

Let us pray: Heavenly Father we come before the throne of the Lamb to praise and worship You. For You have called us poor, miserable sinners from death to life and have given Your Only Son to be our Savior. Lord, thank You for all that You have done for us and continue to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Revelation of Jesus Christ as recorded by Saint John, the seventh chapter, beginning at the second verse:

Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm

the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: ⁵ of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; ⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; ⁷ of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; ⁸ of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed. ⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could

number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

The Prophet Ezekiel writes about a vision he was permitted to see by God. In this vision the Lord calls forth six men to go about the city of Jerusalem and slay everyone... everyone who does not have a mark on their head. Thus God sends out one man to go and mark the heads of those who ***"sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within [Jerusalem]."*** Only those who are repentant, who mourn and wail about the abominations and troubles around them... only they will be saved. Everyone else will suffer death and an eternal death at that.

This account as recorded in Ezekiel 9 is not exactly a story that I would want to read before going to bed; yet, it displays perfectly for us what God is saying in our text before us. There are people on this earth who will be killed, who will die... but not God's chosen, not His elect. Those elect, whom He will call out of every tribe, nation, tongue, and people, will be saved because they will

have the mark of God upon them. And when they all finally get into heaven and stand before the throne of the Lamb, the throne of God, then we will be part of *A Great Multitude of God*.

“The Book of Revelation is scary...” or so I was told in a Bible Study. The Book of Revelation, when read incorrectly, can indeed be a very scary and terrifying book. The fire, the demons, the beast, the dragon, the battles... all of this would make for great television, and that is what John is getting at. No, Saint John did not write a television show, but John is using imagery and pictures to get his point across it is the hallmark of apocalyptic writing. And so he is also using picture language to give us a very important and non-scary lesson today, “Those who are faithful will stand before the throne.” You see it, right?

Here we have John telling us that 12,000 from every tribe will come ‘out of the earth.’ “Aha! So you admit that only 144,000 will be in heaven as 12,000 times 12 is 144,000 and even John says 144,000...” or so our Jehovah’s Witness friends say. But no, there will be far more than 144,000 in heaven.

John says that 12,000 will come from every tribe, but what is wrong with that tribe list? Where is Ephraim? Where is Dan? Levi doesn’t get an inheritance for God is his inheritance so why is he listed? And Joseph... he gave his to his sons, I’m so confused. But what is John trying to say here? Well to be as non-technical as I can the number 12,000 represents completeness of people on the earth. As Becker says, ***“Everywhere in Revelation, twelve is the number associated with the church. Twelve squared is 144. Squaring or cubing with the symbolic numbers occurs several times in the book, but without affecting the basic***

symbolism. The 144,000 are the full number of the elect, or the whole church as it is known to the omniscience of God. The number 1,000 is ten cubed, and therefore the number of completeness.” So the 144,000 does not represent those in heaven, in fact the 144,000 are not in heaven they are still on the earth; rather, the 144,000 are the complete host of the church, the faithful, on this earth.

Thus, the angel who cries out to the others is telling them to hold back the dangers, the winds, from the whole earth until all of them are sealed. For those who are not sealed are those who are not faithful to God. Those not sealed are the adulterers, the slanderers, the idolaters, the greedy, the covetous... the unrepentant sinners. And that is what all of us were at some point in time in our lives. We were, and we at times are unrepentant sinners. And left to ourselves and our own devices we would have succumb completely

to those desires and we would end up in hell. There would be no heaven and no eternal life, there would only be fire and brimstone, and the worm that does not die.

However, God has sealed us. God has sealed us in His word and in His baptism. Through His word He has promised us His Holy Spirit. And through our baptisms God has claimed us as His own and placed His own name upon us and His Spirit in us. He picked us and had us cleansed and now he preserves us to this very day.

But it wasn't our goodness or our works that made God choose us; no, for if it were based upon us we would wind up in hell. Rather it is solely because of our Savior Jesus Christ that we have salvation full and free. It is because of Jesus' perfect life and innocent death that we can now know heaven is ours. From all eternity God knew those who are

His and it is through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ that we know that we are God's.

And once we are sealed on this earth as one of God's own children, then we know that we will spend eternity before the throne of the Lamb singing praise to Him and worshipping Him for all that He has done for us. Yes, once we are sealed in faith, we can continue to live out our lives for our God. We can praise him and laud Him for all the wonderful and great things that He has done for me, most importantly for sending His Son to live, die, and rise again and thus to assure me that now my sins are forgiven.

And then once this life is over, once we are removed from this earth then we go into heaven. And how many people are in heaven? John tells us, ***“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing***

before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” A countless multitude will be in heaven, waving palm branches, and praising their Savior. And each one of us will be clothed in white... “Behold, a host arrayed in white.” We will be a great multitude... a great multitude of God. For God has created us, God has preserved us, and God has redeemed us... we are God's and we can thank God for that.

Now hear how John finishes this description of heaven that we all have to look forward to: ***“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 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 dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

This is what we all have to look forward to. Once we pass through this great tribulation called life, we will spend eternity with our God. We will stand before His throne in the white robe that He has provided and that He has cleaned, cleaned in the blood of Christ. And there will be no hunger or thirst, nor heat, and Christ will shepherd us... and God will wipe away every tear.

Dear friends in Christ, the Book of Revelation can be scary until we remember that we already know the ending. While there will be many a battle and fight along

the way, we know that Christ has won every one of them for us. He has conquered every foe and now He offers to us His righteousness, His white robe of righteousness in our baptisms where He also claims us as His own. And wearing this robe we will one day stand before the throne of the lamb and praise him for all that He has done for us.

Thanks be to God for allowing me to be part of the innumerable crowd that is in heaven. Thanks be to God for giving me the white robe of righteousness that is washed in the blood of Christ. And thanks be to God for knowing from eternity that one day I too will be a part of that ***Great Multitude of God*** in heaven.

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.