

# “Eternal Sanctuary”

Revelation 7:9-17

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**Psalm 107:1-9 MSG & 23 (NLT)** “Oh, thank God—God is so good! God’s love never runs out. All of you set free by God, tell the world! Tell how God freed you from oppression, Then rounded you up from all over the place, from the four winds, from the seven seas. Some of you wandered for years in the desert, looking but not finding a good place to live, Half-starved and parched with thirst, staggering and stumbling, on the brink of exhaustion. Then, in your desperate condition, you called out to God. God got you out in the nick of time; God put your feet on a wonderful road that took you straight to a good place to live. So thank God for God’s marvelous love, for God’s miracle mercy to the children God loves. God poured great streams of water down parched throats; the starved and hungry got plenty to eat.

**The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. God lets me rest in green meadows; God leads me beside peaceful streams. God renews my strength. God guides me along right paths, bringing honor to God’s name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.”**

DC Talk’s song *Day by Day* begins, “I live a simple life I take a day at a time. I spend my mornings with God before I hit the grind. The subtleties of darkness never cease to amaze as a physical world creates a spiritual haze. Blinded by distractions. Lost in matterless affairs. Reaching through the darkness trusting you will meet me there.”

John was exiled by the Romans to the Island of Patmos for the crime of being a Christian. Life was difficult on the island populated by exiled convicts. Some historians conclude John spent his days preaching to criminals with a cave for his home. Others speculate he spent his nights in a dungeon and days working in the mines under the brutal direction of taskmasters. Both scenarios portray John’s living conditions as brutal. John was sustained by belief in resurrection. One day God revealed to John his eternal home in heaven through a vision.

**Revelation 7:9-17 (NRSV)** “After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, “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 addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; 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 worship God day and night within God's temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."**

It is a reassuring vision revealing the glory of our eternal life with all we love. The vision assures us no matter what tribulation we are experiencing God will deliver us to an eternal sanctuary.

Yesterday was All Saints Day in which we celebrated those who have gone before us in faith and who are now rejoicing in heaven. Saints are imperfect people that God perfects. Everyone who trusts in God is a saint. Saints at their best inspire us to imitate their love and at their worst remind us that salvation comes from God not through anyone's works or goodness.

John has this marvelous vision of heaven and retells it to us. **Revelation 7:9 "There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages."** There are no broken relationships. There are no divisions or separations of any kind. The uniqueness of each person is there; yet, all are united in their praise of God. Each separate distinct voice comes together in perfect harmony to glorify God.

John's vision is full of symbolism. The lamb symbolizes Jesus. The white robes and palm branches symbolize victory. The victory of good over evil, love over hate, joy over sorrow, peace over chaos.

They proclaim. **Revelation 7:10 "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the lamb!"** Salvation is all God's doing and not our own. People are constantly trying to earn salvation, through good deeds, rationalization, intellectual pursuits, spiritual disciplines, comparing themselves to others, and the list can go on and on. Some people struggle with guilt feeling they are not worthy of salvation. John's vision clearly states, "salvation belongs to God." We are saints, because Jesus freely gives us his righteousness. We are transformed by God's work not our own efforts. This point is made a second time when the elder explains how the saints got to heaven. **Revelation 7:14 "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb."** Jesus' blood is the greatest purifier permanently removing the stain of sin. White symbolizes sinless perfection and holiness, which is given to us by Jesus the sinless, holy, Lamb of God. We are saved by grace.

Their once was a faithful Presbyterian that died in his sleep. He arrived at the gates of heaven and St. Peter explained to him that you need 1,000 points to get into heaven. He explained how as a child he had perfect Sunday School attendance. Peter said, "That's 1 point." He said, "I have worshiped God almost every Sunday of my life." "That's good for another point," replied Peter. He pointed out that he read his Bible everyday and prayed everyday. Peter said, "Very impressive. That's worth 2 points." The man then went on to list a multitude of missions he had done. He told of the large sums of money he gave to the church. Peter said, "Well done, 2 more points." The man mentioned his service as a faithful elder. Peter said, "Two more points. You only need 992 more points." The man said, "This is impossible the only way I am going to get into heaven is by the grace of God." Peter smiled, "You got it. Welcome to heaven."

John's vision does not sugar coat our life on earth or promise us an easy life. Our scripture describes our life on earth as a great ordeal with spiritual dryness, emotional distress,

tears, physical pain, hunger, thirst, and scorching heat. If John were living in Minnesota at the time of his vision, the elder probably would have included frigid cold.

John's vision ensures us that even through the most tragic of human circumstances our resurrection is always secure. We can be certain of an eternal life with God where every need is supplied by God. We will enjoy all love from the beginning of time for infinite. In heaven we will feast at the banquet. It is always the perfect temperature for that moment. Living water will constantly refresh us. Jesus will fill us with every joy. All of this is done by Jesus, the lamb, our good shepherd, who carries us through tribulation, the dark valleys, and the horizon of death to a glorious majestic reunion and abundant eternal life.

The saints in heaven are within God's temple. They enjoy loving relationships with all and with God, who is a loving relationship between Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. The temple reminds us of God's abiding presence with the Israelites that got them from slavery to the Promise Land. They carried the tabernacle everywhere as a constant reminder of God's presence. Today our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit. Our selves and each other remind us of God's presence. Our memories of those who are in heaven are assurances that we will be united again with them in the eternal sanctuary. Our experiences of love and joy draw us on our journey home, to the splendor of God's temple.

God showed John his eternal destiny to give us hope. Hope to endure difficult times. Hope to encourage us through days when everything goes wrong. Hope trusting every hurt will be healed. Hope believing every broken relationship will not only be mended but wonderful. Hope to trust our Good Shepherd. Hope to nourish our spirits, invigorate our bodies, and gladden our emotions.

We can be certain that God will guide us through the blinding distractions, matter-less affairs, and spiritual haze created by our physical world to our eternal sanctuary. Can you imagine the gloriously robed choir of saints praising God? Let this reality permeate every fiber of your being and create a sanctuary, an experience of worship and refuge here on earth.

Life is sort of like a car race. During the week we get banged up, worn down, and our energy gets depleted. Worn out, running on empty, we come to church for our pitstop. We are surrounded by people who care and love us. God's word inspires us. The Holy Spirit fills us with love. We feast at the Lord's Table. We are cleansed in baptism. We drink Living Water. Nourished and refurbished, God sends us back out to do our best for God. Jesus and the saints in heaven cheer for us. In the end all of us are winners, all of us are saints. All of us will celebrate in heaven.

Thankfully, unlike John, we do not have to fear imprisonment, exile, or execution because of our faith in Jesus. However, each of us is distracted from glorifying God. We face an array of temptations. We are bombarded with burdens. The temporary outer shell of our eternal soul, that is our physical body, is returning to dust. Brother Lawrence suggests that we create sanctuary by constantly being aware of God's presence. Sanctuary includes striving to perceive God all around us. Sanctuary trust God's sovereignty. Sanctuary is thinking of God's love for you, God's delight in you, and God's desire to be your friend. Sanctuary is a way of life in which we are constantly aware of God's saving actions on our behalf. Sanctuary is feeling safe in joy, protected in love to share out of gratitude. Your sanctuary in this life is only a mere snippet of the grand sanctuary you will enjoy for eternity.

You are a saint. Saints are ordinary people - past, present, and future - who have a relationship with God. Saints are not perfect, sinless people; rather, they are profoundly connected people for they are united by love directly to God.

The elder in Revelation asks John, **Revelation 7:13 "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?"** John shrugs his shoulders, and so the elder answers his own question. They are not necessarily the best or most faithful, the most sophisticated or the most successful, or even the most loving, but they have been transformed and resurrected by God's amazing grace. They have come out of the great ordeal that is our earthly life. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Out of the great ordeal we to will go to heaven, out of a life of trials and temptations, distractions, and interruptions we will be carried by Jesus to our eternal sanctuary. Although being pushed, pulled, pulverized, and bloodied by earthly events, broken relationships, and failing bodies ultimately God will save us. Jesus will wash us clean, wipe away every tear, fit us with our resurrection body, and take us to our place in God's eternal sanctuary. We are all saints. Alleluia Amen!