

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 9

Scripture: Rev. 7:9-17

INTRO: What we have discussed for the past few messages is what believers do in heaven after they die but before the resurrection. I do believe the catching up of the Church, which is made up of Jews and Gentiles who were saved from the time the Church began until the catching up, happens before the tribulation. That 'catching up' is part of the first resurrection. In the next message I want to deal with what happens at that time. However, this morning I want us to look at what people do who die during the tribulation. We are talking about what they do in heaven before they are resurrected. The information is sparse, but there is at least some in the book of Revelation. This morning we will look at several passages that deal with this topic.

Before we do that, let me insert a thought this morning. A while ago, in my morning devotions I was reading in Job. And I was reminded how Satan (this name means adversary), presents himself in heaven before God. In Revelation 12:10 he is called the 'accuser of the brethren'. No doubt he stands up in the courtroom of heaven at every hearing and presents his case against Christians. Then in 1 John 2:1, Jesus is called the Advocate of Christians. It causes me to ponder what happens in this place in heaven where sin is actually taken care of. As encouragement from 1 John 1:9 I can say with certainty that when we confess our sins they are erased in heaven and Satan loses every bit of power he could exert in our lives through that sin. Would it not be exciting to sit in on a hearing in heaven? But I remind us that Satan does not present himself there for nothing. Whenever the justice of God is at stake, Satan wins. And here also, he gains the right to wreak havoc in the lives of certain Christians because there is some place he does have a foothold in that life, as he did in Job. But Job, through repentance, won the ultimate battle!

Now before we deal with the subject of what those do in heaven who die during the tribulation I want to mention a matter here that is of some importance. We have looked very briefly at what OT believers do in heaven before they are resurrected. We have looked more at what Church age believers do before they are resurrected. What we should

consider now, if we were to take things in the order they come, is the resurrection of Church age believers.

Christians who believe there will be a literal 1000 year reign by Christ on earth are among the minority. And these Christians are not agreed on whether Christ comes for the Church before the tribulation, in the middle or at the end. It is my position that Christ comes to take the Church home before the tribulation. If you differ with that, that is fine with me. I think the best evidence falls on the pretribulational view but many fine Christians differ on that.

So, in my position, if we continued to take things in the order I think they will happen, we would now look at what Church age Christians do after they are resurrected since I believe that will happen before those who become Christians in the tribulation die. However, we will look at the order of the resurrection in greater detail after this message. So before we look at the catching up of the Church, the resurrection of Church age believers, we will look at what Christians who die during the tribulation do after they die and go to heaven.

h. What do tribulational believers do in Paradise? (cont'd)

With regard to what those Christians do who die during the tribulation, we now go to a passage we have considered earlier, Revelation 6:9-11 (read). We have looked at this earlier and speculated that Church age believers may all come past this altar as well, after they die. This morning we look at what happens to those who die during the tribulation.

First, they come to the altar, that I believe is the altar of sacrifice. This altar was much larger in the temple service than it was in the earlier tabernacle. I suggest that it may be even much larger in the real Temple in heaven. Once more, here all sin is dealt with, and they are made fit to enter the presence of God. Then they are given white robes. Now they are perfectly clean from all blot.

And for this morning, the key we want to add is what they are told after they have been robed in white. Verse 9 says, "Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed." So, what do they do in heaven? They rest! The word is *anapauw*, to refresh or rest. The word 'rest' here is the same as Mark 6:31 which says, "And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.'" And they are told just how long they are to refresh themselves. It is until their fellow believers who will yet die in the tribulation have also died. Well, until when is that? It is until the end of the tribulation!

So, we go now to Revelation 7. In 1-8, we have the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses. 12,000 of the elite of each tribe are set out for what we believe is the task of evangelizing the world. It is my view that these 144,000 are all martyred during the tribulation! (14:1-5). Some teachers, like Tim LaHaye, believe this is not the same group of 144,000. I believe they are the same and all die during the tribulation. All of these would then go through the process we saw in Revelation 6:9-11.

Now we want to read 7:9-17 (read). Here we have, I think, the rest of those who would be killed as those in 6:9-11 had been told. And the sum of their number was so vast no one could number them! And we are told precisely who they are in verse 9-14 (read). They are the slain from every nation, tribe, peoples groups, and languages! And they have come out of great tribulation! These are the slain of the seven year tribulation! These are those evangelized by the 144,000 and the two witnesses and others. And they are standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb. That is before the Temple!

What we need to note first is that we are at the end of the tribulation because this is the sum of those that are slain for their testimony. We have arrived at the time that those who were instructed at the altar to wait for. And that is when the number of those that would be killed was completed. We are at the very threshold of the millennium which will begin now in a very short time. We are also at the time they will experience the resurrection of their bodies!

Now, we need to learn a few things about them. Note in verse 9 first that they are dressed in white. From this we may learn that they too have come past the altar and been made completely clean by the blood of the Lamb. Once this was completed they have been robed in white. The time has arrived when all those who would be killed for their faith is completed.

So, I propose to you this procedure thus far. First, these are people who became Christians during the tribulation. They were bought by the blood of the Lamb. Then they were slain for their testimony and they were carried by the angels to heaven. After this we see them under the altar of sacrifice. Then they are given white robes and welcomed to Paradise, and instructed to rest until the number of martyrs is complete at the end of the tribulation. When that number is complete, they are all gathered before the throne as we see them here in Revelation 7:9-17. And now I want you to notice that they are standing before the throne of God. They can stand in the presence of God because they are pure and clean and holy! That is the significance of their white robes here.

So we have seen that they are dressed in white and now we have a second task before us. It is to determine the meaning of the palm branches in their hands. This is not information added for color. I believe what we have is something

very significant and our question is, what do these palm branches signify?

Well, hardly a commentator who is familiar with the OT fails to mention the feast of tabernacles in connection with the palm branches. You will understand by now that Israel commemorated seven feasts. In our day, four of those seven have been fulfilled. Three still await fulfillment. These are the feast of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the feast of booths or Tabernacles.

At three of these feasts all Jewish males were required to appear. These were Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Now God gave these seven feasts to Israel because they were prophetic of what would happen in the future. Every year thousands upon thousands of Jewish people came from all over the world to keep the first, the middle and the last feast. The first 3 feasts that came close together began with a display of palm branches. The last feast also began with a display of palm branches.

Let me quote to you from a message I did many years ago on a day we call 'Palm' Sunday. "Now the feast of Passover starts the feast of Unleavened bread. And at Passover and at the feast of Tabernacles, when the Jewish pilgrims came it was customary to sing the Hallel Psalms. The Hallel or praise Psalms are Psalm 113-118.

"In Psalm 118:26 we have words of welcome and Ellicott says, "These words of welcome are probably spoken by the Levite in charge, to the procession approaching the gates. According to Rabbinical writings, pilgrim caravans were thus welcomed on their arrival to Jerusalem.

"Now turn to Psalm 118:22-29. This entire Psalm has a messianic ring to it. Notice verse 22 is a reference to Christ. Then in verse 25 we have the words from which we get the word

hosanna. It says, "Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity." The word *hosanna* comes from two Hebrew words in this passage. Let me give you the Hebrew, "Ana, Adonai, hosheja na ana..." Ana means I beg, I beseech, I pray. Hosheja means to save or salvation. You see, the writer of the OT book Hosea is called Hosheja. His name means salvation. So if you put these words together with *hosheja* first and *na* last you have *hoshejana*, *hosiana* or *hosanna*. In Psalm 118:25 the words mean, *I pray Lord, save now ...*

"Historically, at the feast of Passover and the feast of Tabernacles the Jews would cut down branches and wave them as they chanted the Hallel Psalms. These branches were called *hosannas*. The people of Jerusalem would welcome those who came to the feasts with these *hosannas*. When they neared the temple, the priests too would welcome the pilgrims with the words, 'I pray Lord, save now, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Now throughout Israel's history they have commemorated the feast of tabernacles. Turn with me to Leviticus 23 (read 39-43). The feast of tabernacles is a feast of joy. They would make little dwellings outside and use these branches to build them. Here they would stay night during this feast. It was a wonderful picnic or campout for the children.

Now all seven of these feasts were prophetic of something in the future. For example, the Passover lamb pictured Christ our Passover. This feast has been fulfilled. The feast of first fruits pictured Christ, the first fruits of the resurrection. But what did the feast of Tabernacles picture? It pictured the millennium, the 1000 years of joy! And here, in Revelation 7, we stand on the very verge of the fulfillment of this feast! And I believe that is the significance of these palm branches here!

I am not alone in this conclusion. Leyman Strauss in his commentary on this book says, "Tucker suggests that the palms may be in celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles which is about to be kept in the land when the blessing comes upon both Jew and Gentile (Leviticus 23:39, 43; 2 Chronicles 20:19; Ezra 3:11-12). Scott points out that palm branches express the joy of complete deliverance (John 12:12-13). They are celebrating the triumph of having been brought through that awful period of tribulation. Palm branches were used on such occasions. Roman conquerors wore garlands of palm leaves. Greek athletes found a palm branch awaiting the winner at the end of the race. Since the Feast of Tabernacles was preeminently a feast of joy, because of deliverance and protection for the future, I am inclined to apply the same idea here. When the children of Israel returned from the captivity, they made booths of palm branches 'and there was very great gladness' (Nehemiah 8:15-17)" (pg 176).

Now it is pointed out by commentators that these palm branches may signify victory or the millennium. So it may be that combined in the palm branches are the two ideas of victory and salvation. However, I think that the special significance of these palm branches is to signify the time that will now very shortly begin, and that is the millennium. These martyrs were instructed to rest until their fellow believers were all killed that would be killed. That time has now arrived, and the millennium will now shortly go into effect!

Notice also in Revelation 7:10, that these believers ascribe salvation to their God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb! They recognize that apart from the Lamb of God they would not be there, nor would they have the victory, nor would they be able to enjoy the millennium apart from the Lamb of God!

And when all these martyred saints say the words given in our text, I believe that once

more they say them in song. They are singing this victory song right there before God Almighty! So we have all these martyred saints around the throne. But notice in verse 11 that a host of angels is standing around the throne as well. Furthermore, the elders, that is, I believe the 24 elders, are there as well. And the four living creatures are there! This is one powerful moment of glory for God Almighty! And these all together sing for God again (read v. 12).

Turn with me now to Revelation 14 to see something special here with regard to the 144,000 (read 1-5). Now we have a very special song sung for God Almighty which only the 144,000 elite Jews who have all been martyred could learn to sing! What would we not give to hear this song! And without doubt, if we walk faithfully with God to the end, we will be there and we will hear all this!

What do tribulation saints do in heaven after they die but before they are resurrected? Here we have it! Turn with me to one more revealing passage (read 15:1-4). Here we have another special number sung to God. This time it is all the martyred saints together, singing to God in the deepest of worship!

Now, last, I want us to notice in 7:15, that they are before the throne of God and serve in the temple day and night. Now the question is when do they serve God in the temple? And since we are at the end of the tribulation, I believe that this refers to their service in the millennial temple, which we will see later will be built. The palm branches were to welcome in that time period which the feast of tabernacles had spoken of throughout history and now the final fulfillment of that feast has come. So, between the time they are before the throne in heaven, where they rested, until the time they serve God in the temple day and night, they will be resurrected first. This resurrection takes place shortly after the tribulation ends.

Now, let me just briefly mention an account in the Gospels here related to the feast of Tabernacles. We have a little more history on this feast in John 7 in the life of Christ. So turn with me to John 7 (read 37-39). When it says, "On that last day, that great day of the feast..." it refers to the last day of the feast of Tabernacles (read 7:1-2).

CONCL: So, in conclusion, I want to review what we have seen of what tribulation believers experience after they die but before they are resurrected. First of all, during the tribulation they got saved. 7:14 says they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This may well refer to the experience at the altar. And when the number of the martyrs of the tribulation is complete, they are gathered before the throne of God in heaven. We see them there, dressed in white. Now one of the interesting things about them is that they are there with palm branches in their hands. I believe this signifies especially the age which will begin very shortly now because the tribulation has come to an end.

Among those martyrs in heaven at the end of the tribulation are the 144,000 Jewish evangelists as Revelation 14 tells us. And this special group sings to God a song that nobody but they can learn. I wonder, does this song they sing, sing about the age that is now about to unfold, the millennium? Then in chapter 15, once more we see the martyrs of the tribulation, and they sing the song of Moses, and the words are recorded in 15:3-4.

So, we have seen this morning what those believers do who die during the tribulation. And I have no doubt, during that time they are told to rest a little while that they stroll the golden streets of this city and marvel again and again. What wonders must there not be to behold in this city! Imagine these believers having just recently suffered the horrors of the tribulation, having then been killed, and then entered heaven! Here, after coming past the altar of sacrifice and having been dressed in white, they walk the streets of this city. Imagine, climbing stairs or taking an elevator 1500 miles up! The time they are resting is probably far too short!