

November 14, 2010
Saints Triumphant

"We Are Saints Triumphant"

REVELATION 7:9-17

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" ¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come 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 spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This last book of the Bible, the Revelation to Saint John, is almost frightening in its description of what will happen to the Christian Church in the last days. It predicts forces of evil rising up to attack the church with such ominous names as Gog and Magog, ancient names that reek with evil. It speaks of false teachers rising up within the church who look like the Lamb of God but speak with the mouth of the devil. Jesus himself warned us of days when the church would be persecuted by the world. He warned of times when many false prophets would come in his name.

Yet, this book, this Revelation to John, contains some of the most comforting verses in all of Scripture. It shows us people standing before the throne of God singing songs of victory and waving palm branches in their hands. It shows us people who are wearing white robes that have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. It lifts our eyes upward and shows us the place that Jesus has prepared for us, a place so beautiful it brings tears of joy to our eyes.

Today we are celebrating Saints Triumphant Sunday. Let me ask you a personal question. How triumphant do you feel this morning? When you look at this "Triumph Meter" where do you fall? Are you a 2 or 3 or 5 or 6? By the end of this sermon it is our prayer that God's Word will convince you that you are a "Triumphant 10" because of who you are in Christ and because of the place that he has prepared for you.

Look at the people who surround us

What beautiful people John saw around the throne of the Lamb. "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that on one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." John sees a huge crowd of people that no one could count. The Lord once told Abraham he would have descendants, people who believed what he believed about the Messiah, more numerous than the stars in the sky. At times it seems the number of believers is rather small. Even Jesus said, "Many called but few are chosen." When we are raised to life again on the last day we will be reunited with a large crowd of people from every time and place who share our faith in Jesus.

These people come from every nation, tribe, language and people. They have different colors of skin. They speak different languages. They lived on this earth eating different foods from lutefisk to linguini. John sees these people standing before the throne, not sitting but standing. They joyfully share the victory without the divisions we have in our world today.

These diverse people share something very special. "There were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands." They were all wearing white robes symbolic of the robes of righteousness that had been given to them in Jesus. "These in white robes-who are they, and where did they come from?" The answer is given, "These are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The terrible sins that stain us permanently and make us unacceptable to our God are totally removed and washed away. I am holding in my hand a shirt that is used for painting. Numerous machine washings will not remove the paint stains. Think of all the stains of sin from your life this past week. Nothing can remove these stains, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Joyfully we encourage each other with these words this morning. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin."

These people gathered around the throne of the Lamb sing their praises to Jesus with loud voices "And they cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb. My salvation does not rest in me or in my hands or in my heart or in my life. I have nothing to offer God to save myself from my sinful condition. My God took this problem into his hands. He took my sin and placed it all on Jesus. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was willing, oh how he was willing, to provide the sacrifice necessary to provide a full removal of all sin. Even the precious faith you have this morning to believe in this gift of forgiveness belongs to God. It is given to you as a free gift. Look more closely at these people with their white robes washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. They are holding something green in their hands. They are holding palm branches, symbols of victory. Now you know why early Christians buried their dead with palm branches in their hands and why they carved palm branches on the front of the tombs where they buried their dead.

These people who stand around the throne of the Lamb have come out of great tribulation. The Greek word for tribulation has the thought of being in a very narrow place, of being squeezed. If I take this grip player and put it over my finger and squeeze it hard, just think of the pain that will come to me. Jesus told us about taking up our cross and following him. If I take this pin and poke it into a dead person they will feel no pain. If I take this pin and poke it into my skin, it will create pain. Because you love Jesus and are alive in him, you carry a cross for him. You experience pain and suffering every time you

fail to live up to the life he has called you to live. You fall asleep at night praying for your family and friends to come to Jesus and stay close to him. Whenever one of your fellow Christians falls into sin or false teaching it rips you up inside and makes your stomach churn. And if you faithfully confess the name of Jesus you will join the disciples of our Lord Jesus who were persecuted for that name. "These are they who have come out tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Oh, my dear Christian, on this Saints Triumphant Sunday, I plead with you and I make this plea to myself, "Look at who you are. You are a saint triumphant. You are around the throne of the Lamb." The book of Hebrews tells us, "You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, the church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven." This puts a huge smile on your face, a large spring in your step, and joyful song in your heart.

This glorious vision to St John offers not only a look at the saints around the throne of the Lamb it also offers us a look at the place that Jesus our Savior has prepared for us. Long before the Internet offered opportunities to see pictures of homes online, Jesus offers us visions of the place he has prepared for us.

Look at the place around us

"They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them." The 23rd Psalm tells us, "Goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The Holy Spirit is constantly fueling our hope and keeping it alive. Romans chapter 8 tells us that we have the first fruits of the Spirit. We groan inwardly as we wait for the Lord to take us home. The Holy Spirit creates in us a deep longing and yearning for what was once ours in the Garden of Eden. Remember the first time you saw the movie, "E.T." Tears may have welled up in your eyes when you heard the classic line, "E.T. go home." It strikes a familiar note and chord with all of us. Even the heathen without hope in Jesus long for something better than this world in which we live.

The place that Jesus has prepared for us is such a nice place. We will live forever in the presence of the Lord. Add up all the happiest moments you have enjoyed in this life with your family, your husband or wife, your loved ones and your friends. Distill them down to one second of pure joy and it will not equal what it will be like to be in the presence of the Lord. No wonder the psalmist David spoke of about joy in the presence of the Lord and why the Apostle Paul said, "I long to be absent from this life and present with the Lord."

What will heaven be like? How often children and adults ask this question! Listen to what the Revelation tells us. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst." We show compassion to hungry people in the world by offering them rice and wheat and other food. When we bring them Jesus the Bread of Life, they will have a place where they will never hunger and never thirst. Gone will be all the stress and strain that comes with providing food on the table, a home in which to live, and jobs that may be in jeopardy.

What will heaven be like? "The sun will not beat on them nor any scorching heat." All the discomforts of this life will be removed. There will be no trips to the doctor or dentist. There will be no pharmacies dispensing drugs, no hospitals, no surgeries, no pain or sorrow. The names of

diseases such as cancer, diabetes, MS, heart disease, arthritis and other problems will be no more.

What will heaven be like? The virtual tour continues. "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." The summer sun beats down, the grasses wither and dry, the streams dry up, but the sheep are OK because the Shepherd carries them in his loving arms through the canyons, up the trails into mountain meadows so beautiful they bring tears to your eyes. Water flows from deep underground springs. Rich nutritious grass flourish. The sheep safely graze in the mountain heights the Shepherd has planned for them. "No eye has seen, not ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him- but God has revealed it to us by his Holy Spirit." In heaven, we will have no more tears. The hardest person to live with will no longer be there, that is my own sinful self.

"God will wipe away all our tears." There will be no Kleenex in heaven for teary eyes. We are saints triumphant. Not we will be or we may be or we can be. "We are saints triumphant." You will know how to end this sermon for me. "We are....SAINTS TRIUMPHANT!" Amen.