

Sooke Baptist Church
Sunday, February 14, 2021
9am Facebook Live Stream, Noon, YouTube

The Awesomeness
of God's Rescue
Revelation 7:14



How you respond to trouble?

REVELATION
7:9-14

Last week we asked the question that arises out of Revelation 7:3 - what is the seal placed on the foreheads of the servants of God?

Today I would like us to grapple with the question that arises out of Revelation 7:14 - **what is the great tribulation?**

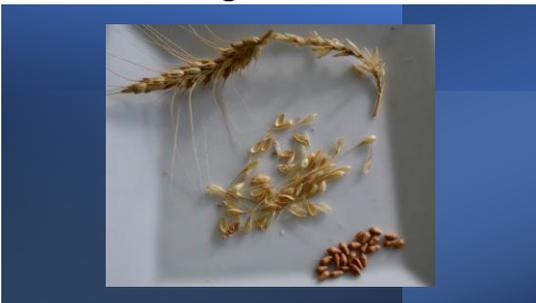
Next Sunday we will ask the third question arising out of Revelation 7:15-19 - what is life like in the visible presence of God?

v.14 speaks of “the great tribulation.”

The English word “tribulation” comes from the Latin word *tribulum* ...



... which is a threshing instrument ... which used pressure and friction to separate chaff from heads of grain.



The word translated “tribulation” in our Bibles comes from the Greek word *thlipsis*.



It conveys the idea of.... a “pressing together” to the point of crushing.

The instrument which best illustrates the severity of this crushing is the olive press.



According to Darryl Johnson... the word thlipsis... best describes the pressure that occurs...



...when the kingdom of God collides with the kingdoms of humanity who are in rebellion against God. DJ, p.181.

Look again at v.14 – the NIV says...

“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.”

The tense of the verb “come out” in the Greek language is very important for our understanding of what the great tribulation is and when it happens.

The NIV says “who have come out.”

But commentators tell us that the verb tense is best translated by saying...



The verb tense communicates that the coming out... of the tribulation... is not a one-time event, but something that is ongoing.

This could be why one of the reasons why no one could count the great multitude, because it continues to be added to.

Since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, humanity has been living in what the Bible describes as ... the last days.

These days are... an unprecedented time of gospel opportunity; a time for “whosoever will” to come home to God and be saved.

In addition, the Scripture teaches... that last days are also a time of tribulation.

Do you remember what Jesus said to his disciples around the Passover table?

John 16:33

“In this world you will have trouble.”

Do you know what this word... “trouble” ... is... in the Greek language?

It is... thlipsis.

Here Jesus made ... a blanket statement.

He didn't say, from time to time you will have thlipsis.

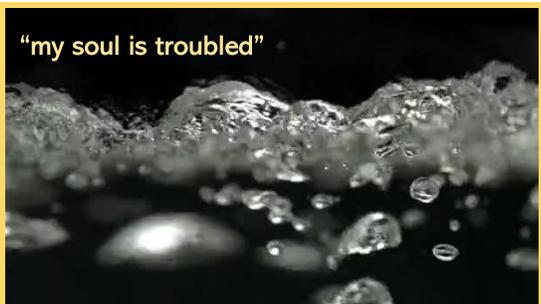
He said...in this world...

Throughout the duration of their lifetime on the earth Jesus told his followers to expect...thlipsis.

This is what Jesus himself experienced throughout his 3 ½ years of public ministry.

While we will not experience thlipsis like Jesus did, it is important to realize... as our Savior experienced everything we do... that he too faced, experienced and went through thlipsis.

In John 12 as the hour of his suffering drew near, Jesus said, v.27....



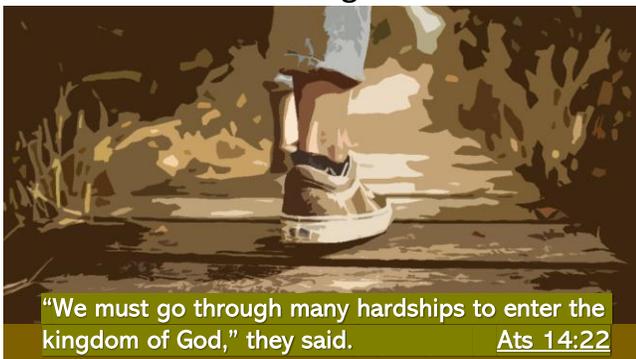
The word “troubled” literally means... agitated like boiling water.
Can you picture a pot of boiling water?
This gives you an idea of what was happening to Jesus in his inner person.
His soul was distressed and perplexed.

The night before his death, Jesus experienced thlipsis in the garden of Gethsemane.
Luke 22:44 says he was in anguish.
That word anguish in the Greek language is agonia.

It speaks of severe emotional strain...and we know how that emotional strain impacted Jesus physically - his sweat was like drops of blood!
Again, I don't think we will experience thlipsis to the extent Jesus did, but Jesus' experience tells us thlipsis is unsettling and difficult, and that the grace of God will meet us at that place with grace when grace is needed.

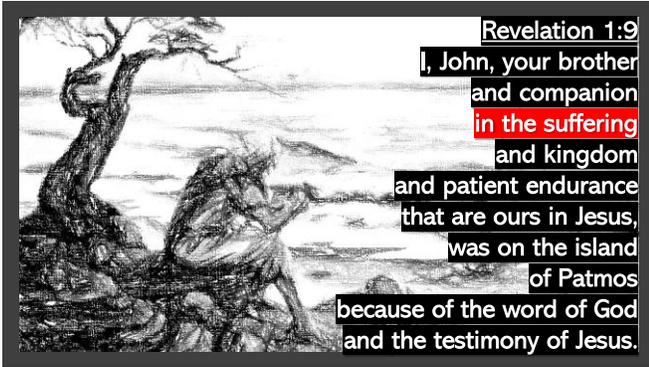
Remember the angel who came to Jesus and strengthened him.

After his death, resurrection and return to heaven, tribulation continued to touch the followers of Jesus... as Jesus had told them it would.
Paul and Barnabus taught the churches...



The word translated hardship is...thlipsis.
And take note that Paul and Barnabus said – many....

John on the island of Patmos experienced suffering as did the churches of that time in the first century.



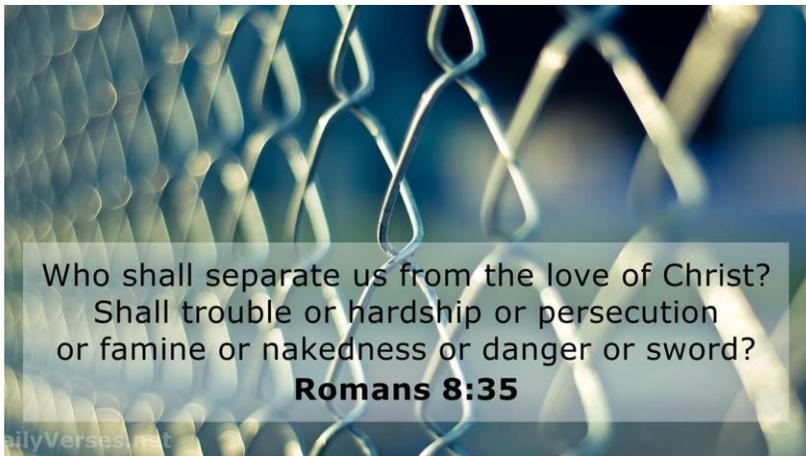
The word translated suffering is... thlipsis.

Since the time the Revelation was written, God's people and his churches have continued to experience tribulation.



While there are things Revelation 7 doesn't say about the great tribulation, we must not miss what is clearly communicated.

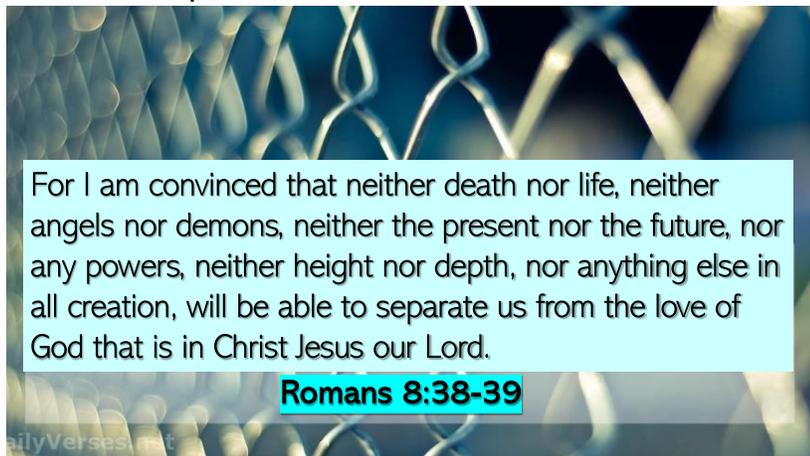
- The time of tribulation is temporary – it only happens in this world. There is no tribulation in the visible presence of God.
- The parameters, intensity and duration of tribulation has been determined by God.
- In the face of tribulation nothing can separate us from God. I love how the Scripture qualifies this in Romans 8.



The word trouble in this verse is the Greek word... thlipsis.

Thlipsis cannot separate us from the love of Christ... and neither can hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword.

Just in case someone was able to think of another possibility not mentioned, verse 38 closes all loopholes.



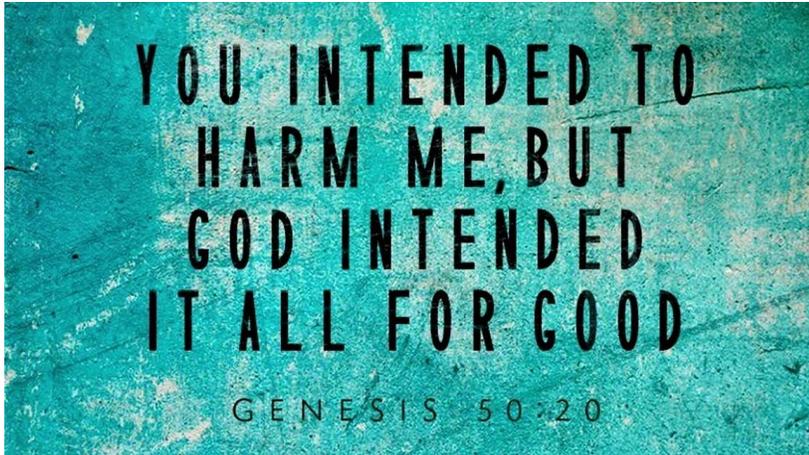
We need to be clear - these verses are not saying that our lives won't be touched by these things.

What they are saying is that these things can't separate us from God and his love for us.

God's sovereign power is so great... and his wisdom so vast... that what was true of OT Joseph is true of God's people in every generation.

After their father had died, Joseph's brothers were worried that he would exact revenge upon them for selling him into slavery when he was 17 years old.

But Joseph assured them...



God can turn things intended for harm into the means by which lives are saved... and that includes thlipsis.

Let's consider several connection points to our own lives.

1. GK Beale raises an intriguing question – if we view the “great tribulation” as an event... associated only with a time... immediately preceding the return of Christ rather than as something that the church has been living through... throughout the last days and that will intensify before Christ’s appearing – could this lead us to minimize the perils of the very real present pressures we face to conform to the world? p.163

As I thought about Beale’s question, what Peter wrote in his first letter came to mind.

1 Peter 5:5-11

⁵ ...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. **Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**

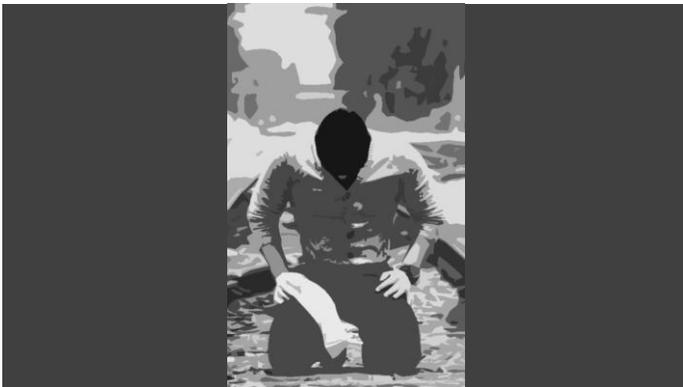
Peter warned his readers about their enemy... describing Satan as one who prowls like a lion – as one who moves in the shadows looking for opportunity to pounce and to devour – as one who roars in order to intimidate and paralyze with fear.

But before Peter warned his readers of their adversary, he urged them, as Paul had urged the Ephesian church to put on the armor of God (see Ephesians 6)... to clothe themselves with humility.

Humility is a grace to be worn like clothing.



It is also a posture of faith – that one takes in the presence of God...



...as in submission to God's power and authority and in confidence of his providence, they cast upon the Lord any and all anxieties of heart, soul and mind.

It is from this posture of humility that there grows in the follower of Jesus.... a spiritual alertness and an ability to think clearly... to see things as they truly are – to put the threat of the lion in perspective by fixing their eyes on the Lord.

This is how humility, like the armor of God, provide protection from our adversary Satan.

The grace of humility strengthens the heart of the believer to stand their ground; confident that the one who is in them – the Holy Spirit - is greater than their adversary.

1 Peter 5:5-11

⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

The tactic of a lion is to isolate its prey.

This is why Peter reminded his readers that the sufferings they were experiencing because of tribulation were also being experienced by believers...where?

1 Peter 5:5-11

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¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

- It was important for Peter's readers to know that their sufferings were not an anomaly, but something which believers everywhere faced.
- It was important for Peter's readers to know that tribulation will not carry on indefinitely, but would last only for... a little while.

What is his promise? Look at the verse again.

1 Peter 5:5-11

⁵ ...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up **in due time.** ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. **Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**

In due time... God will lift up his people.

In due time... God will restore them...because he has all the power for ever and ever.

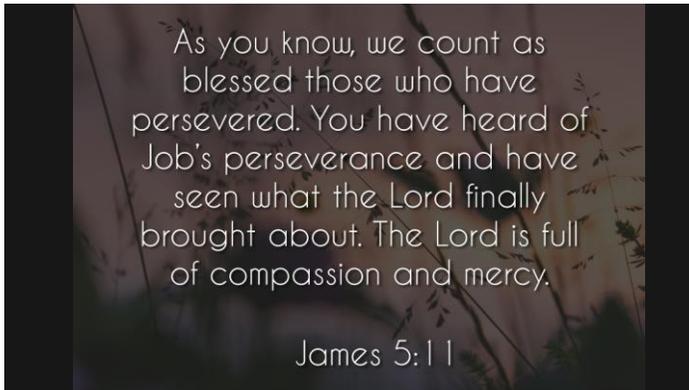
- It was important for Peter’s readers to know that any loss suffered will be made right by the God of all grace.

It may be something we wish were not true – but in the last days tribulation is normal. It is something... the people of God face together... encouraging and helping one another to resist the devil and to stand firm in the faith.

2. After God appeared to Job and spoke with him, look at what Job said to the Lord...



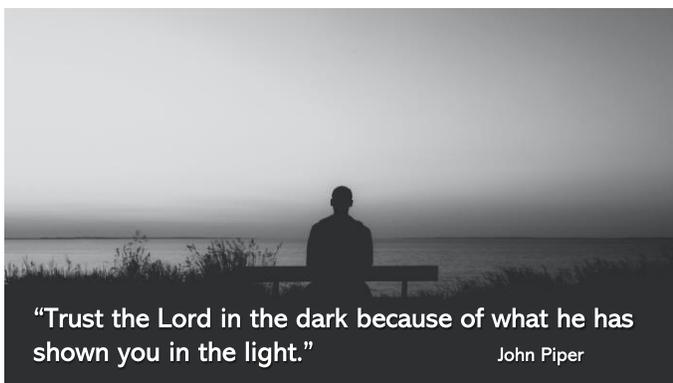
James, the brother of Jesus, wrote about Job in his letter, 5:11, and said...



The troubles of Job were used by God **to forge perseverance within Job's character.** During those long weeks and months when God was silent, God had not forgotten Job. At all times the heart of God towards Job was full of compassion and mercy.

As Peter wrote that phrase... **in due time**... in order to encourage his readers... I wonder if Peter thought of Job and how God... in due time... brought about his rescue of Job?

Regarding the tribulation that the church of Jesus faces in the last days, John Piper wrote:

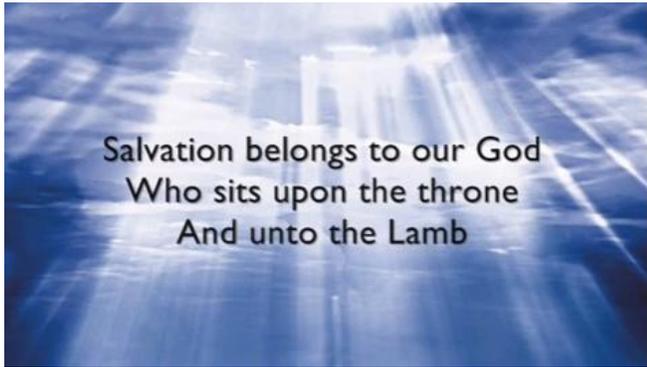


When tribulation touches the lives of God's people, he would have us stand our ground in faith and in trust of him.

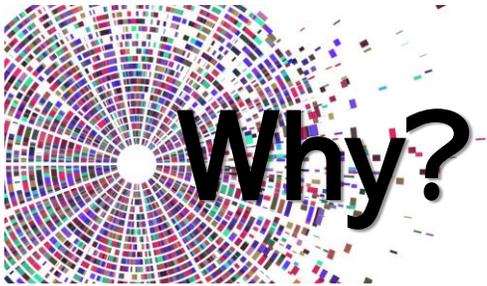
3. When we stand in the presence of God, all our questions will be answered, or... be seen as no longer relevant.

In Revelation 7:9... in a vision... John saw those coming out of the great tribulation, a great multitude that no one could count.

He not only saw them.... he also heard the song they sang as they stood in the presence of God.



What John did not hear... was the redeemed asking of God... "why?"



Why did we suffer?

Why did we face trouble?

Why did we experience loss?

Before God appeared to him, Job deeply wrestled with this question.

He repeatedly insisted to his friends who sat with him that he wanted to argue his case before God.

But when Job finally saw God his questions were no longer relevant.

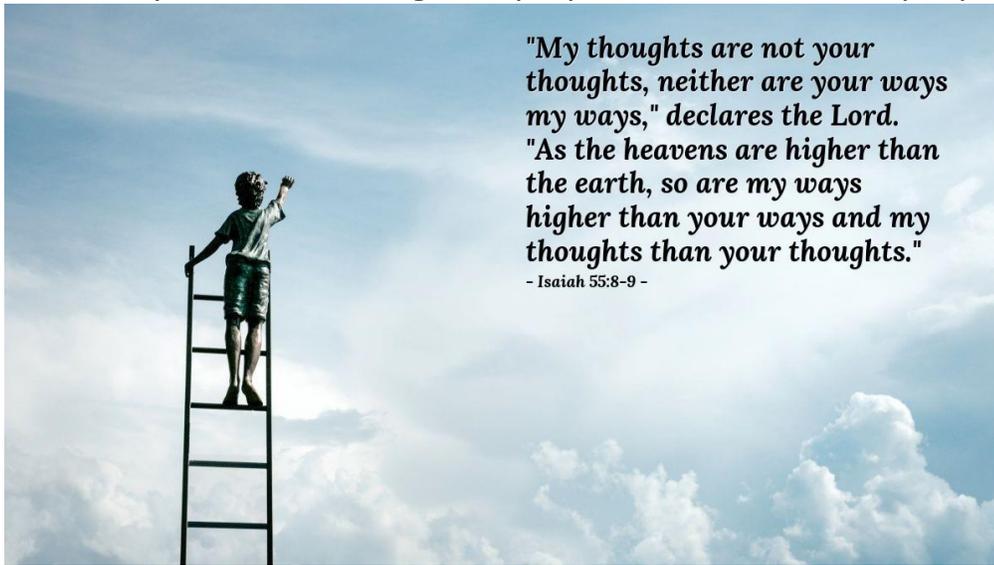
We know this because of what Job said to God, 42:5-6...

Job 42:5-6

My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.
Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.

Remember the theme of Revelation - things are not as they seem.

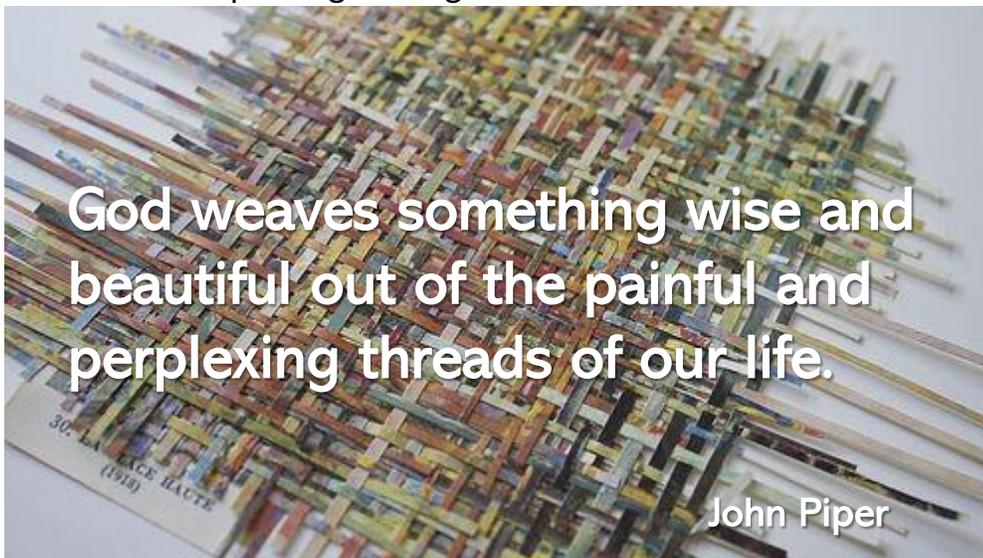
This is why the LORD through the prophet Isaiah said to his people, 55:8...



"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

- Isaiah 55:8-9 -

Again, I quote from John Piper regarding God's ability to turn what is intended for harm into the accomplishing of his good...



God weaves something wise and beautiful out of the painful and perplexing threads of our life.

John Piper

God is preparing for himself a people, who for all eternity will manifest his glory. Listen to the confession of Benjamin Warfield:
God so governs all things that we shall receive only good from all that befalls us.

Warfield's confession is the testimony of the redeemed in the face of tribulation.
God so governs all things that we shall receive only good from all that befalls us.

The living God is not a manager of a museum of antiques.
He is building a living temple where exhausted and ruined sinners become the dwelling place of God.

Remember – the treasure is in earthen vessels.

This brings us to our third question.

3. What will life be like when Jesus' followers live in the visible presence of God?

Let's ask some clarifying questions.

Where are the people whom John saw in verse 9?

v.15 – they are before the throne of God.

How can they stand before the brilliance of God's person?

Because of what v.14 says - they have appropriated the blood of Jesus.

GK Beale says, "The Lamb has reversed the effects of Adam and Eve's fall." p.160.

By grace alone through faith alone in the sacrifice of Christ alone their sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west and the righteousness of Jesus has been credited to them by God.

But something more has happened.

Hebrews 12:22-24 explains.

Their spirits have been made perfect.

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to **the spirits of the righteous made perfect,** ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood of Abel.*"

Hebrews 12:22-24, NASB

This is why those who make up the multitude no one can count are able to stand in the presence of God.

At the moment of their physical death, the work of transformation which the Spirit of God had carried out in them throughout their life on earth... it was completed.

Their spirits were made perfect.

This is what was being communicated when John described them wearing white robes. There is in them no longer any stain of sin.

And when Jesus returns to the earth – their bodies will be raised from the dead to never die again.

When this happens... the work of salvation in them will be completely completed – God will have saved them body, soul and spirit.

Standing in the visible presence of God what do they do?

v.15 – they serve him day and night in his temple.

The statement of v.15 connects to...

Revelation 1:5-6

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us **to be a kingdom** and **priests to serve** his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 5:10

You have made them **to be a kingdom** and **priests to serve** our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

The gospel of Jesus which saves a person from their sin, establishes their identity and the purpose for which they live.

Who are the redeemed?

Our identity is based on who God is and our relationship with him, but also the community of faith to which we belong – they are a kingdom and priests.

What do the redeemed do?

They live to serve God

Look at Revelation 20:15.

They are sealed, they are marked as belonging to God because... their names are written in the book of life.

This sealing is in contrast to the sealing done by the beast, who in mocking imitation of God, puts his seal of ownership on those who align themselves with him.

Look at 14:9-11.

We know from John 17:20...

John 17:20

I pray also for those who will believe in me
through their message, that all of them may
be one, Father, just as you are in me and
I am in you. May they also be in us so that
the world may believe that you have sent me.

...that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for all who would follow him...
for those not yet believers... for those not yet born... for you and me.
He knew us.

Jesus said in John 10, that the One who seals, also sustains and keeps us.

I give them eternal life,
and they shall never perish;
no one will snatch them out of my hand.
My Father, who has given them to me,
is greater than all;
no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.
I and the Father are one.

John 10:28-30

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How great are the ways of God... how good is the wisdom and the sovereignty of the One who is on the throne and the Lamb!

In Revelation 6:16, on the last day, those who have lived without God attempt to hide from God; they are terrified of the face of the One on the throne and of the wrath of the Lamb.

But it is different for those who have trusted in Jesus.

Look at 7:9 – they stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

How is that possible?

How can they stand in the brilliant majesty of God's person?

The answer has already been given in Revelation 5:9 and it is repeated in 7:14b.

Revelation 5:9

They sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy... because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God person from every tribe and Language and people and nation."

Revelation 7:14b

...they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

We need to press into this truth.



On the day of Passover... Jesus was condemned to death by Pilate.

On the day of Passover... Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross.

On that day, unseen to those who watched, as he hung on that cross, the Father placed on Jesus the sin of the world.

As the Father turned his face away, Jesus called out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Shortly thereafter, knowing that all was now completed, Jesus called out again in a loud voice, "It is finished," and gave up his spirit.

This was when... this was how the Lamb purchased for God people from every tribe, language, people and nation.

The testimony of Scripture is that the sacrifice of Jesus' life...
...purchased our freedom from sin...

Revelation 1:5

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...

... purifies the believer from the stain and corruption of their sin...

Revelation 1:5

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...

1 John 1:7

...the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin.

... restores fellowship with God....

Revelation 1:5

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...

1 John 1:7

...the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:3

...our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

The question was asked in Revelation 6:17 – who can stand?

The answer given in Revelation 7 is... only those who have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb.

But there is more to the answer.

The placing of a seal upon the foreheads of God's servants is connected to the question ... who can stand before God?

What is the seal that is placed upon the foreheads of God's servants?

Look again at Revelation 7:14.

What does it mean... "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?"

Gerhard Krodel writes, "The gift of redemption received must be ratified with one's life." p.186-187.

The apostle John in his first epistle said it this way, 2:6...
Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Those who stand before God... have not only received grace...they have laid hold of God's grace and Jesus' righteousness.

Those who stand before God... were born of the Holy Spirit...and during their life on the earth... they cooperated with the Spirit in his transformation of them.

Those who stand before God... with the Spirit's enabling... put off habits of sin and learned new habits of godliness.

Those who stand before God... in the power of the Spirit.... stood their ground in spite of opposition and tribulation... many of them stood their ground...even to the point of death.