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Revelation

Chapter 7 - Revealing the Coming Forces

Breaking the 7 Seals - A Power Controlling & Protecting Washed for Worship (vs. 9-17)

Revelation 7:9-17: After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 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, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are

the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. “They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

One of the wonderful things about the Book of Revelation is we get glimpses of heaven and being with God that we've never seen before and how wonderful it is as we begin to see what God has intended for us. Of course, Jesus puts it so clearly to His disciples, “I'm going to prepare a place for you and you're going to live with Me.” And as His prayer goes in John 17, and you can hear Him

just talking to the Father, “Can they come too? Can they come too? Because I want them to be with Me.” And how wonderful it is going to be because we actually have somebody that wants us to be with Him in heaven, and we kind of get a glimpse of that once again in this particular picture.

As we come to this passage, this chapter in particular, what is being conveyed is that there is Someone that is controlling this earth even beyond the realm of the prince of this air, and that, of course is God, and He knows His own. The Lord knows those who are His and He's protecting them. In one case, He seals the 144,000 and takes them through the tribulation unscathed. So, an interesting picture, of course, as we made mention of in the Old Testament, in which literally Noah was taken through the flood unscathed. He was in the ark. Did he stay during the time on the earth of the flood? Yes. But he went through the time of the tribulation and made it to the other end. The 144,000 are that interesting picture of God keeping a people during the time of the tribulation. Now, He begins to deal with those that go through great

tribulation and in this particular passage He says, “And they have been preserved for a reason as well.” And what we're going to see is God's sovereign hand as well as Him standing firm as well as clearly Him orchestrating everything that is going.

Before we look there though, if you take a moment and turn with me to Romans 15, just to reiterate that God chooses different people to do different things. It's conveyed at the end of the Gospel of John in which Jesus is talking with Peter. He tells Peter, “You’re going to be bound, you're going to be put in chains, and you're going to give your life; at one time, you went anywhere you wanted to, but now you're going to be bound, and you're going to have to go where they tell you.” And then Peter turns, of course, to John, and he goes, “Well, what about this guy?” And God says, “Look, if I choose to have him around till the time I come, that's up to Me. But I have different plans for different people.” And I think sometimes our perception is that God's only good to this group because He allowed them to do this and God says, “No, I'm good to every group of people and I've called

them to do a particular work.” And we see those that died as martyrs, rejoicing as dying as martyrs. Paul longed to give his life for the sake of the gospel, as in many respects, I think that he felt still that guilt as he gives his testimony, “I ravaged and I killed so many people” and God says, “I'll give you an opportunity to die for them.” And you don't hear regret in the voice of Paul. So, God calls and is leading different ones at different things.

A passage to look at, in particular, in regard to this is found in Romans 15. If you look specifically in this particular passage, I think one of the things He's trying to convey is you need to accept one another. You're going to be different, you going to be called to different things, but you need to accept one another.

He says,

(Romans 15:7) “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”

(Romans 15:8) For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Jews) on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers.”

In other words, why did He call the Jews? To reveal that God keeps His promises. Why does God keep His promises? Because they were worthy of God keeping His promise? Because they were really nice people? They always obeyed God? Because they fell in line? No, because God is faithful to keep His promises. So, if you're going to reveal that you're faithful to keep your promises, who do you use to reveal that through? Well, you take people that are unfaithful. You take people that are obstinate and rebellious. These are God's words, not mine. So, you take these people and then you say, "I'll be faithful to them." Now, you walk away and you go, "Ok, He's really faithful." Because if God was just faithful to faithful people, then you would think that in some way His faithfulness had to do with their faithfulness, and so it was contingent on that. But His faithfulness had nothing to do with them. So, why did He choose the Jewish people? To demonstrate His faithfulness in His promises. He keeps his promises.

Now, watch in verse 9. Why does He choose the Gentiles? To reveal mercy, right? Because I'm not even in the

family, I'm not even in the mix, and God saves me. Why does He save me? To reveal that He's merciful. So, does God keep His promises? Absolutely. He's going to reveal that through this group of people. Is God merciful? Yes. Ok. So, God calls and uses different ones for different reasons, as well as our ministries, and obviously, He had Peter die a martyr's death. John seemed to have lived out an old age even though he was on the island of Patmos. He seemed to have survived even that in his 90s. So, what an amazing thing that God uses both and has a glory in both.

So, as we come to this, in some way, He's going to be establishing that in this chapter. It starts off with 144,000. He seals the 144,000 and takes them through, like we mentioned last week. Before the flood, there was a man by the name of Enoch. He walked with God and then he was translated up. So, God so ordained that that he would not see death. He was actually raptured. There was a thing called rapture in the Old Testament, and Enoch is kind of a pre-filment of that in the Old Testament, and then there were those that went through the flood. It

would be interesting correlation to the 144,000 that will go through the time of the tribulation. What we're going to see is that there are those that go through tribulation and I think maybe perhaps an initial thought in our mind is, "Ok. So, there might be people that are sealed and they're really loved. The people that get hurt, God doesn't like them." And so He's going to erase that thought and He's going to reveal, "No, different calling for a different glory, to do a different work."

And we see the calling, of course, of the 12 tribes, the 144,000, and we see an exact number in which we see God's ability to be exacting in His calling. Now, as we'll look at the second group of people, there'll be a people without number. It will actually say no man is able to number them. Why is He saying that? Because God is able to work without the boundaries of exact numbers. So, in both cases, He's revealing, "I'm Lord of all." And we're coming in contact with One who is sovereign, Who is steadfast, Who is superior, is clearly orchestrating all things.

As we come to this, it's important that we understand the dynamics of the Book of Revelation and the way He reveals things, because if you don't, you then begin to try to tie things together that shouldn't be tied together, and then you don't tie things together that should be tied together. So, as we come to this passage, what you're going to see is what initially perceives to be a timetable. So, you have 144,000. Then, He now shows a different group of people and after them come... That's not true. He's not going chronologically, and you can kind of get that feel if you go back a little bit further and we'll look just a minute of Revelation 4. But as you look at this chapter, you have the 144,000 and the scene starts off, if you look at the beginning,

(Revelation 7:1) “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth...”

Where are we? The earth. We're on the earth. So, this text is with 144,000 on the earth.

Now, if you pick up in verse 9,

(Revelation 7:9) “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude...”

And if you look within the passage, we're at the throne of God. We're in heaven.

Now, you're going to see the same thing if you back up into Revelation 4. You end with Chapter 3, where are we? We're on earth with the seven churches of Asia Minor.

Then chapter 4 starts,

(Revelation 4:1) “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven...”

So, these things happened after the seven churches of Asia Minor? No. Because once you get into heaven, you're not dealing with time. There're not the confines of time. What you're dealing with is the heart of God and the pursuit of God and the economy of God and the kingdom of God, but you're not dealing with time. On the earth, you're dealing with time. So, once you jettison up into heaven, ok, what He's showing you is the big picture. You immediately go into the big picture. So, as you look in Chapter 4, this is not something in a timetable in which you see the those crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” So, that happened after the seven churches in Asia Minor? No, it's happening now. It

happened before. It's just the way it is in heaven, and you'll see the same thing happening in this passage. Pretend like it's a camera. Ok, so, we're on the earth, and then, "Ok, John, bring the camera up here and you're in heaven." And now He says, "Ok, take a panoramic view because this is what's happening. So, if you understand that, then you can understand it better.

As we went through the list last week, of the 12 tribes, we began to see that God is telling a story and I purposely left out one of the names. I'm so thankful because I had someone say, "You left out somebody." And I'm glad that was mentioned, and God purposely leaves out one of the tribes, Dan, right? Which you still have 12 tribes but represented a different way through another name. Why is that true? Because He's giving a message and the message of Dan would be to judge, and God says, "We're pulling out judgment." As Hebrew says, the next time God comes, it's without reference to sin. So, He's not coming to judge you. So, I'm so thankful about that. So, the great message that is given as you go through the tribes and just to kind of reiterate with you,

“Judah” - Praise Yahweh

“Reuben” - behold, a son, bringing good fortune.

“Gad” - and happiness.

“Asher” - wrestling and fighting

“Naphtali” - for you to forget sorrows and pain

“Manasseh” - for He has heard

“Simeon” - your desire to join

“Levi” - and to be crowned with victory

And then we skipped Issachar.

“Zebulun” - to give you an exalted habitation

“Joseph” - and this was all added to you

“Benjamin” - by the Son of the right hand

In other words, it was all made possible because of the Son of the right hand, of course, who is Christ. All of them pointing to Christ, the things, the happiness that comes, the good fortune that comes. But the point of Issachar is very unique, it literally tells us how the Son of the right hand makes it all possible. In many respects, this is what we're going to be talking about in this passage we're

going to be looking at, and that is God made it all possible by lifting up His Son and paying the price. Issachar kind of has 2 words that come into play with the name itself, “*nāśā*” making reference to being exalted or lifted up, to bear up or to lift up, and “*śākār*” making reference to payment, or we would use the word “redeemed” - paid for. So, like the Gospel of John, I think it’s in John 12:32, where Christ says, “The Son of man must be lifted up, and if He is, He will draw all men to Himself.” Why? Because He's paying the price. So, Issachar is that great picture of how all of this becomes possible. I mean, the Son of the right hand comes, but how can I have all these things? How can I be a part of the kingdom? How can I have happiness? How can He wash away my sins? And Issachar basically says, “Because He paid the price.”

So, if you look in Revelation 1, once again, the reminder at the very beginning,

(Revelation 1:4) “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

(Revelation 1:5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.”

He paid the price.

So, you come into Chapter 5, and of course, who is worthy to take back the world? And you see it in Chapter 5,

(Revelation 5:9) “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased...”

A payment has been elevated. It's been exalted. The payment was the Lamb of God paid for your sins.

“... for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

So, we're going to see the same praise that is given in this text that we're looking at in Revelation 7:9, in which the declaration goes, “You've been redeemed, you've been

redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.” And what a great picture that is of all these that have come.

Now, once again, I just want to emphasize that as we begin in verse 9, we're now in heaven and we're seeing a great multitude which can't be numbered, and the point of the text is not necessarily to tell us what's happening in the tribulation. That would be erroneous for you to come to that conclusion. The point of the passage is to show us what's in heaven and how God sees things and how He has eternally seen things. Scripture tells us that before the foundation of the world, He knew us. So, God has ordained that these things exist in the heavens and that love would be superior throughout all ages, but we see them in punctiliar pictures, individual pictures, in which it's like something's happening on a given day. But when did that happen? Like in Revelation 12, we see the woman who is loved by God, and the dragon goes after the woman and then wants to kill the child, and we go, “When did that happen?” Well, we know that Jesus came to earth, but in the heavens it's like seeing as this picture this, this drama that's going on. So, the same thing is

happening here. There's an interesting picture that is going on.

So, we're going to pick up in Chapter 7,

(Revelation 7:9) “After these things I looked...”

Or “After these things that happened...” It's not put in the chronological order of after these things, but “This is what I saw next” would be another way of putting it because it's in the context “After these things I looked. These are the things that I saw.”

“... and behold...”

Now, why would God be showing him these things after the 144,000? Once again, your thought is going to be, “Well, He seals the 144,000. He loves the Jews, but He doesn't love me because He doesn't seal me. He's not going to keep me through the tribulation.” God goes, “I have something else for you.”

But the passage reads this way,

(Revelation 7:9) “After these things I looked, and behold...”

Which is basically an imperative which is actually calling upon us to see, and the declaration is, “Look at how many people. Look at the great multitude. Well, let's count them. You can't.” And look at verse 9. This a key phrase, “every”.

(Revelation 7:9) “... every nation and all tribes...”

It's very important that you see that because if you don't, you're going to be saying, “Well, these are people that died during the tribulation.” Well, he's going to talk about tribulation, but these are not just people that died in the tribulation, which here again, we'll talk about the erroneous interjection of the definite article, “the” tribulation. It's not “the” tribulation, it's just that these are people who died in tribulation. Which, just as a reminder, in Acts 14:22, Paul says to his disciples, “Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God” and uses the same word.

Of course, Jesus will say in Matthew 5:10, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness on account of Me.”

Of course, Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will,” not might, “will suffer.” And the term that he uses there for suffer is obviously to be mistreated, and that is a kind of persecution that we begin to realize. We see this persecution in the early churches, there’s persecution with the church of Thessalonica, there’s persecution with the church of Philippi. There's even persecution with the church of Smyrna that's listed at the beginning of Revelation, and it says, “You're all going to die.” So, they're all going to die even before, well, I would say within the first hundred years of the early church. However, what's also interesting is when He talks about the church of Philadelphia, He says, “I'm going to spare you from the hour of testing.” So, one church is spared in the hour of testing, the other church all dies as martyrs. A different purpose God has called for a different work, and obviously God is doing a clear and wonderful thing to glorify Himself in each case.

So, as we come to this passage, what we're going to see is a great multitude, and let's just read what it says,

(Revelation 7:9) “... which no one could count, from every nation (every ethnic group) ...”

He's going to actually define the way that we see groups of people. One might be through their ethnicity, their culture, or might be in nation.

“... all tribes...”

“Tribes” would make reference to the fact that they're related to people. So, they're kindred. Some people are grouped together because of their families. I know my son-in-law, they have a family that bought a cul-de-sac and so almost all the relatives live in the cul-de-sac. I think the street is named after them. So, some people are tribal.

“... and peoples...”

That's more geographic, when he uses the name “peoples”. “Why are you together?” “We just moved here.” So, you have like this neighborhood, and it becomes a neighborhood, and you don't even know them, but you're a neighborhood. Strangely enough, when you have a hurricane or something, you all start

pulling together, just like you're a people. So, some of us come together because of geographics and some come together just because if you can speak the same language, it's always helpful. So, some come together because of tongues, but the point of the passage is people come together for different reasons, and there are different groups of kinds of people. But every groups of people. Now, the reason why I emphasize this is this, that would have to mean prediluvian, before the flood, as well as after the flood. It would have to mean during the times of David as well as during the time of Abraham to get everybody, because there are some cultures that are gone, erased. Where are the Edomites? Where are the Hittites? I can go through a list of them. Where are they? I don't know. If every is here, then that would be every. That's the way I'm looking at it. Call me a literalist, but that's the way I see it.

So, the passage is telling us that they're all there, and the passage then goes on and says,

“... standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”

Which is an interesting combination because some would know God through the power of God, other through the Lamb, but they're the same and he conjoins them as the same. In other words, it was God saving you all along. Abraham didn't fully comprehend how the Christ was going to save him, and yet he was talking to Him under the oaks of Mamre. Jesus, Christophanies, Christ in the Old Testament, came and talked. We know it wasn't God. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in His Spirit and truth. So, if there was a being, who was that? So, there He was, but he didn't know who He was. I mean, at first, he just calls Him "lord," which is just kind of a nice way of saying "Mr." or "lord" or something like that. But he at the end realizes, "You're LORD. So, You're Yahweh, aren't You?" So, he comes to the realization of that. But at first, they don't know.

So, the way that it's pictured is,

"... standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

(Revelation 7:10) and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

In other words, we understand that salvation comes from Him. Now, what are they wearing? Well, Scripture says white robes, which means that they've not only become victorious, but they've been made clean according to the passage. What do they have in their hands? Palm branches, right. About the only thing that we know to tie palm branches to is the feast of tabernacles. Now, what's interesting is that when Jesus came in the time of the Passover to give Himself as the Passover Lamb, to die on the cross, they were throwing down palms on the road. However, they were doing that to subvert the feast of the Passover. In other words, they were saying, "Skip the Passover, go to tabernacles." Why? Because tabernacles is where Christ reigns. So, they were saying, "Hosanna, save us now!" That's what "Hosanna" means. So, they were crying out, "Save us now." So, what were they throwing on the ground? Palm branches. Because palm branches was the feast of the tabernacle in which Christ,

according to Zechariah 14, is going to stand on the mount; the mount is going to split open and He's going to rule on the earth, and they're going, "Do it now." Of course, if He did it now, they would all die and go to hell. So, it was His grace that He went through the Passover, but them throwing down the palms were requesting that. The same thing is seen in this text, that there is a declaration for God to reign.

By the way, there are three main feasts; the feast of Passover is first, the feast of Pentecost is second, which is the feast of the fruits, and then the final feast which comes in the fall, is the one in which is called the end gathering. In which literally all the world, not just the Jews, but all the world will be gathered together and it's celebrated specifically. I mean, all you have to do is go into Exodus or Leviticus, with palms and you build booths. Another word for "booth" is "tabernacle"; another word for "tabernacle" was "dwell". So, the point of booth, tabernacle and dwell is God will dwell with us. And that, ultimately, is at the end of Revelation, that the kingdom of God comes down and says, "And He is tabernacled

among us, or He's dwelling with us. God is with us." So, what a wonderful picture that is. So, this particular feast is very inclusive and brings all the nations in together to worship God as King of the earth. So, the picture is, if you look, that all of these have white robes and all these have palm branches which they're declaring, "God has come to dwell with us." It's kind of a picture of finality in which this is where the heavens are moving everything, because you see difficulty, you see hardship, you see pain, you see sorrow, you say, "What's the use?" And God goes, "You have no idea. Let Me show you where this is taking us."

So, they begin to cry out with a loud voice, and here again, a key point is "Issachar," how are we redeemed? We were purchased. So, salvation comes. "*Sōtēria*," the word that He uses, you've probably heard the word "soteriology" which means to study salvation, but "*sōtēria*" makes reference to the fact that not only are you saved from hell, but you are provided with blessings and success. So, the word "salvation" in Scripture is not just limited to the fact that you don't have pain or sorrow. It's focused on the blessings of God that are immense. So,

not only did He save you from, but He saved you unto His kingdom. So, if you were to define “salvation,” it could sometimes be defined as deliverance, sometimes preservation, sometimes safety, sometimes well-being, and you're going to love this one, health. But it's salvation, and the point is that the blessings, the good, every good and perfect gift comes from above. It's virtually saying salvation comes only from God, and the whole point of it is that there is no salvation other than God. That's the whole point of the praise here. So, everybody's come to the realization that in order to be preserved, in order for you to be delivered, in order for you to have safety and well-being and be happy and to be blessed, it has to come from God, and these people are declaring that. Now, we're going to see why they're declaring it so loudly above everybody else, but it's necessary that they proclaim this.

“... “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Of course, you read in Isaiah, “I'm your Savior. There is no other. Nobody else saves.” And here again, it's very

irritating to me when people go around saying, “Well, they're our heroes, they're a hero.” Wow, is that word being used like a lot. “You're our hero. You're our hero. You're a hero.” And I keep telling people that's the word “Herod”. “Herod” means “hero”. So, you're calling everybody “Herod,” but in many respects, that's what they are. They're Herod's. They're taking credit for something that they didn't do. Through God, you live and breathe and have your existence. What did you do? Did you birth yourself? Did you make yourself come into being? Were you created yourself? Are you the one that sustained yourself? Would you still be alive if breath wasn't in your nostrils? Quit regarding man whose breath is in his nostril, Scripture says. So, here again, it keeps coming back to only salvation is Him.

These people are crying loud and then all the angels as well. So, we're talking about spiritual beings, as Colossians will talk about those in the heavens, those in the earth, those under the earth, all giving praise to God.

So, you have,

(Revelation 7:11) “And all the angels...”

Not just some of them. So, this is kind of like an all event. I guess that's what I'm saying.

“And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders...”

Which are basically honorable authorities that has been designated by God. So, you have spiritual powers, you have honorable authorities, you have creative life influences.

“... and the four living creatures...”

Every power force is there declaring, “They're right. The only guy that makes anything happen good is praise God from whom all blessings flow. He's the only one.”

“... and they fell on their faces before the throne...”

All these powers, all these authorities, and I just wish I would see that today. I mean, people are getting TV. If it weren't for these people, I have yet to hear Jesus about anything. I have yet to hear that God is faithful. It's all Him. It's none of us. As the psalmist says, “Not to us, O Lord, not to us.” So, they all fall on their faces, and what do they do? They worship God. Right. It's profound

reverence and awe, “It can't be anybody but You.” And there's this intensity that surrounds the throne because of course, obviously, you're in the presence of the God who sustains and makes happen. Really, if you look at this literally sevenfold, which is another picture of a completed act.

(Revelation 7:12) “saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God...”

You have the perfect sevens within the passage making reference to the fact that this is a completed power, and of course the blessings all come from God's. Glory only comes from God. If there's any wisdom, it comes from God. He deserves thanksgiving. He's the only one. Should you be thanking anybody else? Thanksgiving to Him. Yeah. Honor is to Him, and power. The honorable elders are saying, “Honor is to Him.” The powerful angelic beings are saying, “Power is His; might is His.”

“... to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Now, what's interesting in the setting is one of the elders comes out. Now, who are the elders? Well, we talked

about this. So, you see the 24 elders in Chapter 4, and it's my contention that you not only see them in Chapter 4, but you see them at the end of Revelation. At the end of Revelation, he gives you the picture of who they are because he says you have the 12 tribes who are the doors of the kingdom of heaven, and you have the 12 apostles who are the foundation stone. So, if you add them together, the way I figure, it comes out 24. Here again, the point is, as God has shown from the very start, that in creation it was evening first; there was evening and morning, one day, right? So, Jesus will say in the Gospel of John, "Do you not know there are 12 hours in a day?" Which means that there are 12 hours in a night. So, if we're starting with the night, which we do in the Old Testament, you start and you have 12 hours of night. So, who are the stars? According to Daniel 12, who are the lesser lights that point to the Messiah? And that's why a star led the wise men to Bethlehem. Why is it that they are there and what are they conveying? Well, what they're conveying is that God is pointing to the truth that will come, not the sun itself, because the sun hasn't risen yet, but they're pointing in the darkness, and God is using

them to do that. So, you have the doors that are calling out, "Come. We're going to lead you to the Messiah." Now, the 12 foundation stones, and Jesus will say to His disciples, "Do you not know that your sons of the light?" He says, "As long as it's day, we need to do our work." So, they become sons of the day. So, you have 12 and 12, which is 24. So, God is declaring, "I have ordained My word to be proclaimed 24/7." We'll put it that way, and it's been His grace that has done that throughout.

One of the elders comes up to him. We don't know which one. (I'm just interjecting and this is not biblical, so don't quote me. Although, you could maybe erase it on the thing, but I personally think it's Peter. The reason I think it's Peter, obviously he's dead already at this juncture, but more than that, he was one that knew John very well and they had camaraderie, even going to the tomb, but I won't push that one.)

But it says,

(Revelation 7:13) "Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes...'"

And he basically asked 2 questions,

“... who are they, and where have they come from?”

Two great questions. Now, what's interesting about this is that John doesn't ask the question, but the elder goes, “I know what you're thinking.” Have you ever had one of those moments in which someone walks up, “I know what you're thinking.” And you go, “What?” And then they say it and you go, “That's what I was thinking.” So, John's going, “Who are these people? Where did they come from?” And the elder says, “I know that's what you're asking.”

(Revelation 7:14) “I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of...”

I'm not asking you to change Scripture, but if you could just kind of put a line in the “the” because the definite article is not there.

So, it reads this way, “These are the ones who come out of great tribulation...”

Once again, Jesus will talk to one of the churches and He'll say, “I'm going to put you in great tribulation.” He will

actually use the term, "I'm going to put you in great tribulation if you don't start changing your attitude." And it's not unusual, once again, as Paul will say, "Through many tribulations, you must come." The point is that we're going to be dealing with suffering in our life and there are people throughout history that have been mistreated by others. In fact, as you go into Matthew, it's basically saying, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for My namesake." And there's an interesting parallel because as you see the parallel between like the Pharisees who go around, and they do all their works to be noticed by men, and they're patted on their backs and they say, "Wow, you're really important people." And God goes, "Ok, you don't want to be with that group. You want to be with a group where people are being despised, rejected, persecuted, ostracized, belittled, and made fun of. Those are the people that you want to hang around." And I know that doesn't come natural, but there is that clear distinction throughout Scripture and Jesus will even tell His disciples, "You're going to be locked up, you're going to be beat and you're going to die because you're associated with Me. Because they didn't like Me, they're

not going to like you.” Once again, I can attest, if you're liked too much, there's something wrong with your testimony. You're either not bold enough, you're not strong enough in what you're saying; you're not clear enough. There's something wrong because I can tell you, it's really a testimony of love, but if the testimony is clear, they're not going to like you because we have a prince of the power of the air that's against you.

(Revelation 7:14) “... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Now, this is the key point, “Who are these people? Where do they come from?” Well, they came out of great tribulation; they suffered greatly for the sake of the Name and what has happened is that they purposely literally identified themselves with Jesus knowing that they we're going to be ostracized, hated, rejected, seen as somebody insignificant for the sake of Christ. Think about that. Now, the wording here is great and if I could just emphasize this, by the way, all the way through, it's in kind of an active case, which means that they willingly did this,

nobody forced them into it. "All those poor people, they had to give their lives or had to be persecuted." They did this, and the phrase that's used here, "they have washed their robes". See that? Once again, we talked about this earlier today, robes is significant in the sense that this is your glory. So, they've chosen to make their glory sacrifice. It's a different kind of glory because pomp and circumstance, you can go around and once again, people congratulate you and give you trophies, but Paul will say in Philippians 3, "Whatever was gain for me, I count as loss for Christ's sake. But the things that allowed me to suffer for Christ that I might know Him," listen to the phrase, "and the fellowship of His suffering." So, there's a cleansing that takes place. Now, this is what I love about this word "washed". See the word "washed" there? The thing I love about this word is it actually means to take a plunge. Don't you love that? You understand the point? The problem is that people won't take the plunge. They take their big toe, they dip it in the water, "Oh, it's chilly." I told Connie, "I saw this home video. It was really strange. It's big gorillas and they were with people. It was

raining and they were under shelters in some foreign country, and the gorillas, you could tell they didn't want to be with the people, but it was raining. They finally walked through the rain and they go like this and they started shaking their hand like, oh, and I'm going, "A gorilla, really?" I've never thought a gorilla would be concerned about getting his feet wet. My point is that I think there a lot of Christians that do that, "Ugh, it might hurt." And God says, "Take the plunge." You're literally washed by taking the plunge, and if you don't jump in, there is no washing. There is no partial washing. That's why we do baptism. It's called "*baptizō*". It means "dipped". It doesn't mean sprinkle; it doesn't mean kind of wet or damp or dewed to death. It's talking about your dipped, and you're jumping in. And these are ones who, on their own volition, willingly jumped in and their robes were made pure because they identified themselves with sacrifice.

If you look with me in 1 Peter. Read with me,

(1 Peter 4:1) "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose,

because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

"Suffered in the flesh" in this particular text means to die. It's a mortal wound, which means that you're giving your life. The point is that when you die to self, you cease to sin, and if you'll suffer for something, if you'll give your life and literally if you're being ostracized for your faith, for instance, if you're being belittled but you hold tenaciously to it and say, "God, there's just no way I'm leaving You." If you'll do that, I can guarantee you that day you're not going to go out and sin. I can guarantee that, because you so are immersed in being loyal and intensely devoted to God, there's just no way you're going to sin that day, and it's that suffering that really is very cleansing because you've identified yourself to the point of embracing for yourself, "I'm willing to die for this." And anybody willing to die isn't living in the superficial world. They're living in very, very deep waters, and they're willing to go there.

He says in 1 Peter 2, if you look with me,

(1 Peter 2:15) “For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

He goes on and says,

(1 Peter 2:20) “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated...”

(1 Peter 2:21) “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

(1 Peter 2:22) WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

(1 Peter 2:23) and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

In other words, when you're suffering for Christ, you do it the same way as Christ. That is to say, you're not complaining. You're not fighting back. You're willingly giving of your life, and when you do that, there is a cleansing that takes place in your life, and there is a washing because you've devoted yourself to God hook,

line and sinker. You've taken the plunge. You're selfless in this.

To give you another passage, in Philippians 3. He tells us in this that if you're of the true faith, this is what you're going to do. Like Paul says, if you profess God, you're going to suffer, it's just going to happen.

(Philippians 3:3) “for we are the true circumcision (true followers of God), who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

So, I'm crucifying the flesh and just living for Christ.

The same truth is seen in Galatians 6, and we'll end this search with this one.

(Galatians 6:14) “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

That's a great text, isn't it? That's Galatians 6:14, “May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

“They don't like me either. I don't love the world; they don't love me.” And what a great picture that is, a loyalty and devotion in which they take the plunge. Now, there's so much more I can say about this. Of course, James talks about those that suffered in that time; wages were being held back because they were identifying themselves with God. He says, “Don't say anything, because God's going to take care of you and put your trust in Him. The Lord's even at the door.” And you see at the end of Hebrews 11, “Look at the great cloud of witnesses that we have and those that were sawed in two and those who were beheaded and those who were stoned, and women, their babies. He goes through this interesting list of those that have really sacrificed, even starting all the way back with Moses, who could have had all the riches of Egypt but said no. So, these are ones who have gone through great tribulation throughout all time. Now, what happens to them? And this is the key point, and I've got to end this. So, I mean, sorry, but verse 15,

(Revelation 7:15) “For this reason, they are before the throne...”

Now, I want to stop here because this gets so confusing. You're going to be wonderful, you're going to be glorious, you're going to have this wonderful place in heaven if you save over 500 souls and you'll get the ruby position or maybe the diamond. Ok, I'm not going to go into that, but the point it has nothing to do with your labors. I mean, you might labor tenaciously for God because you love Him, and that's a good reason, but He'll reward your love for Him. He accomplishes all things. If somebody's saved, it's not a notch in my belt. God saved him. I get to be there and watch the birth. I didn't make the birth happen. I didn't make the baby come. I get to watch it happen and what a wonderful thing to be a part of, but I don't get credit for the baby. We live in, and it's kind of Americanism in which it's kind of penetrated the churches that if we do this or we do this, or we feed the hungry, we do this. It's not a bad thing to feed the hungry, go ahead and feed the hungry, but you're not going to have a special place in heaven for doing that. Please understand that. The special place in heaven comes for those who are loyal to Christ; who were willing to devote their lives to Christ to point to Christ. Now, if you're giving a glass of

water in the name of Christ, you'll never lose that reward. But it's your devotion to Him and that heart of devotion. It's the Lord God that you're serving. Who do you think is going to reward you, and what do you think He's going to reward you for? “Well, because I did so many good things.” Of course, that's the argument in Matthew, “Didn't we prophesy in Your name? Didn't we do miracles in Your name?” He goes, “Who are you? Have we talked before?” The fact that somebody has done so much and they're baffled by the fact that God is not impressed, and the point of this passage is it's a demonstrative pronoun which means at the very beginning of this statement, God is literally saying, “For this reason and this reason alone, they're with Me.” If you understand that, then you'll focus more on your devotion to God and less on your devotion to try to impress people.

But the passage says,

(Revelation 7:15) “For this reason, they are before the throne of God...”

More specifically, they are in the face of God, and they're talking to God face to face. You're like right there. It's such a great passage.

“... and they serve Him...”

It's where we get the term liturgy but kind of falsely so. What it's talking about is a providing of service but not as much a serving as a worship but not as much of worship as an awe. If I can just kind of put it in more human terms, you have a sports figure that is your sports hero, and he comes to town and then he calls you up and he says, “Hey, I'd like to have dinner with you.” You're going, “I'm going to have dinner with my sports hero.” And he says, “Yeah, we'll have dinner together.” You go, “I'm going to be with him face to face.” And you're going to sit down and you're going to talk to him, and Scripture is going to call that worship or service. That's what it's talking about, that you're going to be in the presence of God dialoguing with Him going, “Really? Really? And what happened when You did this? Really?” Isn't that going to be a great time? Because I've got a lot of whoppers.

“... and they serve Him day and night in His temple...”

Which, by the way, you come to the end of Revelation, there is no temple. So, the point is, in His holy place. What does that mean? This is what makes the passage so wonderful. His holy place is being with you. He's made this his holy place. We all have favorite places to go. What's your favorite place to go? "This is my sanctuary. This is my holy place." God's holy Place is being with you. "There's nobody I'd rather be with than you." You want to know why? Because you have the heart of sincerity like I do. You were willing to die for your faith. I feel the same way. I can just see God talking to me, "That's the way I've always loved you." So, the connection is going to be that we're going to be there at the throne, and He's just going to spread over and tabernacle with us, and we're going to feel His presence all through our being. It's a great picture. They shall never hunger. They're never going to crave anything. They never going to want anything. Nothing's going to hurt them or wear them out or bring any kind of hurt.

(Revelation 7:17) "for the Lamb..."

Is where? Right in the middle with you.

“For the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd...”

This shows you you're not waiting on Him. He's shepherding you, and He's going to walk you around, and He's going to say, “Remember when you took the plunge?” Look at the phrase. “Remember when you took the plunge? Let me show you something gushy,” because the word “springs” there is “gushy”. “Let me show you something gushy.” And He's going to show you His love just gushing. You're going to get a perspective of His grace upon you, and He's going to go, “And let me show you this one. Let me show you this one.” Because it's plural, “springs,” gushing(s). “Let me show you all the gushing(s). Scripture says that when He died on the cross, His side just gushed out, and what a marvelous picture it was of God just longing to shed grace on you. He longs to be gracious to you, and should it surprise you that He will wipe away every tear?

Closing Prayer:

Father, thank You for Your word that encourages us, and through many tribulations we must come to the kingdom and down through the ages many have suffered because they love You. As You died for us, we felt Your Spirit move within our hearts, and we said, “We want to love like that.” And You helped us. You moved us, and to think that throughout all of eternity, we're going to sit around and just be with each other intensely. It will never be mundane. It will never be superficial. It will always be intensely loving. We can hardly wait to see You.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. One of the reasons why Revelation is written is so that you might say, “Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” Is it working?