



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Revelation 7:1-17

"An Interlude of Encouragement"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] While we're turning to the continuation of our exposition of the Revelation and we're turning today to chapter 7 our subject is, "An Interlude of Encouragement," before trial. And the reason for the term interlude is that more than once in the Book of Revelation as we go through we will notice that the author stops and there is something like an intermission, attention being devoted to individuals as well as the flow of the unfolding of the divine revelation. And this is one of the intermissions or interludes, chapter 7, verse 1 through verse 17. The apostle writes,

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth nor on the sea nor against any tree." (I've made that slight change. It's justifiable from the original text.). (The apostle continues,) "And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea saying hurt not the earth neither the sea nor the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God and their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed

twelve thousand, of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Asher were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Naphtali were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Manasseh were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Issachar were twelve thousand, of the tribe of Zebulon, or Zebulon were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand."

Perhaps as you read through this you may have thought back to your reading of the Old Testament and asked the question, "Are the twelve tribes all set forth here?" And then as you went through your calculations you may have noticed that the tribe of Dan is not mentioned. And you also may have noticed that Joseph is mentioned who would represent Ephraim, but Manasseh also is represented. And so, we have a different numbering of the tribes. But now if you read the commentaries on the Book of Revelation or on the tribes, articles on them, you will discover that in the Old Testament there are at least eighteen different numberings and listings of the tribes. So that's not surprising.

The reason Dan is omitted, many feel, is because Dan came to be associated with apostasy. And for that reason, Dan is not mentioned, but we're really not certain of that.

Continuing of the 9th verse. After this John writes,

"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts or living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen.

Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

I guess, as one looks at this seven fold ascription of praise to the Lord, his greatness, his might, his power, you can see how foolish it is for us to think of using God for our purposes. If there is one thing that stands out in Scripture, he is the sovereign God who performs his own purposes and our task is not to devise ways by which we can use him for our purposes, but rather to find by God's grace our place within the purpose and plan of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.

The 13th verse continues and very similar to prophetic writing such as in the book of Zachariah in which the prophet is asked questions by an angel and then the angel explains. So we have here an interpreting elder. So it's in harmony with prophetic type of language and Revelation. "And one of the oldest answered saying unto me, what are these which are arrayed in white robes and whence came they? And I say unto him, sir thou knowest." Incidentally, there's a little bit of emphasis upon that thou in the original text. Thou knowest. John knows he knows. He knows he doesn't know. "And he said to me these are they which came out of great tribulation."

One important point, that expression has the definite article. And consequently this is not a general statement of having undergone great tribulation, but rather a definite point is referred to, a definite time is referred to. It's the great tribulation. In fact, in the original text it is, "These are they which came out of the tribulation, I mean, the great one." I'm paraphrasing a bit, but that's the force of it.

"And I've washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Therefore, are they before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the lamb

which is in the midst of the thrown shall feed them and shall lead them onto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Remarkable promises that are given in the last few verses of this remarkable chapter. May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn to thee with Thanksgiving for the blessings of life. How wonderful it is and how comforting it is what great assurance it gives us to realize that thou art the one to whom all honor and power and glory and blessing belong. We thank thee Lord that thou hast in Holy Scripture reminded us so often of our littleness and of the greatness that is thine. And father we confess before thee today our sins of rebellion against thee of indifference toward thee of lethargy and seeking to do the will of God so often with the Bible in our hands we still are disobedient and fail thee. Father forgive us.

We pray that by thy grace thy wilt enable us to be pleasing to thee in our daily life. Help us to remember that the precepts of the word of God are precepts that we are to follow and that these precepts should be given first place in our lives. Help us to remember amid the day in which we live with the departure and neglect of the divine revelation that we who name the name of our Lord and who claimed to be saved through his grace follow in his steps in a faithful kind of life that brings glory to the triune God. Oh, God, help us by Thy grace to be a testimony to him.

We pray for Believers Chapel, its elders, its members, its friends, the visitors who are with us today, we pray particularly for them. We ask Lord thy blessing upon the ministry of the chapel its taped ministries, its publications' ministries, the radio ministry, the preaching and teaching of the word of God in this service, the Sunday school and other meetings we pray for each one of them. And for those who minister the word of God, bless them richly. We pray for the sick. We ask especially for them, encourage them. For those in the hospital and we know of some, O God, sustain them, build them

up in the faith and bless those who ministered to them with wisdom and guidance. Be with us now in this service as we sing as we hear the word of God for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] If we are to take Revelation chapter 7 at its most obvious sense, the greatest of all the evangelistic campaigns will not have been the campaign of Paul or the campaign of the apostles if we may call their work that. It will not have been the campaigns of the reformers if we may call their work that. It will not have been the campaigns of Wesley, Moody or Graham. It will not have been Jonah's conquest of Nineveh which was surely a great conquest. The greatest of all of the Evangelistic campaigns if this is its plainest sense we're still future. It is that of the one hundred and forty four thousand servants of our God who it seems are responsible for that great multitude that no man could number out of every kindred tribe, tongue and nation who will surely come to the knowledge of the Lord. Compared with this one if that is true, the others were the cell groups of alter boys so far as size and influence is concerned.

Now, in chapter 6 of the book of Revelation we noticed that the point of the apostle as he recorded his vision was that the Lord Jesus shall assume his dominion over the empire of the thousand years after deceit, after strife, after famine, after death and martyrdom amid worldwide catastrophe and unbelief. Then chapter 7 comes as something of an interlude. We noticed that the 6th chapter concluded with a great question. "For the great day of his wrath has come and who should be able to stand?" And I think again if we are to take this at its plainest sense then we are to regard chapter 7 as the answer to that question. We now learn who will be able to stand in the great day of his wrath.

Now chapter 7 is a parenthetical interlude. It's a kind of an intermission. And as I mentioned in the Scripture reading there are several of these in the Book of Revelation. This is the first one of them. It's almost as if you were looking at what John is seeing and you were looking at it as a moving picture that at a certain point some part of the

projector should break and we should have the scene stopped and then an intermission or an interlude.

Well, that's what we have in chapter 7. We've been looking at a moving picture or a vision of a wild storm and great things happening on the earth's startling things. And suddenly things stop and chapter 7 intervenes.

Now, it's a very simple chapter. There are two great subjects in it. The one hundred and forty four thousand Israelites and innumerable multitude who come from all of the nations. We just call them the innumerable multitude of gentiles. These are the two subjects of chapter 7 in John's vision. The background of this, in my opinion, and there is nothing that states this clearly in chapter 7, is the restoration of the nation Israel to its place in the center of the divine program. In fact, we can call it the preservation of Israel and the restoration of Israel to the blessings promised in Abraham a covenant.

You may remember Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 10 where the prophet says, "Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it to the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock." That's precisely what we have in this chapter. We have the one who scattered Israel, gathering Israel, and acting as a Shepherd not only for Israel, but for all of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.

Past history would create something of an assumption that Israel would be restored to the land and returned to blessing to the extent that which Abraham a covenant has set it out. Pharaoh tried to drown the children of Israel and they would not drown. Nebuchadnezzar tried to burn them and they would not burn. Haman tried to hang them and they would not hang. The history of Israel as one well known figure has said, "Is the history of a miracle and the miracle of history. Men may rest assured that the displeasure of God shall still be upon all who tried to drown or burn or hang them." And, in fact, we could go on and say more than that. Darius tried to throw them to the wild beasts and again, God intervened and saved them.

It's very noteworthy in the history of the human race how Israel has survived. In fact, it's one of the puzzles of the philosophy of history. It's remarkable that men can write an entire volume, really unusually gifted intellectual philosophers of history, can write an entire volume and omit the handling of the nation Israel. Bruce Mazlish, some years ago, wrote a philosophy of history, and treated the subject, and remarkably my recollection is I remember reading it when I was sick and sitting on the bed. And when I got through it was remarkable that practically nothing in the book, I don't want to say nothing because it's been a long time since I've look at it. Practically nothing in the book was written about the nation Israel.

Adolf Hitler new better. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* wrote these words, "From being a feeble cosmopolitan I had become a fanatical anti-Semite." Now, you must remember that many of the people that Hitler had to deal with were Jewish men who were at that time very much impressed with Marxism. And so, his comments, I think, should be understood in the light of that. I do not believe that Jewish people were Marxists as a whole, but there were some that were and particularly in the Russian revolution and events connected with it.

But Hitler went on to say, "From being a feeble cosmopolitan I had become a fanatical anti-Semite. Only once more, it was the last time, there came to me with deepest concern, anxious or pressing thoughts. As I considered carefully the influence of the Jewish people through long periods of human history, there suddenly arose in me the anxious question whether perhaps inscrutable fate on grounds unknown to us poor mortals by internal unchangeable decree," how close he was really to truth, "Wishes the final victory of this small people."

But then he went on to say, "But as I deepened my knowledge of the doctrine of Marx, and so undertook a calmer and clearer observation of the influence of the Jewish people fate itself gave me its own answer." Hitler saw rightly that the views of Marx could never triumph for they disregarded individuality as he put it and must therefore

prove unworkable. But, of course, it was confusion on his part to identify the plans of God with the opinions and doings of those Marxist minded people of whom a number of them were Jewish at that time.

But it's remarkable in a sense that he should come so close. And I'm sure that at the judgment seat at the Great White Throne judgment, to put it in the language of the Book of Revelation, when Hitler stands ultimately before the Lord God he will have no excuse. He actually considered the question of the divine plan of God and rejected it. So when we look at the word of God there is that presumption that God is going to preserve, that he is going to restore Israel to the land and to the enjoyment of the promises that he has in his sovereign grace granted to her.

Now, the scene of chapter 7 verse 1 through verse 8 is the scene on the earth of four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. Incidentally, in the thought of those days the winds that blew from north and south from east and west were favorable winds. But the winds that blew diagonally were regarded as unfavorable winds. And so here the angels, standing at the four corners of the earth holding the four winds of the earth, were holding back unfavorable winds. So it's a picture of judgment in abeyance. And we read that this has to do with the earth, the four winds of the earth. "And they stood at the four corners of the earth and the wind was prevented from blowing on the earth or sea or against any tree."

Then John saw another angel coming from the east. And if John is on the Isle of Patmos as he has said, coming from the east, would be coming from the general vicinity of the land of Palestine. So coming from the east would perhaps suggest coming from the Lord himself. Of course, we know that that is true, but coming from the background of those promises that have been made to Abraham and to his seed. And so this angel says to the four angles with a loud voice, "Do not hurt the earth, the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

Now, the seal suggests, of course, ownership. It suggests security, and its ownership and security when the winds would be freed to bring the winds of judgment over the face of the earth. And so we can expect the one hundred and forty four thousand to be preserved. They have seals, the seals suggesting the ownership and security.

You may remember in the Bible that when Joseph was made prime minister of Egypt, the Pharaohs said to him, "I'm going to give you my signant ring" which he did. And he gave him some clothes to go with his high office of Prime Minster. And then, tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon less the hippies of today hear it. He gave him a gold chain around his neck. [Laughter] And that marked him out as an individual in authority in the land. So the sealing then is the sealing for protection, possibly a visible seal.

We do read in chapter 9, verse 4, "And it was commended them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads." And then in chapter 14 in mentioning the one hundred and forty four thousand, the seal is said to be the name of the lamb and of the father. So it was some kind of seal, at least, that marked ownership and security, and the ownership of the father and the lamb.

The sealing takes place and, of course, the feature that stands out is the number of them, one hundred and forty four thousand. The commentators, of course, differ over this as you might expect there are, generally speaking, two classes of interpretation. Some say that we are to take these one hundred and forty four thousand individuals as simply a round number, a symbolic number. And we are to take the one hundred and forty four thousand to be a reference to the church, the whole church. On the other hand there are those who take this much more literally and regard the individuals as being truly of the children of Israel as it is stated and refer this to a particular group of individuals

who will be brought to the knowledge of the Lord during and just before the great cataclysmic judgments of the last days before the return of our Lord.

Dean Alfred, one of the fine premillennial interpreters said in his commentary, "No one that I'm aware of has taken it literally." Well, he was an Anglican dean and he had not read everything because in his day there were many who had taken the number literally. And one might also ask the question if we are to take this as an indefinite number, as a number referring simply to a round number, then how are we going to take the indefinite number of chapter 7, verse 9 where we read of a great multitude which no man could number of nations, kindreds, people and tongues standing before the throne. It would seem that there is a studied point in the divine revelation to make a difference between the specific number of the one hundred and forty four thousand and the indefinite number of those who are mentioned later on.

So further one might say, in addition to that, the term Israel, as we've often said, is never found in the New Testament in any other sense than in the ethnic sense. There is really no text that says that. There are one or two texts that are debated, but I've never really felt that if we have a term that occurs a number of times in a certain way plainly, and there may be one place, I think there's only one place that's debatable, but at any rate let's say two. That two places that are somewhat debatable that we therefore, on the basis of the two debatable, or the one debatable place should interpret those that are plain and clear which are much more numerous as seen to me a very simple interpretational principle that we should follow the normal sense, if the normal sense makes good sense. We should only go to abnormal or unusual senses unless the normal sense just does not make sense. So I don't think there is any reasonable way by which Dean Alfred can take the view that he does and Alfred is followed by very many of the most recent interpreters. I've tried to read them all. I cannot say I've read them all, but I've tried to read most of them and those that hold that view generally say one

hundred and forty four thousand is a round number and so, therefore, since it's a round number it ought to be taken symbolically.

If that is so, then for example in the Old Testament where there are seven thousand that have not bowed their knee to Baal, the passage that Paul quotes in Romans chapter 11, that perhaps we should take that not as seven thousand but just as a round number. But I think you can see, of course, that we involve ourselves in unnecessary difficulties in the word of God in taking positions like that. But let me hasten to say, I cannot say I know that this is right. And when we stand in heaven you and I, you may come up to me and be able to say, "Dr. Johnson, you really mislead us." And I hope they're not too many of those cases. I'm sure there will be some. And I hope they're not many. I can at least say well I worked at it. I worked at confusing you anyway.

[Laughter]

But, at any rate, you'll understand how I'm taking it and you'll understand there are others who do not take it that way. But I'm not going to be like one of the early fathers who said, "But those of us who are right-minded Christians take it this way." Well, anyway they're called one hundred and forty four thousand of Israel. They are servants and they've proclaim, so far as we can tell, the word of God. I suggest to you that what they proclaim is the gospel of the kingdom.

Now, the reason I say that is because in Matthew chapter 24 it is stated that there are individuals who proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom just previously to our Lord's second coming. But we must not misunderstand that term "the gospel of the kingdom". The gospel of the kingdom is no different from the gospel of the grace of God. There's simply a difference emphasis. That is at that time they would be even more concerned about the coming kingdom than we are now. And so the gospel of the kingdom is nothing more than the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God, for there is only one gospel. Please remember that. There is only one gospel ever. But the emphases of the gospel may change. And I think in the light of the soon coming kingdom, that's the

meaning of the expression the gospel of the kingdom. Paul talked a great deal about the kingdom that was before, the Messianic kingdom. If you look up his usage, you'll find that that's probably the sense in which he used the term kingdom. It referred to the coming of our Lord and the kingdom to be brought by him. So these individuals are those who proclaim the kingdom of God and the grace of God by which we are saved in difficult catastrophic cataclysmic days

The one hundred and forty four thousand, of course, have nothing whatsoever to do with Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses is not a Christian organization. I do not deny there may be some fine people in the Witnesses, but it's not a Christian organization. Let me tell you why it's not. Russelism or the Witnesses reject the doctrine of the Trinity. They reject the doctrine of one God who subsists in three persons. They reject the deity of Christ. He is a god, little g, not God the sovereign triune God.

They reject the personality of the Holy Spirit. They reject the atonement that Christ offered on Calvary's cross. By their doctrine, as they say, "One forfeited life can redeem only a," let me go back, "One unforfeited life can redeem one forfeited life only." That's reasonable. If Christ is just a person such as we are, even sinless, and not infinite, not the infinite son of God his death could only have that value. But Christians have believed he's the infinite son of God and thus his death has infinite value.

They do not believe in eternal punishment. Men will be given a second chance for salvation during the millennium. They do not believe in hell. They do not believe in the eternal, that eternal punishment is taught in the Bible. They do not believe in the second coming. He came to earth in 1874 and the saints were raised in 1878 and many other doctrines that are not suitable for Christians even to anticipate.

Mr. Russell was a proprietor of a chain of drapery stores. He assumed the title of pastor. He found no existing religion to his liking so he founded one of his own, the most attractive plank of which was the non-existence of hell. If one could assure people of that with authority and gain some authenticity in their hearts, of course, that would be

popular with some people. One would expect that the man who boldly proclaimed that the whole church and our ministers were wrong in their teaching would at least be truthful. But Mr. Russell was forced to appear before a Court in Hamilton, Ontario and he was asked the question, "Do you know Greek?" And he said, "Oh, yes."

Then he was handed a Greek New Testament. He proved unable to read the letters of the Greek alphabet. Now, asked the lawyer, "Are you familiar with the Greek language," he unblushingly answered, "No." He then admitted that he knew neither Latin nor Hebrew, nor had he ever taken a course in theology. And yet this is the man who pronounces Bible translations generally to be poor translations and, therefore, unreliable.

The doctrine of the one hundred and forty four thousand is not, of course, in the word of God in the sense of which the Russelites proclaim it. The one hundred and forty four thousand at one time were the numbers of the elect. Many years ago I was in New York City on 42nd Street and I didn't have anything to do for a couple of hours so I was just kind of walking in the city looking around. And I saw some Russelites standing on the corner dispensing his papers. So I went over to talk to him. We had a little theological discussion on 42nd Street. And there had been something in the paper about them. It may have been one of their conventions at the time. It's some years ago. But, I asked him about the one hundred and forty four thousand and as far as he knew, he believed that they were the number of the elect. Later on, that doctrine was changed. But, at this point I asked him, "Well, I understand now that there are more than one hundred and forty four thousand people in the Jehovah's Witnesses, how do you explain that?" And he was not able to explain that. Of course, I wasn't able to explain that either. But later on it has become bigger so you have to change your doctrine as you go along. Well, I mention this because a lot of people really have been taken in by the Russelites.

Now, the last part of the chapter is much more significant where John sees the vision of the enumerable multitude of Gentiles. Now, I'm going to suggest something I cannot prove, so I'm warning you ahead of time. I suggest that it is implied by the way in

which these two visions are put together, the one hundred and forty four thousand and then the innumerable multitude, that since they are servants of God and the judgments are withheld and restrained until other events take place that we should think that there is implied in this that the innumerable multitude are the result of the evangelistic activity of the one hundred and forty four thousand. In other words, the one hundred and forty four thousand servants of God who are sealed are those by whom the innumerable multitude find their salvation.

Now, you cannot prove that. The connection of the sections in the book and in the chapter, suggest that to me. I can only tell you that this is a polyglot cosmopolitan crowd as one of the scholarly interpreters have called it. And further that they are those who have come out of the great tribulation. Now that we can say. In other words, they're individuals in the last days before our Lord's coming who come out of the great tribulation.

Now, there are three contrasts with the one hundred and forty four thousand in number, one hundred and forty four thousand versus the innumerable multitude. No calculator could calculate the number of the innumerable multitude. The nationality, in the one case we have those who are the children of Israel spelled out as the children of Israel. In the other we have those from all of the nations and tribes and kindreds. And further those one hundred and forty four thousand are prepared for the tribulation where as the innumerable multitude come out of the tribulation. That we can say and there is not a whole lot more that we can say from the information given us.

Well, John after seeing this finds that one of the elders is going to quiz him a bit. So we read in verse 13 of chapter 7, "One of the elders answered saying unto me, what are these which are arrayed in white robes and whence have they come?" And the questions are answered in reverse order. That is he answers, "Whence have they come." and then tells us who they are. He says, "They've come out of the great tribulation." I

suggest to you that what is suggested by all of this is that God is sovereign in his activities and we can expect him to carry out his purposes.

Now to the question, "Who are they?" John has one of the most magnificent sections of divine promises in the Book of Revelation. I want you to look carefully at them. These individuals know the joy of salvation. It is stated in verse 14. "These are they which came out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." They know the forgiveness of sins for they have washed their robes. They know justification. They have made them white. They stand now holy and righteous before the Lord and they have done this by virtue of the blood of the lamb. So we can say the blood of the lamb means pardon, it means security, it means the penalty is gone.

Only chastisement remains for those who know Christ in this sense. That's the only chastisement because Christians very frequently after they have been saved fall into difficult trials and tribulations in their lives. And there comes across our mind from time to time the question. We have believed in our Lord, but why these trials to which we are given, evidently, by the Lord. And one occasionally finds Christians who find it hard to believe that they really are safe and secure in the midst of trials. They wonder is God punishing me.

Now let me say, as far as I can tell from the word of God, there is no punishment of believers, but there is chastisement. Now, there is a great deal of comfort in knowing in the midst of my trials and the midst of my difficulties, if I have by God's grace been brought to rest upon Christ and what he is done, I am delivered from penalty. I may suffer chastisement. I need chastisement from time to time. I also need trials for my education as a believing man. So it's a great comfort to know that my robes have been washed and have been made white in the blood of the lamb.

My trials are the trials of children of a Heavenly Father. That's comforting. And, furthermore, I know that there's going to be a glorious end to them in the future. They

know the joy of serving. They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. Very obviously a reference to the priestly activity of those who belong to the Lord, this great multitude. They serve him day and night in the temple. That expression is very closely related to the Old Testament language of the Levites and priests as they carried out their particular tasks. Turn to 1 Chronicles chapter 9 and you will find reference to it.

"They know the joy of being sheltered," we read in verse 15 at the conclusion, at the beginning of the verse, "Therefore, they before the throne of God and serve him day and night in the temple and then at the conclusion he that sitteth on the throne shall tabernacle over them." Now these words are taken from an Old Testament messianic passage in which Israel, and those who are related to Israel, perceive receiving as gentiles, the promises of Abraham are looked at as being married to the Lord. And we know there is a marriage supper of the lamb following later on in this Book in chapter 19. So the reference is to a kind of marriage canopy.

And Isaiah chapter 4 states that in verses 5 and 6 in language that is borrowed in this vision. So to understand this, we would have to understand Isaiah chapter 4 and 5, chapter 4 verses 5 and 6. "And he that sitteth on the throne shall tabernacle over them." Belong to him. It's kind of the encouragement and assurance that we really are his. It's the New Testament equivalent of our Lord's great promise, "My sheep here my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, not six months life, not life until I send, but I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish."

If one saint ever lost his salvation, our Lord's words would not be true. "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish." Nothing could be plainer. And so I'm not surprised that these individuals find the Lord tabernacling over them like the [indistinct] of glory of the Old Testament days of the Exodus. They know the joy of satisfaction. The 16th verse says "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat." Heaven's not like Texas. [Laughter]

And what we've been having recently is just an interlude, an intermission. We all know just like this 7th chapter.

"They know the joy of satisfaction. They know the joy of eternal shepherding for the lamb which is the midst of the throne shall feed them, (literally shepherd them,) and shall lead them onto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Eternal shepherding. This is a pastoral scene. This is what we are being given by John, a pastoral scene of the final assembly of the saints and of the life beyond the grave. In other words, as we look back over our lives, we can speak of the bleak herbage, of the wilderness, the brookless channels, the falling snows, the angry tempest, the roar of the ravening wolves, but they are no more. It's a glorious picture of unbroken sunshine gleaming pastures, pellucid waters, living fountains for sheep. That's what we are. We're sheep. The satisfaction of the sheep. But notice the strange change of metaphor. It's the lamb who shepherds. It's the lamb who shepherds. Isn't that strange? The lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them.

That's the meaning of the original text. My text has feed, but the word is *poimaino* shall shepherd them. So the lamb is a shepherd. Lambs are shepherded, normally, but this lamb is different. He shepherds. But the fact that he's a lamb, my Christian friend, identifies him even more closely with us. We are lambs and he's a lamb. Just as we say we are men, but he's the God man. He's one of us. And because he's one of us he knows us. He knows our needs and because he's the God man he could supply our needs.

And the fact that he is called lamb means that there is a continual remembrance of the saints of God of the fact that he is a lamb as slain, as we read in chapter 5. Stems the line of the tribe of Judah as a lamb and as slain. He never loses that capacity. That's why

Dr. Louis Sperry Chafer, whenever the subject came up, he used to like to say to us that he did not like that hymn in which there was a reference to the old rugged cross. You know the hymn as The Old Rugged Cross. And he used to like to point out to us, and he was a good teacher for Mr. Prier has learned the lesson from Dr. Chafer at least. He said, "So I'll cherish the old rugged cross till my trophies at last I'll lay down. I would cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it some day for a crown." And Dr. Chafer used to love to say, "Well never exchange the cross for anything. We'll always be thankful and grateful for our Lord as a crucified Savior. Even in glory we'll look back at that as the ground of our salvation." I think this text certainly suggests it.

And they know the joy of continual sustaining. They are led to fountains of waters, not a fountain but fountains one succeeding another that is an infinite progression in joys and felicities from pasture to pasture from fountain to fountain, variety and diversity in heaven, and yet he feeds, he leads, he wipes away the tears. There's no heaven without our Lord even though it should be filled with arc angles, it would not be a place I would want to be if Jesus Christ were somewhere else. He's the one to whom we owe our eternal salvation. And I love that final word. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want, we say. This is the final fulfillment of that great text.

And furthermore, the explanation of the thorns and the crevasses into which we've fallen as sheep and the attacks that we've received from the wild beasts, the hyenas and the wolves that were the plague of the shepherds in the land, incidentally, and in the land of Palestine the shepherds were always with their flocks. In Scotland you can look out often and see many flocks and there's no shepherd anywhere. You look around for the Shepherd it's hard to find them, but in the land of Palestine you'll always find them. They're always with the flock because the flocks were subject to the wolves and the hyenas. There are not many hyenas in Scotland, and they're human when they are found

there. [Laughter] But, at any rate. So consequently, the idea of a shepherd is the idea of constant presence, constant protection.

Tears in heaven, do you we have tears in heaven? No, we don't have tears in heaven. It's very much like someone has said like a forest after a drenching shower. And the sun's come out, but the leaves are still dropping water. And so in heaven we want to know why so many things have happened. Why? Why did they have to preach to a group of people like you in Believers Chapel? Well, I'm happy over that, of course, but we learn the answers to a lot of things when we get to heaven. That's what is meant by God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. Romans 8:28 we know, but now we will know only that, but we will know the why of the experiences of life. And as I've often said, as he explains to us his dealing with us as individuals everyone of us will echo Jacob's great saying near the end of his life after all of his trials and troubles and disobediences and rebellions the God who fed me all the days of my life. That's what we have.

I have a friend, he's about eighty five years of age. He's still preaching in North Carolina. I heard him say one time in a meeting in Pennsylvania that we used to go to together, he made reference to this text. He said, "And God's going to wipe away all tears from their eyes." And then he said, "Brother, God sure has a big handkerchief."

[Laughter] That's the way he puts it. So this is the greatest period of judgment, the greatest period of justification. The Jews accomplish, if this is correct, somebody is in seven years what they could not do in the other sixty nine weeks of the seventy weeks of Israel. And so the blood avails in every age it's the lamb of God who has died for the sins of us and the world.

One last point, will you notice that the statements of verse 14 are put in the active voice. "These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes." Not and their robes were washed. They have washed their robes. "They have made them white" not they were made white but "They have made them white." I preach

sovereign grace I am told. And there's no question about it, I do. And I'm accused of overdoing it. I wish I could overdo it. I wish I could overdo it. But I want to also point out to you that the Scriptures teach the responsibility of man. We preach sovereign grace, but we preach also the responsibility of man. And if you will look at this, this is put in the language of responsibility. "They have washed their robes. They have made them white." Well, I'm not suggesting that our salvation is produced by us.

What John is saying, as is evident from all of his writings, is that there is a human responsibility and it's the responsibility of believing, faith. He will tell us that's something that God gives us, but we are responsible to the revelation. And you are responsible to the revelation. You're responsible to believe. It's your responsibility. You may wash your robes. You may make them white in the blood of the lamb. And when you get to heaven if you're, if it's not plain already you'll find out there why you responded as you did and God will get the glory. But if you're here today and you've never believed in Christ, your responsibility is to believe.

May God in his marvelous grace touch your heart. May you come to him. And when you do sooner or later you will discover no man can come to me except the father which has sent me, draw him. And you'll be drawn and you'll believe. And, so we invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus to come to him, put your trust in him and receive as a gift eternal life. May God enable you to do that. Let's close in the word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to thee for the blessings that are ours through the word of God and we rejoice in these magnificent promises to think that our Lord, the great shepherd, the good shepherd, the chief shepherd is the lamb who feeds and leads his flock. The thought is too high for us. We thank thee. We praise thy name. May the Holy Spirit work in our hearts to glorify him.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.