

**Revelation 7:9-17**

April 29, 2007 – GOOD SHEPHERD, WELS “Walking Together”

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**Worship Our God Who Saves**† **Before the throne of heaven (vv.9-11)**† **Out of the great tribulation (vv.12-14)**† **Into the bliss eternal (vv.15-17)**

In the name of Jesus, the Lamb, our Shepherd, dear sheep in His tender care:

What is that one thing in life you long for most? Most likely you've never told anyone because if you did, they would point to all your other good things and tell you to stop feeling sorry for yourself. Maybe you've wished for a soul mate, but still walk alone. Who else feels your pain if you thought you found that special someone, but now feel more lonely than ever? What well married wife does not want more of her husband's time and attention; what blessed husband does not want more of his wife's time and attention? You bare your heart only to the Three-in-One: to the dear Holy Spirit for patience and strength, to our dear Lord Jesus for forgiveness and grace, to our loving Father for the needs of your heart? But why does God withhold that one thing? Why must you cry, “How long, O Lord? How long?”

Every human heart is a God-shaped vessel which we sadly try to fill with people, places and things. We need the last book of the Bible, the *“revelation of JESUS CHRIST which God gave Him to show His servants the things that must happen without delay;...He sent this revelation by way of symbols through His angel to His servant John.”* (1:1 NETNT) We need our GOOD SHEPHERD to fill us with Himself – His loving kindness and tender mercy. He gives so much as He keeps us “Walking Together” in the WELS. Let us learn better this day to **Worship Our God Who Saves. Worship...**

† **Before the throne of heaven (vv.9-11)**

Sometimes all alone in our little room we forget the big picture. Christians in prison – cold hard walls, or stubborn hearts, may feel all is lost. “Why am I surrounded by happy people while my cross is so heavy?” “I spoke up at work; now look what happened.” “I tried to tell my friends about Jesus; where did they all go?” “We've tried as a Synod to spread God's Word, how can we now find ourselves in such a pressing crises that our cherished worker training schools are severely threatened?”

Looking back to when we joined the Wisconsin Synod my seventh grade year, I'm awed by the grace of God on me and my family. So many questions, doubts and fears. While some criticized the WELS, I prayed, “Dear Lord, you know how young and impressionable I am. Give me faithful teachers of your Word. Take my fears away.” How richly blessed I've been by WELS professors who humbled themselves before God's Word, lifting our eyes to see God blessing His Word throughout the world, so gracious about other Christians, reminding us that denominations don't save; faith in Jesus saves. *“The Lord knows those who are His.”* (2 Tm 2:19) Reason more than ever to keep God's Word clear and clean.

John in exile looked up to see *“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.”* Pictured as 144,000 – the triple complete Old and New Testament Church no one can count this *“great multitude”* because only God can see faith in our hearts. *“Standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb,”* John sees the *“white robes”* of righteousness God gives us by faith in Jesus, and *“palm branches”* like the crowds waved on Palm Sunday, cheering Jesus to the cross. *“Salvation belongs to our God.”* He invented it. He holds the patent. He *sits on the throne* to dispense His forgiving grace as He desires. We **Worship Our God Who Saves** by the sacrifice of *“the Lamb.”* Myriads of angels surround the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, the cherubim. Solid confidence stretches back to the beginning and eternally past the end as they all **Worship Our God Who Saves**, counting Him a perfect seven: *“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever! Amen!”*

## ✠ **Out of the great tribulation** (vv.12-14)

Why does God withhold that one thing? Another apostle, Paul, prayed three times for God to take away his “thorn in the flesh.” Do you remember the Lord’s answer? **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** (2 Corinthians 12:9) God has not forgotten His own Word and promise. He means that one thing too, whatever it may be for any of us when He says, **“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”** (Romans 8:28) Why does God withhold that one thing? Because He wants us to be in that number.

One of the elders answered his own question: **“These are the people who are coming out of the great suffering”** (NETNT), **“the great tribulation”** (NIV). Every day their numbers grow because as Christians pass through death’s portal. On the other side they join the multitude of souls delivered from this **“great tribulation.”** You know what it means to be “between a rock and a hard place.” We’ve all felt life pressing in so hard we can’t breath. That’s θλιψις – **“tribulation”** in the Greek New Testament. One professor in China noted, “In our culture we say, ‘We’re between two jagged rocks.’ The immorality of church leaders on one side, on the other, government trying to keep the church from growing.” How can we escape heartbreak, pain and suffering, frustrations and defeat? How can we show more thanks to God for the freedom we enjoy and the blessing of our Wisconsin Synod united in sound doctrine?

Home washing machines won’t work. City water cannot clean greedy stains from our souls or wash away the mud of materialism from our hands and feet. What cuts the grime from selfish hearts? Only God’s detergent: **“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** You see, **“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”** (Hebrews 9:22) And **“the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”** (1 John 1:7) **Worship Our God Who Saves...**

## ✠ **Into the bliss eternal** (vv.15-17)

Waiting can be so hard. As one hymn writer said, “When we seek relief From a long-felt grief, When temptations come alluring, Make us patient and enduring; Show us that bright shore Where we weep no more.” (CW 422:3) Can you see it? Can you see yourself there for Jesus’ sake. He forgives all our doubts and fears, or selfish desires and earthly ways. He is using our troubles to draw us to Himself whether as individuals or by His discipline of our Wisconsin Synod. Look **Into the bliss eternal.**

**“These people...[who] have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple....”** Serving God there will be like taking the boat to the lake or gassing up the jet ski. God’s kind of work is never drudgery when you **Worship Our God Who Saves.** **“He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.”** If we could always have that one thing and be perfectly happy here, would we long to be with God hereafter? Would ever desire **bliss eternal** if we could always have life our way? Where winter never chills your bones, who can appreciate the summer sun? A little rain sure brightens the light when the sun breaks through the clouds. The last laps of life run so much stronger when you focus on laying your trophies before the throne of God. That’s why Queen Victoria of England wanted to greet Christ on Judgment Day. “How dearly I would lay my crown before Him,” she is quoted as saying.

**Bliss eternal** is where you want to be with God, like that ancient Jewish festival called Tabernacles, a national picnic, a great family campout with everyone out for a holiday – forever. Time to enjoy our God together, time with each other, and everyone close – forever. At the festival of Immanuel, “God with us,” He **“will spread His tent over them”** to live with His people forever. “Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored” (CW 415:4), press on for one more day to **Worship Our God Who Saves.** Beyond hunger, thirst, sunburn and heat **Bliss eternal** beckons to where our Good Shepherd **“will lead [us] to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes.”** Walking together with Jesus, may we keep “Walking Together” in the WELS. May He graciously use us to help others to **Worship Our God Who Saves**, and sing with us and all believers forever, **“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever! Amen!”**

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