

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Tribulation Saints, Part 1

Scripture: Revelation 7:9-12

Code: 66-29

It's that time now for us to look together to the wonders of prophetic Scripture. And I invite you to open your Bible to the seventh chapter of the Revelation...the seventh chapter of the Revelation. And tonight our text is taken from verses 9 through 17, the second-half of this wonderful chapter.

To begin with, some things that will help us find our way into the text, there is a great awakening ahead. There is coming a worldwide revival, like nothing this earth has ever experienced or heard of...an international harvest of souls that will exceed anything in human history up to that point.

Now certainly all of us who are Christians and all Christian through the ages have prayed for the salvation of souls worldwide. We have prayed for great awakenings and great revivals and great movings of God's Spirit and we have prayed for people and families and cities and nations to come to Christ. We have prayed that some day there would be a sweeping revival across the world that would bring millions of souls into the Kingdom. It has been the prayers of God's people through the centuries that God would bring a great harvest of souls. And He will. One day it will come. It will be the greatest movement of God's saving power in terms of sheer numbers that the world has ever known.

Now that anticipation of that should not shock us because God longs to save. In fact, just a couple of Scriptures point that out to us. First Timothy chapter 2 verses 1 through 4 says, "First of all then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men for kings and all who are in authority in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth for there is one God...further down into verse 5 and 6...and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all." God desires all men to be saved. That's why He gave Christ and that's why He calls on us to pray.

And then that familiar text of 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God is a saving God. That is His nature.

And we have been studying, as you well know, on Sunday mornings in the pastoral epistles, we have in the past covered 1 and 2 Timothy, and now we're in Titus. The pastoral epistles feature much

about God as Savior. For example, in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 1, it says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus who is our hope." Down in verse 14, "And the grace of our Lord was more abundant, more than abundant with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." God is a saving God. Christ is a saving Lord.

Over in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy we find again a reference to this in verse 10. "We have fixed our hope on the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." In other words, His saving power shows up on behalf of all men in a temporal way and of believers in a spiritual and eternal way.

In Titus chapter 1, again God is designated in verse 3 as God our Savior and then in verse 4, Christ Jesus our Savior. Titus chapter 2 and verse 10, again speaks of God our Savior, verse 13, our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. And then into chapter 3 verse 4, the kindness of God our Savior, and verse 6, through Jesus Christ our Savior.

The Scripture characterizing God and Christ as our Savior. These and many other texts of Scripture identify God as a saving God. He desires and He plans to save sinners and that is why Jesus came. He even bears the name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins.

And so as we come to Revelation chapter 7 we come to a text in which we see God in His saving activity in numbers never seen up until this time, a time in future history when His most massive saving work will take place in a very brief period of years. It is at the same time a most unexpected time, for since God is going to be saving people in a volume never known before in that short space of time, we would want to call it the best of times, but the fact is it's the worst of times. It is the worst time in human history. It is the day of Satan's full fury. It is the time of the unleashing of demonic power over the face of the earth. It is the time when the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is taken away and sin runs absolutely unchecked and wild. It is the time of the terrorizing dictatorship of Antichrist and his cohort, the false prophet. It is the time of the hellish murderous reign of terror that causes people to slaughter each other all over the globe.

It is the time of God's unrestrained fury as the whole world is engulfed in His wrath as He lets loose powerful judgments that destroy men and women. It is a time of war. It is a time of famine, earthquakes, pestilence, wild animal, destruction and death, plagues, a collapsing universe, a splintering and fracturing earth that will kill billions of people and culminate in a time called the day of the Lord, the ultimate fury of God. It is in the very midst of that time that God will be who He is, the Savior, saving people, in a way, and to an extent unknown before. And the prayers of all the saints through all of the centuries for such a time to come will be answered.

Now the saving work of God in this time period to come will be two fold and it's important to remember that it will be. It will involve on the one hand Israel, and on the other hand the nations of

the world we know as Gentiles...another word for nations, other than Israel. Now just to give you a little bit of quick background because I don't want to belabor the point, we know that God has promised to save Israel. And we are waiting for that day, we are longing for that day. The Apostle Paul certainly prayed for that day passionately, zealously, his heart's desire was for Israel that she would be saved as he expresses in the ninth chapter of the book of Romans. His passion was for the redemption of Israel.

In chapter 10 of Romans and verse 21, "As for Israel, the Lord says all the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." God Himself even longing for the Jewish people to turn to Him and they would not.

In Romans 11 Paul writes, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be." And then in verse 2 he says, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." God has not turned His back on them, He has not obviated His promise.

Over in verse 11, "I say then, did they stumble so as to fall? Did they? May it never be...may it never be." And then finally down in verse 25 of Romans 11, "I don't want you to be ignorant, brethren," he says, "or uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of Gentiles has come in." It's partial and it's temporary. And then he says, "All Israel...verse 26...will be saved." That promise will come to pass.

And here in Revelation chapter 7, we've already gotten a taste of that in the first eight verses, haven't we? For there we meet twelve thousand Jews out of the twelve tribes who will be redeemed, who will be sealed and protected during the time of Tribulation. They will become the evangelists and the preachers of the gospel that will crisscross the globe. And at their preaching, Israel will hear the message of the saving gospel, eventually they will look on the one whom they've pierced, they will be redeemed, as Zechariah says, that a fountain of cleansing will be opened to them and their salvation promise will come to pass. Salvation for all Israel is coming.

But secondly, and this is what is featured in our text tonight, there is coming salvation to the Gentiles. And do you know that this too is promised in Scripture? And because this is rarely ever dealt with, I want to spend a few moments dealing with it, if I may, tonight.

Go with me back to the book of Genesis and I want to set in your mind the promise of God to the nations of the world, for the ultimate time of salvation. It really finds its beginning in the twelfth chapter of Genesis with God's promise to a man named Abram, later Abraham. Verse 1 of chapter 12, "The Lord said to Abram, `Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your fathers house to the land which I will show you and I will make you a great nation...that's the nation of Israel...I will bless you, make your name great, and so you shall be a blessing and I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse...and then here is this...and in you all the

families of the earth shall be blessed."

Now that can have a number of specific fulfillments. It was through them in the Old Testament that any nation or any person of another nation heard the truth because the law and the prophets and the testimonies, the ordinances, the covenants, all the promises of God were given to the nation Israel and it was then through the means of Israel as the witness nation that others heard.

It also has the implication about the Messiah, for it was through the nation Israel, through the very loins of Abraham that ultimately the Messiah came in whom is provided salvation...not only for Jews but for Gentiles.

And then finally, I believe it will be through the witness and testimony of a converted Israel and certainly in great part a hundred and forty-four thousand Jews that the rest of the world in the time of the Tribulation to come, hearing the truth of Christ will be saved, and thus in Israel they will be blessed. So there is a promise there at the very outset in the Abrahamic covenant related to the salvation of nations.

Now look at Psalm 67 and I want to show you just briefly a few places in the Psalms to set this in your mind. Here is a Psalm of praise that the Jews would read and sing. It speaks about God's blessing to them. Verse 1, "God be gracious to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us...why?...that Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations." And then down in verse 7, "God blesses us in order that all the ends of the earth may fear Him."

God had designed them to be His witness nation. And they were in part and temporarily, and then, of course, they failed and had to be set aside and a new people was called out, namely the church, but I believe again, in the end, in the future, at the great testimony of the hundred and forty-four thousand Jewish evangelists, the nations will hear and fear the Lord and turn to Christ.

One Psalm further, Psalm 68 verse 32, "Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praises to the Lord." From the very beginning there was a call to Gentile salvation.

Psalm 98 will be the last Psalm that I'll draw to your attention although there are other places you can find. In verse 3 of Psalm 98 you have it summed up very well, "He has remembered His loving kindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel, all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

In other words, God put His saving power on display through Israel in order that He might reach the nations of the world. Israel was never ever called His people to be an end in themselves. They thought that, that wasn't God's plan. God didn't save them as an end, He saved them as a means to reaching the nations of the world. And eventually, though they failed the first time, they will succeed

the second time as God converts them, sets aside these marvelous witnesses who preach and the result is massive Gentile salvation.

Look at Isaiah chapter 11 verse 10, "It will come about in that day...and here we're looking at the future time of the glorious reign of the Messiah...it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse," that's a messianic term, they will turn to the Lord, the Messiah. "And He will stand as a signal for the peoples...that means Gentiles...and His resting place will be glorious." In other words, there's coming a time when the nations of the world bow their knee to the Messiah.

Isaiah 49 deserves at least a look, in verse 6 and I'll read it to you and just make a brief comment. Isaiah 49 verse 6, He says, "It is too small a thing that you should be My servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel...that wouldn't be enough, it's too small...I will also make you a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Always God's plan with Israel was through them to reach the world, just as when they were set aside His plan was through the church to reach the world...as made clear in the great commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

In Isaiah 52:10 it says, "The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God." That looks to that future time when the Messiah comes and the world is going to see the power of God and as they see the power of God, they will be saved.

Joel, the prophet, has something to say about this that demands our attention. In Joel chapter 2 verse 28, "It will come about after this that I'll pour out My Spirit on all mankind." And this looks at the future glorious kingdom. "Your sons, your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." Here what you have in the Kingdom is all mankind. All mankind in the millennial Kingdom...what that means is they have to be redeemed during the time of the Tribulation to go into the Kingdom because there will be no unbelievers in the Kingdom, initially. Some will be born and reject. But there will be believers from all mankind going in to the Kingdom as the Spirit of God is poured out on them all. And, of course, that's repeated in Acts chapter 2.

Now go into the New Testament, Matthew 24, very, very familiar turf for us in dealing with these eschatological. Matthew 24:14, now we're in this chapter, right now in the time of Tribulation, verse 14 says, "The gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations and then the end will come." So right before the end of the Tribulation when the Lord comes back and sets up His Kingdom, there will be worldwide gospel preaching across the face of the earth. That is part of the Lord's plan for the period we know as the Tribulation. And the Messiah is one called in Luke 2:32, "A light of revelation to the Gentiles, as well as the glory of the people of Israel."

Well, clearly then from those and many other Scriptures, God has promised salvation to the Gentile world. And it will come to pass. In John 11, one of the most curious prophecies in all the Bible because it was given by an avowed hater of Christ by the name of Caiaphas. He made this statement, simple statement, "It is expedient for You that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation shouldn't perish," he meant one thing but God put those words in his mouth and meant something else. In verse 51, "Now this he didn't say on his own initiative but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation." Then verse 52, "And not for the nation only but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." Not just for Israel but the world. And there again the promise that Christ died to redeem people from the world.

Romans 3, "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also," Romans 3:29.

When is this going to happen? Oh yes, there are Gentiles coming to Christ all the time. But when is this great massive revival that's going to sweep Gentiles from across the face of the earth...when is this going to happen?

Let's look at Revelation 7 verse 9 and find out. "After these things I looked and behold a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches were in their hands. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever, amen.' And one of the elders answered saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they and from where have they come?' And I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the Great Tribulation and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, for this reason they are before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in His temple and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them, they shall hunger no more and neither thirst anymore, neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb is the center of the throne...the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall guide them to the springs of the water of life and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.'"

Here we find, according to verse 9, a multitude beyond counting from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and singing about salvation. Who are they? And where did they come from?...John is asked. To which he replies, "You tell me."

As our text unfolds we're going to meet this group and we're going to find out not only the answer to John's question, but some other things. Let's begin with some key words. The first word is description...it starts out with a description. The description, of course, is in verse 9, it says, "A great multitude beyond counting out of every nation, tribe, people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Now all kinds of suggestions have been offered as to who these people are. You read it and probably say...Well, it's pretty obvious who they are, I mean, they're people from every nation and over there in verse 14 it says they came out of the Great Tribulation, and pretty clear.

Well you'd be amazed at how foggy commentators can get. Some people say this refers to all the people who have been saved through all the ages, it just sort of sums them all up. This is just a representative group of all the people who have ever believed in God, Old Testament, New Testament, everybody is sort of represented in this group. It's just a symbolic group.

Some have suggested that it represents the spirits of just men made perfect, as it says in Hebrews. The spirits of the saved who are now in heaven waiting their bodies. Others say it is the raptured church. Some believe it is just the accumulation of all the martyrs through all the ages. Some have suggested that what you're seeing here is the Millennium and this is a millennial scene, a scene of saints.

Some have even said...No, what you have here is really a symbol of the triumph of the Christian faith under the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century. That's what's called a historian's view. And then others have said, "No, it's just a big general symbol of how the Christian faith will ultimately be victorious."

Well let's look at the description and find out who these people are. John begins by saying, "After these things I looked," and I comment on that because that's a kind of a key little phrase. When he says "after this I looked," or back in verse 1, "after this I saw," or back in chapter 4 verse 1, "after these things I looked," each time that phrase is there we have a new vision. So starting here in verse 9 we have a vision that is separate from the one in chapter 7 verses 1 to 8, different from the vision in chapters 4 and 5. The phrase is used to mark off a new vision, distinct from the previous one.

And then he says, "Behold," which puts exclamation in it. It's a startling vision, it's a shocking vision. Now remember, by the time John was on the isle of Patmos in his old age in say 96 A.D. and this is thirty years after the last real apostolic action. And he's really alone, as it were, now in receiving revelation that late in the century, but that time he knows Gentile churches have been established all over everywhere. He knows that Asia Minor has been evangelized by the Apostle Paul. He knows that Timothy and Titus have been working in their respective areas and there have been others who

have evangelized Gentiles. So he knows that Gentiles are going to come to Christ. He knows that. But what he sees here is way beyond what he could even imagine, for the most part, it should be obvious to you that the Gentile churches were not large. They were beleaguered in many ways and for all intents and purposes the Gentile churches that we know in the biblical sense that existed in Asia Minor have, for the most part, passed out of existence. There is nothing left of the testimony today in most cases.

And so they were small and beleaguered and persecuted and to see a massive Gentile multitude singing salvation to our God was a very shocking experience. Now this is different than the one hundred and forty-four thousand, although some other commentator wrote that he thought this was another way to describe the hundred and forty-four thousand, which doesn't make sense to me since it tells you they're Jews, names the tribes, and these are not, they're from the nations. But he sees them as separate.

Let me show you why...how they are different. First of all, the number of people here is indefinite and the number of people in the prior vision is definite, a hundred and forty-four thousand. Secondly, the tribes of Israel were mentioned there. Here every nation and tribe and people and tongue. And there the people were prepared for perilous persecution, here they are victorious and beyond any persecution. So it is a distinctive group and a distinctive vision that John sees. And as I said, it's a shocking thing for him to see Christianity for which he is now suffering exile on the island of Patmos and he's going to be sending these letters, these seven letters to the churches, only two of those churches were faithful, five of them were into sin at one level and some of them were even told that they were going to pass out of existence if they didn't shape up. John has probably got the worst case scenario in his mind.

But on the other hand, in spite of the littleness of the church, he sees the massive volume of Gentiles in this vision. What hope that must have put into his heart, what joy, what exuberance, what exhilaration, what anticipation.

He said, "I saw an ochlospolus, a large multitude. And then he says, "Which no man could count." The number was too high. The crowd was too large. God knew, but couldn't be counted. Well, they counted three thousand on Pentecost and kept counting and counting in the early years of the church. So they could count to some degree, but not this crowd. This is beyond counting. I'm sure if there were some modern evangelist there they'd figure a way. But it can't be done humanly. And these people come from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues.

Now that same fourfold description appears, as you remember earlier, in the book of Revelation. It is a way to designate the people of the world. It is a way to identify broadly and comprehensively the people of the world...every nation, tribe, people, tongue. As we noted earlier in our study of this tremendous book, those four things speak about descent, language, race and political association.

And it's just crisscrossing them so that nothing is left out, no one is left out. By the way, that same phrase appears again and again. It appears back in chapter 5 verse 9, "Every tribe, tongue, people and nation," at that time we went into it in detail. You'll find it again in chapter 11 verse 9, "From the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations," and you find it in chapter 13 verse 7, chapter 14 verse 6. It just means the mass of humanity crossing all barriers, all lines.

Persecuted believers fleeing and preaching all over the world, the flying angel with the everlasting gospel, the two witnesses, the hundred and forty-four thousand are going to be going all over the place preaching the gospel and they're going to ignite a revival that is going to result in this massive number of people embracing Christ. I suppose we could conclude that the church may not succeed in reaching every nation, but the Tribulation saints will. They're going to get a little help, they're going to get some help from the miraculous, the two witnesses that have a miraculous ministry and even are risen from the dead in front of the whole gaze of the world. The angel flying through the heavens preaching the everlasting gospel in some supernatural way, like some supernatural celestial skywriter. And then the hundred and forty-four thousand who are sealed and protected from any harm doing the same thing. And then the persecuted believers who are running everywhere calling people to come to Christ for whom they are willing to die.

Now they are further described, look back at verse 9, they are further described at the end of the verse as being clothed in white robes and palm branches were in their hands. Now, first of all, being clothed in white robes gives us some insight into their condition. The word "white" is a word that doesn't really conjure up in English what it does in Greek. The word leukostolos from which we get stole describes a robe, leukos from which the word "white" comes is really a word that means brilliant or dazzling. It's a dazzling, brilliant, shining light kind of white. And they have robes that are dazzling and brilliant.

Now the only other people we see in the book of Revelation who are dressed like that are back in chapter 6, look at verse 9. "And when He broke the fifth seal I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony they had maintained." And we said that some time back in the first half of the Tribulation period, even before the abomination of desolation hits at the midpoint, believers, people who have come to Christ in those first few years are going to start being killed. There will be persecution. People are going to begin to take the life of believers. They're going to die. They're going to die for the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained, a testimony of Christ. And here these believers are seen in chapter 6 verse 9, they've been martyred and it says they're under the altar. And what are they doing? Verse 10, "They're crying with a loud voice, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" And here they are, they're saying, "Lord, when are You going to stop this bloodshed, when are You going to stop this persecution, when are You going to take Your vengeance?" Verse 11, "And there was given to each of them a white robe." There's that leukostolos again. They were told they should rest a little while longer until the number

of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed, even as they had been, should be completed also.

He says just be patient and just wait and it will happen. It's going to come. And here we find a similar group. Here are people from every tongue and nation and they have white robes. They then would be identified with those people in chapter 6 verses 9 to 11 as people who had been identified as believers and had been martyred. They are the believers martyred. Not just in the first half, as those in chapter 6, but now in the second half when the martyrdom is even exaggerated, as Antichrist has now taken charge of everything and massacres believers every where he can. So here starting in the middle or starting before the middle, starting early in the first half of the Tribulation, or somewhere in the first half, people start to die for Christ and it accelerates and accelerates and now there was some under an altar praying, we don't know because there's no number indicated, but from chapter 6 to chapter 7 as you move through the Tribulation, that group that's under the altar has swollen to a mass that can't even be counted. And that shows us the tremendous spiritual revival that is going to happen even during a time when Christians have to pay the high price. Don't you ever think that people come to Christ when it is as easy as possible. The greatest revival the world will ever experience will come when the price is the highest its ever been.

So there they are. Phillips calls them "majestic martyrs." And those white robes are symbols of exaltation. They are symbols of righteousness. They are symbols of victory. They are symbols of celebration. All of those things are related to the wearing of white robes.

Now there's no need to assume they had actual bodies because we know they don't have actual bodies at this time. You say, "How do you know that?" Because Revelation chapter 20 and verse 4 says, "I saw thrones and they sat on them and judgment was given to them and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand, and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." So up until that time, chapter 20 verse 4, they haven't yet come to life. Verse 5, "The rest of the dead didn't come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection." So they're still waiting for their bodies to come to life, that doesn't happen until the time for the initiation of the Kingdom there as indicated in chapter 20.

So here they are just souls. You say, "Well how can you put a robe on a soul?" It's symbolic. If you didn't put a robe on a soul, John couldn't see it because a soul is invisible. So the symbol of those souls is that dazzling robe that they wear that symbolizes their righteousness, their exaltation, their victory, their rejoicing. So in the vision, the souls...by the way, they're even called souls back in chapter 6 verse 9, "the souls of those who had been slain." They don't get their bodies until, as I read, Revelation chapter 20 verse 4, the end of the Tribulation time in preparation for entering the Kingdom.

Second thing about them is they have palm branches in their hands. Now that's a very interesting thing. Palm branches were associated with celebrations. To the ancients, the palm tree was the perfect tree because it had so many uses. I don't want to go into all of that, look it up in your encyclopedia and you'll see. But the palm branch was, of course, a tree very familiar in that part of the world, very useful to those people because of all that it provided. And whenever there was a time of joy or a time of triumph or a time of celebration, palm branches became prominent. They were waved like fans or flags. You remember, for example in John chapter 12 verse 13 the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is called Palm Sunday because the people were waving palms in their hands. They associated palms with deliverance, with celebration, with joy. Especially prominent were palms in the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles was a Jewish commemorative feast which was a remembrance of the wandering in the wilderness when the children of Israel lived in tents or tabernacles. They would use when they reconstructed those booths, they would use palm branches for the roofs. During the Feast of Tabernacles they would put up little booths to remember the time of their wilderness wandering and they would put palm branches on the top as roofs. You can read in Nehemiah chapter 8 verse 17 about that. Even the Greeks and the Romans would use palm branches as symbols of great celebrations and triumphant and victorious times.

So here we see them in righteousness, in victory, in celebration and the celebration not only represented by the white robes but by the palm branches in their hand. Now remember, the Feast of Tabernacles was in many ways the supreme feast because it remembered God had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt which was God's great Old Testament deliverance act and provided for them and cared for them as they wandered through the wilderness. So it has a sort of a deliverance, salvation feel. So here the palm branches are waved at the Messiah in the triumphal entry, as if to say "Here comes the deliverer." And here again we see them celebrating their salvation with symbolic palm branches in their hands, a fitting backdrop for the One who had delivered them from the world, Satan, Antichrist, death and hell. So much for the description.

A word about the location, back to verse 9. Where are they? It says in the middle of the verse they were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Now we know where that is because we've gone through chapter 4 and chapter 5 and the throne is very clearly identified for us. Chapter 4 verse 1, John says, "I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven, the first voice which I heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, 'Come up here and I'll show you what must take place after these things.' Immediately I was in the Spirit and behold a throne was standing in heaven."

So where are they? They're not on earth, they're in heaven. These are the souls of these folks who are now in heaven. And the throne is described, the throne it says right here in chapter 7 and verse 9 that they are standing before the throne, the throne that is described as a magnificent throne in chapters 4 and chapter 5 as well. It is the throne of God. It is the throne where the Lamb is as well. Back in chapter 5 the Lamb, verse 6, is right there in the midst of the throne. The throne of God, the

throne of Christ. They're in heaven.

How did they get there? Well you have to die to go there. They died. They were martyred. Chapter 20 verse 4 that I just read to you tells us. They were beheaded. They were killed because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God and because they didn't worship the beast, they didn't worship his image, they didn't take his mark. And so their souls left their bodies when their bodies were killed. They died as martyrs, like those in chapter 6 verses 9 to 11. Again it says they died for the same things, because of the Word of God and because of the testimony they had maintained.

And so, these saints are in heaven because of death. Now let me just add this. Many of them had been martyred, others of them had probably died in the holocausts that are going on in the world as the judgments of the first six seals hit. Others of them perhaps died through other more natural means. But here is a massive group of people, not just martyrs but certainly in great measure martyrs, and others who have died. It is an international crowd. It is so large it defies counting. Victorious celebrating righteous saints who have been faithful to the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God and are now in the presence of God at His very throne. They're now out from under the altar, would you please note that? They were under the altar praying that the Lord would take vengeance. They've now seen enough to know He's already done it. We have them praying in verses 9 to 11 of chapter 6, and the sixth seal breaks right after that and the whole universe begins to disintegrate and they know the end is near. And the seventh seal, the last seal, spells the final end. So they're no longer under the altar interceding, they're now standing triumphantly before the throne. They've gotten up, come out from under the altar and they're standing ready to see the triumph and to receive their resurrected bodies and come back to inherit the earthly Kingdom of Christ.

A third word, the first is description, the second is location, the third word that unlocks this text is action. What are they doing? Standing there, what are they doing? Well the answer to that is in verse 10. "They cried out with a loud voice saying, `Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" They're worshiping, that's what they're doing. Their prayers of intercession have stopped, for the moment. They're not pleading...how long, O Lord, how long are You going to let this stuff go on...now that's changed. Now what they're doing is crying out in worship, joyful exuberance. In fact it says they cry out with a loud voice. God likes things loud. It's interesting to me, but He does. And they say, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." Just those two words, "our God...our God," startling.

I mean, we look at our world and we get so discouraged, don't we? Nation after nation after nation rejecting Christ. You look over to all of Europe where Christianity was so strong once, times of the Reformation. You look at Europe and it is dead and little tiny insignificant infinitesimal churches are here and there and the great mass of humanity have rejected Jesus Christ in western Europe. You look at eastern Europe and its been locked up on communism for decades and now is emerging and

trying to find its way as it screens itself through the religions of the world. You look at Latin America and you see it steeped in an unbiblical and non-saving kind of Catholic system. You look at Canada and it's as pagan as the United States, or more so, indifferent to religion. Few churches having impact. You look at Asia and it is steeped in all kinds of false religious systems. You look at India and you just keep moving around the globe and you say, "Where are the believing people?" You look at Africa, the same thing.

But here is a mass of humanity from everywhere and they're saying, "Salvation to our God." God had become their God and they're now worshiping the God who sits on the throne and they're worshiping the Lamb. They've had a change of heart.

To be real honest with you, I'm not surprised in one sense since we already know what they've just experienced. There are many people who curse God but there will be many others when this stuff begins to break loose who will turn to the gospel under the judgments that are falling. This multitude of people from all over the world are saying, "Salvation to our God," that simply means we give Him the credit for our salvation. Salvation is the theme of their worship, just like it is of ours. They have now entered into the fullness of salvation. They've been delivered from sin and delivered from death and delivered from hell and delivered from Satan, they're now in the very throne room of God and they're right in His glorious presence and the presence of the Lamb. And their praise is very much like some others.

Go back to chapter 5 for a moment. We met a group called the twenty-four elders there. At the time we studied them I told you that it is most likely they represent the church for a number of reasons. They have harps, harps are associated with prophecy. They have bowls of incense which are there characterizes the prayers of the saints. They are saints and they are praying saints and they are those who spoke and heard the Word, the prophetic Word, and they sang a new song, "Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals for Thou wast slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a Kingdom and priest to our God and they will reign upon the earth." They're simply praising God for the church, praising God for redeeming the church.

Here again in chapter 7 a new group shows up and they're praising God for redemption, as well. They're not the church, they're a new group who have come out, verse 14 says, of the Great Tribulation. What we learn here is that the action of heaven is primarily praise, isn't it? Back in chapter 5 certainly we saw that the twenty-four elders start the praise along with the four living creatures, the four living beings. And then there's more praise in verse 12 when all the angelic creatures chime in and say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing," and then every created thing joins in, "To Him who sits on the throne, to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. And the four living beings kept saying Amen, and the elders fell down and worshiped." That's what

heaven is, it's just all praise.

We find over in chapter 11, look with me at verse 16, there is praise in verse 15, the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, He'll reign forever and ever, the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God saying, "We give thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign."

Over in chapter 12 verse 10, "I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down who accuses them before our God day and night." And there again is the praise for salvation and power and kingdom and authority.

We find it again, don't we, in chapter 19 verse 1, "After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, `Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God.'" They're always singing about salvation in heaven. That's because it's the redeemed and the saved that are doing the singing.

By the way, all of the worship of heaven is to be focused on God and the Redeemer. Chapter 19 verse 10, John falls down to worship an angel, and he says, "Don't do that, I'm a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." Over in chapter 22 verse 9, John says...he did it again, he fell down at the feet of the angel and he said, "Don't do that, I'm a fellow servant of yours, your brethren the prophets, and those who heed the words of this book, worship God." All the worship in heaven focuses on God and the Lamb.

Well, we meet then a group of redeemed and ascended souls in the presence of God engaged in worship. Let me introduce just one more word, and I won't cover all of it because it's so wonderful, but I want to give you the fourth word, and that's the word association. I already told you that they have a song, a hymn of praise very much like the twenty-four elders. But I want you to notice in verse 11, "And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever, Amen." Association. It must be wonderful, it must be wonderful to go to heaven and hang around holy angels. It must be wonderful when you know what a wretched, vile, rotten, undeserving sinner you are and only by God's grace are you there and all of a sudden wake up some day and be in the presence of holy angels standing before the throne of God and the throne of the Lamb. That's pretty classy association.

And that's where these folks find themselves. In fact, their very presence and their very worship elicits the worship of the angels. And it says in verse 11, "And all the angels," it's pantos, it's

emphatic and all the angels, those worshiping, celebrating creatures that God designed to praise Him are stimulated and they all join in praise. After all, that's there, as the French say, *raison d'être*, that's their reason to be. We have heard them doing it before, haven't we? In chapter 4 and chapter 5.

They're joining in. You say, "Have they experienced salvation?" No...no, angels don't experience salvation, the ones that fell are damned and can't be saved, and the ones that didn't fall aren't lost don't need to be saved. But they're very curious about salvation because it's something they can't experience. First Peter 1:12 says, "Angels long to look into it." They want to understand this miraculous thing that God does called saving people. In Ephesians 3 we are reminded that the Lord saves the church so that He can make known through the church, through the salvation of the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places His manifold wisdom. His saving work they can't experience, but they're fascinated by it and it puts God's power on display. They have never experienced and never will experience salvation. But they love to praise God for it. And so there is an immense crowd coming into the presence of God wearing robes of righteousness, triumphant, victorious celebrating who spend their time worshiping God with such worship for salvation that it elicits the attendant praise of all the angels...all of them.

Well, in conclusion, and we'll save the rest for next time, in conclusion tonight, I don't know about you but that gives me a lot of hope, doesn't it you? It's wonderful to know that we struggle along in this life and we have such strong desires and such intense wishes that the gospel triumph...and as I said this morning, you know, it's inexplicable to me how people can hear the gospel and walk away from a rational standpoint, it's irrational. It is absolute folly, foolishness, idiocy, mindlessness. And sometimes we Christians do get a martyr complex, don't we? We feel like we're outnumbered. I think a lot of Christians thought when Clinton got elected that was the end of the Christian faith. There was tremendous despair. And, you know, we want to crawl into our little corner and say, "You know, just a few of us, you know, like Elijah, I, only I am left. We're on the losing end of this deal. I thought we were going to be a part of the conquering force."

Well the day is coming when by God's grace and His mercy the gospel will triumph. It will triumph across the world and the promise of salvation to the nations of the earth will come to pass. It will be the best of times during the worst of times. But that's just like God who in the midst of wrath remembers mercy, in the midst of judgment remembers grace. More about this group next time. Let's pray.

Father, what wonderful triumphant victorious news this is that while the world will get worse and worse and plunge into the darkness of the time of Tribulation in the horror of Antichrist rule and hell belching loose demons all over the globe and Satan and demons being cast out of the sky, as it were, and down to the earth will exaggerate anything this world has ever known about evil. Withholding of the restraining work of the Holy Spirit will let sin run amuck and unchecked. Satan will have his day and have his way, the horrors of devastating judgment will fall. It all would seem so bleak if it weren't

for this wonderful little chapter that says, "But in the midst Israel will be saved and become the nation of evangelists that You wanted them to be originally," and through their instrumentation and their faithfulness the gospel will reach the farthest corners of the world and You will redeem a people for Yourself. The few who find it will become many. We thank You for that triumphant future that You will be vindicated, that the work of Jesus Christ will culminate in that great revival. In the meantime, Lord, help us to know the gospel can still triumph in the hearts of those who are open. Give us open hearts, Lord, to reach and to teach, in Christ's name. Amen.

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