

The Lamb Will Be Their Shepherd

✦ **Salvation belongs to Him.** (vv.9-10)

✦ **He deserves all worship.** (vv.11-12)

✦ **He leads beyond tribulation.** (vv.13-17)

In the Name of Jesus the Good Shepherd, dear sheep of His flock:

Do you know what can kill a person quicker than the most deadly disease? Take away their hope and people will shrivel up and die on the inside and then their body too. Back in the early days of the Internet a picture circulated of two twins born premature. One was very sick and not getting better until one of the nurses had a great idea. She put the twins back together in the same bed. The picture showed the healthy one with her arm around her sister. That loving closeness helped bring health and healing.

The Holy Spirit puts His arm around us in God's Word to lift up our eyes above all the sickness and grief, violence and contention. Rather than leaving us wrapped up in worry, He opens our eyes through the Revelation Jesus gave to John many years ago. The Lord's aging apostle was in exile on the prison island of Patmos because kept preaching Christ crucified and risen. John was given a vision of seven visions on the Lord's Day, Sunday, to symbolize hope for God's persecuted church. Through the smoke of suffering and turmoil shines this warm anticipation: **The Lamb Will Be Their Shepherd.**

✦ **Salvation belongs to Him.** (vv.9-10)

What's all this shouting? No anguished cries of prisoners or painful weeping of persecuted Christians tortured and tossed to the lions. Shouts of triumph from *"a great multitude that no could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language...."* Such hope! When we feel our outreach efforts are in vain, as if our neighbors may never come and see the joy of Jesus, that our list of straying members shows loved ones staying away, our risen Lord says, "Look! This great multitude is still coming in from all the cultures around the world and in your neighborhoods too. Through another Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit says, *"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* (1 Corinthians 15:57f NIV84)

Countless souls are now *"standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."* They had practiced Palm Sundays before, now John sees them *"wearing white robes and...holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" God invented salvation. He gives it to whomever He wills through His powerful Word and sacrament. And all who receive this gift by faith can't help celebrating Jesus!*

✦ **He deserves all worship.** (vv.11-12)

In the Bible when someone is standing there is strength and confidence. Jesus' Revelation to John shows *"all the angels,"* as Daniel describes *"thousands upon thousands [who] attended [God]; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him...."* (7:10 NIV84) With those celestial beings were also *"twenty-four elders"* (4:4,10,8) *"and the four living creatures"* John had seen earlier, *"covered with eyes all around, even under [their] wings."* (4:8) In humble awe *"they fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.* You see, God alone **deserves all worship.** To worship and serve created things rather than the creator is folly. Materialism and greed always end up in grief and mania, foolish fears and obsessive desires that cannot satisfy, but can only destroy the souls trying to hide in them.

We worship God when we echo these heavenly voices in that most ancient, wide-spread Hebrew word known by **“every nation, tribe, people and language.”** Outside a Chinese house church you’d hear this same word prayed and sung: **“Amen!”** This means *solid, sure, certain!* **“Praise”** – all good things said about God, but also the *praise* God gives when He says good things about His people like, **“Your sins are all forgiven. You are mine!”** We worship God’s **“glory”** – His absolute right to do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, as He wants. **“Wisdom”** – data used in love for the good of others. **“Thanks”** – because we owe God an eternal debt of gratitude. **“Honor”** – for Him who alone deserves to be put on a pedestal above all else. **“Power”** – energy in action. **“Strength”** – energy in reserve. All this belongs **“to our God for ever and ever.”** And we join the hosts of heaven in hopeful **worship: “Amen!”**

✠ **He leads beyond tribulation. (vv.13-17)**

One of the elders asked, **“These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from.”** John could only answer, **“Sir, you know.”** So the elder answered his own question. And it’s a good thing he did because we would have to wonder whether we had any hope of standing with them or worshiping God in heaven. Ask most people if they’re going to heaven and they’re not sure. And how could we be? Have you been praying and meditating on God’s Word with all your heart? I sure struggle with that. Is God’s Word your greatest love or just something you allow an hour or less a week, maybe only once a month? Have you worshiped God with only words, robbing Him of tithes and offerings, giving God only the leftovers after trying to satisfy your own desires and your wants? Or does God receive the firstfruits to honor Him as the Giver of every good and perfect gift? God will not tolerate, but punishes every sin.

So I’m personally very grateful for the elder’s answer. Aren’t you glad too? On top of selfish guilt we feel the pressure of life on us. Maybe your health has become a burden too heavy to bear. Maybe your relationships seem to be falling apart. Maybe the bills keep crushing the life out of your necessities and any enjoyment of bright sunny days. We’re often pressed hard between a rock and a hard place, or as one Chinese professor said, **“Between two jagged rocks.”** What could keep our hope alive?

The elder’s answer is really the goal of what God’s Apostle Paul preached, **“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 14:22) Literally the elder answers: **“These are they who are coming...”** or even, **“keep coming out of the great tribulation....”** You see, we’re not meant to stay here any more than a sick infant is meant by God to stay that way. He designed us to thrive and grow and live in His grace. So a brother or sister or the Holy Spirit Himself with an arm around your shoulders is meant by God to give you hope and health and healing – through all sorrow to heaven’s joy.

And God wants to use your arms, hands and feet, smiles, hours, generous gifts to support this message of pure hope so everyone can see how He has made a gift of your guilt in Christ. Stop fighting God. Give in to His grace because these who **“keep coming out of the great tribulation...have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Cleansed inside and out, **“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. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 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.”**

God pictures heaven like an eternal family vacation, camping with no bugs, poison ivy or storms to rock your tent. God **“spreads his tent”** over His people. Under His sheltering care there can be no more **“hunger...thirst...[blistering] sun, nor any scorching heat.”** If God told us all the joys of heaven, who would want to stay here, carrying our crosses, following our Lord? We have work to do now in grief and tears in this **great tribulation.** But all that will end because **“the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them.”** His staff that rescued little lambs here and His rod that struck down our enemies by His powerful Word will still be the symbols of His conquering, victorious love in heaven. Never ending **“springs of living water”** will quench our soul’s thirst forever. And every tear in your eye, God’s own hand will gently, lovingly wipe away. Live in hope today for that everlasting tomorrow. Amen.

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