

Christmas in Revelation: Salvation Belongs to the Lamb

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[0 : 00] It's so great to be with you guys for Christmas Eve. A lot of people are traveling in our church because we have a very young church.

I think maybe 10 years or so, more people will be traveling back here because you guys will have maybe families and roots here.

But for now, a lot of people travel for Christmas. Today is the last day of Advent, and tomorrow is Christmas, as you know. And Advent means arrival or coming.

It's a season in the church's calendar where we remember the first coming of Jesus to redeem his people and also anticipate the second coming of Jesus to consummate the kingdom of God and bring his final judgment.

So it's appropriate that we're in Revelation 7 this morning. We've been in the book of Revelation for the last couple months, and this passage looks back at the redemption of Christ that accomplishes the first coming, but also looks ahead to the final judgment and the vindication of God's people.

[1 : 08] So if you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Revelation 7. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to give you a copy that you could have and you could use while you're here. We pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.

Father, it's a privilege once again to stand in your presence, to be able to worship you as members of a local church together, but also as members of the numberless strong throughout the ages and all over the world who belong to you and worship you.

Impress upon us this morning that great privilege and remind us again of the great love that you showed us in sending Jesus to die as the sacrificial lamb so that we might be washed clean by his blood.

build us up as your people, as your body, as your church, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's word from Revelation 7. After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

[3 : 18] Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun with the seal of the living God. And he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel. 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed.

12,000 from the tribe of Reuben. 12,000 from the tribe of Gad. 12,000 from the tribe of Asher.

12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali. 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh.

12,000 from the tribe of Simeon. 12,000 from the tribe of Levi. 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar.

12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun. 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph.

12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. 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.

[4 : 29] Clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And 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 worshipped God, saying, Amen.

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these?

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. 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.

[5 : 33] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for 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. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

You may be seated. Last week, Revelation 6 ended with John's prophetic vision of God's end time judgment, and that which began, inhabitants of the earth, both the great and the small, the kings and the rulers, all of them hiding from the Lord and His judgment, because the great day of the wrath has come, of His wrath has come.

And they asked this haunting question at the end of that chapter. Who can stand? In the face of the wrath of God, who can stand? When the holy, holy, holy God brings His judgment to bear upon a sinful world, who can stand?

And that's a question that reverberates throughout the Old Testament. Psalm 130, verse 3 asks, If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities. O Lord, who could stand?

[6 : 56] Nahum chapter 1, verse 6 says, Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the heat of His anger? Sometimes people think that the second coming of Jesus will be similar to the Santa Claus coming to town.

He's making a list and checking it twice. Gotta find out who's naughty and nice. The nice ones will get prizes, and the naughty ones will get none.

The difference is that while it's possible to be nice enough to meet Santa's fictional standards, it is not possible to meet God's real, perfect standards.

No creature, it says in Hebrews 4.13, is hidden from God's sight. But all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

How would you like being utterly naked and exposed before the all-seeing eyes of God? It's a terrifying prospect.

[8 : 03] The things that you browse on the internet with the incognito window. The things that you mutter under your breath when no one is listening.

The things that you do in secret when no one else is watching. Even the hidden thoughts of your mind. They're all out in the open to the all-seeing eyes of God.

That's why the psalmist despairs in Psalm 130, verse 3. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who can stand?

No one can stand. But thankfully, it's followed by verse 4, which says, But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.

If God should mark our iniquities, none of us could stand in the presence of God. But it's because there is forgiveness in God through Jesus Christ that we can have hope.

[9 : 07] That's the main point of this chapter in Revelation 7. It answers that question posed at the end of Revelation 6. Who can stand? And it answers that by saying that we can stand before the throne of God and before the Lamb because we have been sealed by God and because we have washed our robes in the blood of the Lamb.

This passage describes the people of God in glorious terms. First, it tells us that we are sealed in verses 1 to 8 and that we are standing before God's presence in verses 9 to 14. And finally, that we are sheltered and shepherded by God himself in verses 15 to 17.

We'll look at those things in turn. First, the people of God are those who are sealed. John begins in verse 1. After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

So when you see words like after this in Revelation, you shouldn't think time and like chronological sequence. Rather, you should just think of it as different scenes and different visions like you would see in a movie or in a book that you're reading, which can jump from different time and place to give you different angles or perspectives on what's happening.

And so this is not chronologically after what happened in chapter 6. There's a repetition of the number 4, and the numbers are very significant in this book because they have symbolic import. [10:38] And the number 4 consistently represents universality. And so four corners then are referenced to the entire earth. It encompasses the north, the south, and the east, and the west.

All four directions of the compass. And then the four angels then standing at the four corners of the earth are those who have rule and superintendence over the earth. And they are holding back the four winds of the earth so that they don't blow against and harm the earth or the sea or the trees until the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads.

Later in Revelation chapter 8, we'll see the first two trumpets blown of judgments, God's judgments, and they will affect precisely those things, the earth, the trees, and the seas.

And so this angel is saying you need to hold back until the people of God have been sealed. And that means the sealing here takes place before the judgments of God.

And that means this sealing also takes place before the judgments we read about in chapter 6 because these judgments are cyclical and not sequential.

[11:50] The four angels who have control over the four winds of the earth likely parallel the four horsemen of divine judgment we saw in chapter 6. The four horsemen in Revelation 6 represent conquest, war, famine, and death.

And they're patterned after the four horsemen of the apocalypse we see in Zechariah 6, 1 to 8. And interestingly enough, in that original context in Zechariah 6, the four horsemen are described as going out to the four winds of heaven.

So four horsemen and four winds mentioned here in this chapter, so they're parallel. So likely the four angels here are parallel to the four horsemen we saw in chapter 6. But before that, those judgments are unleashed.

The servants of God are sealed on their foreheads with the seal of the living God. What is this seal? A seal serves two primary purposes.

One is identity, and two is security. It serves to identify something as one's own, to indicate possession and ownership. When a king takes a document and then impresses his seal upon it, it becomes a royal decree that carries his authority wherever it goes.

[13:04] It belongs to him. When we put our own signatures on a check or a contract, we're taking ownership of that and saying, that belongs to me. I stand by this.

A seal also serves to secure something, to close it off, like when we seal an envelope so that its contents do not fall out, or when the bank seals off a vault to keep it safe from robbers.

So the seal of the living God in this passage serves both of these functions. The idea of the seal on the forehead comes from Ezekiel 9, where God commands an angel to put a mark on the foreheads of people who have not participated in the idolatry of the Israelites.

And so they are sealed as God's own, and they are protected when the angel of judgment passes through and strikes down the idolatrous people. This is in Ezekiel 9. And Ezekiel 9 passage, in turn, is alluding back to Exodus 12, during the Passover, when God's people are marked or sealed on their doorposts with the blood of the lamb, and the angel of death, again, passes over them, and instead goes and strikes down the idolatrous Egyptians.

We're given more details about this seal later on in chapter 14, verse 1, and chapter 22, verse 4, where we're told that the 144,000 had the lamb's name and his father's name written on their foreheads.

[14:33] So God is putting his name upon his people, indicating ownership and possession, as it was a common practice back in the day in the ancient world for slaves to be marked on their foreheads to indicate to whom they belong.

And so this is confirmed by the fact that these people, the 144,000 are called the servants of God in verse 3. So there's, as God's servants, they're being marked out on their foreheads as belonging to him with the name of God and the name of the lamb.

They're the ones who have been purchased or redeemed by God. This is later imitated by Satan and his beast. In Revelation 13, 17, the beast also puts his own mark on his followers, the idolaters. And that mark is called the name of the beast or the number of its name. And so it's a counterfeit seal that the devil uses.

So everyone who belongs to Jesus, the lamb of God, has his name on his forehead, and everyone else has the name of the beast on their forehead. There is no middle ground. There's no one in

Revelation that has no seal of any kind on their foreheads.

[15:47] As Jesus said in Matthew 12, 30, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. If you abstain from making a decision, if you withhold judgment, that means you are not following Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

And that is a decision you have made and a choice that you have made. And there is no neutral ground in this cosmic battle between the lamb and the dragon. Whose side are you on?

If you have repented of your sins and trust in Jesus for salvation, if you have pledged your allegiance to Jesus, then you have been sealed with the name of God on your forehead. It's not a literal mark.

As you can see, I don't have a mark on my forehead. Neither do you. And Christians don't have physical marks. Rather, this is a spiritual seal. And other parts of scripture confirm that.

Ephesians 1, 13 to 14 says this, when we heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, and believed in Jesus, we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems his possession.

[17:03] The Holy Spirit is the seal of God upon our souls that bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God, that we belong to him. I like to tell the story when I speak of this.

In Toy Story 3, when 17-year-old Andy is about to leave for college, he puts his toys in a trash bag in hopes that he will, he's planning to bring it up to the attic so that he can keep it in storage and get back to it until it finds a better home or whatnot.

But because it's in a trash bag, his mom thinks that it's trash that he forgot to take out, and so she grabs it and then throws it out and puts it in a garbage pickup truck.

And the toys are dejected because they think that Andy threw them out. They're like, Andy doesn't want us anymore. He's too old.

And so they escape, seeking, trying to find a new home where they can be loved by other children.

And they don't know that they weren't meant to be thrown out, and only toy that knows this is Woody, who was left out of the trash bag, and Woody saw everything that happened.

[18:17] And so Woody tracks these toys down, and these toys are despondent. They don't want to go back to Andy. They're like, Andy doesn't want us. And at that point, Woody tells them, hey, look under your bus.

Look, Jesse, you too. Whose name is written there? He's trying to remind the other toys.

You're not a castaway toy. You're not a piece of trash. You have an owner who cherishes you and loves you and owns you and wants you.

We have to go back to him. That's what the Holy Spirit does for us. When we believe in the goodness of Jesus Christ, God seals us with his spirit, and his spirit declares to our spirit, mine, my child, my son, and my daughter.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, and you are mine. Fear not, for I am with you, everyone who is called by my name.

[19:29] And that seal of God is unbreakable. It's unerasable. It's uncancellable. That's why the Holy Spirit is called our guarantee.

That's in the passage I cited earlier, Ephesians 1. That word guarantee literally means down payment.

It refers to a deposit that you make, a down payment that you pay to get legal claim over something, and to guarantee that the rest of the payment is coming. So the fact that we have the Holy Spirit now guarantees that the rest of our heavenly inheritance is surely coming.

Amen. In this way, the Holy Spirit not only identifies us as God's own, he also secures us with himself as a divine seal.

But in the same way that the seal is not a physical seal, but a spiritual seal, the protection, the security that the seal brings is not a physical one, but a spiritual one.

[20:34] We know this because in Revelation 6, we saw that many Christians are ordained to be killed on earth by the enemies of God to die as martyrs.

We know this because later in Revelation 13, 7, Satan's beast is allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.

That means Christians die while we bear witness to Jesus. That means Christians get killed because we say, no, I will not take on the mark of the beast because I am sealed with the mark of the living God.

So we are not given physical protection, but he does promise here invincible spiritual protection. That God will, by his power, protect and preserve us in saving faith until the end.

This is a very important doctrine that I think many of us need to be reminded of. The scripture does teach, on the one hand, the perseverance of the saints, which is an important and biblical doctrine that emphasizes the need for God's people to persevere and endure in faith and obedience till the end.

[21 : 43] All those of us who truly belong to God will persevere till the end, but it requires hard work and requires effort. And we're reminded over and over again throughout Revelation 2 and 3 that we have to conquer by faithfully following Jesus and living in patient endurance and through suffering and tribulations, and then we must hold fast to Christ's name and not deny him his faith.

And we have to be faithful even unto death. Yes, we have to persevere on the one hand. But on the other hand, scripture also teaches us of the preservation of the saints, which emphasizes that God will preserve his own people with his power until the end.

In Romans 8, 29 to 30, we see a glorious chain of salvation. Those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

You know that he might be the firstborn, he might be firstborn among the many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified.

From electing for knowledge to predestination, from predestination to effectual calling, from calling to justification, and justification to glorification, there is no broken link in that glorious chain of God's salvation.

[23 : 09] Salvation belongs to the Lord from the beginning to the end. Jesus says of all those whom he saves in John 6, 37 to 39, all that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me, and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing, no one of all that he has given me, but raise them up on the last day.

Note the unbroken sequence of events once again. God the Father gives to the Son, and all that God the Father gives to the Son come to the Son without fail, and all those who come to the Son without fail will be preserved without fail till the resurrection, because Jesus loses none, nothing of those who have been given to him.

That's why he says in John 10, 28, I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Who dares, who dares to try to pry open the mighty hand of the conquering line of Judah, in which the saints of God securely rest?

[24 : 41] The New Testament epistles are filled with assurances like this, that God will sustain us till the end. He will keep us till the end. He will guard us through faith until the end.

He will keep us from the tribulation that we face in this world. I'm going to have to digress for a little bit, and this part might be a little bit harder to follow, so I ask you to focus with me, because it's just in the text, I have to explain it, because I've been taking for granted up to this point that the 144,000 represent all of God's people, but that's a debated point, so I'm going to prove that to you over the next few minutes.

So for example, Jehovah's Witnesses say that there's a literal 144,000 of special anointed class of believers who will reign with Christ in his heavenly kingdom, while the rest of the believers will just get to be a part of the restored paradise on earth.

Mormons contend that the 144,000 sealed believers refer only to the Mormon high priests, and not to all believers, but all of these misrepresent the truth, and these are one of the many reasons why they're not considered to be in the mainstream of Christianity, that are considered cults or outliers. It's because all of these misrepresent the truth. The 144,000 are not some special class of elite Christians. How do we know this? They're called servants of God, in verse three.

[26 : 13] That expression occurs many times throughout the book of Revelation, and it never exclusively refers to an elite group of Christians. Rather, it says in Revelation 11, 18, and 19, 5, it defines the servants of God as all those who fear God's name, both small and great.

So it's not an elite group of people. It includes the small and great. And some Christians also argue that 144,000 represent either a literal or figurative number of ethnic Jews who are a physical

descendants of Jacob.

They think this because it says in verse four that the 144,000 are sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel, which is a reasonable inference. But I still don't think it's a reference to ethnic Jews or to the nation of Israel for several reasons.

Reason number one is that already twice in this book, in chapter two, verse nine, in chapter three, verse seven, Jesus has denounced those who say that they are Jews, but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

So we have been told in Revelation that it's not Jews who are ethnically Jews who are true Jews, but those who have faith in Jesus who are the true Jews. As Paul says in Romans 2, 27, 28, no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit and not by the letter.

[27 : 41] That's why throughout the New Testament, James 1, 1, Galatians 6, 16, the Christians, all Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are called the new Israel of God. Reason number two is that the tribal list here in verses five to eight is not a typical list that you expect of the 12 tribes of Israel.

One odd thing is that the tribe of Judah is listed first, and usually if you look at the genealogical lists of the sons of Israel, Judah is not listed first for the simple reason that Judah was not the firstborn. But here, Judah is placed at the head because from Judah came, the tribe of Judah came, the lion of Judah, lion from the tribe of Judah, the conquering lion, Jesus Christ, who is the messianic king. And moreover, if it's meant to represent ethnic Israel, it's curious that it omits tribes of Dan and Ephraim, which is usually not the case in these lists. Usually in the lists of the tribes, 12 tribes, Levi and Joseph are the two tribes that are omitted.

Levi is omitted because that's the priestly tribe, and they don't get an inheritance along with the other tribes of Israel because their inheritance is God himself. And Joseph is omitted because at the end of his life, Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own sons in Genesis 48, verse five.

[29 : 02] And so Joseph gets taken out and those Joseph's two sons get added is usually how the list is comprised. But this list instead includes Manasseh and includes Joseph and includes Levi, but it omits Dan and Ephraim.

And that's once again for spiritual reasons. In Judges 18 and 1 Kings 12, we see that the tribe of Dan becomes the center of idol worship among the Israelites.

And then in Hosea 4.17 and Hosea 5.9, God says that Ephraim is joined to idols and that for that reason, Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment.

And so in light of the recurring polemic against idolatry throughout Revelation, this list is not making a physical point, a genealogical point. It's making a spiritual and theological point that this is the purified group of all of God's people, the new Israel, the true worshipers of God.

And the final reason why I think this is referring to all of God's people is that we see a surprising juxtaposition between the depiction of Jesus as a lion of the tribe of Judah and the slain lamb of God we saw in chapter 5, 5 to 6, right?

[30 : 18] It said, John heard that there's a lion of the tribe of Judah who has conquered, but then when he turned to look and behold this lion that he has heard about, he saw the slain lamb of God.

So John uses this pattern where what John hears is then interpreted and its understanding of what he heard is deepened by the vision that he sees subsequently.

And so that surprising juxtaposition is here replicated almost exactly because John heard in verse 4 to 5 the number of the seal, 144,000 seal from every tribe of the sons of Israel starting with the 12,000 from the tribe of Judah like the lion of Judah that he heard.

But then he looks and beholds in a vision that the 144,000, this is actually a great multitude that no one could number from every nation and from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the lamb.

So what he hears is the 12 tribes of Israel. What he sees is the innumerable throng from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues. And so again, it's what he hears is interpreted by what he sees.

[31 : 29] So then the 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel is a symbolic representation of all of God's people from all nations, Jews and Gentiles throughout all human history.

The number itself is symbolic. The number 12 often represents in the Bible the people of God because of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Christ who are the foundation of the church.

Number 1,000 is a figurative number that represents a multitude. So when you multiply 12 by 1,000 you get 12,000 and that's the number of each of the sealed people from each tribe.

And when you add that up you get 144,000. Likewise, in Revelation 21 we see the New Jerusalem which is a reference to the church, the bride of the Lamb. and that New Jerusalem has 12 gates which have the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on them and then its foundation has the names of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ inscribed on them.

And so then you multiply 12 times 12 and get 144. You guys all know this. And you get 1,000. Multiply it by 1,000 you get this number.

[32 : 40] So while the number is symbolic, the specific number still shows us that all of God's sealed people are numbered. As we saw in Revelation 6, God has a specific number of people who will bear witness to the name of Jesus and will be martyred.

And until that number is completed and filled, the full final judgment and vindication of God's people will not come. And so God has a number and this should encourage us not only that we are numbered among them but also to go and find the rest of the number among all the nations because there's some people from every tribe and every nation that will come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

It's kind of like, I know it's Christmas, not Easter, but imagine an Easter egg hunt and I usually hide the eggs, let's say for my kids and the kids come back, hey, are there any eggs left?

And if I know exactly how many eggs I hid, then I can tell them, yeah, keep looking because there's still eggs left. If they don't know, then they'll stop, they'll get discouraged, oh, maybe there's nothing left, right?

In the same way, when God tells us that there's a number, 144,000, a numberless multitude among all tribes and peoples and nations and tongues who are to come to know Jesus and be saved, that should propel us to go, say, because we have faith and confidence that by God's will, they will come to know Jesus.

[34 : 13] So the saints of God are sealed, but we also see in verses 9 to 14 that they are standing and that's significant because of what I mentioned at the beginning of the message, the chapter 6 ended with that despairing question, who can stand?

And here's the answer, 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.

Once the last of those who have been sealed come through the great tribulation, they will be this innumerable multitude, which is a fulfillment of the promise that God had given to Abraham to multiply his offspring and through his offspring all nations will be blessed and that's happened through Jesus, the promised messianic offspring from Abraham.

This great multitude from every nation is standing before the throne and before the Lamb and that parallels the description of the slain Lamb of God who was described as standing in chapter 5, verse 6.

So in the same way that Jesus, the Lamb of God, conquers sin by being slain for our sins on the cross and then being raised from the dead. His people follow in His footsteps and they bear suffering witness to Jesus and are faithful even unto death and it's through that they conquer and come out through the great tribulation and can stand before the presence of God.

[35 : 52] All of Christian life is full of tribulation and affliction and we see that all throughout the Bible. However, the expression great tribulation occurs only here in Revelation in the New Testament and in Matthew 24, 21 which also speaks of the end times, the final end.

And so we are, while we are all in the midst of tribulation as Christians, there will be an intensified, severe tribulation that the Bible calls the great tribulation near the end of human history and that's an allusion to Daniel 12, verse 1.

There shall be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered. Everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

Even through that great tribulation, those who have the seal of the living God upon their foreheads will be delivered. Those are the ones who conquer by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their

testimony.

So this is the answer to that question. Who can stand? They can stand. And that's why they're clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands.

[37 : 03] Palm branches are a symbol of victory. But even more significantly for this context, in Leviticus 23, 40, God commanded Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tents known by many names with palm branches.

They were to collect palm branches and use it to build these makeshift tents and dwell in them for like six, seven days to commemorate this time that they were in the wilderness where they dwelled in tents as they were journeying to the promised land and they dwelled in tents and God himself dwelled in a tent called the Tabernacle and dwelled among them, among his people.

So it's celebrating that and palm branches are reminiscent of that. And this multitude now gets not merely a temporary dwelling with God, they get a permanent and eternal dwelling with God.

And how did that come about? Where did this multitude get their white robes of purity and righteousness? How were they made worthy to stand before the throne of God?

God, verse 14, tells us, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is the only way to get our robes clean, made white.

[38 : 26] Isaiah 64, 6 accurately describes the condition of all sinners apart from Christ. It says that we have all become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

This is not talking about the righteous deeds of the saints, righteous deeds of those who have given their lives to Christ. It's talking about the so-called righteous deeds or the grandstanding and the virtue signaling of people who have rejected Christ as their Savior.

Isaiah says even their righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. This is why sinners cannot save themselves. They can never hope to make their robes white by their own good deeds.

I once saw a moving photograph of women in India washing clothes manually in the polluted water of the Yamuna River.

That water is brown in the picture. It's brown and it's murky because it's wastewater. Urine and feces invested water from the city of Delhi.

[39 : 41] The wastewater from the city of Delhi gets directly deposited into the Yamuna. And not only that, in the picture you see the water is covered with floating trash all over.

This whole surface is covered. And yet, there are these women who have their washing boards and they're washing their clothes in that filthy river because they don't have any place else to wash them.

Can you imagine the stench, the stains on those clothes as you're trying to wash it clean? That is the sad spiritual reality of all sinners who seek to justify themselves before God.

trying to cleanse ourselves, wash ourselves but our robes are filthy, polluted garments. You can't ever get that thing clean.

That's why God had to send his only son. And that's what Christmas is all about. John 1.14 says that Jesus, the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.

[40 : 55] Translated more literally, that word dwelt means he pitched a tent among us. He pitched a tabernacle. He tabernacled among us. Remember I mentioned the palm branches are connected to the feast of tabernacles because God knew that sinners like us could never on our own make our way to God and stand with our heads held high before the throne of God because he knew we could never do that.

God sent his only son down to us to pitch his tent among us. The infinite son of God confined in space-time.

The one by whom the whole world was created becoming one of the creatures. The author of history enters the book of history.

The king and ruler takes the form of a servant and he comes not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus died on the cross where we should have died in our place as a substitutionary lamb. As we are told in Revelation 1-5 Jesus loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

[42 : 28] We can never make our robes white by doing our best to do good deeds and be good people. It's never enough but the blood of Jesus God's son cleanses us from all sin.

This is why the multitude cry out with a loud voice in verse 10 salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb and then in verses 11-12 the angels who are standing around the

throne join in their chorus they fall on their faces before the throne and worship God and then they say amen blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever amen that's an expression of affirmation and acclamation indeed it is so yes it is true salvation belongs to our God amen blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God amen all of heaven sings worship our God is so unlike the so called gods of paganism who quarantined the rabble far away from their lofty dwelling up in the mountain

Jesus has been among us as one of us so that he sympathizes with us with our weaknesses with our failures with our frailties with our tribulations because Jesus pitched his tent among us and died for us and that's why he's the only one who can bring us to God's heavenly temple and so we see in verses 15 to 17 our ultimate reward we're being sheltered and shepherded by God it says in verse 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 it's because our robes have been washed white in the blood of the lamb that we can now stand before the throne of God and serve him in his temple but this is no literal temple because we are told later in Revelation 21-22 that the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the lamb so this image of us serving God as priests in his temple is actually a picture of our ultimate dwelling with God and our intimate union with God so it says that he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence and that word shelter is just a different translation of the same Greek word that was used in John 1-14 to say that Jesus pitched his tent among us he tabernacled among us

Jesus pitched his tent among us and died for us and was raised from the dead so that God will ultimately forevermore pitch his tent over us with his very presence I look forward to that we're not going to be aliens forever living in this world whose values and priorities we don't recognize having to tolerate a world where Christ is not honored not worshipped we will not always live as aliens one day we'll be in our father's country and we'll be citizens we're not always going to be pilgrims we're pilgrims now we're journeying through the wilderness in temporary dwelling places longing for our home but one day we will be home

God is our home his shelter over us his presence our temple and we'll also be shepherded by our Lord Jesus Christ the slain Lamb of God who is also the good shepherd it says in verse 16 to 17 they shall hunger no more neither thirst anymore the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd he will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes it's a fulfillment of Isaiah 49 9 to 10 Isaiah 25 8 have you known hunger in this life have you known thirst in this life have you been beat down by the scorching heat of life have you known tears have you known loss have you known suffering have you known persecution all of these things will be no more

[47 : 48] Jesus our shepherd will take us to green pastures make us lie down beside still waters he will wipe away our tears with his own hands and death shall be no more neither shall that be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away Lord Heavenly Father we long for that day help us not to lose sight of our home your shelter

Father our good shepherd who awaits us in our eternal dwellings help us not to lose sight of that Father so that every day we live here and every day we have tribulation in this sinful world that we that we would always have hope thank you for that hope Lord in Jesus name we pray Amen