

**Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 17, 2016**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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**Revelation 7:9-17**

**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.'"**

Dear friends in Christ:

In the Sundays which have followed our celebration of Easter and the Lord's resurrection we've been considering various sections from the book of Revelation in our sermons – examining various visions that the Lord has for the members of his church both young and old. The Lord Jesus gave these visions to John with the instructions to write them down for the benefit of the Christians who remained on this earth waiting for the Lord to take them to glory. In the first part of the chapter from which our text for today is taken John discovered that the church on earth would be safe and secure in spite of the fact that the earth itself is destined for destruction. In our text for today – John beholds a multitude of people from all over the world – standing before the Lord's throne in heaven. They have joined the multitude of angels, the four living creatures and the 24 elders whom we met previously in this book. We were able to identify the 24 elders as representatives of the Christian church from the Old and New Testament. We were less certain about the four creatures which were covered with eyes and their six wings – either they were a special rank of angels or else they represented all of God's creation.

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**Theme:** Behold! A Host Arrayed in White

1. How we will join them
2. What we will enjoy with them

In order for us to answer the question, how shall we join this host, we need to understand who these people are. Fortunately we're not left guessing. John tells us **Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?"** Perhaps John could have given an answer to that question but he responds by indicating that the elder should answer that question for him: **"Sir, you know."**

And then the elder responded by explaining who these people were; **"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."** The elder's words echo the words of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:22. **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.** In Matthew 24 Jesus spoke about the tribulations that would take place prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and prior to his second coming. It is clear that tribulation is a fact of life for NT Christians. The fact that these individuals have been rescued from the tribulations which are a part of life in this world underscores the truth of Paul's statements in Romans. (Romans 8:18, 28) **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ... 28) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

These individuals are enjoying the victory and deliverance that the Lord provided for them. **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."** The palm branches are symbols of victory. The white robes are indicators of purity, holiness and glory. And how is it that their robes are white? Certainly they were not that way as they experienced the difficulties of the great tribulation. They like, we needed cleansing and purification. The prophet Isaiah confesses: **All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.** But he also spoke of the robes of righteousness with which the Lord clothes his people. (Isaiah 61:10) **I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness...** He also spoke of scarlet sins which by God's gracious verdict would become white as snow as he recorded these words of the Lord: (Isaiah 1:18) **"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."**

Because Christ died after all our sins were laid on him we are now free from all sin. It's as if our clothes have been washed clean with the perfect blood of Christ. That's why those John saw in his vision were crying out in a loud voice, **"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."** He's the one who gained salvation for us. He rescued us from the curse of sin and he's the one who will bring us to glory.

Already we've begun to answer the question how will we join that host arrayed in white. That privilege will be ours through faith in Lamb. Jesus promised (Matthew 24:14) **And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.** In his vision John saw the fulfillment of that promise as he saw **a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.**

Down through the ages the Lord has continued to call Christians out of the tribulations of this world into the glories of heaven. We will join that throng around the throne after we have suffered in the great tribulation. That leads us to ask, what kind of tribulation is the church suffering today? At John's time Christians were violently persecuted for their faith. Some even met a violent death. There are those places in the world today where Christians are still persecuted for their faith but America by God's grace isn't a place where the persecution is violent – at least most of the time. In place of violence what we see in many cases is apathy -- *Christianity is tolerated, most of the time, but not looked upon as the vital life-changing power that it really is.*

And that is one of the challenges which we and all Christians need to overcome by God's grace. It's all too easy for us to take our Christian faith for granted. Often we think we are secure just because we know that Jesus died for our sins. But knowledge and faith are not the same thing. Faith is knowledge in action, relying on what we know Christ has done, enjoying and showing the life changing power of the Gospel.

One of the objectives of the worship and education ministries of our congregation is to help individuals young and old alike not only to understand the truths of the Gospel but to touch their hearts with it. It is our desire with God's help to enable them to live as God's children in a world which largely ignores the power of Christ and his resurrection. Regular contact with the Word will empower us to recognize the subtle dangers to our faith as well as the not so subtle ones. That word will also equip us to fight the good fight of faith and to remain faithful to the end – until the Lord calls us out of the tribulations of this life to join the glorious throng who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and who will enjoy the blessings of eternal life. Then together with them we will stand in the eternal presence of the Lamb to give the Lord credit for our salvation.

Now that we've seen how we will be numbered among the host robed in white let's see what we will enjoy with them. **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.'"**

Interestingly the heavenly bliss we will enjoy together with the saints before the throne are described in 10 statements. The number 10 symbolizes completion or totality. Here John envisions the complete joy of believers in eternal glory. Jesus told his disciples that he had come that **they might have life and have it to the full.** (John 10:10)

John sees that full life in the vision in our text. The reason for this full life is the washing provided by the lamb. Because Jesus has washed away our sins we will enjoy a life of perfection which consists of

1. being before the throne of God
2. serving him day and night in his temple
3. the Lord spreading his tent over us.
4. We shall hunger no more
5. we'll never be thirsty
6. the sun will never beat upon us
7. nor will any heat oppress us.
8. The Lamb will become our shepherd
9. who will lead us to springs of water that give life
10. and God will remove every tear from our eyes

In poetic verse the blessedness of the redeemed is presented. The first three lines focus our attention on the joys that will be ours because we are in the presence of the Lord. **They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.**

The service the saints perform before the throne is described as worship. They spend their time in praise and adoration of the one who provided them with salvation. Many picture the saints as strumming their harps and singing praises but that's far too narrow a view of the life of praise we enjoy in heaven. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul speaks of the service we are to perform by using our body and all of its members to do the Lord's work in this world. John describes a similar type of service – one that honors God by what we do without mentioning any one particular type of service.

The place of our service is described as the temple of the Lord – the word temple described the inner most sanctuary of the OT place of worship – the place where his glory dwells. As we serve the Lord we'll be in the presence of his eternal glory and he will spread his tent over us. He will provide us with safety and security. The next four lines describe this safety and security as a freedom from sin and its harmful effects.

When man fell into sin, God's curse fell upon his creation. God explained how mankind would eat his bread by the sweat of his brow. Hunger and thirst which was so easily satisfied in the garden of Eden before the

fall into sin would now be a common source of suffering in the world. The sun which was created to serve man causes burning discomfort and even torture for some. With these phrases we are reminded of all the natural evils that have entered the world because of sin.

Those who dwell in the shelter of the most high will enjoy the security and refuge which he alone can provide. No more will the evils of sin afflict them. **Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.**

The last three lines once again speak of the source of the joy that will be ours. Our joy comes from the Lamb who has become our Shepherd. Once again the joys of heaven are described in positive terms. Freedom from the sufferings of this present time and bliss in the presence of God will come to us because **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."**

We can't help but call to mind the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as we hear about the Lamb of God becoming our shepherd who leads us to streams of living water. As our Good Shepherd he will supply all our needs and as he does that he will be wiping every tear from our eyes. Anything and everything that caused us to weep during the great tribulation; persecution (both violent and subtle), death, famine, war, illness and disease will forever be a thing of the past in the perfect life that awaits us in heaven.

John's vision was intended to provide hope and encouragement to Christians still living in the time of the great tribulation. Though we will not be immune to the troubles and difficulties of life in this world this vision shows us that our place in heaven has been secured for us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It reminds us of the blessings we will enjoy even as it encourages us to place our trust in his gracious promises of rescue as we serve him with lives that give him honor and glory.

May the Lamb even now shepherd you through the valley of the shadow of death into the glorious light of heaven. Amen.