

11-6-23: All Saints' Day. Text: Revelation 7:9-17 Pastor Priewe

Theme: A vision of our future glory gives us assurance and endurance.

Text: Revelation 7:9-17 NIV

⁹After 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. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

¹¹All 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, ¹²saying:

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

¹³Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵Therefore,

“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.

¹⁷For 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.’”

In the name of the Lamb who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Our sermon text from Revelation chapter 7 gives us the most beautiful, glorious vision of what it will be like for believers at the end of it all, in the perfect bliss heaven, with the multitude robed in white, safe in the presence of the Lamb forevermore. It's the vision you were singing about in our first two hymns about the Higher Throne and

Jerusalem the Golden. It's the kind of vision that makes your eyes well up right there in the pews, and especially when that vision has recently become reality for one of your dear loved ones, whose body you've laid to rest, but whose soul has gone to join that white-robed multitude before the throne.

Today, we want to take the truths of this vision to heart so that we can experience the blessedness that God promised for those who do so. At the start of the book, Jesus promised, **“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. (Rev. 1:3)** We'll summarize the blessings God gives us through this particular throne room scene with *our theme—A vision of future glory gives us 1) assurance, 2) endurance for the here and now.*

Before we launch in, it's good to know the overarching purpose God gives for the whole book, **“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.” (1:1).** God's purpose is to prepare and equip us for the present and the future, here in the time in between Jesus' first and second coming. That verse also tells us something about the method of the book. God's method was for Jesus to show us through the words of the Apostle John. So, Revelation is a series of visions and pictures that illustrate truths about what is happening and is going to happen. It's important to see the pictures as a whole and in their context, rather than pressing any one detail too literally. It's important to compare the pictures with each other and it's important to let God give the meaning by comparing it to the rest of Scripture. ¹

When we narrow down our focus to our text's specific place in the book, we find that it comes at the end of a vision called the vision of the Seven Seals. The picture you want in your head for the Seven Seals is of an ancient looking scroll, which only Jesus, the Lamb, is worthy to open, because he was slain and purchased for God people from every tribe and language and nation. The scroll is sealed with seven wax seals pressed with an official seal, like a signet ring, and each time the Lamb opens one, a new part of the vision is revealed. Our text comes from the 6th seal, the end of the vision, but if you just skip to the last page of the story, it doesn't have the same effect. So let me walk you quickly through the other seals.

¹ Scherbarth, Rev. David. *7 Visions, 7 Truths*. Outskirts Press. Denver, Colorado. 2014. P. 27.

Things start on a positive note as the Lamb opens the first seal. Out bursts a rider on a white horse, wearing a crown and bent on conquest. Later in the book, we find out that the rider is Jesus going out with the gospel to win souls to himself. But then the next bunch of seals that are opened spell out mostly bad news. You probably have seen some representation of the four horsemen of apocalypse. The red horse and its rider bring war and violence to the earth. We've seen those wars continue to break out through the ages, most recently in Israel, and in Ukraine. Then comes the black horse with famine and inflation. A voice announces an insane sale price, basically "A loaf of bread for a day's wages"². I don't have to tell you about inflation these days, or the fact that a decent portion of world is still going hungry. Then out of the fourth seal comes the pale horse with its rider named Death and Hades following behind. He brings sickness and plague and disaster. Together, these three horsemen were given power to afflict the earth with suffering and death.

Then the Lamb opens the fifth seal and shows us the souls of the believers who had been slain and martyred because of God's word and their faith. And they're crying out "**How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? (Rev. 6:10)**". But it's not the time yet, so they're given a white robe and told to wait a little longer.

The sixth seal opens in a terrifying way with a great earthquake and the sun turns black and the moon turns red and the stars fall out of the sky. It's Judgment Day, and on that day the kings and princes and everyone who rejected the Lamb will shake with terror as they cry out to the mountains, "**Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!**" (Revelation 6:16). This terrifying picture of judgement calls everyone to repent during their time of grace, lest they face the wrath of the Lamb.

But this great day of judgement ends much differently for believers. An angel comes with the seal of the living God and puts a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God, the faithful remnant of believers that God has preserved through the great tribulation. The number that was sealed was 144,000; not the exact, literal total, but a symbol of God's church here on earth, 12 x 12, like the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples. 144 x 10 x 10 x 10, the number of

² Becker, Siegbert. *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*. Northwestern Publishing House. Milwaukee, WI. 1985. P. 108

completion. Yet, it's still a relatively small number compared with the population of earth, showing the humble and struggling Church militant here on earth.

Then, finally it gives way to the glorious end of the vision we've been waiting for. The tribulation is over. The church militant becomes the church triumphant! **“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.” (Rev. 7:9).** Not just 144,000, but that number added to all the believers of all time, a countless multitude in heaven. **“They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches,” (7:9)** the symbols of purity and victory.³ Everyone is worshiping and giving glory to God and crying out, **“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.”**

God has designed the structure and the movement of this whole vision of the 7 Seals in a very specific way to bless us. He shows us all the bad stuff brought on by those horsemen to prepare us and brace us for reality. **“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 14:22) But he also shows us the end to all the trouble we face. He shows the trouble giving way to the final glorious resolution. He shows us all of what must soon take place, both the trouble and glory, and for good reason! Let me illustrate this way.

This summer, maybe you remember, my family went to Alaska. We went on two mountain hikes that turned out to be vastly different experiences. They were both really hard, harder than we should have been doing, carrying a 30-pound toddler and another one in the womb. The first one was long and steep and a little drizzly and our friends had never done it before either, so nobody knew what the end would be like. We walked and climbed and dragged ourselves up higher and higher only to realize as we got closer, that the top of the mountain was covered in clouds and fog. No matter how much farther we went, there was going to be no glorious sight in store for us at the top. And that fact was draining. It made every step more painful and heavy and meaningless. It made it so much easier to say, “Forget it,” and forsake the journey, turn around and take a bitter hike back down the mountain, which is finally what we did, without ever reaching the top.

³ Becker, Siegbert. *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*. Northwestern Publishing House. Milwaukee, WI. 1985. P. 127

My friends, that is what the devil is trying to do to us through the bitter troubles and tribulations of this world. He's trying to get us to grow weary of God's plan and finally say, "Forget it!" He's trying to veil our eyes and destroy faith in what God has in store for us, and he has already succeeded in doing that with a vast number of people here on the earth. Like the Apostle Paul says, **"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:4).**

War and inflation and sickness and pandemics and death are all painful enough to block our view of God's plan for everything to work for our eternal good and result in our eternal glory. And when our confidence in God rescuing us and delivering us to his heavenly kingdom dies, so dies our faith.

That's exactly why God has given us this vision of glory, to give us assurance and keep us moving forward. Let me tell you about the other hike we took. There was a similar set of tribulations on the hike. We were still carrying the kids. This time it was brutally hot. We didn't have as much water as we should've. It was steeper, pretty much a couple miles straight up steps! And good grief the mosquitos were bad. But this time our friends had been to the top. They knew how glorious it was and could assure every step of the way, "Just a little longer, it'll be worth it! There's more in store for you than steps and mosquitoes."

That *assurance filled us with endurance* to keep going, one step at a time until we reached the top. And when we made it, it was one of the most beautiful sights I've ever laid eyes on. It made us forget all about how much our backs and feet hurt, and about how many mosquito bites we had and how many steps there were to walk back down. It was all worth it, just as we had been assured!

That's the kind of vision Jesus has given us here in Revelation 7. The vision of the multitude in white tells us there is an end to the tribulation. One of the elders around the throne asked John, **"These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" (7:13)** And John replies, [Surely, you've gotta know better than me.] And the elder answers, **"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." (7:14)**

The Lamb will bring us out of the great tribulation. He will give us white robes washed in his blood, which is kind of a strange image because blood red is usually a disaster for a laundry load of whites. But **the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin**, (1 John 1:7). Though those sins were like scarlet, his blood washes them white as snow and he clothes us in robes of righteousness.

Jesus gives us this glorious assurance of our future in heaven *to give us endurance* and to encourage us through the pain now. It's his voice, whispering in our ear while we're still right in the thick of pain, "Just a little longer, it will all be worth it! There's more in store for you than the crying and mourning and pain of this world. In fact, when you get here, there will be no more of any of that ever again! The Apostle John says, **"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. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them nor any scorching heat. 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.'

All of this that no eye has seen and no ear has heard and no human mind could conceive of, these are the things God has prepared for those who love him! For you and every believer who has died in Christ. And these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. Friends in Christ, let these assurances that God has given you of your future in heaven fill you with endurance so that you may run with perseverance the race marked out for you until, at last, the vision comes true, and you stand faultless before the Lamb forevermore. And you'll know with all your heart, "It was all worth it." To him be glory forever and ever. Amen! Now we know that "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures... we might have hope. (Romans 15:4) Amen.