

Revelation 7:13-17

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (NRSV).

Today is All Saint's Sunday. Today we honor and respect our loved ones that have passed. We can focus on the sadness or we can focus on the glory - the fond memories, friendship, and love shared, and the promise of eternal glory. We can all agree that our time will come and when it does, we all want the same thing. We want to stand before the throne of God like the child of a proud parent that proclaims "You are good, I love you, and I am proud of you." That is the ultimate goal.

We are in a historical phase in our religion. We have experienced phenomenal growth after World War II. During the war there was tremendous fear of death and fear of losing the war. Many people bargained with God and promised a life of devotion. After the war ended we had a baby boom, a housing boom, an industrial boom, and a religious boom. This religious boom peaked in the early 60's and a great decline began in religion. Church attendance began to decline, prayer became less frequent and less public, and religion began to lose its influence on society and society began to gain its influence on religion.

I frequently point out that some of the things that happen in the Bible also parallels some of the things that happen in contemporary society. This is because of the nature of people. Our behavior mirrors the repeat cycle of prosperity in the Old Testament. The faithful have prosperity and blessings but in time many become complacent and disobedient. They are warned that the consequence of this is hardship but they are stubborn, refuse to repent, and are punished. Finally they repent, change their behavior, and the cycle of prosperity repeats. This happens over and over again in Bible. It is a valuable lesson that we need to learn because it is applicable to contemporary society.

Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land has multiple lessons on blessings and curses. If they are obedient to God they get the blessing of a wonderful land. This is an excellent trade off. Land that is much better than in Egypt or the 40 years spent in the wilderness. In Deuteronomy chapter 9 there is a good summary of the rebellions against God. At Taberah, the fire of the Lord burned in anger due to their continued complaints. At Massah, they argued about a lack of water instead of trusting God. At Kibroth-hittavah, they complained about the manna and demanded meat. At Kadesh-barnea, they made a premature attempt to conquer Canaan because they did not trust God. The worst offence occurred at Horeb, where Aaron gave in to the demands of the people and made a golden calf to worship.

In spite of all of the numerous transgressions God still delivers them to the Promised Land. By now they should know to stay true to God. They spent 40 years in the wilderness due to transgression. A generation passed before they get to enter into the Promised Land. If they

break covenant they don't keep it. On the verge of entering the Promised Land they get a warning from God that is repeated for emphasis. They are told not to claim that they are getting the Promised Land because they are righteous. No, they are getting it because of the wickedness of these nations. God is specific, they are stubborn people, and they have provoked the Lord, and they have rebelled against God. So, God warns the people they are not getting the Promised Land because of righteousness, they are getting it due to the wickedness of others.

God wants humility not arrogance. That lesson goes ignored in various places throughout the Bible. It is a repeat cycle of transgression into today because the people of God are more stubborn than righteous but think of themselves as being righteous. They had a terrific deal. God gives to them a wealthy resource if they stay true to God. I would take that trade any time. To keep it, all they have to do is stay true to God. But they didn't do it. So, they lost it during the Exile. There is a theme running throughout the Bible about a loving God that cares for and provides for a stubborn people and all they need to do is to love and obey God. We live in a society that has fallen away from God much like the stubborn people of the Bible.

The Scripture for today is selected due to the saints. John the writer of Revelation is writing about what he sees in heaven. There is a great multitude in heaven, robed in white, standing before the throne and the Lamb. This is a vision of assurance. God's faithful ones from every race, tribe, people, and tongue, stand before the throne of God. This is a vision of promise. They are blessed. There is no pain, nothing but peace and joy. This is a vision of victory. The faithful arrive in the presence of God. They do not appear weary, battered, or worn. They appear victorious. An elder asks John "Who are they?" The answer is "They came out of the great ordeal." There are some common prevalent thoughts in mainstream society. One is that complacency is OK. Another is that the believer gets to escape tribulation. I want you to notice that Revelation teaches, it is not the complacent and it is not the lapsed, but the saints that stand before the throne of God. Revelation teaches us that the saints do not escape - pain, suffering, trials, and trauma. The saints are the ones that did not lapse during tribulation. They are the ones who remained faithful. They get to stand before the throne of God. Remember your goal is to stand in front of the throne of God like a proud parent that is pleased with you. That is the goal of everyone here today; everyone listening, watching, or reading this message. There is a great spiritual promise here. One of ultimate satisfaction where there is no hunger and no thirst. It is a promise repeated in the New Testament - especially in the words of Jesus. Heaven is a place where hunger is satisfied and thirst is quenched. The Divine Shepherd nourishes our bodies and comforts our hearts. Today is All Saints Sunday. Today we officially acknowledge and remember loved ones that have passed. If you lost a loved one recently and are in a state of mourning, I encourage you to think about the blessings from God. Imagine them robed in white standing before the Lamb, standing before the throne of God.