

<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." <sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; <sup>17</sup> 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."

Text: Revelation 7:9-17 A 5/12/19 Acts 13:15-16a, 26-33 John 10:22-30 Ps. 48 Resp. Ps.: 23  
Hymns: 210, 371 (1-4), 371 (5-7), 656

## WHO ARE THESE, CLOTHED IN WHITE ROBES?

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Our text is from the book of Revelation, written by God through the Apostle John. In the first chapter of Revelation John says, "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (v. 9). John had been exiled to an island because he was a Christian – a Christian who preached salvation in Christ alone and who remained faithful to the Word of God. God has given us the book of Revelation, encouraging John and his fellow believers at that time and all Christians of all time, especially when we're being persecuted for our faith in Jesus.

In our text John was given a vision of heaven: "All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures." We understand who "the angels" are. Who are "the elders and the four living creatures"? Who is in heaven, and who is also going to be in heaven? God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the angels, and everyone who believes in Jesus. From the verses before our text as well as related Scriptures we can tell that "the living creatures" are special angels, such as cherubim or seraphim (Rev. 4:7-9; Is. 6; Ezek. 10:20), and "the elders" are believers from both the Old and the New Testaments (Rev. 4:4, 10; Mt. 19:28). So our text is simply a vision of God, the angels, and all the believers in heaven.

John speaks of "[these] in white robes" in heaven. Who are they? To put it another way, who gets to go to heaven? We sometimes hear people say about someone who has died, "He was a good person. If anyone is going to heaven, he is. In the sight of the perfect, holy, God we "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" – Romans 3:23. Human goodness doesn't even come close to getting us into heaven. The Bible says that "a man is not justified by the works of the law...." (We're not saved by trying to do a good enough job of obeying God's commands and Commandments.) "By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

We're told that those *"in white robes ... are the ones who ... washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* If we get a blood stain on a white garment we have to wash the blood out to make the garment white again. But in the case of those wearing white robes in heaven the blood is what makes their robes white. The Bible says that Jesus is *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* (Jn. 1:29). Like an innocent lamb, Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sins on the cross. Scripture assures us that *"the blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, cleanses us from all sin"* (1 Jn. 1:7b). Those *"in white robes"* in heaven are all those who believed in Jesus during their lives, and have all their sins washed away by Him forever.

God doesn't choose us for heaven because we're good enough. God clothes us sinners with the white robe of Christ's righteousness and makes us fit for heaven. No matter how sincere we may be, no matter how hard we may try to be righteous and good, it's not by our goodness that we're saved. We're saved by the perfect life and death – the perfect righteousness – of Jesus Christ. We're told that all those in heaven will *"[cry] out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* Our salvation comes from God. God gives us salvation. It's by faith alone in Jesus, faith which God gives us, that God saves us!

We're told that the believers in heaven *"are the ones who come out of the great tribulation."* The original text says that the believers *"are the ones coming out of the great tribulation."* It's not referring to some future tribulation. It's referring to every believer, when he or she dies, *"coming out of the great tribulation"* of life here on earth and going to heaven. Acts 14:22 warns us that *"we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."* When a loved one who is dying is suffering, and he then dies, we're relieved and grateful for his sake that his suffering is over. Why does God allow us to experience suffering? God isn't punishing us. Jesus was already punished for all of our sins on the cross. God allows His believing people to go through times of suffering to purge away the sin that we would otherwise let cling to us. God's purpose is to bring us closer to Him and make our faith purer and stronger. James says, *"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience"* (or *"endurance"*). Through suffering, God seeks to wean us away from our natural attachment to this world and this life, and set our hearts on going to heaven one day and being with Him. *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us"* in heaven! – Romans 8:18.

In heaven this is what we're going to see and be a part of for eternity: *"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"* (which were used for celebrations and as symbols of victory and royalty: Lev. 23:40-41; Jn. 12:13) *"in their hands, ... crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' 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, saying: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'"* In heaven we will finally get to see the almighty, living God in all His glory with our own eyes! We will never have to leave Him. We'll be able to worship Him and serve Him perfectly forever!

In heaven, *"God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes."* Sin is what causes all of our problems in life. If we were all perfect, and this were a perfect world, we wouldn't have any problems. In heaven, there will be no more sin, and no more effects of sin. *"God will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like His glorious body"* – Philippians 3:21. In heaven never

again will we get sick or hurt or grow old or die. We will live forever in perfect health and happiness. The twenty-first chapter of Revelation tells us that in heaven, “*God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*” (3-4).

When someone we love who believes in Jesus dies, we don’t have to wonder, “Is he/Is she going to heaven?” Our text says that “*the Lamb*” (Jesus, the Lamb who sacrificed His life for us) “*in the midst of the throne will shepherd them*” (Jesus, also the Shepherd who leads us to heaven); “*will lead them to living fountains of waters.*” “*The LORD is my shepherd.... He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake*” (Ps. 23:21, 23). Our salvation doesn’t depend on us and how strongly we can hold on to Jesus. Our salvation depends on Jesus and how strongly Jesus holds on to us. And Jesus promises us, “*Neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand*” (Jn. 10:28b). Jesus is the One who is taking us to heaven, and Jesus is the One who will keep us safe in heaven forever. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as his Savior is going to heaven! Jesus says, “*Whoever believes in Me has everlasting life*” (Jn. 6:47). Jesus does not say, “*he might have everlasting life,*” or “*he hopes he will have everlasting life.*” Jesus says he “*has everlasting life*”! Jesus tells us, “*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (Jn. 14:1-3).

When John wrote the book of Revelation he and many other believers were experiencing severe persecution for their faith. Some were put to death (Rev. 2:13). We’re living in a time of growing opposition and persecution for our faith. The theme that runs throughout the book of Revelation is that Jesus gives us the ultimate victory over the world and over Satan, sin, death, and hell. Jesus tells us, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10).

“*Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ 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. 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. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 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.’*” **WHO ARE THESE, CLOTHED IN WHITE ROBES?** We know who they are: You and me and everyone else who believes in Jesus, with Him in heaven forever!

Behold a host, arrayed in white, Like thousand snow-clad mountains bright,  
 With palms they stand. Who is this band Before the throne of light?  
 Lo, these are they of glorious fame Who from the great affliction came  
 And in the flood of Jesus’ blood Are cleansed from guilt and blame.  
 Now gathered in the holy place, Their voices they in worship raise,  
 Their anthems swell where God doth dwell, Mid angels’ songs of praise. Amen.  
 (TLH #656:1)