

November 2, 2008  
 Messiah  
 All Saints' Day - A

Revelation 7:9-17  
 "O Saints, Your Reward is Great in Heaven"

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## Introduction

1. It is around the year 95 AD
  - a. Already most, if not all, the apostles have been crucified, sawed in half, speared, or beheaded → it is a time of great persecution for those who believe in Jesus Christ, which will continue until the return of Christ
  - b. The Roman Government has exiled this youngest of the apostles to Patmos Island, out in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea
  - c. And for the sake of the Church, to give her comfort in this time of great distress – God gives St. John this marvelous vision, or revelation, of heaven – to give comfort and hope to the saints on earth, like you and me (because we need comfort and hope)
  
- I. **In Revelation, chapter 7, John is given a great and glorious vision of hope and comfort for us – who are still on earth feebly fighting the good fight of faith – I would like you to envision the glorious scene**
  - A. There is a great multitude of people, human beings, who have died in the faith, and are now in heaven –
    - a. these were the believers in Jesus Christ on earth: they are the ones who believed in the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, they confessed their sins and were absolved, they ate and drank the meal of Christ's body and blood, they were baptized, they went to church to hear His Word, they taught the faith, they believed the faith, they lived the faith
    - b. There are so many, they are beyond number, much like God told Abraham, "your descendants will be greater than the sands on the seashore"
    - c. This great multitude of people comes from many tribes and languages
      - i. While on earth – these people came from Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, Australia, and even Antarctica (if there are any inhabitants there)
      - ii. While on earth – these people spoke Russian, Spanish, English, Swahili, Norwegian, Navajo, French, German, and every other language ever spoken on earth
  
  - B. But look upon the heavenly vision once again – and in the middle of it all is the Lamb (long silence)
    - a. All eyes are on Him
    - b. All praise is directed toward Him
    - c. He is thee central figure
    - d. This is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world, still bearing the marks of crucifixion, yet scars of healing for the nations

- e. This is Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried
  - f. This is Jesus who crushed the head of Satan, rose from the dead, destroyed sin and death, who ascended into Heaven, and who will come as Judge on the Last Day
  - g. He once was slain – but now He is alive; Victorious, Triumphant, the Almighty Lord and Savior of the entire creation
- C. Look upon the heavenly vision – and there are myriads and legions of angels, thousands upon thousands
- a. Never were they human, but always were they angels
  - b. God created these beings to worship Him, to proclaim heavenly messages to God’s people, and to serve Him
- D. And with the angels are elders – representatives of the great multitude of humans – designated by God to stand around His throne
- a. And there beside Jesus, the Lamb, were the four living creatures, often thought to be the Four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, just as you often see engraved on ornate altars in many churches
  - b. Look at the heavenly vision – and these elders, these four living creatures, and these angels are all bowed before the Lamb, willingly and with devotion and praise, they fell with their faces to the ground before the throne and worshiped GOD
  - c. Listen (pause): they are crying out in a loud voice: not a hundred thousand, (like in a football game), but hundreds of thousands, millions, shouting out, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!”
- II. ...Back to the great multitude of believers from every tribe and language**
- A. Look at them – because among those standing there – is you, (pause) and all those who have died in the faith: your mother, father, your wife, husband, your children, friends, and neighbors, ancestors and prophets and apostles, Mary and Joseph, the Wise Men, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Noah and Naaman, Adam and Eve, and thousands and thousands more – restored to Eden perfection!
- a. They are clothed in white robes
  - b. They are holding palm branches in their hands, just as Jerusalem greeted the King, Jesus, on Palm Sunday
  - c. And together, in unison voices of praise, not ashamed or embarrassed, not preoccupied or distracted, they shout out loud, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”
- B. And one of the Elders stands beside Saint John, and says to him, “These in white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?”
- a. The Evangelist, St. John says, “Sir, you know”

- b. And the elder says, “Yes, these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”
- C. You see – while this multitude of people lived on earth (like us), they wore TWO robes: a black one and a white one (like us)
- a. While on earth, they were conceived in sin, and they sinned every day
  - b. They were marked with the black robe of sin, deserving death and damnation
  - c. They went chasing after other gods, they rebelled against their heavenly and earthly father, they hated in their hearts, they stored up things of no eternal value and called them “treasures”, they lusted and misused their sexuality, they did not strive to love, but they delighted in slander, they became tolerant of other gods and even became fascinated with them, their eyes feasted on another’s wife while they ignored the beauty and gift of their own...
  - d. Dear friends – this is us, even as St. Paul says we are sinful and unclean, and that no one is righteous in God’s sight, we all deserve eternal damnation
- D. And yet – another robe is given to us as a gift, a pure gift, GRACE from God!
- a. On earth, our robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb
  - b. Listen once again to the cheers and praise of the human multitude in heaven, “SALVATION belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”
  - c. At Holy Communion we sing “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” for a reason, a very good reason → because the Lamb, Jesus Christ, has taken the filth of our sins to the cross, He bore them in our place, and now He covers us with HIS OWN righteousness, purity, and holiness
  - d. It is the LAMB on the throne of heaven whose RED BLOOD has made our SOULS WHITE!
  - e. Why is ANYONE in heaven? – only through the blood of Christ, shed on the cross for our sins, and now clothing us with His righteousness – salvation belongs to God, because salvation is only through Him
  - f. For each of us personally, this salvation happened at Holy Baptism – where we were given the white robe of Christ, washed in the water of Christ’s blood, and came out white, spotless, and pure – that’s the POWER OF CHRIST’S BLOOD!
- III. **When we go to heaven, our black robes of sin are buried in the tomb of death forever, and we will be forever clothed in ONLY the robe of Christ – we will be sealed with Christ’s forgiveness and righteousness FOREVER, never vulnerable to sin and death again!**
- A. But while we live on this earth, we contend with the reality, as Luther says, “Sinner and Saint at the same time”

- a. The elder talking to St. John says, “This multitude are before the throne of God - and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence”
  - b. The elder continues to say, “And this multitude, Christians who have died in the faith, now raised to eternal life in heaven, will NEVER AGAIN hunger, NEVER AGAIN thirst, NEVER AGAIN deal with any scorching heat, NEVER AGAIN shed the tears of sadness from their eyes
- B. St. Paul says in Romans 8, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
- a. And yet, in this present time – we do suffer
- C. In this flesh, saints on earth, we suffer hunger
- a. While we may yet live in a nation of wealth and excess, barely do we hunger for food; and yet, who knows what tomorrow will be, and millions around the world will indeed go to bed tonight with no food in their stomachs
  - b. But there are other kinds of hunger in this sin-infected world: we hunger for direction in life, we hunger to be loved (even by our husband or wife), we hunger for someone to care enough about us to help us when we are depressed and feeling no hope, we hunger for right and godly wisdom in voting, in parenting, in growing through our teenage years
  - c. But most of all – all of us hunger for God to love us, we hunger for His forgiveness, even as we feel so worthless at times, we hunger for God to say once again, “you are my child, I love you, you are mine”
  - d. And yet, God feeds His children with His own body, “Given for you for the forgiveness of your sins” – and with sin forgiven we leave the rail every Sunday – declared SAINTS in Christ, satisfied with hope and peace
- D. In this flesh, saints on earth, we suffer thirst
- a. Our lives feel so dried up at times: suffering through cancer treatments, pain medication, and expensive medical therapies
  - b. Our lives feel so dried up at times: feeling empty inside, depressed, anxious, and guilty for past mistakes
  - c. And yet, God quenches His thirsty people, even as on the cross He said, “I thirst” – as He thirsted for our righteousness, thirsted to reverse sin’s curse in us – and there He filled our souls with wells of Living Water, refreshing His people and declaring them saints
- E. In this flesh, saints on earth, we feel the scorching heat of this fallen world
- a. We are two days away from a very important election: not only for our nation, but also for the Church throughout the world
  - b. I am not called to be a political advisor, but I am called to proclaim the Word of God, and to warn you of the sins of this perverse and fallen world
  - c. There are some extremely important issues coming up in this election for which Christians MUST speak: national, state, and local elections that could turn the tide for the Christian Church, and have immediate and

direct influence on every Christian, right down to the local congregation (you and me)

- d. We feel the scorching heart of candidates who openly support that if an abortion is not successful and baby is born alive, that that child can still be aborted, which God calls murder (even while still in the womb)
  - e. I would ask those in the world who pompously relish abortion to hold their newborn grandchild in their arms and kiss her soft warm head, and try to justify this murder
  - f. The president of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has spoken out this past week to those people who live in various states (Arizona, California, and Florida) where they will vote on same sex marriages
  - g. The world is dismissing God's Holy and Sacred 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment which involves marriage between a man and woman ONLY – anything else is a perversion against this holy estate, and erodes and destroys the sanctity of “family”
  - h. And what happens when it becomes illegal for churches to preach the pure Word of God and pastors are imprisoned for faithful preaching, or church are heavily taxed or for “breaking the new laws of the land”
  - i. Throughout the ages, the world has come down hard on Christianity, as our nation and world continue in this “great tribulation” – you, me, and all those who openly confess Jesus Christ and Him crucified – COULD VERY EASILY face persecution, taxation, imprisonment, and closing down of churches; God help our children
  - j. And yet, the Lamb is Lord of the Church, and the church is often strongest when it is persecuted and forced to go underground: may God preserve His church, in our nation and throughout the world
- F. And, finally, for those washed in the blood of the Lamb, yet living in this fallen world, our eyes are often filled with the tears of sadness
- a. In our own sins – we drench our sheets with tears of guilt and shame
  - b. In this fallen world – we have watch our loved ones suffer and die
  - c. In this perverse generation – our eyes are wet with harsh words spoken against us, pain that writhes our body, and with broken and splinted marriages and relationships
  - d. Think about those things for which your eyes cry...
    - i. When Christ bathed you in the font – He was personally present to wipe your eyes with forgiveness of sin
    - ii. When you hear God's representative say, “Your sins are forgiven” Jesus is personally present to hold you and wipe your eyes
    - iii. When you come to eat His body and drink His blood, Jesus Christ greets you with His very presence to wipe away your sins, your sadness, and surrounds you with His peace and comfort, saying to you, “You are saved; I have done it”
    - iv. When you read God's Word, hear it preached and taught, these are not empty words, but the very pages of Christ bear you up, wipe

your tears and give you the promise, the longing, and the hope of eternal life in heaven

### **Conclusion**

1. The elder said, "These in white robes, these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"
2. We are washed in Christ's blood, and He has made us white and pure in His sight
3. While we are yet sinners in a fallen world, YET WE ARE SAINTS, forgiven, made clean, restored, and holy in His sight
4. But when we leave this veil of tears, we shall join those who have already departed this great tribulation; and Christ will remove the garment of sin and death forever
5. Among the multitude will be YOU and me, joined to all those who have died, believing in Jesus Christ – clothed in the white robe of Christ, which is the celebration of every Christian funeral
6. Heaven is for the Saints, children of God, not self-made, but made to be saints through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
7. O Saints in Christ, children of God suffering yet in this fallen world, do not lose hope, do not fear; be comforted and at peace
8. For your GREAT REWARD is Christ, and because of Him – your GREAT REWARD is IN heaven, the eternal home of the saints! Amen.