

Date: February 9, 2020

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Title: The Greatest Revival on Earth

Theme: Gospel of Jesus Christ

Proposition: The gospel goes forth until the end.

Introduction: In James we read, **“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14)**. Have you ever felt like the world around you is getting older, faster than you? I will often mention to Kathy that I may be 61 but in my mind I still think I’m 31 and usually my body rebels.

I read a humorous incident about a woman was sitting in the waiting room for her first appointment with her new dentist. She noticed his diploma on the wall and thought she recognized his name. She remembered that a tall, dark-haired boy with the same name had been in her high school class many years ago. She wondered, could it be the same guy she had a big crush on back in the sixties? Surely not! She quickly discarded the thought when she met the balding, grey-haired dentist. After he examined her teeth, she asked, “Did you happen to attend Morgan Park High School?” He said, “Yes, I did.” She then asked, “When did you graduate?” He replied, “In 1967.” She could not believe it. She said to him, “You were in my class!” “Really?” He asked. Then, looking at her closely, he added, “What class did you teach?”

The Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine reports the industry of supplements, home remedies, vitamins, and medicines designed to prevent the decay of the body’s organ, vitality, strength, etc. now bring incredible revenue. In 2012, the anti-aging industry was an \$200 billion-a-year-business. Colin Milner, founder and chief executive officer of the International Council on Active Aging, wrote, “No medication can properly be called “anti-aging,” because as the federal government’s National Institute on Aging has stated, “No treatments have been proven to slow or reverse the aging process.” He went on to state, “Remember that everyone grows older from the moment they are born.” That’s powerfully enlightening, is it not? Pew Research did a survey in 2018

and discovered that 90% of Americans say they believe in a higher power. 86% percent believe in God in some way and 73% say they are religious. It's interesting that only 67% believe that heaven is an actual literal place (Lifeway). Perhaps the connection between this belief and the \$200 billion plus dollars spent this year to stay young is either willful disbelief or ignorance of the record of Scripture. Listen, life on earth is a prelude to life eternal. For the believer, the only part of our biography of everlasting life that has any sorrow, pain, difficulty, challenge, or heartache is our life here on earth. The best is yet to come. It is incredible, unspeakable, and unimaginable glory in the presence of God. The apostle Peter wrote, **"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ"** (I Peter 1:6-7). Peter wrote that our testing time will be turned into praise and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, so let us turn to the book of Revelation of Jesus Christ and see this literally played out in the lives of millions of people who have died and gone to heaven—which happens to be, by the way, an actual, literal place! Look with me at what God promises in Revelation, chapter 7, and verse 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.”

Prayer:

Friends, you cannot read the book of Revelation without developing a global outlook. In our study this morning we will witness the greatest evangelistic movement of all time. It will be greater than the revival that took place with the Ninevites in Jonah’s day, and that was a great evangelism explosion. It will be greater than what was experienced in the early weeks of Pentecost in Acts 2. It will be greater than the campaigns of the reformers or greater than the evangelistic crusades of Wesley, Moody, Sunday, Jones or Graham. The greatest evangelistic campaign is still yet to come. And when we think about the beginning of the end, there are a couple of questions that immediately capture our attention: *Will people be saved during the Great Tribulation?* Even more importantly, *will people who heard the gospel before the rapture have an opportunity to be saved during the Great Tribulation?* The answer is found in two magnificent visions in this chapter. The first vision is of God’s mercy to the sealed Jews in verses 1-8; and secondly of God’s grace to the saved Gentiles - vv. 9-17.

Last week we looked at those who will be signed, sealed, and delivered. God longs to save. II Peter 3:9 is a familiar text and states, **“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”** Jesus said, **“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the worlds a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).** The gospel will go forth until the end.

The first six seals were broken in chapter 6 with catastrophic results. The chapter ends with an apocalyptic question, **“For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (6:17)** To this

question chapter 7 provides for us the answer, for in the midst of God's wrath, the peoples of the world witness God's mercy. In the first vision His mercy is seen in His plan and in the second vision we see results from the gospel.

1. Plan for the gospel - vv. 1-8

- By the pause of God's judgment - vv. 1-3
- By the people under God's jurisdiction - vv. 4-8 The ones who will give the gospel are those who are sealed by God and under His jurisdiction. These witnesses become known to us in verses 4-8. John hears the number of them in verse 4: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. The term "**Israel**" is never applied to anyone in the Scripture except for physical descendants of Jacob whom God called Israel. The church is never called spiritual Israel. The point is that the 144,000 sealed persons are Jews. On face value the text is clear. This is not the church. In the tribulation Israel will once again occupy the most prominent position. I want to just briefly show you Psalm 67 to help you understand God's plan for Israel. This Psalm of praise was a Psalm that the Jews would read and sing. It speaks about God's blessing to them. Verses 1-2 states, "**God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us.**" Why? "**That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.**" Down in verse 7 we read, "**God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.**" God had designed Israel to be His witness as a nation, and they failed and had to be set aside for awhile, and a new people were called out by God, namely the Church. But I believe what we see in Revelation 7 is the restoration of Jewish prominence through the great testimony of 144,000 Jewish evangelists. The nations will hear the message of salvation and turn to Christ. God will protect these witnesses throughout the tribulation period as they evangelize the nations. We will see more specifics about these 144,000 Jewish evangelist later in Revelation 14.

Transition: The second vision complements the first vision, yet it is significantly different. The first vision is on earth, and the second takes place in heaven. The first vision is numbered with 144,000 Jewish evangelists. The second vision is of a great multitude that cannot be numbered. The first vision the Jewish evangelists are sealed for service on the earth and in the second vision the great multitude are secured in their salvation.

2. Result of the gospel - vv 9-17

- Produces worship for what God has done - vv. 9-10
 - Represented by a great multitude - v. 9 **“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.”** Verse 14 tells us that these are the ones who **“come out of the great tribulation.”** The term “Great Tribulation” originated from Christ Himself as He described this eschatological period of divine wrath in Matthew 24. He used the phrase “great tribulation,” in Matthew 24:21 to refer to the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week. So, we are now entering into the final three and half years of the Tribulation period—when disasters and persecution rise to unprecedented levels of horror and devastation. **“Who come out”** is actually a present participle *erchomai* literally meaning “they are coming out” with present, continuous action. In other words, the early vision of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are preaching on the Earth, is occurring simultaneously with the vision of all these believers who have just died on the Earth and are now literally pouring into heaven. Imagine this scene. As John is watching, the number of people entering heaven is actually multiplying, like people streaming through the gates into a football stadium. These people keep coming in. **“To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord” (II Cor. 5:8).** There is no holding tank, often called purgatory, in which souls wait to be purified before entering heaven. There is also no soul sleep where we wait in limbo until we are

further summoned. There is no waiting in the grave until the resurrection. Only the body waits as if it were asleep; the spirit immediately goes to be with the Lord. They come from every 1) nation—*ethnos*— which refers to an ethnic body of people united by culture; 2) tribe—*phyle*—which refers to the same family line; 3) people—*laos*—to the same race; 4) language—*glossa*—which refers to the same language. So people will definitely be saved during the tribulation. These people did not go with the raptured church, since they weren't saved. They are the opposite of those described in II Thessalonians 2. So, will people who rejected the Lord before the rapture have an opportunity to receive Christ during the tribulation? Some believe these people who accept Christ are people who've never heard the gospel and are the only ones who have this opportunity to accept Christ. You can't find that anywhere in the Scripture, although many commentaries say that only those who have never heard the gospel are the only ones who can be saved. Friends, during your lifetime the gospel invitation is open. If you happen to be alive during the Tribulation, I believe still have an opportunity to accept Christ. If the church is raptured and you're still living, then you still have time. Some of you may say, "Well, I'm so glad to hear that because I'm just going to live the way I want to live now and then after the rapture I will fall on my knees and confess Christ as Savior." May I warn you not to presume on God. You don't know when your last breath will be.

- Resurrected and in heaven - v. 9 **“Standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”** The fact that they are standing before the throne and not seated around it indicates that these people are not identified with the twenty-four elders, the believers from the church age. These believers who become public enemy number one stood for truth at a time when lies were popular and Satan was in charge. Although they were

rejected on earth, they now stand accepted before the throne of God and the Lamb.

- Redeemed clothed - v. 9 **“Clothed with white robes.”** White stands for purity. These people have been forgiven. Their scarlet-stained lives are now washed white as snow depicted by their white robes. White robes also represent victory. Ladies and gentlemen, these people do not arrive in the presence of God weary, battered, worn-out and discouraged. Not on your life. They are victorious. These believers may have been cut down by an executioner but they are actually victors.
- Rejoicing in celebration - v. 9 **“With palm branches in their hands.”** These saints are waving palm branches before the throne of God. You may remember that this also happened when Jesus Christ rode into the city of Jerusalem. The people took palm branches and welcomed Christ as He entered the city (John 12). This created quite a stir because waving palm branches before someone was an activity reserved for royalty. This was only done for the celebration of a king. The Jewish people in Jerusalem on this day were recognizing the One they believed would establish His Messianic kingdom and rule over them. They were declaring their King had come; however, that same group would later reject Him, and He, according to God’s divine plan, would suffer as the Passover Lamb. Here in Revelation 7 we see the Lamb again. This time, untold millions are waving palm branches before the throne of God the Father and His Son, the Lamb.
- Responding in praise - v. 10 Look at the action here, **“And crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”** Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”** Salvation is a gift from God. It is His redemptive plan to save the world through His Son. Do you hear anyone

boasting of their deeds in this scene? Do you see anyone before God's throne admiring his own efforts to earn their ticket in? Absolutely not! These believers are praising God because of His great plan. The writer of Hebrews urgently warns, **“How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (Hebrews 2:3).**

- Produces worship for who God is - vv. 11-12 **“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.”** This is such a moving, overwhelming sight as all the angels and the four living creatures, possibly the worship leaders in heaven, fall down in awe and worship before the throne.

- Center of worship - God is the center of worship. As the apostle John gazed at the majesty and beauty of the throne of his eternal Creator, Revelation 4:2-3 tells us that all he could comprehend was the gemstone-like brilliance and the radiant beauty. Friends, God is still seated on His throne, and His throne is still a throne of majesty and glory but also one of grace and mercy. It's the heart and hub of all our worship both now and forevermore.

On September 22, 1967, at Wheaton College in suburban Chicago, Dr. V. Raymond Edman, a revered Christian educator and devotional writer, returned to campus after an extended illness to preach in the auditorium named after him—Edman Chapel. His subject was “The Presence of the King.” He began by telling of an invitation he once received to visit Haile Selassie I, the emperor of Ethiopia. He described in detail the preparations and the protocol that preceded his visit, and he spoke of the sense of majesty he felt upon entering the throne room. He spoke of walking down the aisle, pausing, bowing, and waiting to see if he would be allowed to proceed. It was an experience that he said he would always treasure. Then Edman shifted gears and told the

students: *But I speak primarily of another King. This chapel is the house of the King. Chapel is designed to be a meeting on your part with the King of kings and the Lord of lords Himself. To that end, chapel is designed for the purpose of worship. . . .Chapel is to be a time of worship, not a lecture, not an entertainment, but a time of meeting the King. Coming in, sit down and wait in silence before the Lord. In so doing, you will prepare your own hearts to hear the Lord, to meet with the King. Your heart will learn to cultivate what the Scripture says, “Be still and know that I am God.” Over these years I have learned the immense value of that deep, inner silence as David, the king, sat in God’s presence to hear from him. A moment later, Edman collapsed behind the pulpit and went instantly into the presence of the very King of whom he was speaking. As a preacher and pastor myself, I would count it an honor to be called home while preaching—on the subject of the King.*

- Chorus of worship - The apostle John actually eavesdropped on several worship celebrations in heaven (4:4; 9-11; 5:9-10; 5:12-13; 15:3-4). The activity of heaven is primarily praise, isn’t it? We see it all throughout the book of Revelation.
- Contrast of worship - It’s all about Him not us. The object of our worship is sitting on the throne as seen from the doorway of heaven. Our lives in this world become smaller and smaller in light of the grandness of eternity. When John looked at heaven through the open door in chapter 4, and verse 1 everything he saw was grand in scale and gigantic in proportion. The problems around him on earth took on a different tone. Secondly, worship is not about here; it’s about there. One of the main purposes of worship is to get our minds off the things of this earth and onto things in heaven. If you walk through your life focused on the here and now, forgetting about the eternal realities of God, you’ll be discouraged every single day. But if you remember heaven,

your life down here will begin to make sense because you'll have the correct perspective. Remember what Paul said to the church at Colosse? **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).** This last week the Lord has been convicting me of my own anxiety and fear. I came across a great statement that hit home, “Too many Christians live their lives crucified between two thieves, the regrets of yesterday and the anxieties of tomorrow.” (Erwin Lutzer) Keep heaven on your mind.

- Crescendo of worship - v. 12 You can feel the movement building here. Please read aloud with me verse 12, beginning with Amen. **‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’**” Notice quickly the seven-fold doxology whereby the angels reinforce the worship of the saints by quoting from the resume of God. They chant **“Amen”** meaning “This is the truth. . .” 1) He is worthy of *eulogia*. This is the Greek word for “blessing”—from which we get our word “eulogy”—“to speak well of someone.” This eulogy is offered to the living God—He is worthy of all praise; 2) He is worthy of *doxa* the glory derived from a good reputation; 3) He is worthy of all *sophia*, wisdom; 4) He is worthy of *eucharistia*, gratitude or thanksgiving; 5) He is worthy of *time* or great esteem; 6) He is worthy of *dunamis*—inherent power; 7) He is worthy of *ischus*—strength throughout history, often related to God’s mighty act of salvation. This is part of His divine resume. For how long is our God worthy of all this—for a month, or a year, or a century? No, John writes, **“forever and forever.”** Amen, it is true.

At this point, an interesting conversation takes place between John and a believer. This believer, an elder, who, as I have mentioned earlier,

represents the church, was raptured to heaven prior to the tribulation. This elder highlights these white robed saints by asking, **“Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”** The elder wants to make sure John is getting the picture here as to who these saints are. John answers the question at the beginning of verse 14, **“And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’”** The elder knew the answer but this was his way of clarifying for John, and for us, that these were not members of the church, already raptured. These were believers who were saved and then died sometime during the Tribulation. But notice the promises that close out this chapter.

- Promises to believers from God - vv. 13-17
 - Promised salvation - v. 14 **“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.’”** Robes made white by the blood of the Lamb. Now you ladies know very well that blood doesn’t get anything clean. It stains and has to be cleaned. So, here is a paradox. Blood is the divine detergent that removes sin all together.
 - Promised service - v. 15 **“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.”** To serve is a priestly word; they are washed in the blood so that they may come before the throne to worship Him day and night. They are rendering spiritual worship.
 - Promised security - v. 15 **“And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.”** For these saints what a wonderful promise. Never again will anyone harm them. Never again will they suffer pain, for the Lord will be their protection.
 - Promised satisfaction - v. 16 **“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat.”** This verse, many believe, is a reference to the fourth bowl that will be poured out, causing intense heat from the sun. In Revelation 13 in order to buy anything you had to have the mark of the beast. Perhaps not being able to eat or

drink water, they were forced out into the scorching sun where they died of exposure, thirst, and hunger.

- Promised a shepherd - v. 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.”** What an encouraging passage. I think one of the favorite Psalms of so many people is Psalm 23, **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want—that is, I shall not lack anything; He makes me to lie down in green pastures—meaning I can rest; Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”** If you want Him to be your shepherd up there, you must have Him as your shepherd down here. He will go before you. He will lead you. Finally, God will wipe away the tears of suffering and heartache.

Conclusion: Friends, as God’s sheep, we are sometimes led by Him into the valley of darkness, where there is fear, danger, uncertainty, and the unexpected. . .even death. He knows that the only way we can reach the higher places of Christian maturity is not on the playground of prosperity but in the schoolroom of suffering. Along those dark valleys of difficulty we learn volumes. We keep our courage simply because our shepherd is leading the way.

Prayer: