

The Lamb of God Lives 3) To End All My Tears

Revelation 7:9-17 • May 12, 2019 • Fourth Sunday of Easter



It happens every now and then that my wife and I hear someone crying. Four of our children are four years-old and under. One of them comes running into the room with tears streaming down their face. Often I can just give them a hug and assure them they'll be okay. And that is enough for them. But sometimes my hug will only do until they see mom coming. They go right past me as if I'm not even in the room because mom is the one they really want. There's a reason we celebrate mother's day. Moms have the magical power to make the hurt fade away and make the tears cease - especially if you're four or under. But what about the tears a mother can't fix? Today we need to look at a much bigger hurt and a far bigger source of comfort when tears come. We continue our series looking at the book of Revelation this morning and see God's solution for every tear for all people of all ages. THE LAMB OF GOD LIVES TO END ALL MY TEARS.

Today we are focusing on the *second* vision which we began to look at last week starting at chapter 4. This second vision involves the opening of seven seals to reveal the events of history. Seven is a number which symbolizes for us God's dealing with his people. What do we see as the seven seals are opened? God's working and his judgment on all the earth. The first seal reveals a white horse: sent to conquer. With this we see the gospel being spread over the entire world. The second seal is opened and reveals a red horse: symbolizing war between mankind, people killing one another. Then the third seal shows a black horse, symbolizing justice and judgment over the earth. Finally the fourth horse is a pale green horse. Killing occurs by sword, famine, and disease. Death and hell follow the pale horse.

These horses depict things that will occur from Christ's first coming until his return. They are not horses of the apocalypse, rapture, or so-called millennium with a supposed seven years of suffering. Recall why John says this book is written. It is not to point to some supposed extended time of apocalypse or only end times yet to come. It is not written to predict future events that have nothing to do with God's people today. It is written to tell us what takes place *until* Christ returns, from John's time until the Last Day. Jesus told John: "*Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*" Revelation begins with "*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants (that is show us) what must soon take place.*" These horses symbolize what comes upon the earth *from the time of John and onward*. You might compare it to a window or art piece. One thing my wife and I found our home lacked is scenery from our state. So, to celebrate mothers' day we picked out some wall art. We choose one of those canvass prints of a photograph with the image spread out across multiple canvasses. Each canvass contains a portion of the same scene. One panel has cacti, another has cacti and a trail, another has the trail and mountains. Each canvass is progressively different, but they're all of the same scene. It's like looking out of several windowpanes. That's what the book of Revelation is like. The book can be easily divided into seven different visions which God gave the apostle John. It's as if you are looking at seven different canvasses which convey to the same scene. Together they show us history from Jesus' first coming until his return: including our lives today.

That's why these are familiar pictures! It's a colorful picture indeed; one we are all too familiar with already. Yes, the conquering power of the gospel wins souls for the flock of God. But along with it one sees the other horses of various color. Death abounds with killings and wars. Famines both natural and man-made befall the world. How many countless haven't died over history because of these things already? And don't forget the diseases which are killing millions and millions each year. Need I mention all that has happened with wars, disease, and abortion even in the past 100 years –not to mention the centuries before? And the working of these four horses are seen even in our little corner of the world. Just this past week local news reported a shooting, a house fire, and someone drowning. And awaiting us all is death. And all these horses pale in comparison to the death and hell which follows close behind them!

And what about God's people? Are they spared from all this? The fifth seal is opened to reveal that they suffer in the end times. Did following Jesus lead them to a glorious life on earth? The fifth seal shows the souls of all who died and were killed because they followed Jesus. "*When will it end?*" they cry to God. "*Patience,*" is his answer as the death of his flock continues at the murderous hands of God's enemies.

Then the sixth seal reveals what Jesus said regarding the last days, "the sky will be darkened, and the moon will turn to blood." The sixth seal shows the end is near and the world's response to all that has gone on. There is a listing of six types of people, from king to slave. Six represents what is just short of God's complete number of seven. It is man's or Satan's attempts to be like God, but it always comes up short. People from all over the world are calling to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" Who can stand before the Lamb of God? People won't want to come near to God but will desire with all their being to flee from his coming.

What about us who still live in these end times? Where are we in this picture? "Life is difficult enough already" the Christian cries. We face those pale and dark horses. Tears flow from the one who says, "My husband is going to be deployed off to war, my mother is dying with disease, death has taken my friend." Isn't that enough? What consolation does the suffering Christian have? They find they will be persecuted because they follow the Lamb. Tears upon tears come to us as God's people! I always find it ridiculous when people think we need to hide our tears. We live in a world that demands our tears.

This second vision seems awful so far, nothing but tears, loss, pain, death, and hell. Who could remove such pain?

That leads us to the portion of this vision in chapter 7. The book of Revelation is not meant to stir us with fear, but to heal us with comfort as we follow the good Shepherd. This shepherd is the center of the image we see today: The sevenfold canvass of the book of Revelation keeps leading us to see one important image. Behind the suffering, the pain, the tears, is the Lamb of God. He is leading his flock from tribulation to tearless bliss. Tears may come, but the Lamb never leaves us.

This is what John sees at the start of chapter 7 it is you and all God's own brought to tearless bliss. Recall what we heard our Good Shepherd say in our gospel reading this morning: "No one can snatch them out of my hand." The 144 thousand at the start of chapter 7 are *God's people* now on earth. They are an exact number known by God. He knows who are his in this world. The shepherd knows his sheep and those that follow him. They are symbolized in Revelation with the number 12, representing God's church. 12 times 12 in a multiple of ten symbolizes the complete number of God's church. A seal is placed on each believer. God knows you as his.

And you are led by him through all the tribulation to standing before his throne. That's what we read earlier today in chapter 7. "After this I looked and there before me was a *great multitude that no one could count*, from every nation, tribe, people and language." There is no reason to worry in all of our tribulations and awaiting the Last Day if God will include us in his rescue. John sees a number that cannot be counted. 1) nation 2) tribe 3) people 4) language. The number four symbolizes for us of all the world. Every believer in every part of the world is now included in what John here sees. John sees God has gathered all his sheep in all the world.

And these are no longer in the world facing tribulations. They have come out from the tribulation. They don't cry out that they be hidden from the presence of God and his holy throne. They "stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

The colorful picture John now presents is these standing in white robes and holding palm branches. What do they cry out? "Salvation, rescue, belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." Then the whole heavenly throng falls down in worship with sevenfold praise! "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Recall that seven reminds us of God's working and completeness! He has worked rescue for his sheep, and they dressed in white and holding a palm, symbol of victory and praise. They do not give these things to God but acknowledge gladly that they are his! The Lamb of God lives!

This is what John saw in his vision. What did this all mean? This is not a hidden and obscure message. The picture is further explained to us: 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." Another colorful and amazing image! These are the people coming out of the tribulation. That time of suffering many trials before entering the kingdom of God, has ended for these. Who are they? They are all your loved ones who have died in Christ. They are all the yet unknown fellow sufferers of this world who bear the name of Jesus. They didn't escape tribulation, but they were in it and have come out from it.

How have they come out of the tribulation? By faith! The most beautiful painting in chapter 7 is this: robes made white in the crimson blood of a Lamb that was slain. They come out of the tribulation through the blood of Jesus Christ. *The Lamb* refers to the sacrificial Lamb of God. "Look the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." And Jesus, like a lamb to the slaughter faced a greater tribulation and greater persecution than any has ever or will ever face. He shed his blood and suffered the judgment of God in our place. By his blood our garments, spiritually speaking, are cleaned. And whenever our time to leave this life comes, by faith in him we will stand in his clean garments and join this countless crowd.

All who have died in Christ have left the tribulations of this life. The soldier killed on duty has left the wars forever to stand before the Lamb, washed in his blood. The loved one who died of disease, now standing before the throne of God because of the blood of the Lamb. The loved one lost in death? They are now forever living because of the Lamb of God, Jesus. Even the one who suffered and died because of the tribulation and persecution with carrying Jesus name: now standing before Jesus himself with a song of victory. Because the Lamb has led his flock out of the tribulation by his sacrificial death and shedding of his blood. He forever paid the judgment price. Death and hell no longer hold power over those washed in his blood. He leads you and me there too!

Now because they were led by the Lamb, their tribulations are forever gone, and their bliss is complete. The Lamb leads his flock: from tribulation *to tearless bliss before his throne*. Since they have been washed in the blood of Jesus, their sins removed, and his perfect righteous robes given: John lists for us a complete list of things they forever enjoy. This list includes ten things, symbolizing that completeness of the tearless bliss that the Lamb has given to his flock: 1) "they are before the throne of God 2) and serve him day and night in his temple; 3) and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 4) Never again will they hunger; 5) never again will they thirst. 6) The sun will not beat upon them, 7) nor any scorching heat. 8) For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 9) he will lead them to springs of living water. 10) And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Tears will come. They will hurt. And there will be times when it feels like not even a mother could fix them. But look at every part of the canvass of history. You will see behind the tears there stands a Lamb who spilled his blood for the flock. He is the Lamb of God. And he lives to lead his flock. He leads his flock, from tribulation to tearless bliss before his throne. Amen.