

THE CHURCH GLORIFIED, REVELATION 7:9-17

Well let's turn in our Bibles please to the book of Revelation chapter 7. As we have been preaching through the book of Revelation, we began last week to explore verses 1 through 8 of this chapter. Today, God willing, we're going to look at verses 9 through 17. Let's read together the entire chapter in order to pick up the context of the section we will be studying together. Revelation chapter 7:

“¹ And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. ² And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, ³ saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. ⁴ And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. ⁵ Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. ⁶ Of the tribe of Asher were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthali were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasseh were sealed twelve thousand. ⁷ Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. ⁸ Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

“⁹ After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; ¹⁰ and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. ¹¹ And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, ¹² saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

“¹³ And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? ¹⁴ And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Now as we concluded our study of Revelation chapter 6, you recall that we looked at the sixth seal, in which God is pouring out His wrath upon the wicked at the end of the age. We see the wicked who participated in and who cooperated with the work of the four horsemen now crying

out in terror, as they see the wrath of God descending upon them. They cry out in abject terror at the end of chapter 6.

The great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand? They certainly will not be able to stand up to the wrath of the Lamb, and they will certainly not be able to stand before the presence of the Lamb. When Jesus returns, they will fall before Him and they will be smitten by Him with that rod of iron, and they will be cast into hell forever.

But the good news of chapter 7 is that there will be some who will be able to stand before God without fear, and they are revealed to us in verse 9. Notice verse 9 of chapter 7: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,”—now here it is—“stood before the throne, and before the Lamb...” So chapter 6 closes with this terrifying cry, “Who shall be able to stand?” And chapter 7 and verse 9 says, “*These* shall be able to stand.”

Who, then, are these people and how do they differ from those of Revelation 6 and verse 17, who have no chance of standing before the throne? Well they are those who are described in verses 1 to 8 of chapter 7, which we looked at last week. They are those who have the seal of God in their foreheads.

Now last week we examined these people, and we saw that God restrains the execution of His judgments upon the earth until God’s people are clearly identified, so that none of His judgments will fall upon them. Believers receive the seal of God, which is a mark of authentication and a mark of ownership and a mark of security. God’s people are thus identified, and thereby protected from the wrath which He pours out upon the ungodly during this age.

This is not to say that God’s people do not experience some suffering in this age, but it is to say that whatever suffering they experience, that suffering is meant for their good; it is meant to sanctify them; it is meant to preserve them. And our suffering in this age is not in any way an expression of God’s wrath against us, for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

When God pours out His wrath against a society that is rebellious and hardened against Him, those who are believers in that society may experience some suffering as a result, but what they are experiencing is not God’s judgment. And so as God’s judgment falls on all of those around them, what falls on them and what falls out in their lives is God working all things together for their good, and God working all things together for their godliness. No suffering of any saint who is sealed by God ever hurts them, it only helps them to be more like Jesus, to be matured in the faith, and to be preserved from apostasy.

Last week we also saw the number of the people who were sealed. The number of the people sealed who were chosen from various tribes of the nation of Israel, we saw in verse 4, was 144,000, 12,000 from each tribe. As we looked at this passage, we saw that this was symbolic terminology being used by God. This terminology of the choosing of the 144,000 out of these

twelve tribes was used to convey the idea that the entire body of God's elect represented by this perfect number 144,000 makes up the true Israel of God. These are the genuine Israelites, who are children of Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ. This body of God's elect which makes up the true Israel of God is composed of a wide variety of people taken from a wide variety of people groups—some from this tribe, some from that tribe, some from the other tribe.

So we see in verse 9 that there are some that are taken from every nation and kindred and people and tongue. Israel is no longer defined by ethnic descent. It is defined, rather, by divine sovereign election, and it is revealed by the presence of the seal of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these people. As they bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, you can say, Ah—there's one that has the seal of the Spirit. Just as Old Covenant Israel was identified by the external mark of circumcision, so New Covenant Israel is identified by the internal mark of circumcision of heart and the sealing of the Spirit, which is then manifested in the behavior of those who bring forth the fruits of that regeneration and indwelling Spirit of God.

So what we have in these first eight verses is the whole church in its symbolic significance as the true Israel, and the protection that she enjoys from God in this age, being shielded from the wrath of God that is poured out on those of this age who are in defiant rebellion against God.

Now in verses 9 to 17, which we're going to look at today, we have a revelation of the actual dimension and size of the church, and we have a revelation of the blessedness that she enjoys in the presence of God after she is faithful unto death.

We have the symbolic number, 144,000, which speaks of the complete perfection of the full number of the people of God. There are none of God's elect that are not sealed by God. And then we have an actual description of the number of God's elect in verse 9. And how big is it? Is it 144,000? It is not. It is a multitude which no man can number.

So then, last time we looked at the church sealed, in verses 1 to 8. Today we want to look at the church glorified, in verses 9 to 17.

Now Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 to 17, which is the subject of our study today, is one of the most precious passages in all of the Scriptures, because in it we see in great detail the destiny and the blessedness of the believer in Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation is sprinkled with passages like the last half of chapter 7, and the purpose of this constant reminder of the destiny of the suffering saints is to encourage the saints *in* their spiritual warfare and *in* their suffering for the name and the gospel of Christ, and that though you suffer now, *here* is your destiny.

The purpose of passages like this second half of Revelation chapter 7 is to tell us that our afflictions are temporary, but our joy is eternal. It is to tell us that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Now as Christians, we go through much hardship and we endure many sufferings, as we serve the Lord

Jesus Christ on this earth, during our lifetimes. We have to deny ourselves, we have to take up our cross daily and we have to follow Him. We have to lose our lives.

Sometimes we ask ourselves, Is it worth it? The pain and the suffering and the rejection and the scorn and the shame that we endure for following Christ—is it worth it? And this passage in Revelation 7 and many more just like it in the remainder of the book answer that question and declare in no uncertain terms, It is worth it, indeed!

So what this passage is, is a balm to the wounds of the suffering saints, saying to them, These light afflictions that are for a moment are going to work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Don't look on these things which are seen, focus on the things which are unseen, the things which are ahead, and recognize that the little time of suffering is nothing compared to the eternity of glory that you will enjoy in the presence of Christ.

So remember, Saint, if you suffer with Him, you will also reign with Him. And here's what the reign looks like. So keep your eye focused on the prize, endure the cross, despise the shame, run the race with patience. Soon you will cross the finish line and enter into the glorious winner's circle. And here in Revelation 7, verses 9 to 17, is what that winner's circle looks like. So just because your side aches and your muscles groan and your joints hurt as you run the race in this life, don't quit, don't stop, don't give up, and don't turn aside. Press on towards the prize of the high calling of God in Christ, and here is what that prize looks like.

Well then, let us consider together this wonderful revelation of the eternal reward that those who faithfully persevere through tribulation and persecution obtain when they reach the end of their lives. And how fitting it is that we would be studying this passage the week after our dear sister Jackie Clark died and went to be with the Lord. *This* is what she is experiencing, right now at this moment. It makes it pretty real, does it not?

Well let's consider together then in the first place that heaven is a place that is well populated. Notice verse 9. It says, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."

Now here in verse 9, John sets before us an unforgettable picture of the vast crowd of people from every nation on earth who are now experiencing the indescribable joy of heaven. This vast crowd is innumerable. It is too large to be counted. John couldn't even begin to start counting. He recognized it was a hopeless endeavor.

So the definite symbolic number in verse 4 of 144,000 symbolized the perfect completion of the church. None were missing. But the great throng described here in verse 9 shows the impossibility of counting the vast number of redeemed that are symbolically represented by that number 144,000. Who are these people before the throne, this vast uncountable multitude? Well

they are both Jews and Gentiles. We are told that they come from *every* nation and kindred and people and tongue. So no sector of humanity is excluded from heaven.

Now these are the same categories of people that are spoken of in chapter 5 and verse 9. Turn back to Revelation 5:9 for a moment. It says, “And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every”—here it is—“kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

So back in chapter 5, Jesus was seen as having just ascended to heaven from His work on the cross, and that work was declared: You redeemed a people on the cross—a people out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. And now in chapter 7, we see the application of that redemption to the perfect and complete body of God’s elect, and what we see is that what Jesus purchased, Jesus applied, and Jesus brought into heaven—that body of people from every nation and kindred and people and tongue.

So in heaven, every political group, every ethnic group, every social group, every linguistic group is represented. Listen to me. No one is excluded from heaven but those who exclude themselves. Only by rebellious unbelief can you stay out of heaven. The vastness of this multitude tells us of the vast generosity of God’s electing love. It is not small or limited.

And the vastness of this multitude tells us of the tremendous success of the evangelistic efforts of the people of God through the ages. You know, you go out and witness and you think, Well, is anybody going to get to be saved? Well let me tell you something, a multitude which no man can number are going to get saved through the preaching of the people of God. So be encouraged. God has an uncountable number of people to be led to Christ, and when you go out and preach the gospel, you are going to be involved in leading some of them to Christ.

Indeed, what we have here in verse 9 is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham repeatedly in Genesis 13:16, in Genesis 15:5, and in Genesis 22:17, when God said to Abraham that his seed would be like the sand of the sea; his seed would be like the stars of heaven; his seed would be like the dust of the earth. Now if you can count the stars in the universe, and the dust of the earth and all the grains of sand on all the seashores, then you can count this crowd.

And notice, they are standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They are serene, they are confident, they are certain of their approval by God and their acceptance with God. They are not in the condition of those in Revelation 6, verses 15 to 17. Notice there the great multitude: “¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man,”—and that covers every category of people as well, and it says they “hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: ¹⁷ for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” So we see the terror, we see the fear, we see the dread in the people of the sixth seal.

But here we see the serenity, we see the confidence, we see the joy of those who God has sealed. As Colossians 1:22 says of these people that are standing before the throne in Revelation 7, verse 9, they are holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight. God has no single negative thing to say about them. As Jude 1:24 promised, they are faultless before the presence of God. As Hebrews 10:19 says, they have boldness to enter into the holiest dwelling place of God Himself.

And why can they stand before God when others cringe in the presence of God? Well it says in verse 9 that they are clothed in white robes, and these white robes are symbolic of the fact that they have been cleansed from their sin and they have been adorned in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They do not have the filthy rags of those of Revelation 6 and verse 17, but rather they have the glorious wedding garment of Christ. Through the saving work of Jesus Christ they have been made as morally pure as God Himself is. They are holy as He is holy. Therefore, they can stand unafraid in His presence. They can stand not only unafraid, they can stand with confidence and boldness.

So the good news of the gospel is that you will not cringe before God on the day of judgment. Instead, you will be confident before God on the day of judgment. You, in His presence, will be able to humbly hold up your head and behold His face and not have to cast your eyes down in any kind of shame or fear. That's what Jesus Christ has done for you in His cleansing, saving work, and in the lovely robe of righteousness that He has provided you by His saving work. Knowing that Jesus has brought you from crying and cringing before God to being confident and cheerful in the presence of God is what will move you to eternal worship and praise of God for all eternity. So what is heaven? Heaven's a place that is well populated.

Secondly, heaven is not only a place that's wellpopulated, heaven is a place that is full of praise. Our text says in verse 9 that they stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and—notice—with “palms in their hands; ¹⁰ and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”

Now the last phrase of verse 10 tells us that these people before the throne had palm branches, that is, the branches from palm trees, the fronds, in their hands. These palm branches that they are holding allude to the feast of tabernacles, in which Israel built booths to live in during that feast, and they built those booths out of palm branches. This feast of tabernacles, in which palm branches figured so prominently, was a celebration of God's protection of Israel during her pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Remember when they left Egypt and it took them forty years to get to the Promised Land, and they lived in tents? Well they had this feast of tabernacles in which they would build little tentlike structures out of palm branches and live in them for a week, and they would remember and reflect upon how they were sojourners during those forty years, and how God protected them and how God watched over them during that time. And it was a time of tremendous joy and

rejoicing. It was kind of like everybody got together and they had a campout, and they built their little shelters, and they praised and worshiped God as they reflected on His goodness in preserving Israel on the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

And so, in heaven we will be celebrating God's preservation and protection of us during *our* pilgrimage through this life as we journeyed to heaven through the wilderness of a God-hating, Christ-rejecting world. There was nothing out in the wilderness that was friendly to the Jews as they traveled through it. And there is nothing in this world that is friendly to us. John the Baptist himself said, Who am I? I'm the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

So that's what we live in. A wilderness. We are pilgrimaging through this life, dwelling in tents, looking for the city whose builder and maker is God. And when we get to that city, we're going to look back on that journey and that pilgrimage, and we're going to say, Jesus led me all the way. Jesus protected me every step. And the palm branches are reminiscent of that rejoicing of the protection and the provision that God made in that pilgrimage journey.

Now in verse 10, we see the praise of these saints who stand before the throne. Notice verse 10. It says, And they "cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." This phrase, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," is a declaration of the saints that both the Father and the Son are the cause of their salvation. One of them did the electing and the other one did the redeeming. One chose the 144,000 and the other washed them in His blood.

So the saints recognize that both the Father and the Son are the cause of their salvation, and both the Father and the Son are to be praised for their salvation. They recognize they could never stand before the throne and before the Lamb without the salvation that the Father and the Son provided them with. And for that priceless gift, they give endless praise to them both, and they say, We are here because they saved us. Our salvation is ascribed fully to the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

But not only do the redeemed saints praise the Father and the Son for the salvation that they provided to God's chosen, the angels do so as well. Notice verses 11 and 12: "¹¹ And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, ¹² saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

The angels are righteous before God. They don't need salvation. They have not, like us, received salvation, but they worship God for who He is. And once again, these angels set forth this sevenfold ascription of praise that they offered back in chapter 5 and verse 12. It says, from verse 11, "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne," verse 12, "saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." That was a sevenfold description of praise back there in chapter 5 and verse 12, and now here in chapter 7 and verse 12, they offer

that same sevenfold description of praise, with one minor change. “Riches” is now substituted out and “thanksgiving” is put in its place, but the other six are all the same.

So the angels declare that the Father and the Son are worthy to receive praise and worship for the blessing that they bestow. They are worthy to receive praise and worship for the glory that they possess. They are worthy to receive praise and worship for the wisdom that they display. They are worthy to receive praise and worship for the thanksgiving that they are owed. They are worthy to receive praise and worship for the honor that they deserve. They are worthy to receive praise and worship for the power that they have exercised. And they are worthy to receive praise and worship for the might that they utilize.

So we see that all that the Father and all that the Son did in providing salvation for the saints not only provokes the saints to worship and praise, but it also provokes the angels to worship and praise God for what He did for the saints. The angels have seen all of these attributes of God displayed in the salvation of these redeemed saints standing before the throne, and they cannot contain themselves. As they hear the saints praise the Father and the Son, they have to jump right in there and praise the Father and Son as well, and join in that thunderous expression of praise to God on the throne and the Lamb.

In heaven, there will be perfect harmony between the praise of the saints and the praise of the angels before the throne, and if you wonder what Jackie Clark is doing right now, this is what she’s doing. She is standing up there saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And then she listens to the angels as they give the sevenfold ascription of praise, and then they all say, Amen.

Well that leads us to our third major point. Having seen that heaven is a place that is well-populated; having seen that heaven is a place that is full of praise; notice thirdly, heaven is a place that is completely pure. Notice verses 13 and 14. “¹³ And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? ¹⁴ And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Now in verse 13, the elder asked John this question, not because the elder doesn’t know the answer, and not because the elder needs information, but in order to focus John’s attention on the reason why these saints are able to be in heaven at all, and why they’re not cringing like the people in Revelation chapter 6. So he asks, Where did these people come from? What is their history? What have they passed through? How did they get here? And what makes them both able and worthy to stand before the throne of God?

Now John says, very respectfully, Sir, you tell me. You know the answer better than I do. I am a student at your feet, ready to learn your instruction. And so he says, Sir, you know—which is saying, Sir, please instruct me as to the answer to your question. So the elder supplies the answer

to him. He tells John that there are two things that characterize all of those who are able to stand before the throne.

If you stand before the throne of God in heaven, two things are absolutely true of you. First of all, those before the throne are those who have passed through and endured great tribulation. Notice he says in verse 14, “These are they which came out of great tribulation.” That’s the first thing He says about them. He’s talking about their history. These people that are before the throne have a history. What is their history? They came out of great tribulation.

Now this great tribulation referred to here is not that period, that short period, between the loosing of Satan and the return of Christ, which is often referred to by theologians as “the Great Tribulation.” It’s fine to use that terminology. Jesus spoke of “great tribulation” in Matthew chapter 24, describing that period. And this period between the loosing of Satan and the second coming of Christ is called “the great tribulation,” due to the extreme intensity of the trans-national persecution of Christians that occurs under the reign of Antichrist. We’re going to see that as we proceed through the book of Revelation. It’s the three and a half day period, as opposed to a three and a half year period.

However, the great tribulation referred to here in Revelation 7 is the tribulation which began at the ascension of Christ into heaven, when Satan was cast out of heaven and down to the earth, and which will continue until the second coming of Christ, with a tremendous intensification of it right at the very end.

Now where was Satan before the ascension of Christ into heaven? Well the answer is, he was in heaven himself. When you read the book of Job, Satan had access to God, did he not? He was in heaven. God says, Where did you come from? Satan says, Well I was walking back and forth in the earth, and going to and fro in it. They had this conversation, right? So from the time of the fall of man until the time of the ascension of Christ, Satan had direct access to the throne and the person of God. That’s not to say he wasn’t fallen, it’s not to say he wasn’t evil. But it is to say that he had access to heaven. But at the ascension of Christ, something happened. There was war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels, and Satan was cast out of heaven, down to earth. And when that happened, all hell broke loose on earth.

Turn in your Bibles please to Revelation chapter 12. It says the woman—which is true Israel here, Abraham and his true children—ultimately brought forth the manchild, who is Jesus, vis-à-vis Mary. It says in verse 5, “And she,” speaking of Israel collectively, “brought forth a man child”—true Israel, collectively. She brought forth a manchild “who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.” So the entire birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ is all handled in verse 5.

Notice what follows Christ’s ascension to heaven. “⁶ And the woman fled into the wilderness”, that is, the church fled into the wilderness, “where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there” three and a half years—“a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”

“⁷ And”—here we go—“there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, ⁸ and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice saying *in* heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. ¹¹ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” So now heaven is absent Satan. He has been kicked out.

Notice verse 12: “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them.” You’re never going to have to be in the presence of Satan ever again. That is a cause for rejoicing. But look at the next phrase: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” So now Satan is dwelling on the earth, he is furious, his doom has been sealed, he knows he only has until all of the elect are gathered, and then he’s finished. So he’s going to do all the damage he can in the time he has left.

Verse 13: “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman,” that is, the true Israel of God, the church, “which brought forth the man child,” who is Jesus. “¹⁴ And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time”—three and a half years—“from the face of the serpent,” which is the entire church age. That three and a half years is the entire church age. We talked about that when we discussed numerology.

“¹⁵ And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood,” who are the wicked people of Satan, “after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.” Do you understand anything about the flood of persecution that wicked people bring against God’s church? It’s enormous. “¹⁶ And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.”

We have been protected by God in this age from annihilation, which is exactly what Satan has sought to bring against us as he’s brought persecution by this government, and by that government, and by the next government. Verse 17: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed,” that is, all who have been born of her, “which”—notice—“keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Now the point of this passage, especially verse 12 and verse 17, is to say that when the ascension happened, great tribulation began on the earth. The persecution of the people of God was carried on and carried out at a scale that the world had never previously known. And to back up that

assertion, let's turn to Daniel chapter 12. In Daniel chapter 12, an interesting individual is mentioned, and an interesting event. Notice Daniel 12:1:

“¹ And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people.” Now didn't we just read about Michael in Revelation 12? He was the guy who stood up and led the battle against Satan and cast Satan and his angels out of heaven. And Daniel 12:1 is talking about that event that took place at the ascension of Christ. Notice it says, “and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book”—those who have the seal of God. And what's the next event? Verse 2: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

So Daniel chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, covers the time period from Michael standing up and casting Satan out of heaven until the return of Christ, in which the resurrection happens and the sheep and the goats are divided. And it says that time frame between Michael standing up and the final resurrection occurring is called a “time of trouble,” such as never was since the first nation was formed on the face of the earth. So, people, we are living in the great tribulation right now. It began when Satan was cast to the earth, it will end when Jesus returns, and at the end of this time, there will be a massive intensification of it when Satan is loosed. But right now it is still great tribulation.

John himself spoke of presently being in this time of “the tribulation” in Revelation 1 and verse 9. That's why he was on the isle of Patmos. If you turn please to Revelation 1 and verse 9, it says, “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in *the* tribulation”—the article “the” is there in the original language—“and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John is preaching the word of God, he's giving testimony of his salvation by Jesus Christ, he is experiencing the great tribulation, he is being persecuted, he is exiled to Patmos, and he's saying, I'm in *the* tribulation.

Turn to Revelation 2. This is the suffering church, the church at Smyrna. Reading from verse 8: “⁸ And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; ⁹ I know thy works, and [the] tribulation”—there it is again, *the* tribulation—“and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

“¹⁰ Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil”—that's the person that was cast down to the earth and is now actively persecuting the church in a way that he never did before—“the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days”—that number ten is symbolic, it's the number of perfection—“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

So He says, You're going to be martyred. And there have been more martyrs to the cause of the name of God and Christ in this age than there ever were in the previous 4,000 years. Jesus promised us that our life would be a life of tribulation. He said in John 16:33, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." And in Acts 14, verses 21 to 22, it says that Paul went about preaching the gospel, strengthening the churches and telling them that they "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

All of these passages combined together tell us that the period between the first and the second coming of Christ is a period of extraordinarily great tribulation for the followers of Christ—greater than the Old Testament saints ever knew or experienced. And it is to the overcomer, who overcomes this tribulation by remaining faithful to Christ through it, that the promises are made of entering heaven to the seven churches in the seven letters, which we previously studied. So the saints prove the genuineness of their faith by persevering through great tribulations for His name and for His truth, without turning back and without turning away.

The point that I want to make to you is this: All true believers go through great tribulation, and none who get to heaven escape it. Who are these people in heaven? It says specifically in verse 9 that they are "a great multitude, which no man could number of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues."

Now there's a lot of things that differentiate them—nations, people, kindreds, and tongues—but there is one thing they universally possess, and that is they all, without exception, suffered great tribulation. So this great tribulation can't be referring to just the saints that live between the loosing of Satan and the second coming. This is a picture of all the saints, all 144,000, the complete total number of the elect of God. Every one of *them* comes out of the great tribulation. All true believers go through great tribulation, and none who get to heaven escape that. And this great tribulation that all of us go through takes many forms and it varies in its expression from believer to believer, but all experience it in one way or another.

So, Christian, if you have great tribulations in your life that have tempted you to turn away from Christ, understand that what you're going through is nothing unusual. Every single saint before you has gone through it, and every single saint after you *will* go through it, because there will be no saint in heaven who hasn't gone through it. Inflicting great tribulation on the saints is the work of Satan in this age, and no one escapes his assaults. God has no children who do not come out of a life of great tribulation.

Now you might say, Well, my tribulation isn't as great as that person's. You know, the word "great" is a relative term. A mouse is great in size compared to an ant, but he's not great in size compared to an elephant, is he? Great tribulation to you might look entirely different than great tribulation to someone else, based on your capacities, based on your resources, based on your gifts and graces, based on the amount of the presence and power of Christ that's available to you in your life. But every person in their particular situation, with their particular abilities and with their particular level of grace, experiences what is for them, great tribulation.

No, maybe you weren't burned at the stake and the other guy was. But you've gone through things that are just as bad, in comparison, to what they have gone through, in terms of your capacity for handling trouble. You know, those who were burned at the stake had great grace—far greater than what you have. So the greatness of the tribulation is directly related to the capacity for suffering that you have in your particular life circumstance. And everyone—every believer in light of his particular life circumstance—goes through great tribulation. Every one.

The second thing that characterizes those who stand before the throne is that they have not only come out of great tribulation, but secondly, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Notice chapter 7. In verse 14, it says: “These are they which came out of great tribulation,” point one; point two, “and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Now washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb is a metaphor which speaks of the righteousness they obtained through the washing away of their sins by the substitutionary saving work of Jesus Christ when He shed His blood on the cross to provide an atonement that would cleanse them from their sins.

In Isaiah 1 and verse 18, it says, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” The only time and place you can take red sins and wash them in red blood and wind up with a white garment is through the saving work of Jesus Christ. It says in Ephesians 1 and verse 7, “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

So this is why they are able to stand before the throne. It is not only because they prove the genuineness of their faith by their faithfulness through great tribulation, but because the object of their faith was the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work *alone* for the forgiveness of their sins.

And so for those in heaven, the battle with sin is over forever. They have no sin on their record and they have no sin in their persons, and this is why they are pictured as being robed in white robes. On earth, they hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and now in heaven they are filled with righteousness. They are perfectly pure with no blemish, no spot, no wrinkle on their character. Now they are holy as God is holy, and their character is as white as His. Heaven is a place that is perfectly pure, and it is perfectly pure people who are washed in the blood of the Lamb who are present in heaven.

And I want to say to anyone listening to me today: You can be washed from all of your sins, no matter how terrible they are, in the blood of Jesus Christ, by repenting of those sins and by believing in Him as your Savior.

It says in First Corinthians chapter 6, in verses 9 through 11: “⁹ Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor [crossdressers, nor homosexuals], ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” People who do such things and who practice such things, which is all of us—none of us can inherit the kingdom if we appear before God with those sins on our record and in our character. He says, “¹¹ And such *were* some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God.”

There is no one who cannot be washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is no one who cannot make their character white so that they can appear before God in the day of judgment, by simply going to the fountain for sin and uncleanness, and there plunging themselves into the grace of Christ and into the mercy of Christ, and calling upon Christ and saying, Lord Jesus, wash me, cleanse me from my sins. Because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. First John 1 and verse 7.

Heaven is a place that’s completely pure, and only pure people will be there. And you say, Well, how can I become pure so I can be there? Answer: You can be washed in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ by repenting of your sins and asking the Lord Jesus to save you and cleanse you in Him. And if we confess those sins, He is faithful and just to cleanse us from those sins, to forgive those sins, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Well that brings us to our fourth and final point. Having seen that heaven is a place that is well populated; heaven is a place that is full of praise; heaven is a place that’s completely pure; fourthly and finally, heaven is a place that is totally peaceful.

Notice verses 15 to 17. It says, “¹⁵ Therefore”—because they believed in Christ for the cleansing of their sin, because they proved the genuineness of their faith in Christ by persevering through great tribulation—because of that, *therefore*, they and they alone “are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Verse 15 says, “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.” You know, I don’t know about you, but I love to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, but my flesh hates to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. I really struggle to serve the Lord. But in heaven, the struggle to serve Christ will be gone. Service to Him will be *all* that we want to do, and the resistance of the flesh against that desire will vanish.

Heaven will be a place of activity. There be much work and service to be done, and we will never tire of doing it. It says we will serve Him day and night. We will have a zeal and an energy that enables us to never have to sleep again. We can just go on serving and serving and serving and serving, without intermission, because we will have the strength and the zeal and the

desire to do it. We will find our greatest joy in serving God in His temple without rest or remission, because we will have unwearied strength to do so, and we will have unlimited zeal to do so, and we will derive endless satisfaction and fulfillment from doing it.

But it will not be some distant and detached deity that we will be serving. It says in verse 15 that we are before the throne of God, and he that sits on the throne will dwell *among* us. In fact, the language is that He will spread His tabernacle over us. The idea is He will bring us into His dwelling place, into His very home. He will live in our midst. Our fellowship with Him will be perfect. Our fellowship with Him will be constant. And it will be all we could ever want in a relationship with God. We will serve Him, He will live with us, we will live with Him, and there will be an intimate fellowship of service and of love flowing back and forth between Him and us for all of eternity.

Notice verse 16: “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.” That is, there will be nothing to desire that we do not have, and all of our needs will be fully met. And it’s interesting that verse 16 is a quote of Isaiah 49 and verse 10. We read Isaiah 49, verses 1 to 10 in our Sunday School this morning, and I told you we were going to refer to that in our morning message.

Let me just refresh you with what Isaiah chapter 49 and verse 10 says, speaking there prophetically of what Messiah *will* do. Here we see, retrospectively, the *fulfillment* of all that He has promised. In Isaiah 49 and verse 10, it says, “They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.” And so what was promised in the Old Testament is provided in the New Testament. There will be no unmet needs in heaven, like there are on earth. Heaven will be a place of full provision and heaven will be a place of full protection. Not only will we have full provision, we will not hunger or thirst anymore; we will also have full protection; the sun will not smite us, nor any heat be upon us.

Now understand something. The Holy Land was a place of burning sun and scorching heat that assaulted the health and the well-being of the people. In Israel, the sun was not your friend. People constantly sought protection from the damage it could do to them. Did you ever wonder why in those incredibly hot climates, people are wearing these full body covering robes? You think, Well, doesn’t that make them sweat? They wouldn’t survive if they exposed their skin to that kind of intensity of sun. So the sun in its scorching heat became a metaphor for any kind of harmful assault upon the people of God.

But in heaven, nothing and no one will assault us—nothing in nature, nothing in people, nothing in angels, and nothing in God. We will never be hungry and we will never be harmed. Jackie is full, and she is safe.

Verse 17: “For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” So verse 17

says we will be fed physically. The Garden of Eden will be restored and we shall have all we need to eat and to drink. The black horse of famine and scarcity will never ride in heaven.

We will not only be fed physically—there will be the river, there will be the trees in paradise restored—but we will also be fed spiritually. Never again we will have to hunger and thirst after righteousness. We will be filled. The Bread of life will be there to fill us and satisfy our spiritual hunger, and the Water of life will be there to quench our spiritual thirst. In a word, Christ will feed our bodies and Christ will feed our souls, and furthermore, Christ will comfort our hearts.

Notice the last phrase of verse 17: “and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Now there are many things on this earth that cause many tears: disappointment, rejection, loss, failure. But every cause for sorrow will be removed and every means of happiness will be supplied. And just as life without tears is impossible on earth, life with tears will be impossible in heaven, because every cause of tears will be forever and irrevocably and completely removed.

We will have unlimited and we will have uninterrupted happiness in heaven. Psalm 16 and verse 11 says, “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” So “fullness” and “forever”—that describes the happiness of people in heaven. How could you ever have tears when you are full of happiness, forever, and there is nothing else?

That, brethren, is total peace. Heaven is a place that is totally peaceful. No anxiety about, What am I going to do? I’m going to serve the Lord. No anxiety about God’s attitude towards me. He lives right with me. No anxiety about, What am I going to eat or what am I going to drink? No anxiety about whether I might suffer some kind of disappointment or rejection or loss or failure. None of that—none of that will be there. All conflict is forever gone.

And so, people, this is what enables us to persevere through the great tribulation that every one of us lives in right now. The recognition that the end of this tribulation is to wind up in a place that is well populated, all of your loved ones who are Christians are going to be there. Jackie’s going to be there.

Heaven is a place that’s going to be full of praise. There’s not going to be any biting or devouring, or anybody with a gun shooting other people.

It’s going to be a place that’s completely pure. There will be no sin. There will be no arguments. There will be no bad feelings. There will be no impure thoughts. It’s going to be a place that’s totally peaceful—nothing to disturb our joy or our happiness forever.

Now if that’s your destiny, but you have to go through the humility of confessing yourself a sinner and believing in Christ as your Savior, and you have to go through tribulation and struggle in this life to get *there*—isn’t it worth it? If you can get to a place that is full of people you love, that is full of praise to God, that is completely pure from all sin, and that is totally peaceful in every respect—isn’t the humility of saying, I am a sinner and I want Jesus to save me, and the

perseverance of saying, Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him in this life of tribulation and difficulty—isn't that worth it?

And so this book was written to encourage suffering saints by giving them a vision of the outcome and the end of their suffering for Christ. And this book is just as relevant to us today. When you start getting really bummed out about the Christian life and all the tribulation and hardship and struggle you have, you just open this and read this and say, This is where that's leading. And when you do, you'll be able to hang on for one more day, and one more day, and more day, until finally one day, at 90 years of age, you pass into the presence of God. Well, keep that vision before you, and the great tribulation will be endurable. Shall we pray together.

Our Father, we stand amazed at the wonder of the place that you have prepared for your suffering saints. And Father, we anticipate with delight and glory the wonder of being there. So Father, help us to set our affections on things above and not on things of the earth, on things ahead and not on things in the present, knowing that this world passes away and the fashion thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever in this glorious place. And so, Father, may we ever keep the vision of heaven before us, and in having that vision, may we be encouraged to go forward with great joy and boldness, even in the face of the worst of tribulation. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.