

**ALL SAINTS DAY 2018**  
**Psalm 90**  
**Baraca Radio Sunday School Class**  
**First Baptist Church, Anderson, South Carolina**  
**November 4, 2018**  
**Lawrence Webb**

Many churches around the world are celebrating All Saints Day today.

That word *saint* has different meanings for different people.

- Someone may call Mrs. Jones down the street a “saint of God” because she is going through great difficulties and is living close to God.

- In the Roman Catholic tradition, it’s not enough to say Mrs. Jones a saint because she is going through great difficulties and is living close to God. The fact that Mrs. Jones is still living eliminates her from sainthood. Catholic saints are no longer living. But they have lived extra-special lives and are said to have performed verified miracles. Catholics are encouraged to pray to these saints because they are so close to God.

- Paul in the Bible is often called the Apostle Paul or Saint Paul, but he uses the word *saint* in a much broader sense. In most of his letters to the churches, he calls all the Christians in those churches *saints*. If you look at the lives some of those church members are living, they don’t look like what we often think of as *saints*. Instead of praying TO them, we probably would be praying FOR them.

- For the past several years, our First Baptist Church has celebrated All Saints Day on the first Sunday in November. We go with the broader understanding of *saints*, as we give special recognition to those dear *saints* from our membership who died within the past year. This day calls those special people back to the attention of all our current saints and also offers further condolence to the families of those who have died in the past year and gone on to be with the Lord.

So, today’ this Baraca lesson will have three separate dedications, first, to the memory of our Baraca members who died within the past year.

We had two saints from the Baraca Class who died within the past year. They were wife and husband, Doris and Leon Philips. Doris died several months ago after a long illness. Then Leon died just weeks ago. Doris sang in our Baraca Chorus as long as she was able, and Leon was our treasurer. As our pastor Jim Thomason often says at funerals, this is a time of worship and a time to celebrate the life of the one who has died. In this case, we celebrate the lives of Leon and of Doris Philips.

I mentioned that I want to make three dedications of this lesson. Second, in addition to those we lost from among those we see Sunday by Sunday here in the Baraca classroom at First Baptist, we also extend our condolence to our radio listeners who experienced the death of a loved one and are still trying to deal with that loss. May you take comfort from what I have to say this morning.

My third dedication today is to the memory of my younger sister, Marie Webb Way, who also was among those who died within the past year.

Today, November 4, is Marie's birthday. Exactly one year ago today, Pansy and I were in Cleburne, Texas, celebrating her eighty-first birthday, along with her three sons and their families, my two surviving brothers and their wives, and a whole crowd of other relatives, church friends, and others.

We gathered for that celebration, realizing this probably would be the last time most of us would see her alive. She suffered the ravages of Parkinson's Disease and had been fading for quite some time. That expectation proved accurate. She died one week later. So we had time to do little more than come home and unpack from the birthday trip and then repack for the funeral trip.

I'm going to be very personal the next few minutes as I share some of the thoughts I gave at her funeral. Here's some of what I said, just about as I said it then:

She turned boys' heads.

They stopped and looked when she walked by.

One night she went to a movie with our older brother Lee Roy and me.

As we stood on the sidewalk in front of the Texas Theater in Sweetwater, waiting for the earlier show to let out, some guys we knew started saying, "How did you luck out and get her to go out with you? Which one of you is she with?"

"She's our sister," Lee Roy said.

The other guys hooted: "Yeah. I bet."

Another said, "Tell another one."

"No," I said. "It's the truth. She really is our younger sister."

"She's young all right. You're robbing the cradle."

Of course, she *was* our little sister, Lois Marie. She was about twelve. I was fourteen. Lee Roy was eighteen. We were three of the five of us who grew up together. Leta Joy, the eldest, was married. Leonard Morris was ten and didn't like to be called the baby of the family. At that age, Mother and Daddy said he was too young to stay out late. He didn't like that either.

Mother and Daddy had seven children, six who lived to adulthood. They gave all of us first names starting with "L." This led some wag to say, "Your folks sure raised a lot of 'L,' didn't they?"

A couple of years after that movie outing with our brother Lee Roy and me, as Marie blossomed further into physical young womanhood, Daddy relented and let her start going out with some of the fellows whose heads continued turning her way.

When she was "fifteen-going-on-sixteen," a fellow my age named Don got her attention and edged out most of his competitors. By the time he was eighteen and she was sixteen, the contest was over. In December 1952, Lois Marie Webb became the bride of Airman Donald Jackson Way.

I was puzzled – No. Let’s say, “stunned.” – that Daddy signed the license and that Mother went along with it. When I asked her, “Why,” she said, ”They were going to get married, with or without our permission. So I got Travis (our Daddy) to agree, as a way to keep peace in the family.”

We have Marie and Don’s wedding picture in a frame. Don in his Air Force uniform and Marie in a neat suit. She wore a hat, the only one I had ever seen her wear, other than the straw hat she had on in the cotton patch when we all were pulling bolls instead of being in school. Her wedding ensemble also included a clutch purse and the highest heels I had ever seen on any female in our family.

Around the borders of that picture frame, you can see the words to Nat “King” Cole’s song, “They Tried to Tell Us We’re Too Young, Too Young to Really Be in Love.” The rest of the lyrics say:

They try to tell us we’re too young,  
Too young to really be in love.  
They say that love’s a word,  
A word we’ve only heard,  
But can’t begin to know the meaning of.  
And yet we’re not too young to know  
This love will last though years may go . . .

Then around the other side of the picture frame, are these final words:

And then some day they may recall  
We were not too young at all.

[Songwriters: Sidney Lippman / Sylvia Dee, Too Young lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group]

We lived to see they were right. When Don died a year before Marie did, they had been married a few months over sixty-three years.

Don wasn’t even a little bit interested in church or religion when they married, but through her prayers and influence, along with prayers of others, he became a Christian and eventually entered the ministry and was pastor of several churches across the years.

Pansy and I have spent most of our life together halfway across the continent. But I’m two years older than Marie, so whatever the number of states between us, she always was and always will be my Little Sister. I thank God for her faith and for her long life of sister, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, cousin, pastor’s wife, and friend to many.

In a moment, we're going to look at today's Bible passage in light of this All Saints Day and remembering Leon and Doris and Marie and the loved ones of those of you listening at home or at work. But first, let me offer a prayer from the Bible, a prayer Paul prayed for his fellow saints in Corinth, a prayer that often comes to my mind and heart in times such as today:

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too (2 Corinthians 1:2-5).*

Now, our focal passage for this morning, Psalm 90.

**This psalm is the prayer of an older person of faith** who has struggled with the complexities of life. As far as we know, all the writers of the Bible were men, but today we can think of this as a psalm for women and men alike who lived long lives. Listen as the Psalmist thinks out loud.

**His first thoughts are about the Eternal God**, who has preserved him and his ancestors.

*[1] LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.*

*[2] Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God. . . . [4] For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.*

**Next, the psalmist is brought up short as he looks at himself.** God remains constant as the days turn to years; the years turn to centuries; and centuries turn to millennia. But this man draws two contrasts between his own time-bound existence and the Eternal God. Measured against God, humans seem as fleeting as a dream, as frail as the grass:

*[5] You sweep us away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning: [6] in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.*

**A third thing comes to mind as the psalmist thinks of the relative shortness of life, as short as a sigh. He also is mindful of his sinful nature:**

*[7] For we are consumed by Your anger; by Your wrath we are overwhelmed. [8] You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. [9] For all our days pass away under Your wrath, our years come to an end like a sigh.*

**This leads the psalmist to think about how tough life can be, however long we may live:**

*[10] The years of our life are threescore and ten — which is seventy — or even by reason of strength fourscore — eighty — yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.*

Leon and Doris Philips lived well passed the seventy mark. Leon was eighty-eight and Doris was ninety-four. My sister Marie lived just past eighty. But they all three would confess with the psalmist: if we pass seventy or eighty or ninety, life is not easy. The psalmist's comments contrast with rosy words Robert Browning wrote in the poem, "Rabbi ben Ezra:

Grow old along with me/The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made:

Browning was only fifty-two when he wrote these lines: If he had written this poem twenty-five years later near the end of his own life, he might have seen the last of life differently.

The so-called Golden Years are not always so golden. Often the gold has tarnished.

California Pastor John Ortberg tells of an evening many years ago when he and two friends were walking along a street in Newport Beach, California. They walked past a bar where a fight had been going on inside. The fight spilled out into the street, just like in an old western. Several guys were beating up on another guy, and he was bleeding from the forehead.

Ortberg and his friends knew they had to do something, so they went over to break up the fight. But the guys who were doing the fighting didn't seem to be intimidated when Ortberg and his friends walked up and yelled, "Hey, you guys, cut that out!"

Then all of a sudden these thugs doing the fighting looked at Ortberg and company with fear in their eyes. Remarkably they quit pummeling their victim and started to slink away. Ortberg didn't know why until he turned around and looked behind them. Out of the bar had come the biggest man he had ever seen.

He was something like six feet, seven inches tall, maybe 300 pounds. Just huge. Ortberg and his friends called the big man "Bubba" (not to his face of course, but later, when they told about him).

Bubba didn't say a word. He just stood there and flexed. You could tell he was hoping the ruffians beating on the poor man would try and have a go at him. All of a sudden Ortberg said his own attitude was transformed, and, with a new-found confidence, he told those guys, "You better not let us catch you coming around here again!" He was a different person, he says, because he had great, big Bubba backing him up. He was ready to confront the bullies with resolve and firmness. He was released from anxiety and fear, he was possessed by boldness and confidence. Why? Because he had a great, big Bubba behind him. He was convinced that he was not alone. (1)

It sounds trite, but the great tragedy of our lives may be when we find ourselves in difficult situations we often forget that we, too, have a great, big Bubba backing us up. We are not alone.

**Like many of us, as the psalmist grows older, he thinks of God's judgment:**

*[11] Who considers the power of Your anger, and Your wrath according to the fear of You?*

The singer realizes this calls for wisdom in her remaining days. So he cries out:

*[12] So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

Hear that cry again: *So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

With suffering that goes with age and affliction, the singer asks for pity from the Lord:

*[13] Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on Your servants!*

Then, as proof of God's pity, the psalmist asks for a balance between difficulties and glad times. Actually, he wants gladness all the days of his life.

*[14] Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. [15] Make us glad as many days as You have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil.*

God does not condemn us for asking, but we have no guarantee God will grant that balance, that we will get an equal amount of good and bad. But the singer keeps asking.

I once heard a Presbyterian minister say, life is like art. We want life to be like a Norman Rockwell painting, neat and orderly and predictable. But what we get often looks more like Picasso: strange and chaotic and out of shape.

**By the end of the psalm, the singer more and more comes to terms with his own mortality,** thinking of what he is leaving behind. He thinks of his children and of his own work. He wants his children to be aware of God's working in their lives:

*[16] Let Your work be manifest to Your servants, and Your glorious power to their children.*

Every godly parent prays for that. I pray that for Russell and Jonathan, and, no doubt, you pray that for your children and grandchildren as well.

**Then, in the very last plea from the man whose last years have been filled with pain, the psalmist would like to know the work he has done was not in vain:**

*[17] Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us, yea, please establish the work of our hands.*

This is a prayer that God will show concrete signs of His love and sustaining power by blessing our efforts, that the work we did will have a lasting quality, that we will not soon be forgotten. Leon and Doris and Marie left the legacy of hard-working Christians. And I'm sure many of you listeners can say the same for your dear ones.

Even so, death of a spouse, a son or daughter, or other close friend can take many months or even years to work through. I recall Elsie, an elderly member of a church where I was pastor. Her husband had been dead several years before I came to the church, but every time I sat down with Elsie for a visit, she lamented his loss, almost as if he had died a few weeks or even days ago.

God is available to us now. He is a God of faithfulness, patience and infinite love.

I read about a doctor whose faithfulness and patience mirrored to a small degree the faithfulness and patience of God. This doctor, years ago, had great empathy for children with Down syndrome. He decided that, with the right care, these children could learn how to function more fully in our society. This was at a time when most children with this condition were denied even the opportunity for the most basic education. So the doctor took twenty-five of these youngsters and began to teach them. It was not easy. Remember now, these children had never received any academic training before.

He began with the alphabet; it took him over four thousand repetitions of the letter “A” before these boys and girls could recognize and repeat that letter. Then he moved on to the next letters in the alphabet. Eventually, the number of repetitions for each letter decreased to about 2,000 and then to 900 and gradually to about 400. Finally, he showed them a letter just once and they could recognize it.

Every one of those twenty-five Down syndrome children entered public school and graduated. One of them graduated with top scholastic honors in his class. (2) That doctor’s faithfulness, patience and love were a reflection of the character of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

God is the God of the now. His love and his patient caring are available to us at this very moment. Regardless of the burden we are carrying, He is available to us.

He is the God of the past, the God of the present. And, of course, he is the God of the future.

Many of us are so fearful of the future. We are a bundle of anxieties concerning our health, our finances, our children, even the safety of our world.

Our constant anxiety calls to mind a story Mark Twain told about a friend of his who — needing a train ride home — came to him at the races one day and said, “I’m broke. I wish you’d buy me a ticket back to town.”

Twain said, “Well, I’m pretty broke myself, but I’ll tell you what to do. You hide under my seat and I’ll cover you with my legs.” It was agreed and Twain then went to the ticket office and bought two tickets, without saying anything to his friend. When the train was under way and the supposed stowaway was snug under the seat, the conductor came by and Twain gave him the two tickets.

“Where is the other passenger?” asked the conductor.

Twain tapped on his forehead and said in a loud voice, “That is my friend’s ticket. He is a little eccentric and likes to ride under the seat.”

Many of us ride into the future hiding under a seat because of our anxieties. Do you think the God who has loved you and sustained you to this point is suddenly going to forget you? Of course not. The future is in God's hands.

This is the secret of facing an uncertain future. God is the God of the past, present, and future. He is with us. He has always been with us. He will never forsake us. He is the God who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. Relax. Come out from under the seat. Big Bubba has your back.

During the terrible siege of Leningrad in World War II, the city's radio station remained on the air to reassure the people in this time of crisis that their country had not fallen.

When the radio announcers were too weak or cold to play music or recite the news, they would turn on a metronome which monotonously clicked back and forth, echoing through loudspeakers on the streets to reassure the people they were not alone. (3)

We are not alone. That is the most important statement I can make to you this morning. We are not alone. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Isn't this what we need to know this All Saints' Day? Think of it this way: Big Bubba has our back.

### **BENEDICTION**

Now we close this week's Baraca Radiio Sunday School Class from Anderson's First Baptist Church, and I challenge you to claim these promises on this All Saints Day;

God's love that will never let you go.

God's grace that is greater than all your sin.

God's peace that passes all understanding.

These are yours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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1. John Ortberg, in the sermon "Big God/Little God." Cited by Barry L. Davis, 52 Sermons From the Book of Acts (GodSpeed Publishing. Kindle Edition).
  2. Skip Ross, Say Yes to Your Potential (Waco: Word Books).
  3. T.T. Crabtree, The Zondervan 1986 Pastor's Annual (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985).