

### **A Selfie of Yourself in Heaven.**

***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. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"***

***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. 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 spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 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."***

A while back my sister made a small photo album with a couple dozen pictures of me when I was a kid. It is fun to look at those pictures. And it is amazing how we slowly we change over time. Want to have some fun? Look at the confirmation pictures downstairs and our members who were confirmed fifty or more years ago. Compare how they looked then to how they look now. Or look at the pastors, like Pastor Bradtke. The differences from one year to the next are not noticeable, but look at Pastor Bradtke with his first confirmation class in 1942 and then with his last class in 1982 and see how much he had changed.

We can see pictures of how we looked in the past. What would it be like if we could see pictures of ourselves long in the future. Kids, can you imagine seeing a photo album of you sixty years from now? How would you look? Maybe you would be bald. Most likely you will have glasses. It's fun looking back at what we were; it is a little hard, maybe scary, to imagine what we will look like in the future.

Revelation gives us a picture of a group people who, like the confirmation pictures, are dressed in white robes. But look closely. This is a picture of what you will look like in the future, and it isn't scary. It is exciting. Let's study our text today from Revelation. It asks and answers two questions: who are these robed in white and where did they come from.

#### *I. Jesus is the Lamb.*

***"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." Look closely. You see yourself and every believer. This is a picture of us in heaven. You see people taking selfie pictures of themselves all the time. It can be annoying, but you understand why. They want a picture of themselves next to some important person or event. Well, I want you to take a selfie right now. This picture of heaven is a picture of you and every believer.***

***And what a life we will have. "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 spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 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."***

It is difficult to describe heaven. Often the Bible has to use negatives and what it is not. Imagine a woman who has hips that are worn out and it is bone scraping bone. She asks the doctor, "What will it be like to have a hip replacement?" And he will probably answer, "Imagine no more pain." He has to tell her what it isn't for her to understand what it is. What will heaven be like? There will be no more hunger or thirst. Thousands die each year from famine and drought. And don't be surprised if you see my car at the gas station at about 3:00 in the afternoon. I will often stop for a Snicker's bar because I am hungry even if I ate lunch two hours before. Hunger and thirst represent the fact we can never be fully satisfied here on earth. Eat, but you will be hungry later. Sleep, but you will get tired again. Make some money, but you spend it and need to make more. We don't know what it means to be satisfied all the time. But in heaven we will.

And the sun will not scorch us. We were complaining about the cold of winter, but soon we will complain about the heat and humidity of summer. Heat drains us. In some societies, they torture people by tying them to stakes on the ground and letting the sun beat on them all day. It's hard to stay comfortable all the time. We install air conditioners to make us comfortable when it is too hot. But in heaven we will be comfortable all the time.

And God will wipe away every tear. I remember when my son played Legion baseball. At a game a boy got hit by the ball in the face. That was not the first time he cried and not the last. We don't know what it would be like to live without tears or sadness, but in heaven there will be no tears. We will not cry not because will make us tougher. He will remove everything that makes us cry.

And finally there will be no more death. I like how our text describes eternal life as waters of life. It reminds me of the tree of life in Eden. With it we will never die nor face any aging. I always tell families when a loved one dies to look at photo albums. The next time they see mom or dad or grandma, they will look more like the picture of when they were 19 and not like the way they looked when they die.

That's what we will enjoy, but why? ***"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."*** You don't wash clean things. You wash dirty things. This reminds us that we were dirty. Our lives are stained with bad thoughts and foul language, with careless words and hateful feelings, with a love of oneself and an indifference to others, even God. We are dirty.

But God washes us clean with the blood of Jesus Christ. This takes us back to Isaiah who said, ***"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*** White is the color of holiness in the Bible. The angels at the tomb of Jesus appeared white. On the Mt. of Transfiguration Jesus appeared to be dressed in a heavily bleached white garment. In other words, God washes us clean of our sins through Christ, and all those who believe stand before God as pure and as holy as Jesus himself.

Those are the ones robed in white. Look now from where we will come.

## *II. Where have they come from?*

***"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."***

Those robed in white are coming out of the great tribulation. Just what is it? Those who believe Jesus will return to establish an earthly kingdom assert this tribulation is a 3 1/2 or 7 year period of time before or after the rapture like in the Left Behind books. They claim this is a time when the earth will undergo all kinds of cataclysmic changes and when the Anti-Christ will be revealed and the Battle of Armageddon will be fought.

But nowhere does God promise a rapture or an earthly kingdom or a time when believers will escape trouble. Rather, God says in Acts 14:22, ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,"*** The Great Tribulation isn't then, it is now, and we will not magically escape it. The same word translated as "tribulation" is used to describe the pain of childbirth; it also describes the trouble widows and orphans face, all the troubles Joseph faced in the Old Testament like slavery and imprisonment. It describes the sufferings Christians go through because they are Christians. They are still talking about Sri Lanka where several Christian churches and hotels were bombed. The death toll stands at 300. It would include the anguish parents feel when their kids haven't returned home by 10:00 at night. It includes all the fears and worries we face. It includes the consequences of our sin like sickness and death. We are living in the great tribulation.

But listen to the text closely. It says we will go through it. ***"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."*** Imagine that. The Lamb who was slain is also our Shepherd. Jesus will shepherd us safely to heaven. Ever watch some disaster movie like the Poseidon Adventure or Jurassic Park? A group of survivors try to make it to safety. Some do, but some die on the way. Our journey isn't like that where some get picked off. Jesus promises that he will lead us even through the valley of the shadow of death, every one of us.

The ancient Egyptians usually buried their dead with items they felt they needed in the afterlife: jewelry, combs, jars of food, their favorite toy. In ancient Greece, they buried their dead with two coins in their mouths. According to Greek mythology, the dead had to cross the river Styx into the afterlife and the two coins were the fare needed to pay for the crossing. We are told that early Christians often buried their dead with a palm branch in their hands.

The Egyptians and Greeks didn't have the Bible nor did they know God or Jesus. They only imagined what the afterlife was like and assumed it was simply a continuation of their earthly life. But Christians believe in God and Jesus. They buried their dead with palm branches as a reminder of the victory we share in Christ. As it says in our text, ***"They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."***

Have some fun to day. Look over the old photo albums and relive those memories. But have even more fun. Read and meditate on these words from Revelation. Take a selfie because it is a picture of you in heaven. Amen.