

Sermon for Easter 4 (Series C)

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Preached on 05-13-2007

Introduction:

A theme that runs throughout the book of Revelation is death. Is death your best friend or your worst enemy? Most people fear death. People wonder when it will come “knocking” on their door, where they will be, how it will feel, and what will really happen to them after they die. For people who die without Jesus, death truly is their worst enemy. That’s not the case for you and me, however. For us, as well as for all those who trust in Jesus Alone for their salvation, death truly is our best friend. It means going to sleep only to wake up where we belong. In Heaven we will never again experience the suffering, pain, and discomfort that we all endure in this life. We will never again have sorrowful tears well up in our eyes. Instead, we will forever respond to God’s goodness. But we don’t have to wait until we are in Heaven to give Jesus the worship and praise He is worthy of. Here and now...

Series Theme: We Sing Our Alleluias to the Resurrected Lord!

Today we sing our Alleluias because...

Theme: The Resurrected Lord Welcomes Us to Heaven!

Part I: Where we belong

Part II: Where we respond

Background:

The Apostle John received this vision (or Revelation) from Jesus while stranded on a small island off the coast of Asia Minor. He had been exiled there, “**Because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus**” (Revelation 1:9) he had given during a time of widespread persecution (95-97 A.D.). No other book of the Bible has been as grossly misinterpreted as Revelation. Perhaps that explains why so many Christians are hesitant to turn to it. Yet this book holds much comfort and promise for suffering Christians today. This scene of God’s redeemed people enjoying perfect happiness in Heaven must have been a source of tremendous encouragement for both John and the seven congregations he sent this letter to. It reminded them, as well as us, that one Day they would be...

Part I: Where we belong

When at his lowest possible point, wondering what would become of him, Jesus appeared to the Apostle John and pointed him to his future Home,

where he would be welcomed with open arms. What captured John's attention was the sheer number of people he saw there. He said, **"I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count"** (v. 9). This "countless" number of heavenly Saints (or believers) were the spiritual descendents of Abraham. Who could forget the promise God made to Abraham concerning his future descendants? God said to him, **"Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be"** (Genesis 15:5). What a sight it must have been to see the fulfillment of that promise; to see believers from, **"Every nation, tribe, people and language"** (v. 9) joined in heavenly celebration!

What are all these believers celebrating? The fact that they are, **"Standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb and wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands"** (v. 9). Their white robes symbolize the sinless purity they now enjoy, HAVING BEEN made holy by, **"The blood of the Lamb"** (v. 14). The palm branches they hold symbolize the victory that HAD BEEN won (for them) by the Resurrected Lord. So this "great multitude" is celebrating being in God's presence, where they belong.

Application:

I remember my first day of high school like it was yesterday. Because it was such a large school I roamed the halls for a long time before finding my first class. When finally arriving there I of course walked in late. Needless to say, all eyes were on me. I found myself checking my class schedule one more time. It was then that the teacher asked, "Are you in the right place?" I honestly didn't know. Can you relate? Maybe you were quiet and reserved when growing up and found it hard to fit in. Perhaps social environments still make you feel uncomfortable. You go at times, but then the anxiety sets in and you can't help but feel nervous, like you don't belong.

That's how we should feel about Heaven. Since, **"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags"** (Isaiah 64:6) and because, **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23), we don't belong there at all! By nature we are spiritually dead, blind, and enemies of God. That means we come into this world not knowing our Savior and ignorant of the salvation He HAS accomplished for us. BUT the Holy Spirit changed all that! You know the day it happened too: Our Baptism Day! On that day the Holy Spirit deposited a good gift into our hearts: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. So coming to believe in Jesus was God's doing

(or work / decision), not ours! Now, by Faith Alone, we know where we belong! Because our future Home HAS BEEN secured by the blood of the Lamb, we belong in Heaven!

Transition:

The Resurrected Lord permitting John to see his future Home, where he would one Day be welcomed, reassured him of where he belonged. In addition to knowing where he belonged, John also knew...

Part II: Where we respond

Listen! Do you hear how that "great multitude" is joined in one, big, collective cheer, singing, **"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (v. 10)?** Why are the Saints of Heaven singing these words? Doesn't everyone there already know that salvation belongs to God? Certainly God knows it. If God knows it, why sing? Allow me to answer that question with a question. Has your team ever won the Super Bowl? If so, how did you respond? You were probably overcome with so much excitement and joy that you cried out, "We won! We won!" Why shout that? The game's over. Everyone knows who won. Sometimes we can't help but to rejoice over the obvious. How much more so for the residents of Heaven! I'm sure that "great multitude" just could not contain themselves. They couldn't help but cheer over the victory Jesus had won for them.

We can better understand why their response is a perfectly natural one when we remember what Jesus delivered them from. We're told that they had, **"Come out of the great tribulation" (v. 14).** Even though they are now singing their Alleluias in Heaven, they had once been in the world as we are in the world. And what did they experience while in the world? In a word, **"Tribulation" (v. 14)!** That means they were abused for what they believed. Some were even tortured and put to death for their allegiance to Christ. They experienced the same sicknesses, loss, and heartaches that we experience today. Despite all of this earthly "tribulation", however, Jesus came down from Heaven, took on human flesh and blood, and perfectly secured their place in Heaven by the cross. Now, HAVING BEEN welcomed there by Jesus Himself, all the Saints are joined with the holy angels in singing their Alleluias to the Resurrected Lord, giving Him their best and most appropriate response.

Application:

Our great "tribulation" is now! We experience tribulation in our hearts, struggling with the guilt and shame of our sins. We experience tribulation

in our relationships, struggling with the hurt we cause others, failing to encourage those who are either troubled or suffering. We experience tribulation in our world, struggling with the horrors of war, natural disasters, crime, disease, famine, economic depression, and persecution. After a while, all this earthly “tribulation” can weigh heavily upon us. It brings our spirits down and causes us to doubt God’s love for us. Such doubt, though, leads to all kinds of ungrateful responses in our spiritual lives. Everything drops: from our prayer life; to our church attendance; to our offerings; to our acts of service in the church. Just one ungrateful response, however, deserves an eternity of “tribulation” in the depths of Hell (**James 2:10**).

BUT instead of experiencing never-ending “tribulation” in Hell, Jesus promises to welcome us to a place where we will stand, **“Before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple” (v. 15)**. John describes our salvation as more than just laying around in a hammock sipping on Pina Coladas. In Heaven we will be doing what God originally created mankind for. We will serve the LORD in on-going, perfect thankfulness and love. Why? NO MORE “tribulation”! The Resurrected Lord will, **“Spread His tent over us” (v. 15)** to shield us from every sorrow that sin and Satan cause us here on earth. Knowing that Heaven IS ours and hearing it described as a “Perfect 10” (**See the 10 Statements in vv. 15-17**), we have no better response to give than to serve the LORD, and each other, with thankfulness and love every day of our lives.

Conclusion:

The vision which God allowed John to see and record isn’t some irrelevant pipedream which has no bearing on our lives today. God gave and preserved this glorious picture of our future Home to give us encouragement, hope, and comfort in the midst of all our earthly “tribulation”. As difficult, trying, painful, and just plain cruddy as this life can be, we can still turn to God’s Word to see, **“Our (Good) Shepherd leading us to springs of living water, where He will wipe away every tear from our eyes” (v. 17)**. Because Jesus lived and died in our place, rose triumphantly from the grave, and ascended to God’s right hand where He rules over, **“All things for the (eternal) good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28)**, you and I can rest assured that a place IS BEING prepared for us among that heavenly host arrayed in white. With our sins forgiven, Heaven is the place (1) where we belong and the place (2) where we respond. Either way, *The Resurrected Lord Welcomes Us to Heaven!* Now that is something to celebrate! That gives us something to sing about! *We Sing Our Alleluias to the Resurrected Lord!* Amen!