

Grace to you and peace from Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to God. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

PRAY: Lord, speak, for your servants are listening. Amen.

Revelation 7:9–17 (NKJV)

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and 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 neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;

17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

PRAY: O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, as we consider Your holy Word, shepherd us to living waters. Amen.

The Lamb Will Shepherd His Flock to Rest

1. His blood has washed and made you white
2. His presence is leading you out of the Great Tribulation

In the name of the Lamb who was slain and has begun His reign, dear fellow partners in the tribulation, the kingdom, and the endurance,

Imagine yourself coming down that home stretch of the Boston marathon. Imagine yourself, exhausted, dehydrated. Your knees feel like rubber. You can hardly get enough oxygen to keep your sense of balance. Just beyond you see the end in sight.

Just beyond the finish line is that rest you so desire. Just as you give the last push to the finish, a bomb explodes, knocking you to the ground.

Maybe you saw the footage of the tribulation that took place at the finish line of the Boston marathon. What a gruesome picture. This world is truly a marathon of uncertainty – a person can't even go to a sporting event and feel safe.

In a sense, we all are coming down the home stretch. We see the finish line. We're fatigued; we're deprived of needed oxygen and hydration; and just when our rest seems within reach, something strikes us and knocks us down.

Who will protect us? Who will lead us safely to rest?

v.17 ...the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters.

The Lamb will shepherd you to rest. He has shed His blood to gather us into His flock. He stands in our midst leading us through the explosions, beyond the tragedy, and out of this Great Tribulation.

1. His blood has washed and made you white

If you watched much footage of the events that took place this last Monday, you see that blood makes things anything but white. There is a reason why blood makes us squeamish. Blood means pain; it is a sign of death. It reminds us of our mortality. It reveals the curse that binds this creation, a curse which destines us for hell. Our clothes are stained with this reality.

The temptation is to think that we will overcome this tribulation of sin by our stick-to-it-iveness. We like to think: we've been knocked down before, we will get up again.

Evil is not just out there in the mind of two calculating terrorists. That same evil is within every one of us. If we fail to recognize this ... if I begin to think that suspect 1 and suspect 2 are worse sinners than I am, then I am left vulnerable to the demands and consequences of God's Law. *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10).*

Do we expect to reach that heavenly goal by gut and determination? If so, this means we cannot stumble once. We must deny our own ways; resist any shortcut, avoid all detours. This means children never ignoring their parents and parents never neglecting their children. This means when certain urges offer a more pleasure-filled path, we cannot take it. We must resist all short-cuts even though we think no one would ever notice. We must press on when we are depressed; when we don't feel like talking to that person we need to talk to; when we don't address that problem that needs to be addressed.

The fact remains – Satan has set the traps; God has allowed the tests; and we have stumbled, wandered, and fallen flat.

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; (Isaiah 53:6)

No matter how we strive to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and push on, the record has been tainted. This forced Isaiah to admit: *But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6).*

We bleed because we are not perfected. This world and the bodies we inhabit cannot find that rest we so desperately desire by simply pushing onward and trusting in ourselves.

The only escape from our Great Tribulation of sin and death is the Lamb.

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” 14 And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

When seen flowing from the side of Him who was slain for us, blood signifies something quite different. This is the blood of the spotless Passover Lamb. Jesus’ sacrifice was pure, not tainted by sin. His death was undeserved. He followed God’s commands with absolutely no hint of a desire to do otherwise. He took no detours or shortcuts. When his human nature was tired, weak, knocked down, He pressed on. He never ignored the matter that needed to be dealt with. He hid nothing from His Father. His sacrifice was spotless.

In our Scripture reading Paul reminds us of this precious value of this blood when he says: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock ... to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” It was the blood of God’s only beloved Son that paid the price of the redemption of God’s flock.

In the midst of your sins, your failures to do what is good, your corrupt thoughts, this is your source of rest. Now, today, rest from your stick-to-it-iveness. Rest from the demands of a marathon in which you have stumbled daily. Rest from a race that ends only in hell. Rest in your baptism: “You have been washed. ... You have been made white.”

By faith in His blood, your robe is washed forever; you are white and blameless; you are forgiven of all your sins. His living blood gives you new life; new resurrection; the new flock to which you have been joined. God no longer sees your tainted rags, because you wear the robe of Christ. In God’s eyes you have already finished the race. The Lamb is, even now, shepherding you to rest.

2. His presence is leading you out of the Great Tribulation

The term “millennialism” comes from Revelation chapter 20 where it refers to Christ reigning with the saints for 1000 years. Millennialists believe that the book of Revelation indicates a time to come where Christ will rule on this earth for a literal 1000 years. They believe that the everything taking place after chapter 3 is happening in the distant future and unfolding in a chronological manner. When they arrive at chapter 7 they start speaking of the “Great Tribulation” as a period of seven years and the “coming out” referenced here they term “the rapture of the saints.” The rapture is a belief that the ones coming out of the Great Tribulation will be suddenly ushered from here into heaven in an instant, leaving only unbelievers on earth.

First of all, there is nothing in the text to demand that these chapters be understood in a strict chronological fashion. Secondly, what purpose does it serve for John to write to the seven churches in Asia about some tribulation that will happen way off in the future and not affect them in the least.

When Jesus spoke of tribulation and the end times, it was always in a RIGHT NOW sense. Jesus tells his disciples point blank: *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*” (John 16:33). Paul and Barnabas were busy encouraging believers to continue in the faith reminding them, *“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”* (Acts 14:22) John himself begins the book of Revelation by saying that he is a partner in the tribulation, in the kingdom, and in the endurance – all part of the Church militant that is in tribulation RIGHT NOW.

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

No one could number this crowd. All nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. The number four is used to indicate the fulness of God’s people on earth. From the four winds, God has sought out those who are joined to His heavenly flock. This is not a small portion of the Church which is suddenly raptured out; this is the fullness of the Church that is continues to be shepherded out day by day. Verse 14 uses a present tense verb to say: “these are the ones coming out...” This procession spans the course of this world from its fall. Though we can’t see it with our eyes, we know it to be going on right now. From among every nation, from among every congregation who confesses the gospel, believers are being led out.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:28–29)

He knows you by name. He is every day guarding and guiding you. Notice, the Lamb is never pictured as laying down. He is always alive and standing. Because of His resurrection, Jesus is always with us. His blood is not just a sign of His dead, it is a sign of His life. His blood is perpetually alive, perpetually giving us the forgiveness of our sins in the preaching of the gospel.

Every time two or three are gathered together in the confession of His name, there He stands, alive. When we come to the Lord's Supper today, we are joining this company which no one could number, both of those in heaven and on earth. The blood of Christ which comes to us in bread and wine is not dead, but alive in the victory He has won. This is how He shepherds us out. This joins us to His resurrected body and blood to give you the forgiveness of your sins. We join the heavenly song: *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

In our Scripture reading, the apostle Paul was literally "dead set" to go to Jerusalem. He knew well what awaited him – "chains and tribulation" (Acts 20:23). Why would he go? Why would he walk right toward suffering rather than away? He continues: "But none of these things move me; not do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." (20:24). He went forth knowing that his life in this world was not really what mattered. What mattered was the testimony of God's grace.

"And they follow Me." What is the destination? Recall our Gradual for this season: *Behold I tell you that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*

We know as Paul did: So Paul rightly said: *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* (Acts 14:22). We follow Jesus to that the heavenly finish line. He is our REST.

Nothing can snatch us away from the Lamb who shepherds us. Every tribulation, every pain becomes God's work to tread death beneath your feet. The Lamb goes before you, treading upon sin and death all the way to the finish line. So press on in your race. But do not do so by trusting in your own balance, your own endurance, your own ability to predict the unpredictable. Rely on grace of God and the Lamb who goes before you.

Many of those injured by the tragedy in Boston had their legs injured and even lost. For many, life will never be the same. What do you say to such a person? You say: "Christ is risen."

Join with Luther's song:

*Laugh to scorn the gloomy grave
And at death no longer tremble;*

*He, the Lord, who came to save
Will at last His own assemble.
They will go their Lord to meet,
Treading death beneath their feet. (TLH 206)*

Those who believe in Jesus truly do tread death beneath their feet. The resurrection of Jesus fixes that broken leg; heals that sore back; restores back those lost limbs; rids the body of cancer forever. With resurrected feet, we stomp on the head of sin and death.

16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Amen.