

# REVELATION – SERMON 37

## *THE MULTITUDE OF MARTYRS*

Revelation 7:9-17

### INTRODUCTION

- The persecution of Christians is increasing
- During the tribulation, the slaughtering of Christians will be commonplace
- The fury of antichrist will be directed against believers in Christ; he will be given power “to make war with the saints, and to overcome them” (Revelation 13:7)
- Yet during that time there will be countless multitudes saved
- Throughout history God has used Satan’s attempts to destroy the saints as the means of increasing their number (Exodus 1:12; Acts 8:1-4)
- Often, where there is great *persecution* against the gospel, there is great *propagation* of the gospel
- The most fertile ground the gospel grows upon is that which is soaked with martyrs blood
- “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertulian, 197 AD)
- This chapter is one of at least three parenthetical interludes in Revelation:
  - ✓ Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seal (7:1-17)

- ✓ Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet (10:1-11:14)
- ✓ Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> vial (16:13-16)
  
- We saw last week the sealing of the 144,000, and noted that this refers to a literal 144,000 from the twelve literal tribes of Israel
  
- While the text does not explicitly state what the role of the 144,000 will be, it is generally understood to be to take the gospel to all the people on earth at that time
  
- The “after this” in v.9 links the 144,000 with the great multitude of converts from all nations, and indicates a causal relationship between them
  
- The 144,000 Israelites are the cause, the great multitude of Gentiles are the effect

## **I. THEIR SANCTIFIED IDENTIFICATION (9,13-14)**

### **A. A great multitude**

1. These are the accumulated martyrs of the great tribulation (v.14)
2. The first of them appear in 6:9-11
3. This group described in chapter 7 encompass the entire tribulation period
4. The indefinite number of this multitude is contrasted with the definite number of Israelites in vv.1-8
5. In the world today, God’s people are a “little flock” (Luke 12:32), but in heaven they will be a countless multitude
6. The revival during the tribulation will be on a scale that this world has never seen

## B. From every nation, kindred, people and tongues

1. The 12 tribes of Israel in vv. 1-8 are contrasted with every tribe (kindred) on earth here
2. This vision sees the fulfilment of Christ's words in Matthew 24:14 accomplished by the 144,000 and the angel of Rev. 14:6
3. The gospel crosses all lines of ethnicity and language
  - a. There is only one race – the human race (Acts 17:26)
  - b. All are the sons of Adam; all are under sin; and Christ died for all (Isaiah 53:6)
4. There is no respect of persons with God (Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:11)
5. The promised blessing upon all families of the earth through Abraham is fulfilled (Genesis 12:3)

## C. They stand before the throne and before the Lamb

1. Some interpret this as Christ's earthly throne, and the multitude as being those who live through the tribulation and enter the kingdom (see Matthew 25:31-46)
2. The throne, however, is the throne in heaven (4:2) and these are the souls of slain martyrs during the tribulation, who will later be resurrected to reign on earth with Christ for 1,000 years (20:4)
3. In contrast with the earlier martyrs, these are not under the altar, but before throne; they are not crying out for vengeance, but crying out in praise

#### D. They are clothed in white robes

1. The familiar description of white garments (Revelation 3:4-5,18; 4:4; 19:14) pictures righteousness (19:8)
2. These white robes “were given unto every one of them” (Revelation 6:11)
3. They “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (14)
  - a. Only blood is capable of cleansing from sin (Hebrews 9:22)
  - b. No other blood, not of animals, nor even their own blood, could take away their sin
  - c. But “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7; cf. Romans 3:25; 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:2,19)

#### E. They hold palms in their hands

1. Palms were used prominently in the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40)
  - a. This feast will be held again during the Millennial Kingdom (Zechariah 14:16)
  - b. It is a celebration of deliverance
2. Palm branches were used to celebrate Christ’s triumphant entry to Jerusalem (John 12:13), and here the saints anticipate his return to earth to establish his kingdom

3. Palm branches represent victory – appropriate emblems of overcomers

F. They came out of great tribulation (14)

1. The phrase in Greek is literally, “the tribulation, the great one.”
2. This clearly distinguishes them from believers our present dispensation
3. John’s failure to recognise them, and their differentiation from the elders, further show that these saints are not part of the church age believers

## II. THEIR SONG OF ADORATION (10-12)

A. The praise of the saints (10)

1. They cry with a loud voice, showing their heartfelt fervour
2. Salvation is the theme of the song
  - a. Salvation belongs to the LORD (Psalm 3:8; 37:39; 68:19-20; Jeremiah 3:23; Jonah 2:9)
  - b. As with the palm branches, there are echoes of Christ’s Triumphant Entry and the cries of “Hosanna” (Matthew 21:9)
  - c. There is no self-praise or boasting on their part – all glory for salvation is given to God (Psalm 115:1; Galatians 6:14)
4. Both God the Father and God the Son are worshipped and ascribed salvation

- a. Beside Jehovah, there is no saviour (Isaiah 43:11)
  - b. This is a demonstration of Christ's equality with the Father (John 5:23)
  - c. The name "Jesus" means "Jehovah is salvation" (Matthew 1:21)
- B. The response of the angels (11-12)
1. At the cry of praise from the saints, the angelic host fall on their faces in like worship
  2. This sevenfold doxology is almost identical with that of 5:12, except *thanksgiving* replaces *riches*
  3. As with 5:12-13, there is an article with each of these seven attributes of God – "the blessing, the glory, etc"
  4. The angels begin and end their doxology with "amen" – so be it
  5. Both the saints and angels address God as "our God"

### **III. THEIR SERVICE OF DELECTATION (15-17)**

- A. Eternal union with God
1. "Therefore" – as a consequence of their being washed in the Lamb's blood, they enjoy the presence of God
  2. The theme of the Scripture is God's plan of redemption to reconcile sinful man back to himself
  3. The conclusion of this plan is "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be

his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” (Revelation 21:3)

4. The *throne* is a metonymy for God the Father and his reign

#### B. The privilege of service in his temple

1. This is the millennial temple (Ezekiel 40-42)
2. The Levitical order being done away with, Gentiles will be permitted to minister in the future temple

#### C. God’s dwelling and nurturing of them

1. “Dwell among them” (13) denotes the spreading of a tabernacle over them
2. Their sufferings and privations will be forever over
3. Hunger (6:5-6), thirst (8:10-11), and heat (16:8-9) are part of the tribulation judgments that will take place upon the earth
4. As a Shepherd, Christ will lead and feed them (Psalm 23:1-2)
5. He gives the living water (John 4:10-11; Revelation 22:17)
6. God will wipe away all tears (Revelation 21:4)

## CONCLUSION

1. The wicked ask the question, “Who shall be able to stand?” (6:17)

2. These saints stand before the throne (7:9) only because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:14)
3. Have you been justified from your sins by repenting and placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone?
4. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord (14:13)
5. Not all the dead are blessed, but only those who *die in the Lord*
6. The great cloud of witnesses of those faithful saints who have gone before us and now enjoy the presence of God, should provoke us to also run the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1)
7. The only true and lasting joy comes from the presence of God (Psalm 16:11)
8. The chief desire of the godly is to behold the Lord and dwell in his presence (Psalm 27:4)
9. Is this your chief desire?