

**Fourth Sunday of Easter – May 12, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

Pastor Charles Heup

Revelation 7:9-17 (NIV)

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:

Today we will have the opportunity to discuss another interesting and exciting text from the book of Revelation. It's important for us to keep in mind that John was commanded to write down the things he saw in his visions of heaven for our benefit. In our sermon last week we joined John in the throne room of heaven and heard a majestic concert as all of creation sang the praises of the Lamb of God who was worthy to unseal the scroll which the Father held in his hands. As John continued to watch the seven seals on the scroll were removed and he saw glimpses of the future. What he saw was in agreement with what the Lord Jesus had previously told his disciples about the signs of the end times. He saw symbols of war and famine, death, persecution of the Christians and the final judgment. He saw the holy Christian church in heaven. This is where our text takes us today.

Look! A Host Arrayed in White

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

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. (show slide of the multitude in heaven with palm branches)

The Lord Jesus commanded his followers to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations baptizing them and teaching them everything he had taught them. The task must have seemed overwhelming – yet it was not impossible. John sees the results of the apostles teaching and of our mission work: a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe people and language standing before the throne and before Christ the Lamb. These are the spiritual children of Abraham. Those who believed and whose faith was credited to them as righteousness. They have taken their places in heaven around the throne with the millions of angels, the elders and the four creatures. They were clothed in white robes. They are holy and pure. In their hands they carried a symbol of victory – palm branches. They have overcome their foes. **And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."**

The multitude gives credit to God and the Lamb for the salvation and the victory which they are celebrating. The angel hosts of heaven, the 24 elders representing OT and NT believers and the 4 living creatures (angelic beings representing God's creation) express their agreement with the words of the multitude.

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! -- which could be translated: "This is absolutely true." And then they add their own 7 fold song of praise followed by another amen of affirmation of truthfulness.

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

As John is watching and listening, one of the elders addresses a question to him. **13) Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?"** Although John may have known the answer to the question he is content to let a higher authority provide it. **14) [John] answered, "Sir, you know."**

The elder answered his own question: **"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.** This verse provides us with some very important information about the end times and our own entry into heaven. *(show slide with theme and parts)*

In the visions which John had seen previously he had seen the horrors of war, famine, pestilence and persecution which would take place on the earth prior to the arrival of the final day of judgment. This is the great tribulation that John speaks about also in this verse. Paul and Barnabas reminded the Christians in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to remain true to the faith because **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."** (cf. Acts 14:22) It is important for us to make careful note of this so that we do not despair if and when we are called upon to endure hardships for Christ.

There are some false teachings which often crop up concerning the end times. One of those false teachings suggests that there will be a single great tribulation before the final judgment and that God will rapture or separate the Christians from the non-Christians at this time. Sometimes those who support this idea try to use verse 14 of this text to back up their teaching. But when this verse is read in the context of the rest of Scripture we have to conclude that it says nothing about a rapture. Furthermore, this idea is simply not consistent with anything that the Scriptures teach. It's important to pay close attention to the words of God so we are not lead astray by false teachings. God does not promise here or anywhere else that he will spare believers the anguish of the last days. Rather Jesus warned, **"In this world you will have trouble."** (John 16:33 NIV)

There's another reason for us to pay careful attention to these words. John saw a growing number of individuals who had been delivered from the suffering which a hostile world had inflicted upon them. Daily this multitude continues to grow as the Lord Jesus summons his people out of this life into the eternal life of heaven. How can we be counted among this number? It is only through faith in the Lamb of God who shed his blood to wash away the stains of our sin and has provided us with the white robes worn by the multitude in our text. They have no righteousness of their own. That is why they wear white robes. In **1 John 1:7** we are reminded **the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from every sin.** One of our hymns explains:

1) Jesus, your blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

2) Bold shall I stand in that great day
Who can a word against me say?
Fully through you absolved I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

Behold! A Host Arrayed in White! Jesus shed his blood for you. Through faith in him you are included in the host. Your place in heaven is waiting for you. What is it that you will enjoy in heaven with this host arrayed in white? Behold what we will enjoy with them!

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.'"

We note once more that the redeemed are in glory because of what Christ has done for them by his redeeming work. Only the blood of the Lamb which has freed them from every trace and stain of sin has made it possible for them to stand before the throne of the holy God with whom no sin can dwell. Once again John has reminded us that salvation comes from our God and from the Lamb who sits on the throne.

Now he lists 10 statements to describe what we will be doing before the throne of God in heaven. (One of the things that we notice in the book of Revelation is that numbers have a certain symbolism connected with them. *(show slides with numbers)* The number 7 for example is associated with the covenants that God makes with his people. The number 3 ½ represents the broken covenant and is associated with evil forces. Some suggest that the number 3 represents God and the number 4 represents the four corners of the earth. The number 12 and it's multiples including 144,000 is used to describe the church. Lastly the numbers 10 & it's cube 1000 appear to be numbers of completeness.

With his ten statements John speaks of our complete release from evil and the complete joy which will be ours at God's right hand. Let's look at the first three statements: *(show slide)*

- 1. they are before the throne of God**
- 2. and serve him day and night in his temple;**
- 3. he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.**

Part of our joy stems from the fact that we dwell in God's presence in his temple or in his dwelling place. There we will have the opportunity to be actively involved in serving him in all that we do. He will spread his tent over us to provide us with safety and security. Another part of our joy is our complete freedom from sin and it's effects as we see in statements 4-7.

- 4. Never again will they hunger;**
- 5. never again will they thirst.**
- 6. The sun will not beat upon them,**
- 7. nor any scorching heat.**

When God cursed the ground after the Fall, it became increasingly difficult for man to obtain his daily bread from the soil. Hunger and thirst which were easy to satisfy before the fall, became a common source of suffering for a fallen world. The sun which was created to serve man, became for many a burning instrument of

discomfort and torture as man earned his bread with the sweat of his brow. But in heaven all of this pain and evil is past. Sin and its effects will no longer harm us there. Statements 8 & 9 tells us we will be set free from the sufferings of this present time and will enjoy eternal peace because

- 8. the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;**
- 9. he will lead them to springs of living water.**

John uses the Old Testament symbols of water which represents salvation and the shepherd as he speaks of the blessings of heaven. John most likely was recalling the words of the 23rd Psalm as wrote these words. The last of the ten blessings that come to those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb is that

- 10. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

Everything that caused them to weep during the great tribulation: persecution and death, war and pestilence – will be gone forever. *(show theme and parts slide)*

The apostle John was privileged to see a vision of the multitudes clothed in white around the throne. This vision assured him of the Lord's faithfulness to his people. Although we will suffer here in time – we have a bright future. John's vision is an encouragement to us to persevere in hope whenever we encounter the tears and difficulties of this life. Jesus has conquered sin and will give robes of righteousness to all who believe in him. He will rescue them from this present evil age and take them to enjoy the blessings we have heard about in our text. God grant that we are numbered among those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and who will enjoy eternal glory with Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Amen.