

The Benefits of His Kingship

Revelation 7:9-17

Series: Easter 2023: The Benefits of His Passion

Preaching Date: April 2, 2023

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Worship: His Triumphant Entry

Key Sentence: The King is glorified by His care for His people

Outline:

I. The True Palm Sunday (Revelation 7:9-12)

II. The Celebrants (Revelation 7:13-14)

III. The Benefits (Revelation 7:15-17)

Revelation 7:9–17 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

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¹⁵“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 shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The Benefits of His Kingship Revelation 7:9-17

“Don’t forget to ask about the benefits.” I’ve used that phrase as an illustration relatively recently, but it occurs to me often, so I’m using it again, as the tag line of this whole series. I can’t remember the first time I heard the phrase. Maybe it was something my dad said to me and that’s why it stuck in my head. It is sound advice, because benefits are important. One website says benefits can add as much as 30 percent to the value of a salary package. When we started Trinity, the church was small and couldn’t offer Gail and I a full salary. But Tom Garissi, one of the founding members said “We can’t give Bob salary, but we can give him vacation. So I started with four weeks of vacation.

In employment there are many potential benefits: sick time, holidays, medical and dental insurance, retirement plans, matching contributions, stock ownership, travel compensation, paid mileage, and more. In the same way, as believers, there are all kinds of benefits. Psalm 103 says “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” The psalm then lists many benefits, beginning with “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.” That’s a good list, though the Psalm goes on to name many more.

This year, for our Easter series, I want to obey the command of that psalm, “forget not all his benefits.” Today we’ll look at the benefits of belonging to Christ’s kingdom from Revelation 7:9-17. Thursday night we will focus on Christ’s sacrifice. What are the benefits we receive from his self-giving? And on Easter Sunday we’ll look at the benefits of His resurrection, both in a first person story at the sunrise service and in the first letter of Peter at the main service.

On Palm Sunday we celebrate the fact that Jesus is King. This celebration is recorded in all four Gospels. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.” Crowds followed him and people came out of the city to meet him. They took their cloaks and laid them on the road as a red carpet for him, and they took palm branches and waved them in celebration. And they proclaimed him, crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” This was a great recognition of Jesus as the promised king.

But as I've often said, it was premature, because before the week was out that same crowd would turn against him and cry out for his crucifixion. He would be condemned. He would be crucified. He would also be resurrected and ascend into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. There he would reign as king, the king who is also the Lamb who was slain. Today as we celebrate Palm Sunday, we won't focus on that first Palm Sunday in Jerusalem, but on a celebration in heaven where the Lamb is joyfully acclaimed and where we see the benefits of his reign. For the king is not only a lamb, but a shepherd, and the king is glorified by His care for His people. We receive the benefits.

Our text is Revelation 7:9-17. Before we read it let me give just a little context. Revelation begins when John, the author is given a vision of the Son of Man, Jesus, and receives from him letters of warning and affirmation for the seven Christian churches in Asia Minor. After this John is taken up to heaven and sees the throne of God and hears the living creatures crying "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come." In chapter 5 John sees a scroll, the scroll of final judgment and final rescue, in the hand of the one who sits on the throne, God the father. But John is told that only the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has conquered could open the scroll. Then John saw the Lion, but it was a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. The living creatures say of the Lamb "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." Clearly the Lamb is Jesus.

In chapter 6 the Lamb opens the seals of this scroll, and they prove to be seven judgments on the earth, the first of the final judgments humankind's sin. And they are awful. But in chapter 7 there is an interlude, on earth and in heaven. On earth 144,000 faithful believers, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel are sealed on the forehead, a mark of protection against the judgments yet to come. And in heaven we see the worship of God the Father who sits on the throne, and of the Lamb. It is there that we learn that the Lamb at the center of the throne is our shepherd, and he is glorified by His care for His people.

Let's read the text. Does it sound like a greater Palm Sunday? Revelation 7, verse 9: *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

¹¹And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you know." He said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵"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 shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Here is a great multitude standing before the throne in heaven. I believe this multitude is the whole church of Jesus Christ, including those lifted out of the tribulation period in the rapture. Why do I think this? First this is the only multitude specifically labeled uncountable in Revelation. Even the angels of Revelation 4 and 5 had a number, though admittedly a large one: thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. I'm not saying John counted the angels, but he saw them as countable. This multitude exceeds that: only the whole church or all of God's redeemed people could be that large. Second, these are people from every nation, tribe, people and language, the same phrase used in chapter 5 of those Jesus purchased by his blood. We know that Jesus commanded the twelve disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, and that when the Gospel had been preached to all nations, the end would come. This multitude is the fruit of that world-wide Gospel message.

Third, this multitude is dressed in white, a symbol of purity, righteousness and holiness in the book of Revelation. In fact we will learn in verse 14 that they are dressed in white because they have washed in the blood of the Lamb. They are made holy by the power of Jesus' sacrifice. So I think it's clear that these are the whole church, the redeemed of at least the church age. I think you can make a case that the rapture of the church fits at the end of chapter 6, and here is the church that was raptured, the dead in Christ plus those who are still alive, who are taken up to meet the Lord in the air, and ascend into heaven just as he did, to now worship before the throne.

This leads to an awesome truth: you and I, who have been saved by the blood of Jesus, are in this scene. We are the redeemed, raised and clothed in white; we worship before the throne. We worship the king in this awesome setting.

Look at the end of verse 9: “standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” Does that sound like Palm Sunday? It does to me: the multitude is waving palm branches and worshipping the king. I’m not saying it’s a direct recreation of Palm Sunday. There is no procession here and the Palm Sunday event itself was not a formal part of any feast. It was made meaningful by the presence of Jesus. Revelation 7, on the other hand, may reflect one of the celebrations God had given to the Jewish people: the feast of Tabernacles. In that feast the people of Israel celebrated God’s deliverance from Egypt. They set up booths or tents to remember their dependence on God in the wilderness. They waved branches and fruit to celebrate the goodness of the land God provided. Verse 15 of our text literally says that “The One seated upon the throne will erect a booth over them with His presence.” Revelation 7, which is a distant amplification of Palm Sunday, is a heavenly recreation of the feast of Tabernacles.

This uncountable multitude, gathered before the throne cries out “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Again, step back to Palm Sunday. What do the crowds cry? Hosanna. What does hosanna mean? Save. It’s a cry asking for salvation. Now, in Revelation 7, that cry has been answered and they know who is responsible for it. One translation says “It is to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, that we owe our salvation!” This salvation is more than a victorious passage through hardship and suffering, as celebrated in the feast of Tabernacles. This is rescue from sin and all its consequences. The great multitude joyfully acknowledges that their rescue rests on the sovereign will of God and the sacrifice of the Lamb.

We’re watching ourselves celebrate. And now the rest of heaven joins in, verse 11: “All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” The heavenly beings that surround the throne respond to the jubilant cry of the saints by falling before God and offering to him their praise. The redemption of the human race, the ultimate purpose of God in creation, is at last being completed. If there is “rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents,” how unbelievably great will be the joyful adoration of the heavens when the redeemed stand before God!

As in other places in Revelation the angels name the attributes of God and the praises he deserves for them. So God is worthy of the praise or blessing of the whole universe, for his is the glory. All of his perfections shine forth in the creation of the universe and the redemption of fallen humanity.

His is the wisdom, God's divine thought revealed in redemption. Ephesians says that God's intent "was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." That's happening here. He is worthy also of thanksgiving, worthy to be honored for this great salvation. He is worthy because all of this has been done with his power and might, which are his forever and ever. These are the perfections of God displayed in his salvation. What are the benefits of his kingship? That all this perfection and power are for us and for our salvation, not against us as they by rights should be because of our sin.

Verse 13: "Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴I 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." The elder asks the same question we ask "Who are these people?" John doesn't know. He says "Sir, you know," roughly "I was about to ask you." The elder says they've come out of the great tribulation. The use of the definite article in the phrase "the great tribulation" indicates that the angel is referring to the final series of woes that will bring God's judgment on the world. We've talked about this as the Day of the Lord and as the unleashing of God's wrath. The time of tribulation may begin with the sixth seal of Revelation 6, or even earlier, but this, "the great tribulation" is probably associated with God's final wrath, from which these redeemed saints have been rescued.

Still, all of us will have gone through some tribulation and affliction, the distress of living in a fallen world. I looked up all the uses of the word 'tribulation' in the Greek, and almost all of them refer to the affliction we suffer now, not to that great tribulation yet to come. Yet even prior to that day we have already been rescued from the full effects of the fall. How? This multitude has "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." This is us. Our stain of sin has been washed away and not at that moment of celebration, but at the moment we trusted Christ for salvation. In Titus Paul writes that "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit." In Hebrews the author says that the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences. John the Apostle writes that "the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin." We can begin to experience this cleansing now, because we have already been given forgiveness and renewal. We still struggle with sin, and we are surrounded by a fallen world in which we walk with brokenness – but Christ has accomplished this cleansing for us and we can know the first fruits of it now, the first fruits of peace and joy and confidence and hope.

Do you remember the story I've read often called "A Girl Named Dirty?" The girl needs cleansing. Another girl, crippled, needs healing. Then you have the king who marvelously affirms that all the subjects of the king are no more than ugly beggars. We're all broken, we're all stained, we're all impoverished. But it is the king's love that cleanses us, so that Dirty cries out "I'm clean, I'm clean, the King has made me clean." We have come into the very presence of his cleansing love: what other benefit could we actually ask for?

But there is much more. Verses 15 to 17 in particular tell us that the King is glorified by His care for His people. "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. ¹⁶Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For 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."

Because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ we are qualified to stand before the throne of God. There we serve him day and night, that is unceasingly, without pause. The temple in which the faithful serve, or worship, is not to be thought of as a building in heaven. Rather heaven itself is the sanctuary: within it all God's children are worshipers. This service is not the Old Testament ritual, but a spiritual worship of adoration and praise. And there we receive his blessings. The Lamb acting as king, from the throne, will spread his tent over us or erect a booth over us with His presence. This evokes memories of the tabernacle in the wilderness, where Israel first worshiped, overshadowed by the pillar of cloud and of fire. The tent, booth or tabernacle has always been a symbol of the immediate presence of God to shelter and protect, fulfilling the central Old Testament promise that God will dwell in the midst of his people. There is no greater blessing than the blessing of his presence.

The eternal blessedness of the redeemed is pictured in verse 16, with phrases drawn from Isaiah 49, Isaiah's description of the exiles returning from Babylon. The promise that they will neither hunger nor thirst would be treasured in a land where both were dangers. Yet the promise goes beyond physical provision. It points to that ultimate satisfaction of the soul's deep longings: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," said Jesus, "for they will be filled" And again, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." In the age to come we will be sheltered from all harm and danger by the presence of God. What are the benefits of his kingship? He provides for his children, his subjects, the people of his holy nation. This didn't happen on Palm Sunday, but it is happening since the Resurrection, and it will happen perfectly in that day, in the age to come.

Verse 17: “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water.” The Lamb at the center of the throne is at the same time our Shepherd. A true benefit of his kingship is that he is our shepherd and that nothing can come between him and his sheep. He is not a remote king on a high throne, but a very present king, a very present help who is guarding and guiding us, a king who cares for us.

This theme, of Jesus or God as our shepherd, is seen throughout the Bible. Jesus says of himself, in the Gospel of John “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” There is nothing we can talk about during Easter week that gets very far away from the truth that Jesus gave his life for us. He valued us more than he valued his own life. In John he goes on to say “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” The lamb reigning on the throne is our good shepherd.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all the shepherd promises in the Old Testament. Isaiah 40:11 “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” Probably the best chapter for this is Ezekiel 34 where God condemns the leaders of his people who have been no shepherds at all. So, he says “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.” The shepherd who is the king cares for us. This is Jesus. A few verses later in Ezekiel 34 God says “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.” David the King is the type of Jesus the king and he is the shepherd.

This is why we love David’s Psalm 23. Let’s read it. It’s on the screen. Read out loud: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” The lamb at the center of the throne is our shepherd. This is the benefit of his kingship.

Remember, this is us in Revelation 7. This shepherd, we are told, will guide us to springs of living water. Again, this soul provision is a consistent theme of Scripture. The Psalmist says that we will drink from the river of God's delights, for with him is the fountain of life. Jesus promises that "whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water [living water] welling up to eternal life."

Finally, God wipes away the tears from the eyes of the redeemed. This looks forward to Revelation 21. Revelation 7 is like a telescope, giving the redeemed of the church the first glimpse of the blessedness of eternity. Revelation 21 says "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Here in this world, we have all been broken; all of us still walk with a limp. There is still death and mourning and crying and pain. Even Jesus wept. Whether we express it as tears or anger, we know something's wrong. Something's wrong with us: we hurt and we hate, we stumble and fail, we sin and we're selfish – we're broken. And something's wrong with the world. There's something wrong with a world that constantly replays the tragedy of war. There's something wrong with a world where nine-year-olds are shot dead in their classroom. There's something wrong with a world that has cancer in it. There's something wrong with a world that has child abuse in it. There's something wrong with a world in which babies starve and old people die in the streets. There's something wrong in which a good man can be proclaimed a king on Sunday and crucified on Friday. There's something wrong.

But the wrong will not prevail. We have been given this hope. Salvation belongs to our God, and to the Lamb. We have washed our robes and made them white in his blood, shed for us. Therefore, we will be "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 us. ¹⁶Never again will we hunger; never again will we thirst. The sun will not beat upon us, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd; he will lead us to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes." This is true benefit of his kingship. We can worship him on Palm Sunday, we will worship him in the throne room of heaven. But we can never outgive our king.