectator, a young guy who got thrown several feet in the air, and then with the help of a few of the other young people, got right back up

on his feet, grinning. Then two of the cars hit each other. No one had reacted in the slightest when the guy was hit by the car, but when two of the cars were suddenly damaged, the crowd reacted with a giant “Oh, no! It’s damaged! Is it totaled? Oh, how awful!” But the drivers didn’t even get out of their cars to check out the damage. They just kept doing donuts, sending up more layers of tread in black clouds, dragging broken bumpers behind them. The crowd forgot about the tragedy that had befallen these beautiful machines and went back to cheering. I’m going to get back to this tale. But let’s turn to our quotes. I’m not going to do what I usually do, and that is overview the Bible books I’ve taken quotes from. But I will honor their original intent.

The first one is from Hebrews: *“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.”* As someone who was raised Catholic, but is now a Methodist, this line is particularly meaningful for me. Notice that it doesn’t say that the Church is not so unjust as to overlook your work. It says that God does not overlook your work. The church doesn’t judge us. God does. And it’s God who decides who is a saint, too, by the way, and not the church. The Roman Catholic church likes to create saints. They have a complex mechanism for doing this. In truth, we don’t really

know which person is a saint and which one is not, but we certainly have a pretty good idea whose work and whose love is probably earning them that status.

Our second quote is from Colossians. *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”* You know what this says? It says that God does indeed decide who is a saint – but that we are in control of whether we are worthy of that status. We are the ones who can bear fruit with our actions in life, show moral strength, have faith that can endure great hardship, and live with patience for others, and in live joy by walking in the Kingdom of God. We are in control of whether we stand in the light.

I will provide some context about Daniel, so we can appreciate our third quote. Daniel was a prophet. Like Ezekiel, he was an exile in Babylon. Daniel describes visions he receives from God. The book is written in both Hebrew and the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic. The basic lesson of his visions is that God is greater and more powerful than any earthly ruler. The visions are wild, apocalyptic in nature. In Chapter 7, our chapter, we are no longer being held in Babylon by an earthly ruler; God has freed his people. Our quote says *“And the*

kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints. God chooses the saints. We are in control of our own destiny as saints. And we must remember that our reward as saints is much greater than an earthly kingdom. It is the ultimate kingdom, the eternal Kingdom of God. That is where we are casting our eyes.

Our last quote comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In truth, we are not at all sure that Paul personally wrote the letter, but it consists of solid Christian teaching. Our letter writer says this: *"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"*. Notice that the people who are receiving this letter – and it includes us, as inheritors of holy Scripture – are alive, but have joined ranks with the saints already. In other words, saints can indeed be alive. You don't become a saint by dying. You become a saint when you are alive. We simply choose to celebrate the fact after you have passed on to be with God for eternity.

So, let's get back to our young men and a handful of young women gathered in a parking lot at night, under artificial lights, with cars that they have poured their hearts and their pocketbooks into, and burning up their tires, possibly tearing up their transmissions and engines, risking their lives, and risking

the physical integrity of their precious cars. Why are they doing it? Well, they're having a good time. But one thing they are not doing is working toward their futures. Yes, most of them have many years ahead of them during which they can find their way. But I couldn't help but wonder, as I watched that YouTube video, and as I remembered the very similar events that I took part in as a young person, will they find their way to God? Will they be saints? It's not for me to judge. God will decide – but they will be in control. The problem is that you can't be a saint if you don't work at it. There is a path that you must find, and then you must follow that path. I just hope those young people spend as much time finding their path in life as they spend inhaling tire smoke in a parking lot.

God has a specific purpose for each of us. For many of us, the most important thing we will do with our lives is to pass on the torch, to teach our children and our grandchildren, and perhaps other people, about God, about Scripture, about the path that leads you to the Kingdom of Heaven and the community of saints. We show them what it means to live as a Christian by living like a true person of faith – and we'll let them know how it was that we learned to be giving, sympathetic, and loving people. It was by dedicating our lives to Christ. We can live like saints by spreading grace. It begins with God. God gives grace to us without us earning it. Then we can pass it on. We can give grace to every

person with whom we come into contact. Grace works its way into someone without them knowing it. Gradually, over a period of years or decades, that grace makes a fundamental change in them – and then someday, they are saints, too.

It is never too late to think about your photo being up here someday – and this includes me. We have pictures of two saints before us. Here is the truth: we only presume they are saints. They certainly led lives that would indicate they are. In the end, it is God's decision, based on what they did with their lives. I found something to do as an older man. I spent decades not thinking about the path I was on. I was one of those young men who started off down a crazy, earthly path, and it was very hard to find my way to the correct path.

Interestingly, God has made use of the things I learned to do during those years as a computer guy. I can make videos for this church to post. I can build a church website. I can create a 3D gaming environment for the faithful to meet in. Who knows if any of this will have any impact? But we all need to try. We need to think about where we are going – and work hard. Please pray briefly with me.

God, thank you for the two saints shown before us. They have done their work and they are with you. Please guide us, push us, give us the faith and energy to truly live like saints. We strive to not only be saved by our faith, but to also be saints. May our photos stand here one day. Amen.