

Revelation 7:9-14

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." 13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, 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.

I do not do a lot of messages based on Revelation because so much of it is subject to interpretation and the book is complex and mysterious. Revelation is a book of prophecy; it is a vision of God's judgment and a reward for the Christians that stand firm in their faith and resist with patient endurance. While Revelation at times can be somewhat confusing, the main point is simple and easy to understand. God wins in the end, God defeats Satan, good overcomes evil, and believers must turn to God for guidance and strength in the face of adversity. Prophecy offers hope in the midst of suffering and oppression and it offers victory and vindication for the faithful. The only guarantee we have is from God and it is to those that remain true to God.

The Scripture takes place during times of trouble as Christians are being persecuted. It addresses a question of how the servants of God fare during catastrophe. In chapter seven there are four angels standing on the four corners of the earth holding back four winds of the earth. They have the power to do some serious damage to the earth. But another angel calls out to them to wait until the servants of God are marked. The plagues of destruction are delayed until the servants of God are sealed. The reward is for those that are truly faithful. This is imagery of those that remain faithful in the most extreme difficulties of oppression, persecution, and death. These are those that remain faithful throughout the great tribulation.

The lesson is about the sealing of the elect. There is a great multitude in heaven standing before the throne and the Lamb. They are in the presence of God and Jesus and are singing praises to God. An elder asks "who are they that are robed in white?" The answer is, they belong to God, and they are martyrs that are being glorified in heaven. They came out of the great tribulation; they did not escape it. There is no exemption for the faithful to escape tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They remained faithful during the most extreme challenges to faith. They did not escape pain, persecution, and suffering. Like Jesus their victory is not from death but it is a victory over death. They came out of the great tribulation and sing victorious songs of praise. The faithful are sealed. This is not just Israel but all nations and languages. They are not numbered but are innumerable. All Christians suffer death

but we do not magically escape tribulation. The Christian is to remain faithful in the face of adversity.

One problem that people of faith have had throughout history is that people have assumed a divine protection from the evil that exists in the world. Revelation reveals that the people who come out of the great ordeal wearing white are the martyrs. They did not get to escape the great ordeal but were killed for their faith during it. God does not promise exemption from pain and suffering, or freedom from temptation, or protection from evil. God promises to be with you in your suffering, heavenly glory for the faithful, and victory in the final conquest. Those that endure did not fall away during trials in the face of evil, they abstained from the ways of the beast, stayed true to the ways of the Lamb, and they faced persecution for the sake of the word of God.

Our God is no stranger to pain and suffering. God does not exempt God's own flesh and blood from suffering. God is with you through the toughest and the worst of the worst. In Revelation, Satan tries to steal a woman's newborn son but is unsuccessful and then wages war against her children. It is imperative that Christians maintain active perseverance and stand firm in faith. The Bible ends like it begins. The first humans broke the only rule that God gave them. The overall problem is the one and only problem. Satan can influence the people. Therefore, sin, suffering, and death enter into the cosmic equation. The rest of the Bible is about God working to undo the damage caused by Satan's control over the people. The vision in the end is those that identify with the ways of the Lamb. They stand against the beast and refuse to compromise as they continue to live by the way of the Lamb. Jesus doesn't die and leave us. Jesus continues to suffer with us. Like Jesus we also suffer the injustice of the world. Our only guarantee is to remain faithful to the very end. Our reward is to be at the throne of God where we get to share in God's victory and enjoy God's divine presence and the victory celebration.