**Revelation 7:2-17 (ESV)**

**2** 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, **3** saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” **4** And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: **5** 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, **6** 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, **7** 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, **8** 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. **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, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” **11** 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 worshiped God, **12**  saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” **13** Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” **14** I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And 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. **16**  They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. **17** 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.”

**“A Future Not So Far Away”**

 To all those loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The science fiction book “War of the Worlds” was one of the first of its kind. Written in 1898, H. G. Wells illustrated what would happen if Martians invaded Earth. Few realized the impact of what it would mean to mix science and fiction together. Everything changed on 1938 when a dramatized version of “War of the Worlds” aired on the radio. People panicked and were in fear thinking the broadcast to be real. Technology showed its power to influence that day and has been doing it ever since.

 Unlike science fiction and the tools of man, St. John held nothing back when revealing what he saw from God. The last book of the New Testament ends with quite the scene. Revelation depicts hardship all over the world. There is much wickedness from men, strife caused by the Devil, and even the fact of disheartened Christians. If the day of Christmas and Easter brings families together each year. All Saints Day is to lift up the heart of God’s family, His saints. It is to celebrate the suffering Church below with the glorified Church above. St. John amidst the disasters of Revelation stops to show us a better picture. There is a great multitude before the throne of God. Our heavenly home is a comfort even if we must walk through the turmoil of the times. The Saints reach their goal because of Christ.

 People identify with titles in life. The most basic is husband and wife, father and mother, grandma and grandpa. There are plenty of designations for differing ranks in the military. Those who work hard in a field of study might have something like “Dr.” in front of their name. Those who care for the precious sheep of Christ typically are called “pastor.” Titles help to make distinctions in life. Of course, a lot of confusion exists today because many do not like using titles. Parents might have their kids call them by their first name. A person might treat the name of another as mere formality. If you think about it, without titles the military would just be a well-armed mob. Titles can be abused, but they are by far a benefit for us in life. The same is true with eternal life. Jesus alone gives us the title “Saint.” It is not like what some churches do when designating a person a saint by particular works performed in life. A saint is not even someone we can pray to as if they can hear us better than Jesus. The title for “saint” in Greek simply means “holy.” Of course, Jesus never called anyone a saint. His place was to be savior of sinners. Who would be holy or a saint without faith in Him and His work? No wonder Peter declared, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). Only Jesus in His holiness died and rose to make unholy sinners into saints. Baptism has poured out that title given by Jesus upon all kinds of people throughout this world. It is a united voice of saints in heaven crying out, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

 What St. John saw of victory for the saints was not without suffering first on earth. The elder said, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.” Those in heaven came through the way of the cross. In other words, there was no way around suffering, no way to ignore the threat of sin, death, and the Devil. The “Great Tribulation” for the saints is not a down the road kind of thing. It has been happening and continues to happen until the end. Abel suffered the wrath of Cain. David suffered the guilt of sinning with Bathsheba. Peter dealt with the pain of denying Christ. Paul bore the Gospel at the expense of his own life. Plenty of unnamed saints have trudged through the ghettos of this fallen world. Plenty in various times and places have clung by faith praying as Jesus taught us, “But deliver us from evil.”

 Jesus gives the title “Saint” for us to bear with the times. The suffering we are talking about is exclusively what falls upon Christians. It is what threatens the faith of a saint. The parable of sower says it best, “he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:21). The enemies of God appear strong flexing their muscles. The church seems fragile and helpless unfit to survive in this world. The saints appear more often than not weak in their own struggles. Yet, all of these tribulations were faced by Jesus. He walked through this valley of sorrows. His glory against the enemies is that His kingdom came out of the cross. His power at work in the church remains firm by Word and Sacrament. His promise of forgiveness rests to purify those who trust in Him. Jesus in the Gospel reading used the key word “blessed” for the saints during this time of tribulation.

 The way to come out of it all unscathed is to hope in baptism. The elder said, “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Christian holiness has always been about what Jesus gives. The promise is that “He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” The Lamb that is the sacrifice for sinners is also the faithful shepherd of the sheep. The goal of the gospel is that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” To reject His protective presence as Savior is certain judgment. To despise His Word is to become food for the wolves. To ignore His love is only sadness missing the sacrifice of God’s Son. How can we rejoice with all the baptized saints in heaven? Is it by our efforts, will power, and planning? Will works save? Never. St. John tells the truth, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” You belong to God. He marked you as His by baptism. Holiness has everything to do with Him who loves us.

 Jesus gives the title “Saint” to bear with the times because our hope abounds eternally in Him. If every Sunday celebrates the resurrection of our Lord then every Sunday is also a celebration with all the saints. We share this joy around the Lord’s Supper for there are the angles, archangels and all the company of heaven. We are a part of the heavenly “hosannas.” Surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses. We have all the holiness they have in heaven because here is Jesus on earth. Panic and fear from the fantasies of man or the tools we use need not cloud the picture. The holiness of works is small in comparison to having God’s Word at for His saints. St. John saw a rocky scene in this world until Christ’s return. Yet, he also heard an angel cry out before the end saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads” (Revelation 7:3). The baptized below are dependent on the Lamb, just like those in heaven depend on Him for He is the Lord. All Saints Day means all the saints reach their goal because of Christ. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.