

*Rev.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 in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All 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, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" I 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. 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. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For 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."*

Today is All Saints Sunday. We remember our Christians brothers and sisters who have died as well as the major saints of history from the earliest time. They are gathered around the throne in heaven, worshipping the Lamb.

What are some things on earth that you won't miss in heaven? For me it is worry about various things. For when faith turns to sight, there is nothing but joy.

How did the elder in our text explain the identity of those wearing the white robes? *"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.* Biblically, the great tribulation is still in our future, although suffering for being a Christian can be its own form of tribulation.

Where are these believers who come out of the great tribulation? *Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple.* They are with Someone Who loves them more than life.

The blessings awaiting those who are martyred in the great tribulation are spelled out in the first lesson: *He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any*

*scorching heat. For 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.”*

What does it mean to you that a ‘great multitude’ will serve God, day and night in His heavenly temple? Worship, doing whatever He calls you to do.

Now ask yourselves: what new insights into God’s character does this passage give you? For me, the passage says that He will work all things together for good.

When it comes to praise, is there a difference in singing an ordinary song and a hymn? Yes. One has eternal purposes and the other does not. Some songs may make a wonderful emotional connection but don’t have eternal meaning. As “Purpose Driven Life” begins, ‘It’s not about me.’ The focus is about Christ.

This day is not only about the saints in heaven, but about those already there. This is the day we remember the saints and that includes people we know who have died in the past year. We list members but also there are family and friends in other places that have gone to be with the Lord. This is a day that can call up grief and joyful remembrance. This is a day to recall great examples of the faith like St. Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, Mother Theresa and others. The others include you and those who pointed you to Jesus. We are indebted to them.

In his book, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, Rev. Don Piper recounts the dramatic story of his ninety-minute journey to heaven. When a truck crushed his Ford Escort in a head-on collision in east Texas, he was declared dead on scene. But a passing minister sensed that God wanted him to pray, so he reached through the wreckage to clasp Piper’s bloody hand while he did so. He prayed but nothing happened, so he just started singing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. While he was dead, Piper speaks of what he saw: heaven’s luminous gates through which he could see streets paved with gold, as well as relatives and loved ones who surrounded him yet wouldn’t let him pass through because it wasn’t his time. He said when he first came to the gates of heaven, he was met by people who had died and who had pointed him to Jesus. That included his parents, his pastors, Sunday school teachers, and others. But then he turned back and heard someone singing, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, he came back to life. After convincing an ambulance crew that he was alive and they verified it, they drove him to Houston to a hospital he was to stay in for over a year or more of recovery. The weather was such that he could not be air evac’d there.

While experiencing heaven, he met saints who made a difference in his life. An old hymn goes, "Behold a host like mountains bright, Lo, who are these arrayed in white. A glorious band with palms in hand around the throne light. Lo, these are they who overcame great tribulation in His name and with His blood, the Lamb of God hath washed away their shame. Before God's face they sing and pray, their voices blend with angels' lay and all conspire a joyous choir to laud Him night and day.

Then sing ye conquering legions white, let myriad voices hail his might and praise the Lord Who by His word hath stablished you in light. Ye, who all earthly lure did flee who sowed and toiled by tears to see with rapture bring your heavens and sing a heavenly melody. Lift up your palms your voices raise, through heaven's vault and endless days to God and to the Lamb is due eternity of praise.

A contemporary song writer wrote a song called *I can Only Imagine*. The song writer says, "I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by Your side. I can only imagine, what my eyes will see, when Your Face is before me! I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

Surrounded by Your Glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for You, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still? Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing 'Hallelujah!?' Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine! I can only imagine!

I can only imagine, when that day comes, when I find myself standing in the Son! I can only imagine, when all I will do, is forever, forever worship You! I can only imagine! I can only imagine!

Another contemporary hymn writer, Ray Bolz, wrote "Thank you For Giving to the Lord. The words tell a story.

I dreamed I went to heaven and you were there with me. We walked upon the streets of gold beside the crystal sea. We heard these angels singing, then someone called your name. You turned and saw this young man and he was smiling as he came. And he said, "Friend, you may not know me now" and then he said, "but wait. You used to teach my Sunday School when I was only eight. And every week you would say a prayer before the class would start. And one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart.

CHORUS-Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am a life that was changed. Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am so glad you gave.

Then another man stood before you and said, “Remember the time a missionary came to your church and his pictures made you cry. You didn’t have much money but you gave it anyway. Jesus took the gift you gave and that’s why I’m here today

CHORUS - Thank you for giving to the Lord

One by one they came as far as your eyes could see. Each life somehow touched by your generosity. Little things that you had done, sacrifices you made: they were unnoticed on the earth but in heaven now proclaimed. And I know that up in heaven, you’re not supposed to cry. But I am almost sure there were tears in your eyes. As Jesus took your hand and you stood before the Lord, He said, “My child, look around you for great is your reward.”

A retired pastor and friend, Mel Swoyer, who is now with the Lord said, “You can live your life in partnership with God. He is your security in bad economic times. He is your healer in the midst of sickness. He is there in the midst of your trials, temptations, and troubles. He will see you through them. He is here moment by moment speaking to you through His Word, your prayers, and your friends. You are part of the body of Christ, His believers in your community. The Holy Spirit speaks to you through both lay people and clergy in your church.”

*“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.” 1 John 5:4*

“Keep on trusting in God. He was there at your entrance into the drama of life. He is there in your enlightenment in life through faith. He will be there in your exit from this life. He is there as the curtain closes and the houselights come on; then the curtain opens again and all the actors in your family are on stage holding hands with you, taking a bow in the encore of heaven.”+ Thanks be to God. The Rev. Mel Swoyer) This is an important day because it looks forward to being with the saints in heaven and yet it is honest about our grief for the saints who have gone before us. Let us be faithful as Jesus says to us: “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.” Amen