

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, November 6, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 196, 237:1, 656, 370, 370:4.

Lessons: Psalm 51, Hebrews 4:1-13, John 10:17-21

Sermon Text: Revelation 7:13-17

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Believers in Jesus really have something to look forward to when this life is ended. This is our sure hope, based upon Christ's resurrection from the dead and his promises in the Bible. Paul expresses our Christian belief: *"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."* I Thess. 4:14

We are sorely in need of such Christian hope. It gives sweet comfort to the heart in all the afflictions and sorrows of this life, for it reminds us of the time when all suffering and sorrows will come to an end. It reminds us of the promise of Scripture that our sorrows will be turned into joy. Paul writes: *"Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."* II Cor. 4:17

Furthermore, when we frequently contemplate the glories of the life to come, we are fortified against temptations, and we are restrained from giving in to our flesh and following the wicked ways of the world. Thinking of the glory of the life to come in heaven, we will also be reminded to take a stand against sin and Satan and say with Joseph of old: *"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"* Gen. 39:9 We will be led to ask ourselves: How can I do this great evil and forfeit the glories of heaven and the life to come?

With these things in mind let us give attention to our text, and learn about:

**THE WONDERFUL, CERTAIN FUTURE
THAT AWAITS THE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST IN ETERNITY.**

- 1. They will wear the white robes of righteousness in Christ the Lamb of God; and,**
- 2. Having come out of great tribulations, they will enjoy eternal blessedness.**

Our text tells us about one of the visions that God gave to the Apostle John to show him the glory of eternal life in heaven. John writes: *"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"*

The Book of Revelation speaks of 24 elders that John saw in the visions from the Lord. They are the representatives of the Church on earth, representing all those who believe in Jesus as their Savior. In the conversation John had with one of these elders, those in white robes were identified. Before our text we are told of these in white robes: *"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."* v. 9 These are the believers in Christ. These are the ones who will enjoy eternal life in heaven. They are a small minority compared to the sum total of all those who ever lived on the earth. Yet they are spoken of as a great multitude, for they are the believers from all ages now assembled before the throne of the Lamb of God.

They are identified as wearing white robes, but these people as they were born are not described like this in the Bible. People are by nature as described by the Lord in Psalm. 14: *"The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they*

have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." v. 2-3 In other words, people as they are by nature, could not be described as wearing white robes. They would have to be described as wearing robes that are dirty and stained and foul-smelling. Isaiah writes: ***"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*** Is. 64:6

Unless we realize this, we cannot appreciate how wonderful it will be to stand before the Lord with pure white robes on judgment day. This is to remind us of the fact that we are by nature sinful and unclean, so that we have to confess with David: ***"Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."*** Ps. 51:5 It is to remind us of the fact that we have sinned against God in our thoughts and words and deeds. It is to remind us that we have broken God's commandments, that we have done what he said we shouldn't do, and that we have not done what he says we should do. The fact is that we have to rightfully confess with the prodigal son: ***"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*** Luke 15:21

How is it, then, that such people can stand before the Lord with white robes in eternity? Our text answers: ***"They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*** This is not to imply that sinners of themselves have done away with their sins. The Bible tells us rather what God has done in Christ and about Christ's work of redemption. Jesus kept all the commandments of God that we have broken. Jesus shed his holy, precious blood as God's Son to wash away our sins. The Bible says: ***"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*** I Jn. 1:7 The Bible also gives us the result of Christ's work of redemption: ***"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them"*** II Cor. 5:19 The objective fact of the Bible is that ***"one died for all,"*** II Cor. 5:14, and that ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** II Cor. 5:21 That's the objective fact of the Gospel, that God has declared sinners righteous in his sight for Jesus' sake. The resurrection of Jesus makes that sure, for Paul says: ***"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*** Rom. 4:25

That we have ***"washed (our) robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,"*** means that we have accepted these objective facts of the Gospel by faith. By the grace of God, purely by the work of the Holy Spirit through the powerful Gospel Word, we have put our trust in Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Is that our confession? We do not take for granted that people believe in Jesus. The Bible leads us to believe that very few people do actually believe the Gospel Word and trust in Jesus as their Savior. But, if we believe by the grace of God, if we by faith have washed our robes in the blood of the Lamb, then we will be among those standing before the throne of the Lamb robed in white, the pure white of Jesus' righteousness. Then we have a wonderful, certain future awaiting us in heaven.

Now we also want to learn from our text that all believers in Christ, having come out of great tribulation, will enjoy eternal blessedness.

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This eternal blessedness, in order to be appreciated, has to be contrasted with the present life on this sinful earth. So our text speaks of those robes in white as having ***"come out of the great tribulation."*** The Bible says: ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*** Acts 14:22 Jesus told his disciples, and that applies to all believers in him: ***"In this world you will have trouble."*** John 16:33 He explains why this is: ***"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."*** John 15: 19-21 So, if we stand up for Christ's Word and confess him before men, we will suffer tribulations. If we do as John writes, ***"Do not love the world or anything in the world,"*** I Jn. 2:15, we will suffer tribulations. If we do as Paul writes: ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,"*** Rom. 12:2, then we will also experience all the tribulations that God sends upon his faithful believers in Christ. This is all the result of sin in this wicked world. It comes about because most people do not listen to God's

Word and pay no attention to his commandments. This is what makes this world a vale of tears for believers in Christ.

Now contrast this with what our text promises about the wonderful, certain future for believers in heaven. ***"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."*** Without interruption we believers in Christ will worship the Lord without any weakness, or fault or imperfection. God will be with us to continually watch over us and we will be in his presence.

This will mean that as believers in Christ we will enjoy the full blessedness that God has prepared for his own. It will be the end of all the evil consequences of sin that we experience here. ***"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat."*** There in heaven believers will enjoy the continual blessings of their gracious God. ***"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."*** Then it will be true in fullest measure as David wrote: ***"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."*** Ps. 23:1 There will be no more tears in heaven, for there will be no death or sorrow. It will be as Isaiah wrote: ***"He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth."*** Is. 25:8

In heaven believers in Jesus will see God. Paul says: ***"Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*** I Cor. 13:12 Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount: ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*** Matt. 5:8 Jesus prayed for believers: ***"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."*** John 17:24

This is the blessedness our Savior has gone to prepare for us. He said: ***"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*** John 14:2-3

May this, then, be the prayer of each one of us:

"When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found,
Clothed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand." Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 370, v. 4)

Preached May 3, 1987