

Coming Out of the Great Tribulation

ALL SAINTS' DAY

November 5, 2017

REVELATION 7:2-17

² Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. ⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 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,** ¹² saying, "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, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation"—that's the description of the Lord's people at the Throne of God. It describes Heaven and all those belonging to the Lord as they are gathered around the Lamb who has taken away the sin of the world—they live before God in righteousness and purity forever, with every tear wiped from their eyes.

But the description is that they are the ones *coming out* of the great tribulation. So there is movement, travel from one location to another, *from* the great tribulation, *to* the throne of God.

John is writing to those still in the great tribulation. They are not yet at the Throne of God where they belong, at least not yet by sight.

John is an Apostle and he is writing, of course, to the church. The church John is writing to at the time is the Church being persecuted by the Caesar in Rome. At the time, that Caesar at the time is Domitian, and he was death to the Church. The Church had already undergone the persecution of Nero. Now, some 30 years after Nero, Domitian is Caesar, and people had to refer to him by the title *Lord God*.

Under Domitian's rule, Christians were legally considered to be atheists because they refused to bow down to Domitian as god, and they didn't bring sacrifice to the gods of Rome.

So, for the Christian, it's tribulation—governmental confiscation of property, taxes for the pagan temples, requirements to bow down to Caesar, taxes levied just because you are a Christian, persecution and murder, it's tribulation.

But John writes his letter of Revelation not just to the Church at that time, under Domitian's persecution, but to the Church of every generation. For, the Church will always live in tribulation. Until that time when we are brought out of the tribulation into eternal life, it will be affliction—until that day when our Lord comes again to judge the living and the dead, bringing all his people into the resurrection of the dead and life before the heavenly Throne.

So we are in tribulation now. John's letter is still read in the Church, from the time of Domitian up until now.

John's letter, which we call the Book of Revelation, is always to be read in the Church, for, as Church, we always find our wellspring of life in the words of Holy Scripture, including the book of John's revelation.

The Church will always be persecuted.

It will be persecuted because its answer to earthly problems is not found in earthly kingdoms or great governing systems; not in taxation, nor in confiscation of wealth, nor in raising armies and setting up government programs, but the Church's answer to earthly problems is found in the repentance of the

sinner. It is found in the preaching of Christ crucified, in the release of sins, in the Body and Blood given to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins, in the sinner being clothed in righteousness in the gift of Baptism—and all of this is an offense to our world.

So, as long as we live from the proclamation of Christ crucified, from the Gospel of all sin forgiven and reconciliation before God by the Gospel, it will be persecution.

Sometimes the tribulation comes from outside the Church. This tribulation will be found in the blood of innocent families who refuse to bow down to the false gods of the earthly powers—we see this in the persecution of Christians under Nero and then Domitian, under imams and Muslim terror, as we see around the globe now. We see it wherever worldly powers or government systems require the Christian to bow down to human arrogance or unjust laws, wherever Christian children are taught immorality, even against the authority of the parents.

Sometimes the tribulation comes not from outside the Church, though, but from within. This tribulation is found wherever the Lord is proclaimed in such a way that the sinner can supposedly justify himself, rather than be justified freely by the Word of Christ; wherever the sinner is tempted to think he causes his salvation with his own decision or choice, rather than being God's free gift of grace; wherever the Christian is taught that sins are not forgiven in what the Lord has promised in his Body and Blood of the Sacrament and in his clothing the sinner in righteousness in Baptism.

But the tribulation comes also not from just outside the Church in worldly persecution, and inside the Church in false doctrine, but also ... in the life of the Christian. Even if there were no sin in the world, and no false doctrine attacking the Church, you and I would still be in our sinful flesh, and as long as we are in sinful flesh, we have ourselves in tribulation.

For what worse tribulation is there, than to be uncertain of your standing before God, than to be left thinking that your salvation depends somehow on your own worthiness.

So John writes, *These are the one coming out of the great tribulation*. There is movement, transport from one place to another. We come out of the tribulation, we come into the blessings of life at the Thorne of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We are still in the tribulation in our life of flesh. At the same time, we are fully in the life of blessing in our life of faith. Until, that is, our flesh is finally put to death when we die, or when Christ comes again, if

that comes first—until then, we still live in our life of sinful flesh.

But of that, we daily repent. Repentance is the life of faith. We repent, knowing that we have been clothed in the white robes of righteousness.

Revelation 7:14:

“Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?”¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus took the sins of every sinner upon himself, and John the Baptist pointed to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

The Lamb, bearing our sin, shed his Blood on the cross. That blood cleanses us of all sin. He now clothes us in the clean robes as he baptizes us into his cross and resurrection.

In Baptism, the Holy Spirit clothes you in the righteousness of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

We were given to see that gift this morning, as the Holy Spirit gathered us to our Lord’s Name, and gave us to see Angel Marquez given the white clothing of Baptism.

Out of tribulation, out of guilt, out of shame, out of death and fear, we have been baptized out of all that, and transferred into the righteousness of Christ Jesus, into the life of faith.

By faith, we belong not to the death we see around us, but the life of all those gathered to the heavenly Throne. By faith, we hold on with certainty to the promise that we are children of God, and when our Lord Jesus appears again, we will be like him who purifies us of all sin.

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

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