

Standing Room Only!
Revelation 7:9-17

The Book of Revelation, or more accurately the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is surely one of the most popular parts of the Bible. Even those who claim the Bible is a piece of fiction seem to enjoy talking about it. Thousands of books have been written and dozens of movies have been made about the mysterious and absolutely holy things revealed in its pages, and now that we live in such troubling times there seems to be an increasing amount of chatter about the world as we know it coming to an end. That portion of scripture we just heard is perhaps one we should just simply appreciate and enjoy rather than seek to fully understand.

I say that because there are some things written in Revelation that we will not completely understand until we reach that heavenly shore. We will not completely understand the symbolism of the bowls and the lamp stands, the white robes and the 24 elders and the four living creatures full of eyes. We can only imagine a sea of glass, and the appearance of the angels with 6 wings. We can only imagine what the living fountains of waters will look like. We cannot know for certain whether the tribulation spoken of in verse 14 is the last 7 years of the existence of the world as humanity knows it or a reference to the tribulation we will each inevitably experience here as a result of living for Christ in this fallen world. The question for us today is not when tribulation will come, but what will happen when we are faithful and overcome it.

Earlier in this book, we will find seven letters Jesus wrote to seven early churches in Asia Minor. Those seven churches represent the church as a whole- the loveless church, the persecuted church, the compromising church, the corrupt church, the dead church, the faithful church, and the lukewarm church. Some are encouraging, some are critical, but there is one consistent theme that is found in all 7 letters. Those who persevere and overcome tribulation will experience and share God's glory. Oddly enough, chapter 7 gives us a glimpse into who the "those" will be. Though there are *some* things that are a bit unclear in this passage, there are also *many* things that are readily apparent. There are three that would be helpful for us to focus on this morning.

The first is found in the latter part of verse 14. The saints are those who have persevered and came out of great tribulation. **The tribulation of the saints is temporary.** Whether that tribulation is seven years of misery while Satan gives it one last try before he is finally defeated or something more immediate the good news is that it need not last forever. If we view tribulation as something temporary, something we experience for a season that is perfectly predetermined by God, when we keep the faith despite heartache and setbacks, when we continue to trust God to lead us to light while living in a dark world, knowing that something indescribably wonderful is there, tribulation becomes bearable.

The second thing that is clear in this passage is that **the saints will be in God's presence.** Verse 15 reveals that they are before the throne of God in His temple, and God will dwell with them. A literal rendering is that God will spread His tent over them. When the new heavens and earth are created, there will be no need for a temple building to shelter people from the elements and the tribulations of the fallen earth. God will be the temple. Can you imagine the day when all who love Jesus Christ will be together as one, without physical and cultural boundaries to separate us? That thought alone should motivate us to overcome tribulation.

The third thing that is clear is this- **the journey of the saints does not end at heavens gate.** Once there, the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And so they can clearly see where they are headed, God will wipe away every tear from their eyes- the tears of sadness from the heartache of tribulation and the tears of joy that flow from seeing Jesus and being reunited with the other saints who have already overcome their tribulation.

This morning we honor all the saints- those who have overcome tribulation minor and great. We also celebrate our own opportunity to meet Jesus and join their company one day in glory. There will be standing room only, but it's only because everyone there will be so filled with joy we won't want to sit down until Jesus calls us to His table. What a glorious day that will be for those who love Jesus! Until then, may each time we gather for worship and communion prepare us for the good things that lie ahead. Amen.