

Martyrs of the Great Tribulation, part 2

Revelation 7:9-17, part2

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-05-15

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Text - Revelation 7:9-17

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from all ethnic nations and tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palm branches in their hands. 10 And they shouted with a loud voice saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels stood around the Throne, and the elders and the four living beings, and they fell down before the Throne, on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 saying: "Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

13 And one of the elders reacted, saying to me, "Who are these that are clothed in the white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 So I said to him, "My lord, you know." So he said to me: "These are those who come out of the Great Tribulation—they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His sanctuary. And He who sits on the throne will shelter them. 16 They shall not hunger anymore, nor thirst anymore; the sun will absolutely not strike them, nor any heat; 17 because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of waters of life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."[^3]

Introduction

In his book, *Harvest of Humility*, John Seamands tells of a wounded German soldier who was ordered to go to the military hospital for treatment. When he arrived he saw two doors, one marked "For slightly wounded" and the other "For the seriously wounded."

He entered through the first door since he was only slightly wounded, and at the end of the hall were two more doors, one marked "For officers" and the other "For non-officers." He entered through the second door and found himself going down another hall.

At the end of the hall were two more doors, one marked "For party members" and the other marked "For non-party members." He took the second door, and found himself out on the street. [Obviously an apocryphal story.]

But Seamonds say that when the soldier returned home, his mother asked him, "How did you get along at the hospital?"

"Well, Mother," he replied, "to tell the truth, the people there didn't do anything for me, but you ought to see the tremendous organization they have!"¹

Many churches have tremendous organization. Their people are busy. But apart from the Holy Spirit's ministry in their midst, that's all it is - an organization.

This passage gives us a lovely snapshot of what the ideal church looks like. Granted, it is in heaven, but that's the point. It is still a *church* in heaven, and in heaven this church is perfected. This is the upward calling that the church has in Christ Jesus.

I. The eschatology: The good news, the bad news, and the who, what, where, why, and so forth (last week's sermon)

Last week I gave the eschatology of this passage. Today I want to see what this upward calling for the church looks like.

II. The ideal church is international, intercultural, interracial (v. 9)

And the first and most obvious thing that we can see is that this ideal church is international, inter-cultural, and interracial. Verse 9 says, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from all ethnic nations [the Identity Movement needs to read that statement - it doesn't say from "white ethnic nations" but "from all ethnic nations"] and tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne..."

This is as clear a rebuke to racist Christians as you could get. To come before the throne is to worship, and verse 11 explicitly says that they worshiped together before the throne. *Together*. The ideal church is not even mildly racist. You didn't have a church of Asians worshiping God in one location, and a group of Africans over here, and a group of Canadians, and a group of Confederates, and a group of Yankees. They were not united around social issues, racial issues, or cultural issues. They were united around God's throne and around Christ. They had a new identity that drove them.

And if that is the ideal church in heaven, should it not be a model for the ideal church on earth? In a previous sermon I demonstrated that the worship

¹ Robert Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 119-120.

of earth is supposed to be patterned after the worship of heaven. Heaven has prayers, and we should have prayers. Heaven has musical instruments, and we should have musical instruments. And you could go through each part of worship and show how heaven is the pattern for earth.

Well, this means that our churches should strive to promote racial reconciliation through the Gospel. We should strive to have more international unity, cultural unity, and interracial unity. The church is not supposed to be a club that unites around social causes. This is not a Republican Church, or a Constitution Party Church, or a Christian Liberty Party Church, though we have had members in all three. And I am not saying that we cannot preach on politics. You know that I do. The Bible applies to all of life and preaching may cause us to repent of some of our political ideas, but it is not politics that drives what our church is about, but God's Word. It is not cultural ideas that we bow to, but God's throne. And racial division makes no sense whatsoever since we are now a new race in Jesus, the Second Adam. What a beautiful picture of a world-wide church being perfectly united in Christ.

III. The church is vast (v. 9)

But the same verse indicates that this church in heaven is of incredibly vast proportions. Last week we saw several reasons why this crowd of martyrs was in the multiplied millions, and we aren't even past AD 66 yet. If the *infancy* of the church is already in multiplied millions, what will it be in the future when it is mature? If the mustard seed stage of the church is so huge, what will the full grown bush look like?

It is staggering to see God's lovingkindness being poured out upon millions of former rebels in the first century. And it is even more staggering to see that of the *increase* of Christ's kingdom and of peace there will be no end - at least from AD 70 and on. Throughout the rest of history He will continue to pour out more and more of His grace. And if it keeps growing from multiplied millions, where will it end? The end of the book shows a completely converted planet earth. Paul says that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more.

Well, I am going to state an application that may seem hard to believe to some of you - but flows out of this idea that grace abounds more than sin. After studying the trajectory that Scriptural prophecy places on history, Reformed scholars like B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, W. G. T. Shedd, and many others have been convinced that at the end of history we

will look back and we will notice that the vast majority of mankind will be saved. There will be far more people in heaven than there will be in hell. Though it is only hinted at here, by the time we get to the end of the book that will no doubt be a growing conviction.

But what is the immediate response that people give to that assertion? It is Christ's statement in Matthew 7:14 where He says, "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." So they conclude that means there will be relatively few in heaven compared to those in hell. They do not see God as being quite as generous with His grace as Warfield did. But that's not what the passage says. Jesus was saying that there were few in His day (He uses the present tense) who were being saved. The majority of Israel had rejected His message. But you keep reading and a few verses later he contrasts that word "few" with the word *many*. In Matthew 8:11-12 He says,

And I say to you that many will come [this is future to AD 30 - "many will come"] from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness... (Matt. 8:11-12)

When were they cast out? In The war of AD 66-73. So already in the first century the few were being changed to many. And it was that "many" that we looked at last week. Though a majority of that "many" were martyred, the 144,000 were protected in order to start witnessing throughout the empire once again once the war was done, and they start an onward growth of the church that attempts to Christianize every nation.

That's the eschatology of Romans 9-11 - that few will give way to many, that the remnant will give way to the fullness.

That's the eschatology of Acts which begins with 120 in the upper room and goes to 3000 in one day. And then there are another 5000 (4:4), and then a multitude (4:32), and then "believers increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (5:14), to a statement by the enemies that they were turning the world upside down, etc. And each section of Acts ends by saying that the word of God multiplied greatly in that new region. Acts is a microcosm picture of the invincible advancement of the Gospel that would start once again in AD 70.

This is the eschatology of Christ's parables that speak of the growth of the kingdom. The leaven of the kingdom eventually leavens the whole lump.

This is the eschatology of Ezekiel's miraculous river that starts as a tiny

trickle at Pentecost, and keeps flowing deeper and deeper until it becomes so vast that you can't swim over it and it brings healing to the entire world.

This is the eschatology of Daniel's image in chapter 2 that gets struck on the feet by a stone cut without hands. That stone represents Christ's kingdom in the first century and it starts grinding the image into powder and causing the wind to scatter that image and the stone grows into a huge mountain that eventually fills the earth.

So yes, there were few in AD 30 who were entering by the gate to eternal life, but that changes to many, to multitudes, to vast multitudes that no man can number in AD 66. And the trajectory of this book keeps going until everyone is Christian in the end of the book.

IV. The ideal church is Theocentric and Christocentric, not self-absorbed (v. 9b-10)

A. Notice the focus

But this passage also shows that the ideal church is Theocentric (that means God-centered) and Christocentric (that means Christ-centered). And by the way, the only way you can be God-centered is if you are Christ-centered - if you approach God through Christ. In any case this church was not self-absorbed. Notice their focus. They could have been so overwhelmed with healed bodies and the new exquisite pleasures that they were experiencing that they would be focused on self. They could have been so overwhelmed by the beauty of heaven that they would be focused on the expensive stuff around them. But something far more captivating and heart grabbing had gotten their attention. They are standing before the Throne and before the Lamb gazing at the glory of the Triune God.

The more we mature, the more we will be like those saints in heaven - more wrapped up in the Giver than we are in His wonderful gifts. Not that we won't appreciate His gifts - we will. But our admiration for the Triune God will far outshine our admiration for anything else. Our goal should be to become more and more God-centered.

B. Notice the throne

And I think there is a reason why John emphasizes the fact that they are before "the Throne" and why they bow before the throne in verse 11. I think it is to emphasize the fact that they are in submission to God's Lordship and to His kingdom, not their own. In fact, it was a radical submission to God's

throne that led to their martyrdom - they were not willing to call Caesar "Lord." The church fathers say that was the issue - they were not willing to call Caesar "Lord." Caesar's coins made constant reference to Caesar as Lord, as God, as High Priest, as Son of God, as Savior, as Provider, and other blasphemous claims to have a throne before which all of life must bow. Caesar was willing to let you have any freedom, so long as you first bowed to His throne. And Christians refused. It was God's throne that was the center of their life, not Statism.

And we as a church must aspire to be like the church of heaven - seeing Christ's Lordship over every square inch of our lives and every square inch of planet earth. Joel McDurmon has a fabulous article on the passage where the Herodians, Sadducees, the priests, and Pharisees banded together to trap Jesus with the question, "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar." If He said "Yes" they would get Jesus in trouble with the people. If He said "No," they would get Him in trouble with Rome. Jesus called them hypocrites and proceeded to show their hypocrisy. He asked them to produce a coin. They did so, and He asked for all to hear, "Whose image and superscription is this?" McDurmon comments:

The denarius itself — most likely a coin from the current Emperor — carried not only his image but an inscription that read TIBERIUS CAESAR DIVI AUGUSTI FILIUS AUGUSTUS (“Tiberius Caesar August Son of the August God”), and the back side continued PONTIFEX MAXIMUS (“High Priest”). If this was not a graven image of a false god, nothing is. And Jesus made it a point to enter these facts into the record.²

They were carrying false gods in their pockets, and because they worshiped money, they bowed to Rome. And by the way, they were in the temple when Jesus asked them to produce the coin.

The Pharisees would have been squirming because they were the most opposed to Roman idolatry, yet here they were handling idols and using an idol to try to trap Jesus.

The Sadducees would have been squirming because they claimed that no one could give Roman money as offerings in the temple, but they did so not for purity sake, but to make money with their own monopolistic racket that had been set up by the high priest around 40 years earlier. They had set up a monopoly money exchange in the temple to let people trade in Roman coinage for temple coinage that had no images on it. Jesus pointed out that their monopoly was a form of robbery. But the hypocrisy was that their theological justification for it was that God doesn't want any idols in the

² <https://americanvision.org/3570/render-unto-god-what-is-gods-you-too-caesar/>

temple. Yet here they are carrying a Roman coin in the temple. What hypocrites. McDurmon points out,

... they had tables and bags filled with Roman denarii throughout the Temple courts. In fact, the moneychangers all wore one of these coins in their ear as a mark of their trade. [They have ears but can't hear (because of their idols)!] You can imagine that passers-by and pilgrims to the Temple saw plenty of display of these images right there in the Temple itself.

They were hypocrites and were enriching their own pockets with their extortionist and monopolistic money exchange. So the Sadducees were squirming. All of the crowds would have immediately caught the hypocrisy, but rather than repenting, they try to kill the messenger who exposes their sin.

The High Priests were squirming because the inscription on the coin called Caesar High priest and every one of those high priests was appointed by Caesar, and everyone knew it. They weren't priests of God. They were priests of Caesar. They were hypocrites.

The Herodians were squirming because Herod was far worse in his taxation than Caesar. In fact, his taxes were so high that Caesar told Herod to cut it out. While all four groups were statist, the Herodians were proudly so. Yesterday a friend sent me a quote from a presbyterian pastor in Tennessee. This pastor said, "If the state legislature passed a law declaring Jesus Christ Lord of the state of Tennessee, I would oppose it with my whole being." That is blasphemy.³ But that pretty much sums up these four groups.

All of these people were in one way or another bowing before the throne of Caesar and calling Caesar the lord of life while pretending to not like it. They were enriching themselves through Statism while trying to trap Jesus with a false dichotomy - "Do you support Caesar or the rebels." They were hypocrites.

And Jesus in effect said that if you are Caesar's servants and belong to Caesar then you have no complaints when Caesar demands taxation. But if you are God's you must render everything to God. The Gospels make clear that these Jewish leaders wore phylacteries and that the high priests who were also there wore a MITRE on their head that said "Holiness to the Lord." The Phylacteries that they wore on their foreheads and on their hands contained the Shema Israel, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which demands that we love God with everything that we are and have, that we be devoted to God

³ BDAG defines blasphemy as "speech that denigrates or defames, reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander." To fight Christ's authority over the state when Jesus claims "all authority"

with everything that we are and have, and that we teach others to be devoted to God with everything.

And the implications are obvious. It is the exact opposite of the way many people interpret that passage. Many people say that Jesus was justifying the secular/sacred divide - that there are some things that belong to Caesar and other things that belong to God. But the inscriptions on the Roman coins do not allow for that interpretation. Those coins made blasphemous claims that Caesar was lord of all. Jesus no doubt held the idolatrous coin up and said, "Give back to Caesar what belongs to him." Caesar created the coin; he can have it back, which is the more literal rendering of the Greek. And then Jesus no doubt pointed to the mitre on the high priests' heads and the phylacteries on everyone's heads and hands and said, "Give back to God what belongs to God." What belongs to God? Everything, and neither the Herodians, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the high priests were acknowledging that.

The high priests were puppets of Rome - total puppets. And when Jesus pointed out the blasphemous inscription on one side - PONTIFEX MAXIMUS (or "High Priest"), the true High Priest, Jesus, was being rejected. It is important to realize that Jesus was *not* acknowledging the legitimacy of the inscriptions on those coins. His kingdom fights those inscriptions with everything that is in it.

When Jesus pointed out the blasphemous inscription on the other side of the coin, "August Son of the August God," the true Son of God was standing before them, and yet was being rejected. Jesus was setting up the true battle that they were AWOL from - a conflict between the throne of Caesar (which encompasses all of life and does not acknowledge Christ's lordship) and the throne of God (which also encompasses all of life and is being advanced through Christ's mediatorial reign). And the particular Greek word that is used in Luke is powerful - give back to Caesar what is his and then you will be free to give back to God what you had previously robbed from God.

And it was because Christians refused to call Caesar the lord of all of life that they were martyred. I have a commentary that shows that this book from cover to cover was a treasonous book in the eyes of Rome. The very fact that "the salvation" belongs to God and to His Son Jesus would have been an offense to Rome. The very fact that "the throne" of the universe belonged to someone other than Caesar would have been an offense to Rome. Thus, Christians were considered subversives because they wanted all of life (including Caesar) to bow down before the throne of Jesus and swear

allegiance him. May it be so. May it be so.

C. Notice righteousness and victory go hand in hand (v. 9)

In verse 9, their righteousness was symbolized by the white robes and their victory was symbolized by palm branches. Palm branches were used at the Festival of Tabernacles as they remembered their deliverance from Egypt. And in the same way, these martyrs rejoice over their redemption by the blood of the Lamb of God and the righteousness that Christ had given to them.

But those two things are always linked in Scripture. The church will never have victory (the palm branches) without holiness (the white robes). A carnal church is a church that will be cast out and trampled under foot of man, according to Matthew 5.

D. Despite their amazing sacrifices, notice where the glory goes (v. 10)

But notice too where the glory goes in verse 10. "And they shouted with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation [And it is literally "the salvation"] belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" The original Exodus out of Egypt was so miraculous that even those hard-hearted people would not have dared to think that their own power wrought the ten plagues, or their own power redeemed them, or their own power crossed the Red Sea. Well, in the same way, despite the enormous sacrifices that these martyrs have made, they have no illusion about who got them through it. It is God alone whom they want to glorify. And that should be our burning passion - whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God.

V. The ideal church recognizes the blasphemy of Messianic substitutes and ascribes salvation to God alone (v. 10)

But as I mentioned last week, verse 10 is a slap in the face of the Messianic state of Rome. Ascribing salvation exclusively to God is just as much a slap against Rome as ascribing the throne (or sovereignty) exclusively to God would have been. Rome claimed to be the Savior. Most of their coins declared it so. Certainly Nero's coins did. But in this book the church declares war against anything that robs God of glory. Salvation is the exclusive domain of God - it belongs to God, which means that Rome has robbed God by its Statist pretensions.

And if the church on earth is to imitate the church of heaven, we must not merely acknowledge God's Lordship or throne over all of life, but must also acknowledge that God alone can save in any area of life. Evangelicals have a tendency to see God's salvation as only dealing with conversion. But Biblical salvation goes far as the curse is found, eventually even making a new heavens and a new earth. Biblical salvation was just as comprehensive as Nero Caesar's claims to salvation were. We saw that starting with Claudius Caesar Rome began having agencies for everything because they saw the state as needing to provide salvation in every area. Some of the coins promise economic salvation. Others claim to be the provider of welfare. Others claim that Caesar will save militarily. Others claim that the state alone can bring peace.

But we are not much different today. We have the same pretensions in America. Everyone goes to the state for salvation. Let me illustrate that. If you look at the Federal Government's website, USA.gov, you will see myriad federal organizations that promise to save us from every conceivable problem. Going in alphabetical order, let me list a few. The AbilityOne Commission promises to create job opportunities for those who are blind. The Access Board promises to provide accessibility for people with disabilities. The Administration for Children and Families promises to provide family assistance and welfare to children and families, including child support, child care, Head Start, child welfare, and other programs. The Administration for Community Living provides for the needs of the aging and disability populations with long-term services. The Administration for Native Americans says that it "promotes self-sufficiency [Ha! What a lie! It promotes ever increasing dependency. Anyway, it says that it promotes self-sufficiency] and cultural preservation for Native Americans by providing social and economic development opportunities through financial assistance, training, and technical assistance." The Administration on Aging is designed to help rescue vulnerable old people with education about the services available to them. The Administration of Developmental Disabilities claims that they give individuals with disabilities numerous "forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration and inclusion in all facets of community life."

I think you get the point. And we have barely dug into the page that has federal organizations starting with the letter A. There are hundreds of agencies, commissions, departments, committees, councils, and services that not only act as throne (that is, they regulate all of life) but that act as Savior (that is, they provide and deliver in all of life).

It is my prayer that the church would become more and more patterned after the church in heaven that recognizes that salvation is the exclusive realm of God and of His Son. And we must look to His Word and to His grace for the patterns of deliverance. Ironically, those who don't acknowledge Caesar as Lord and Savior ended up getting martyred. Some Savior that is! Citizens may not know what is at stake, but the state does.

VI. If martyrdom is bad news, why were the martyrs rejoicing?

A. *They are in heaven (vv. 9ff)*

But if martyrdom is bad news, why were these martyrs rejoicing? And that will be my focus the remainder of this sermon. Obviously the first reason is that they are in heaven. Heaven is a glorious place. It would be impossible not to rejoice. We ought to look forward to heaven. And for sure, we ought to want heaven to more and more characterize earth. We do that by praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." But we do it also by seeking to live out what we pray.

B. *It illustrates the power of Christ - in one generation the Gospel had circled the globe (v. 9a)*

But the second reason they are rejoicing is the number of martyrs present shows that Christ's kingdom has indeed been growing victoriously despite the opposition. In one generation the Gospel has circled the globe. And I won't repeat what I said about that last week. But we too ought to rejoice that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and that it is sufficient to fulfill the Great Commission.

C. *It shows that they are not of the world ("from" or literally "out of" v. 9)*

Thirdly, they are rejoicing because they are not of the world. They were redeemed from all nations, etc. The word "from" is literally "out of." It shows a separation from. Here is how Jesus worded it in John 15:19-21 -

John 15:19-21 – If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

The persecution was one evidence that they were truly saved. It was one evidence that they were not of the world. That is plenty to rejoice in. And Christ's words that I quoted show that we ought to more and more self-consciously see ourselves as not of the world, but rather as being part of a new world that Christ is making - a world in which dwells righteousness. We are revolutionaries (in one sense of the term) who are called to invade earth with the patterns of heaven.

D. It shows that martyrs are victors (vv. 9-10) who bring God great glory (vv. 11-12)

Fourth, the description shows that they were victors who bring God great glory. Rome and Satan did its utmost to force these Christians to acknowledge Caesar's lordship and salvation, and he was unable to do so. They are now the victors.

E. It shows the martyrs as righteous (v. 9)

Fifth, it shows these martyrs as being righteous. Sin brings misery. Holiness brings great joy. And this is not simply true in heaven where no sin will remain, but it is also true on earth where we are progressively being saved from our sin. In John 15:11 Jesus said,

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

What things had He spoken to them that would produce full joy? In context it was the call to holiness - to keeping His commandments. If heaven is joyful because of the absence of sin, the church on earth can increase their joy as they are united to Jesus and bear His character of holiness more and more.

F. It shows them in God's presence (vv. 9b-12)

Sixth, it shows them as being in God's presence. If God's presence would produce such rejoicing, we ought to seek God's presence here on earth. Psalm 16:11 says, "In your presence is fullness of joy." Jude 24 says,

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...

We can approximate the incredible joy in heaven when we actually press into God's presence in worship and in our personal devotions. Devotions are dry without God's presence. But when God ministers His presence to us, we can sometimes experience overwhelming joy. Learning how to enter into God's presence was an important discipline for the Puritans, and their

writings show the incredible joy that was sometimes experienced. Joel Beeke has a great paper that summarizes the Puritan practice of communion with God.

G. It shows wonderful fellowship (v. 15)

And of course, that deals with the seventh point as well - fellowship. They are joyful because of fellowship. Verse 15 shows these martyrs sharing in fellowship and sharing in ministry.

H. It shows that serving God in heaven will be very pleasurable (v. 15)

Eighth, it shows that taking dominion and serving God in heaven will be very pleasurable. There will be no boredom, weakness, tiredness, or irritation with our service. Verse 15 says, "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His sanctuary."

Service on earth can approximate that fulfillment that they experience, but only as Christ does the service through us; as His Holy Spirit ministers through us. That was the purpose for the filling of the Holy Spirit - to empower us for service. In the Old Testament, only certain people and offices had the filling of the Spirit or anointing of the Spirit. But every believer can have that privilege today, which means that every believer has the ability to find supernatural fulfillment in our jobs.

Isaiah 61 speaks of the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus and then goes on to indicate that all believers can enter into ministry in the same way and find success, fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy - yes, even in things like plowing and vine dressing.. If service is a drudgery to you, study Paul's admonitions to the slaves in Colossians and Ephesians (who probably had about as boring of jobs as you could find) and claim the filling of the Spirit to bring you a similar fulfillment as what they experienced.

I. It shows God's protection (v. 15)

Ninth, this passage shows God's protection. That too is a great reason for rejoicing. It says, "And He who sits on the throne will shelter them." In heaven they are perfectly protected. But on earth we still experience persecution. Nevertheless, we can rejoice that 1 Corinthians 10:13 promises that God will protect us from more than we can bear. 1 Peter promises that God will give us supernatural joy and provision in the midst of our persecution so that we can bear it. And if we die as martyrs, obviously we have been delivered from our enemies forever. Nothing can separate us from

the love of God which is in Christ Jesus - not persecution, or famine, or death. So in that sense we are sheltered. But as Christendom spreads Revelation promises that the church will be more and more sheltered from persecution until finally Satan himself will be bound in the pit.

J. It shows absence of pain and distress (v. 16)

Tenth, verse 16 shows that the rejoicing of heaven is in part because of an absence of pain and distress. Hallelujah! "They shall not hunger anymore, nor thirst anymore; the sun will absolutely not strike them, nor any heat..." The word "anymore" shows that they experienced pain and distress on earth. So on earth we do not perfectly experience this. But the trajectory of history is to increasingly remove pain and distress, and certainly, long before that happens we can rejoice because heaven is our reward.

K. It shows God's tender care and refreshing provision (v. 17a)

The first part of verse 17 shows God's tender care and refreshing provision for them in heaven. It says, "because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of waters of life." The switch in metaphors is wonderful - the Lamb becomes our Shepherd. And because He was a Lamb, He can sympathize with us. This Shepherd is not cruel or harsh. He went through everything we went through, and now as Shepherd He knows just how to provide for our every need. So this image shows tender care and refreshing provision.

We will experience that perfectly in heaven. But why not trust Him to do that now? Psalm 23 says that His Shepherd's heart even now is willing to tenderly care for us and provide for us in our difficulties and to refresh us when we are thirsty.

L. It shows the exchange of tears for joy (v. 17)

And the final reason given for their rejoicing is that heaven is the time when tears will be exchanged for joy *par excellence*. It says, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Usually you think of a parent wiping away a child's tears and bringing comfort. But God does that for the martyrs who have just come to heaven. You see, dying is not a loss - it is a great exchange. And when you see all that is exchanged, it ought to make us look forward to heaven. We will be giving up pain, distress, persecution, and tears for untold glories.

VII. Conclusion

A. This passage gives us a whole new perspective on martyrdom & death

So this passage really gives us a whole new perspective on martyrdom. Martyrdom is a privilege, something God honors with special favors, and ushers us into the most glorious existence that can be imagined. We ought not to fear martyrdom. But some people fear any kind of death.

Dr. Barnhouse lost his wife when his daughter was six years old. He had a hard enough time working through his own grief, but it was even harder to help his daughter process through her loss.

One day while he and his daughter were standing on a busy corner at a downtown intersection waiting for the light to change, a large truck sped by the corner, briefly blocking out the sun and frightening the girl.

To comfort her he quickly picked her up. And in that moment, it dawned on him how to explain death to his daughter. He asked her, "When you saw the truck pass it scared you, but let me ask you, had you rather be struck by the truck or by the shadow of the truck?" She said, "Of course, the shadow." He went on to explain, "[When] your mother died, she was only hit by the shadow of death because Jesus was hit by the truck." Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we will fear no evil.

B. This passage gives us a whole new perspective on what is important in life

This passage also gives us a whole new perspective on what is important in life. Caesar tries to convince us that His comforts and His provisions are all that matter. But this passage says that if we are loyal to Christ, we ignore Caesar. And when he persecuted us we realize that even when riches, homes, and life itself is taken away, it is only gain. And it is only what we can take with us into heaven that is of ultimate importance. So this passage helps us to realize what our priorities in life really are.

C. This passage gives us a whole new perspective on heaven

This passage also gives us a whole new perspective on heaven. It involves worship, yes. But it also involves service. Other levels of dominion will be discussed in later chapters, but heaven ultimately restores everything lost by the first Adam plus much more. It's a worthwhile passage to meditate upon

and to worship God with.

D. If this was the harvest of the first century, this passage gives us a whole new perspective on the victory of Christ's kingdom

And finally, this passage gives us a whole new perspective on the victory of Christ's kingdom. If even those first century saints were victors contributing to the advancement of Christ's kingdom, we can be too. This group of people was sold out to Christ's purposes and in the process received a crown of life from Christ Himself when they got to heaven. May we be just as passionate in seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness. Amen.