

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "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.

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 shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

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."

“Salvation belongs to Our God who sits on the Throne, and to the Lamb”

Twenty or so years ago the Monty Python cast made a movie called *The Meaning of Life* in which they attempted to address the question of “What is the meaning of life?” They got into a wide variety of issues. One was the Roman Catholic Church and birth control. The question that arose was, “If the meaning of life is procreation, what do you do with all the excess children?” Monty Python’s answer was donate them to scientific experimentation. They then asked is the meaning of life simply to eat, drink, and be merry. For this, they did a skit of an extremely heavy man going to a restaurant and eating everything on the menu. Pardon my crudeness, but he ate and called for the bucket and ate and called for the bucket. At the end of the meal after eating everything on the menu, the waiter taunted him with an after dinner mint which he repeatedly refused not being able to eat another bite. But, finally he gave in, ate the mint and exploded; and all that was left of him was a rib cage containing an alarm clock for a heart. Then they asked what if the meaning of life is making money. Their answer involved pirates conducting hostile corporate take-overs; except, the pirate ships were skyscrapers moving about the streets of Manhattan. The pirate skyscraper would ram the skyscraper of the corporation it wanted to take over and corporate exec pirates would jump aboard and after much sword fighting, take over. Their point with the movie, I think, is that we are not going to find the meaning of life with our current approaches. Nevertheless, it’s still a difficult question in the broad spectrum of things. We all search for meaning.

We all have our questions. At the top of many of our lists is “Why, God, did you let this happen?” We have hard emotional questions many originating in childhood and they plague us the rest of our lives. I don’t want to be distasteful and start naming off possible questions so that we can maybe relate to something. I just want to say that there is an answer to these questions. God does have an answer, but I’m afraid the answer is a bit, and for the most part, not what we want to hear. I’m convinced that God’s answer is Revelation 7:10; an innumerable number of redeemed people standing in the presence of God in white robes, holding palm branches, and shouting loudly, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Now, if I were a non-believer I think I would laugh at this point in the sermon. If I were agnostic and somewhat antagonistic against the church, I would say, “Why do you Christians always have to start talking about who’s saved and who isn’t?” Yet, I think the answer is relevant especially when we begin to consider why we ask these questions in the first place. These are difficult emotion laden questions that recognize that if there is a God then either something has gone drastically wrong in God’s creation and/or God doesn’t care. Why is that we have to search for meaning? Why is it that in God’s good creation we find ourselves feeling abandoned? Why is it that in God’s good creation everything has to suffer violence and be violent, everything? The answer to those questions is blatantly sin, we are fallen and fall short of our created purpose and what a Hell on earth it has created. Even so, the answer is, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.” If we are looking for things to be put to right in this world then our God who sits on the throne and Jesus the Lamb by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit are who are going to make things right.

Let’s step into the Revelation for a moment. There are two questions that this acclamation addresses. Give me a minute to root them out. At the beginning of chapter six the Lamb begins to open the seven seals that were on the scroll of the Father’s sovereign will for his creation as it will be played out in our history. The first seal brought a white horse that came to conquer. He is imperialistic war. The second seal was a red horse wielding the sword of wanton violence. The third seal brought a black horse that let loose unjust and unfair economic practices. The fourth seal brought a pale horse who unleashed wanton death on a fourth of the earth. In a nutshell, these horse and riders are not God’s wrath poured upon the earth. Rather, they represent the consequence of sin, and particularly the consequence of war. The consequence of sin is having to live with the consequences of sin and it is a mess. The four horses are what have happened because we humans became alienated from our Creator.

The fifth seal brought forth the voice of those who have been martyred for being faithful. They ask the first question. "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Indeed, has their faithfulness mattered? Does God simply wink at evil or will he pass judgment on it? Oddly and maybe unsatisfactorily, they are given white robes and told to wait a little longer until the number of the martyrs is complete.

The sixth seal is then opened. I call it the seal of the Gospel for the Word of God's grace and love spoken in the incarnation of God the Son in Jesus Christ is a catastrophic Word that shakes the powers and utterly turns them upside down and inside out so that they hide in fear. Everyone who is not under the altar asks the second question. The Revelation reads, "They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'" Who can stand by their own merit before the God of grace and glory revealed to us in Jesus Christ?

Well apparently, God will make it so that an innumerable multitude will stand before him, the tribulation ended, praising him and shouting, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." Nowhere else is there salvation. Not in Mohammed, not in Moses, not in Buddha, not in Spirituality, not in Nature, not in Progress, not in Technology, not in Wealth, not in Power, and certainly not in Self. Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. This is what so many churches are not saying today or are totally misunderstanding.

John leans on the Old Testament for his definition of salvation; something that the church in the West has not done since the fourth century when the Roman empire ceased persecuting us and instead institutionalized us. Salvation is God's actively delivering his people from evil, from oppression, from the consequences of sin as I mentioned earlier, and even from our own idolatry, and then ultimately from death. God presently acts in our lives to deliver us, to rescue us from our own demise in sin. John says God will spread his tent over us to protect us. This is metaphorical for God sheltering us with his own presence, the Holy Spirit, now and forever. This is the washing of our robes in the blood of the Lamb that reconciles us to God, the washing made possible only by Jesus' once and for all atoning death on the cross by which he has made us able to stand. God does not remove us from the trial of faith that this world brings against us. Rather, he saves us by sheltering us with his very self until we come out the other side of it. Only in true biblical faith do we find God, any god, so actively present with his people as to shelter them within his very self.

Finally, in the midst of God's sheltering we have Jesus the Lamb as our shepherd who leads us to living water. God does not shelter us so that we can do our own thing. The way to living water, water that heals, is in following Jesus Christ who set us the example of being faithful even unto death. Healing is another strongly Testament understanding of salvation. The way of the cross is the way of new life in Christ. This way is a total reorientation of our self's, in fact a dying to the self, in actively seeking to love the Lord with our entire mind, being, heart, and capabilities and our neighbour as ourselves. It's training the mind to pray and meditate upon Scripture. It's letting our entire being be present to the Lord. It's training our hearts to worship. It's using our capabilities to serve the Lord and one another. It's the obedience of wasteful and extravagant love. Back to where I started, we do have difficult painful questions that overshadow our lives and in most cases seek to destroy not only our faith but ourselves in the process. Do know that in the midst of our brokenness God the Father is sheltering us with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, follow the Lamb to the living water; the spring of healing. Amen.