

Revelation 7:9-17 *After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" ¹³Then 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. ¹⁵Therefore, "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. ¹⁶'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on 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.'*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

"It will be all right." How many moms have comforted their children with these words or words very similar? Everything is going to be just fine. It will all work ok. It will be all right. We stop today to honor our moms who were so comforting and assuring during those challenging and painful times we experienced as children. Mom was always right there to run to during those troubled times. She would gently wipe away the tears as they streamed down our faces, wrap her arms around us to draw us tight and give us that comforting assurance: It will be all right. Even when mom didn't know what the future held or didn't know if everything was going to be all right, she still offered that calm assurance knowing that if she freaked out we would freak out too. Hearing those words spoken with assurance and conviction, most young children are satisfied and content. They trust mom. They can calm down and be at peace confident that mom will see to it that everything will be all right.

Let's admit it: it's not just young children who need to hear that everything is going to be all right. Sometimes, we adults need to hear that too. When faced with troubles, challenges, sufferings and seemingly insurmountable odds, from time to time we need that reassurance that everything will be all right. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, our Good Shepherd does just that. He reaches out from heaven to the believers still in the great tribulation of the church militant with these comforting and assuring words: ***It will be all right!*** Only he speaks those words not just to comfort us, but with a full knowledge of what the future holds. He speaks these words not as a mom who hopes everything will be all right but isn't quite sure what the future holds. Our Good Shepherd speaks these words to you and me today with a full knowledge of what the future holds and the absolute certainty of what is going to happen. He knows without a doubt that everything will be all right. Through a vision granted to the Apostle John, our Good Shepherd grants us a glimpse into heaven to know what awaits in our future. He assures us that no matter what happens here on this earth, in the end for his people everything will be all right.

John was writing to seven different churches in the region of Asia Minor, which is in modern day Turkey. They were all facing severe challenges to their faith and because of their faith. They knew all the other apostles had been martyred for their faith. They knew John was living in exile on the island of Patmos because of his faith. They knew they faced similar threats. They were plagued with intolerant false teachers who were advocating a false ecumenism. They faced wicked and morally evil people who were attempting to lead them astray from their faith with false teachings. Some were enduring the physical afflictions and poverty caused by the Romans imprisoning them and confiscating their property for refusing to worship the emperor. Others had to persevere through religious persecution which included economic discrimination. They were slandered by evil people and tested by the devil himself. They faced vicious attacks from neighbors and fellow townspeople and some were even martyred for their faith. They were hurting. They had endured and persevered through these challenging times but were becoming weary and burdened. No doubt on more than one occasion they had thought about giving up and giving in. No doubt in their weariness the devil had been whispering in their ear: "Is it really worth it? If God loved you the way he says he does, would he really allow you to face all this suffering? Is he really here to help you? Does he really care?"

What comfort John's message would have been to these Christians! With a motherly touch, our Good Shepherd through John was telling these Christians, "It will be all right!" What John saw in his vision into heaven is the church triumphant, those Christians who have ended their earthly lives and are already in heaven from every nation, tribe, people and language. What a sight it is! These Christians are worshipping God and singing praises to God for the salvation which he so freely and graciously granted to them through Jesus. Then as he looked, he saw the angels also around the throne who gave a hearty, "Amen!" to the song of praise which came from the saints and added a song of praise of their own, "*Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever!*" What a joyous celebration! It was the victors singing the victory song in praise of the salvation granted to them by God. They had endured and persevered and overcome and were now enjoying the reward.

John saw something else. It was the constant trickle of people joining the group to sing praise to God. One of the elders asked him, "Do you know who these people are?" To which John essentially replied, "You know, please tell me." The elder replied, "These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb." The tense of the verb there gives us a picture of the continuing trickle of people who have believed in Jesus

during their lives on this earth who have just died and are entering into the eternal glory of heaven. What a transition this was for these people: from the tribulation and suffering of this world to the bliss of eternity! God never promised his people they would be exempt from suffering and trouble here on this earth. To the contrary. He promised the opposite. He promised on this earth they would have trouble. They should expect it. Being his people doesn't make them exempt from facing trouble, even severe challenges and tragedies. While he did promise they would have trouble here, he also promised one day it would end. That's what allows the believer to face the trials and troubles of life with the confidence that it is all going to be all right. One day those troubles are going to end. The believer will leave the great tribulation of this world and enter into the perfection of heaven. Here in our text, John is able to see and record for us the fulfillment of this promise as the suffering for believers ends and the uninterrupted and the perfect joy and peace of eternity begins.

Oh what a sight! Oh, what God's people have to look forward to! The picture I have in my head is like that of the end of a marathon. You see runner's coming in exhausted, barely able to walk much less run, some with tears streaming down their face from the pain they were experiencing and that they made it through the pain and suffering and the race is finally over. That's the same picture I have of God's people leaving earth and entering into the joy of heaven. Some are bruised and bloody. Some are filthy and exhausted. Some have tears streaming down their faces from the suffering they had to endure. But now it's over! Everything is all right! The promises are true and the joy is eternal. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. That is, they know and trust in the forgiveness God offers them in Jesus and trust that he paid the price for their sins. What they will enjoy for all eternity is beyond measure. John's vision shows us that heaven is the complete release from all evil and wickedness. God's people will be in his presence forever. Their bliss will not be interrupted or come to an end. It will be perfect fullness of joy forever. God will shelter them and watch over them. Never again will they be hungry or thirsty or experience the pain of lacking anything. They won't have to worry about the burning heat of the sun nor will it bring them any discomfort and pain. The Lamb who sacrificed himself on the cross of Calvary will serve as the Shepherd who will lead them to the living water they will drink for eternity. All the consequences and effects of sin will be wiped away. Like a mother tending to a little child, the heavenly Father will be right there to wipe the tears away from their eyes with the comforting assurance: It'll be all right! Those tears will be gone forever. In fact, it will be more than all right. It will be perfect. For eternity. What comfort this must have brought to those seven churches to whom John was writing. God hadn't forgotten them. It was worth standing firm. Heaven was waiting. It will be all right.

I don't have to tell you about the challenges you are facing today. You know all too well the turmoil, challenges and troubles that you face continually day after day. From the stress of trying to meet all the responsibilities that confront you to the expectations other have of you. From the physical afflictions which might be plaguing you to the emotional stress of having to care for loved ones who are facing their own problems. You know the temptations and desires which war against your soul. You know the guilt and shame from giving in to those temptations and sinning against God. Add to these things the persecution and pressure from those around you to give up the strong stand which you take upon the firmly grounded Word of God to embrace the empty and hollow philosophies and ideas of this world around us. You know about the warfare your soul is undergoing while you live here on this earth as part of the church militant. You know all about the weariness, battle fatigue and spiritual PTSD that burdens you. It can be a tough fight. You can be at the point of wanting to give in and give up. Maybe you've even entertained those thoughts. Maybe you're here today because mom dragged you to go with her because you have already given up.

Today, your Good Shepherd comes to you with all of his love and compassion, wraps you tightly in his arms and like a mother who comforts her young child confidently assures you: "It's going to be all right! Look what I did for you as the Lamb...and look what I have waiting for you as my child." This Good Shepherd who promises today that everything is going to be all right is the same one who made sure it will be all right. His compassion led him to look down from heaven to see that there is nothing you or I could do to make ourselves right with God. His love for you is so deep he willingly gave up the glory of heaven to live in your shoes. He kept the law perfectly and willingly allowed God to treat him as a sinner and completely forsake him as he suffered the punishment of hell for your sins and mine. Now he gives to us the free gift of forgiveness for our sins and the certainty of eternal life. What peace and encouragement is ours to know that no matter what we face here, in the end it will be all right because these pains and sufferings will come to an end. One day we will that next person trickling into heaven, joining the saints and angels around the throne of God to sing his praise forever.

Until then, we can face the challenges and trials in this world with our faith focused firmly on the eternity that awaits. Just like a mother's goal is to help her children grow in their maturity, our Good Shepherd wants the same thing for us as his people. He wants to grow in our faith and in our maturity as his followers. God offers this picture of the heaven that awaits us to strengthen our faith so that we can walk as mature believers confident that "it'll be all right" no matter what it is that we face. To walk in faith simply means to live as if God is who he says he is and confident that he will do everything he has promised to do. Growing in faith and spiritual maturity means growing in your confidence and trust that God will see you through the tough times and that no matter what you face you are certain that everything will be all right. We would love for God to simply say, "Yes," to our prayers and take all of our pain and troubles away. We know that won't happen here on this earth. The sign of a mature faith is someone who can take a "No" from God with the confident trust that it will still be all right. May God help us to grow in our faith so that we trust our Good Shepherd at all times. Be confident in your faith. Stand firm during the trials and troubles that you face. No matter what it is, your Good Shepherd assures you: **It will be all right.** Amen.