

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever noticed how popular books and movies are about people who claim to have seen heaven? Many people read with great interest these first-hand accounts of those who have near-death experiences and believe they actually went to heaven itself. Something in us yearns for empirical proof that that there really is a heaven, and we want to know more details about what it is like.

And who can blame us for wanting that? Just look around at our world, and who wouldn't want the assurance that ultimately we will escape all of this and live with God in heavenly bliss? Just looking at the news ... We have the ongoing threat of ISIS. I don't know about you, the presidential race sure has me discouraged. (We won't go into specifics.) In Japan at least 10 were killed and many more injured or displaced from their homes because of earthquakes Friday. And I read Friday that President Obama's income fell to its lowest of his presidency: just \$436,000. Just depressing.

And of course the difficulties of this world get much more personal, don't they? On Thursday we laid to rest a fellow member and dear friend, Norma Potadle. Numerous members of Good Shepherd face very serious health problems. Numerous members of Good Shepherd struggle with their marriages. And you know the problems you face in your own life that can be great disheartening. What challenges are you facing? We could easily go around and each one of you could tell us things in your life that have you discouraged, frustrated, angry, anxious, hopeless, or depressed.

Wouldn't it be great to know for a fact that there was a heaven? Wouldn't it be great to know for a fact that you are going there?

Let's get the facts from a vision God gave the apostle John. Here's how John describes what happened:

Revelation 4:1-2 "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ² At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it."

So John is taken to heaven and given a glimpse of future glory. Now, remember that what John was seeing was in a vision. And just as your dreams can sometimes be a little weird and confusing, so also this vision of heaven given to John is sometimes weird and confusing. But I think the part before us here is pretty straight forward. That proof of the reality of heaven? Here it is. And when you hear the description of who is there and the reason they are able to be there in the presences of God, you'll know for a fact that this is your eternal future. Let's read it all first then we'll unpack the big ideas.

Revelation 7:9-17 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.”

So there you go, an incredibly comforting, joyful vision of heaven. Did you catch all of the amazing truths?

First of all, **who** will be there? John said: “**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.**” Have you ever felt like you were alone as a Christian? You probably don’t feel that way today as you’re gathered in church with so many other believers. But during the week, when you look around your office, how many are practicing Christians? When you look around the classroom, how many do you know to be Christians? How many of your neighbors are in church every weekend? Don’t you sometimes feel a bit alone?

I grew up going to Wisconsin Synod Lutheran churches, but they were always small churches. Until I was maybe 10 years old, our family attended a mission church in Cincinnati, Ohio. We may have gotten as large as 100 members while we lived there. Then we moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma where again there was a small church of not more than a 100 members. I just assumed that all WELS churches were that size. Then I went to way to college in Watertown, Wisconsin. I will never forget the first worship service I attended there. It must have been St. Marks. It was amazing. The church was huge. It was old and ornate with a real pipe organ. There were hundreds of people there. And I remember how great it felt to worship with so many people. I remember thinking, “I don’t know any of these people, but look at all of them, and they believe just like me!” It was so encouraging.

Now imagine that feeling times a billion. When we get to heaven, we are going to see a great multitude of people... so many we can’t even count them. These are the people of all of history who believed in God’s promised Messiah... depending on when they lived, either the Messiah to come, or the Messiah who came, Jesus Christ. And we will marvel at the fact that they are from every nation, tribe, people and language. Such different backgrounds yet all perfectly united, because all are standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. The Lamb is Jesus, the perfect sacrifice whose shed blood paid for the sins of every last one standing before him. I can hardly wait to experience that!

All of these people have something else in common... where they came from. We are told: “**These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.**” What is the great tribulation? Well, you’re living it. It’s our current existence. It’s life in a sinful world. The tribulations you experience are many and varied. We talked about some of them at the beginning

of the sermon. Natural disasters, economic woes, relationship issues, being hurt by the sins of others, being persecuted for your faith, pain, illness and one day death. This world is a great tribulation for God's people. And we will suffer tribulations of many kinds as long as we live on this broken earth. But God assures us that he will deliver us from evil. He will bring us out of this great tribulation. For Jesus' sake, you also will be numbered among those who stand before the throne.

Why these? But not everyone on the planet will be standing before that throne. We heard very specifically who will be there: It says: **“They were wearing white robes... made white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Only those wearing white robes stand before the throne. The white robes symbolize the perfection and purity of the saints standing before the throne. Where does that perfection and purity come from?

Many believe that you earn your white robe. That you must purify yourself if you will stand before the throne. Do the right things in the right way enough times... do more good than bad... or try to be better than most other people... or keep on improving... and you earn your place in heaven.

But a quick look through Scripture tells us this cannot be the way. The standard God sets is one of perfection. He standard is not “keep improving.” It's not, “Do better than others.” It's not “Do more good than bad.” The standard is perfection. Never do, or say or think anything wrong ever. Always do what is right and never miss an opportunity. In your heart and attitude be perfect. That's God's standard. Are you there? Have you done it?

So if you don't create your own white robe, where does it come from? In the picture of heaven which John saw, the white robes were made white in the blood of the Lamb. Even if you don't do much laundry yourself, you probably realize that blood is a stain, it doesn't remove stains. Yet the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, shed on the cross, does remove the stain of your in and guilt. Following Jesus, trusting in him you are washed completely clean. Your sin is forgiven. The dirt is gone. You already now wear a white robe in God's sight as your live in repentance and trust in Jesus. The moment of your death, you become one of those who have come out of the great tribulation, standing before the throne in a white robe.

Doing what? What will we be doing in heaven? John saw those in heaven holding palm branches and praising Jesus. Praising him for what? **“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”** This salvation we just talked about is the reason for shouting praises to God. He did an incredible thing! His love that led him to sacrifice Jesus for us is astounding! The Palm branches remind us of Palm Sunday when the people shouted praises to Jesus. But won't we get tired of doing that? Won't that get boring? Well, let me ask you this. Husker fans, I want you to imagine this. Our football team is having an undefeated season. Game after game. They even roll over a couple top 20 teams. Win after win. Can you imagine that in the last 2 or 3 games of the season, one of which is the national championship, you will just get tired of cheering for them. You're bored. Another win. Someone offers you tickets to the national championship, and you say, “No thanks. I've already seen 12 wins. I really don't need to see a 15th.” No, you'd be all over those tickets, wouldn't you?

How could we ever get tired of cheering for God who saved us in such spectacular fashion? Now understand, our life in heaven won't be 24/7 shouting and singing. We don't do that as believers now either. We live a life serving God too, don't we. And John says the same: **“[They] serve him day and night in his temple.”** Another part of Revelation says that God IS the temple. He is directly and visible present everywhere. Just as we go about our daily lives in

service to God now, we will also do that in eternity... but without the shackles of sin holding us back. And it will be glorious, awesome, fun, and exciting for all eternity.

What life is like? What else will it be like? “[God] **will spread his tent over them.** [That means you are full protected and provide for, secure and sheltered. “**Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.**” [Everything you need, God will give you. There will be no lack of anything in heaven! No shortages. “**The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.**” [Perfect climate. Nothing uncomfortable ever.] **For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.** [Here we get the strange phrase that the Lamb will be the Shepherd. He is both! The Lamb who sacrificed himself. The Shepherd who leads us, guides us, cares for us, protects. Specifically, he will lead us to springs of living water. That is, life will never end. It goes on and on and on!] **And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.** God himself makes sure nothing bad ever happens.

So what is life like? It's perfect. People ask all the time for more information. Will there be animals in heaven? Will my dog who died be in heaven? What will it be like? Will we eat? Will we sleep? God doesn't give many details, does he? We simply cannot comprehend the joys of heaven. There is no earthly comparison. Most descriptions are what it will NOT be. (Sorrow, pain, death, scorching heat, etc.) God just tells us, “Trust me... you're going to LOVE it! It's beyond your wildest imagination!

Friends, this what is waiting for you. This life stinks sometimes. We all go through seasons when it stinks more, sometimes less. Maybe you're going through a rough patch now. Maybe it's coming up. Either way, keep what we talked about today in your hearts and minds. Turn back to these verses in Revelation 7 frequently.

And what comfort when a loved one dies who believes in Jesus! Today we especially think of Norma Potadle whom we laid to rest on Thursday. Remember that they are now among those in white robes serving God and praising him for his great salvation. Remember that there will be a joyful reunion of all believers before the throne of the Lamb.

Look forward to that “Living Water from the Shepherd-Lamb”. It will satisfy you for all eternity! Amen.