

“9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “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.

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 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Losing a loved one is always difficult. And the closer your connection with the person who died, the more difficult it is. The emptiness and loneliness that follows can be devastating. Sometimes it can even bring out an anger against God. Why did you do this? Imagine how much more difficult it would be if you lived in Rome in the first century and your spouse, parent or child was suddenly arrested and after a sham trial was fed to the lions, or given as sport for the gladiators in the Roman arena while crowds of people cheered. Their only crime was that they trusted in Jesus Christ. Such a situation could easily lead to an even greater despair and anger against God. What is the point of trusting in Jesus if this is what we get?

These are the people John was writing to in the book of Revelation. God gave John seven visions to show the people what was not visible to their eyes. In every vision God revealed that in this world there will be trials and troubles, persecution and false teachers who corrupt God’s word, but Jesus Christ reigns supreme and always wins the victory. Those who trust Jesus share that victory. In chapter 7 God allows us to see all those who have died in the faith enjoying that victory in heaven. This helps to ease our sorrows and it encourages us to continue steadfast in the faith until we are there with them. God assures us that

Our Victory in Christ is Real

John sees a great multitude of people from all over the world, standing before the throne of God and before Jesus Christ, the Lamb that had been slain. Then one of the Elders in heaven asked John, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” The answer is giving, “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.” Let’s think about that picture a bit more.

They are described as “coming out of the Great Tribulation.” What is this Great Tribulation? Some imagine that it refers to some time in the future before the supposed millennium. But when you look at the other passages that speak of the great tribulation, you realize it is a description of life in this world of sin with its trials and tribulations. The greatest time of tribulation was for the Jews in Jerusalem when the Romans besieged it. John was writing to believers who were undergoing the great tribulation in Rome under the persecution of Nero and others. Those troubled believers whose

loved ones had been killed in the Roman Arena, could see that God had not forsaken their loved ones. To the contrary, they are there standing before His throne in heaven.

Now notice the present participle, “These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation.” We come out of the great tribulation of this world through death. That is when and how we are finally free from all the sinfulness, the sorrow and difficulties and the persecution in this world. That present participle reminds us that this is an on-going thing. This great multitude wasn’t just people from Rome, but included people from every nation and tribe and people and language. It is every believer in Christ who dies. This great multitude includes Waldemar, and Rosemarie, and Felix and all our loved ones who have died in the faith. They are all a part of this picture.

Many people like to imagine their loved ones watching over them, looking down on them from above and guiding them. It’s a nice sentimental thought, until you really think about it. Your loved ones have finally been freed from all the sinfulness and corruption of the world, do we really want them to be afflicted with having to see our sinfulness and all our troubles. God gives us something much better. Just look at what God tells us about them.

They are “standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” They are “Standing before the throne.” They are not still watching the tribulation we are enduring here. They are in the throne room of God. They are seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ in all their glory.

They are “Clothed in White Robes.” That is the perfect holiness and righteousness of Christ. All their sins that plagued them and brought guilt and fear into their lives on earth are totally gone. They are living in perfect righteousness.

And they have “Palm Branches in their hands.” That brings to mind the joyful worship and praise of the people on Palm Sunday, praising Jesus as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Our loved ones who died in the faith are in heaven praising God together with the angels.

Even though they cannot see us or communicate with us in any way, through this vision God is giving us a message from them. Notice what they are crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” They are praising God for their salvation, but they are also telling us; this is what faith in Jesus Christ does for you. He gives eternal salvation. He brings us out of that great tribulation and into the glory of His presence. They also urge us to join them and the angels in singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” God truly deserves all of our praise, honor and glory because of that great salvation. We owe Him our whole heart and life.

God gives another message of encouragement from them by reminding us, “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” When I was about 12 or 13 years old, I had a pair of bright white pants. I really liked those pants and wore them often, but no matter how hard I tried, I could never keep them clean and white. My mom had a horrible time trying to get them white again after I got them smudged with dirt and grass stains. That is like us. God cleanses us of our sins and it doesn’t take long and we get all filthy with more sins. Our loved ones are in heaven because they washed their robes in the blood of Jesus. They urge us to do the same. Jesus’ blood, shed on the cross, is the only thing that can cleanse us of our sins. As the Apostle John says, “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sins.” 1 John 1:7 We wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb when we confess our sins with faith in Jesus for our forgiveness. As John continues, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8-9

Finally we see how glorious their life with God in heaven is. Verse 15 “Therefore,” because they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.” The greatest joy will be to be in God’s presence and serve Him day and night. In this world we have sorrow because we fail to serve God faithfully every day.

There we will serve the Lord perfectly like the Angels. It continues, “And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” Several Psalms speak of how we can find shelter under the shadow of His wings. Like Psalm 57:1 “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by.” There in His presence there won't be any calamities.

Therefore, the vision continues, “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.” They have truly come out of the Great Tribulation of this life. They will never again suffer any harm. In God's presence life will be absolutely perfect.

God concludes this message with these beautiful words. “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Think about that, Jesus is our shepherd now, but it is often difficult to follow Him when you can't see Him. We are so prone to going astray. There in heaven Jesus will be visibly with us leading and guiding us to the living water of life. We will see Him in His full glory and He will never leave our side.

Doesn't that give you a greater joy and thanksgiving to God for His salvation in the midst of your sorrow of missing them, when you keep this picture clearly in our mind and know your loved ones are there in this picture?

It also gives us a completely different view of death. It is not something to be feared, it is the way God brings us out of the great tribulation of this world and into the glory of His presence forever. Martin Luther was driven to enter the Monastery because of his fear of death and facing God's punishment. 41 years later, after learning of the grace of God and our salvation by grace through faith, he was not afraid of death but was ready to die. Justus Jonas was with Luther when he died. He asked him if he was ready to die and meet the Lord, and he answered *“Yes.”* Then Luther said, *“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace”* and recited Psalm 31:5, which says, “*Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.*” How wonderful to be able to face death with such confidence and peace.

For the last few weeks now we have been enjoying the fall colours of the trees. It seems this fall has been more beautiful than some years. It just occurred to me that these trees make a beautiful picture of the Christian's life. In the early Spring the bud swells and then begins to open. It's the promise of the new life that will soon appear. Just as in birth a new person breaks forth. The leaves emerge in their bright green and flowers appear in their beauty. That is a beautiful picture of youthful energy and enthusiasm and wonder. Throughout the summer the flowers fade and the leaves grow darker and mature as they bear the heat of the summer.

Then in fall, just before the leaves die and fall to the ground they turn brilliant shades of red, yellow and orange. That is a nice picture of the Christian in their old age. As life becomes more difficult with weaknesses and health issues, at times very severe ailments and disabilities, their confident faith and trust in God shines with glorious splendour. They put their trust in God all the more and look forward to their deliverance from the great tribulation of this life. May this beautiful picture of our loved ones who have passed on before us, fill our hearts with any even greater faith and trust in Christ so that our lives may shine in glorious splendour to the glory of our great God.

Amen.