

“Our Shepherd Through Tribution”

(Revelation 7:9-17)

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 21st, 2013

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our *risen* Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! This is now our third segment/sermon in what has become a *series* in the book of Revelation (keep in mind that we now post both the manuscripts *and* the audio versions of all the sermons on our website www.saintpaulsirvine.com). In respect to now three sermons on Revelation (today being the third) some would say that that is about *two* sermons too many on Revelation! And that for at least two reasons: First, though Revelation may *seem* confusing with its apocalyptic genre and all of that symbolism and figurative language, it really isn't, but is in fact extremely simple: our Lord Jesus Christ wins! He wins over sin, He wins over death, and He wins over the devil. But so as to be consistent with what I preached last Sunday, it would be better said that Christ has *won...when He said “It is finished!” (John 19:30) from the cross of Calvary, our Lord wasn't kidding!* So some would say you really don't need to preach too much on Revelation, because it is in fact very simple: it's about Jesus' being victorious!

But the other reason some might say that three sermons are too much on Revelation is precisely because of the enormous *confusion* which swirls around this book. In other words some might say, “I don't want to enter the confusion, so let's simply avoid the book altogether!”

The problem of confusion, however, isn't on account of the book which when approached correctly is straight-forward enough, but when false teaching is *injected* into the text, then you have the recipe for rousing fear and anxiety. For this reason, I have said the last two Sundays and now I will say it again: do not let anyone convince you that this book is a scary book, it isn't. When the true message of Christ's victory comes out, then it is in fact extremely comforting. You have nothing to fear, Jesus has been victorious for you.

In other words we do *indeed* have good reason to preach more than one sermon on Revelation: you are God's people, you are disciples of Jesus and therefore: Jesus wants you to enjoy the powerful comfort in this book; *and* Jesus desires that you be protected from the false teaching which surrounds this book! So let's get it right and let's apply God's comfort to the sin we battle!

There are two main verses from Revelation 7 that I'd like to focus on, the first being Revelation 7:14. Let's read what the heavenly elder said to John the apostle who received this amazing vision from God:

“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.”

I must say that there are compelling arguments which assert that “the great tribulation” is in reference to *all* tribulations combined together in the life of the Church on earth (e.g. Lenski). However, we have to be careful that we do not overreact to teachings that aren't necessarily popular in the Lutheran tradition. For example, we are amillennialist which means that we properly believe that the 1000 years mentioned in Revelation chapter 20 (six times to boot) is a symbolic reference to the time of the Church (10 cubed is the perfect time-frame for Christ's Church to exist on earth before our Lord comes again). At the same time, we have to admit that many in the early church believed in a form of premillennialism. There was an urgent expectation of Christ's second coming. Many were convinced that Jesus would return in their life-time and that Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom. Historical facts are just that, so we need to be careful about how we approach these issues.

However, there are other popular teachings that are not only recent in origin, but also stretch the meaning of God's Word to say the very least. This includes teachings about the rapture and the great tribulation.

One of those things that we need to take into consideration is that there is a definite article directing this reference in the original language in Revelation 7: this is the tribulation, **the** great one (Revelation 7:14). The Scriptures seems clear in Revelation 20 that Satan is going to be released from his bondage for a “little season,” a short period before Christ comes again. In other words, there seems to be biblical warrant that things might very well be getting worse in the world instead of better. I am not saying that you should go along with all the crazy notions of new world orders and such, but back up and take into consideration what really makes for things getting worse. Many things seem to be better, not worse, but there are other things which should catch your attention:

1. In our world today, would you say that it is easier or more difficult to protect marriage in the sense of staying together?
2. In our world today, would you say that it is easier or more difficult to protect the unborn?
3. In our world today, would you say that it is easier or more difficult to defend biblical and traditional marriage in the sense of maintaining biblical sexuality?

4. In our world today, would you say that it is easier or more difficult to hear the true saving Gospel proclaimed?

There are many things in our world today that are *not* better and while it is true that the Church since the first century has considered herself to be living in the end times, I would not be surprised if we aren't already living in Satan's little season...maybe we are, maybe we aren't, but there is one thing we *do* know:

The tribulation that you go through as a child of God is important to you – and oftentimes very much perceived as “great” to you – and if it is important to you, it is important God.

We also know this, Acts 14:22:

“...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

This word is not the word for persecution in the more direct sense: *dioko*, but is the particular and unique word: *Thlipsis* = also translated as “trial,” “affliction,” and “distress.” All of these other words help us to understand what is encompassed in the word “tribulation.” A trial is a hardship which causes you strain, an affliction is something upon you which causes you to suffer, and distress represents the emotional turmoil within you as you go through these things. On account of sin coming into the world and our own sinful rebellion against our Heavenly Father, we go through tribulation. As you can see, I'm presenting tribulation both in the sense of external causes upon us and internal causes within us (this is the biblical gamut).

This first picture is a representation of the tribulation called depression:



This second one is a picture of the tribulation called addiction:



Sometimes we limit the concept of addiction to alcohol or substance abuse. Addiction goes way beyond that. Anything that starts to dominate our lives; anything in which we lose control of and starts to take control of us...something that we just *have* to do constantly is a form of addiction. In the spiritual realm, we have a simple word for this: *idolatry*.

But there are also tribulations in relationships:



And there are man-made tribulations in the world:



And there are natural disasters which most certainly represent severe tribulations:



So how in the world does any Christian possibly stand up in the face of tribulation? I've just presented a very short list (the *actual* list of what we face in this world is much, much longer). How does the Christian keep their faith? Revelation 7:14 tells us. Those who have come out of tribulation, come out with one thing that marks them. One thing is highlighted. It is what got them through. Just one thing:

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Over the years I've had the opportunity to lead people to experience the powerful resource of individual confession and absolution (remember the little service is on pages 292-293 in our LSB hymnal; this is the service I use once per month when I visit my pastor/father-confessor Rev. Robert Dargatz at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Orange). I will never hound you to use it, but I will always do my best to remind you of the resource and how happy I am to give it to you and to serve you with it. But the point here is that when we confess our sin we are not merely confessing our violations of the Law of God. Confession certainly *includes* these things, but confession also includes the weight of sin in the world that presses us from every side. Confession includes how we feel the crushing pressure of our tribulation.

And every, single time we confess we are given the Gospel of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, the blood of Jesus that covers us our sin and tribulation and says and guarantees that God is on our side. How do we know God is on our side? One reason: the blood of the Lamb. And it's yours and it means that no matter what you face, the Lord is with you, because if He died for you (and He did) and He proves His love for you (and He does), then He is for you! That's how the saints make it through tribulation! And Revelation 7:14 is proof that they do! Even through great tribulation! Amen!

But Revelation gets more comforting! Here is the second verse as we head home for this sermon, Revelation 7:17:

“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.”

The Lord doesn't just get us through. He leads us to the living water; eternal life and will fill us with inexpressible joy. Tribulation ends and this is depicted by the powerful words: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Claim this Scripture, God is talking about *your* tears wiped away from *your* eyes!

What is truly awesome about all of this is that in Revelation 7:17 the Lamb who shed His blood to give us what we needed to be able to stand in the midst of tribulation is *also* the shepherd. For all intents and purposes Revelation 7:17 is the vision of Psalm 23 fulfilled. He is your Shepherd, you have all you need, and He guides you to green pastures, to still waters, He restores your soul! The Lamb who shed His blood also then takes you by the hand and says, “I will lead you!” And that leading happens like it's happening right now, as you cling to the Word of Jesus and He guides you and me through this tribulation-filled life! Tribulation can't condemn you, because Jesus the Lamb covers you with His blood; tribulation can't defeat you, because Jesus the Shepherd defends you through life.



Revelation 7:17 announces that Psalm 23 *was* your life and that the victory of Christ over all tribulation becomes your victory...and that victory dear Christian is guaranteed as you have actively washed your robes again (Revelation 7:14 is an active verb)...that is, you have

come, but Jesus does the rest: He supplies His blood, He supplies His rod, and He supplies His staff. Rejoice!

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.