

Keep Your Head Up The Lamb Is Your Shepherd

A Sermon on Revelation 7:9-17
Year C - Easter 4
17 - April - 2016

JJ¹

A beautiful, white lamb stands off in a field all by itself. It's young. Just one year old. There isn't a blemish on it. It seems so innocent. Life seems so peaceful until a strong hand comes and leads it to the slaughtering floor. Loud bleats fill the air. The knife comes and crimson blood stains it's pure white wool. Quickly the life is gone.

A sheep led to the slaughter. That's how we feel sometimes because in many ways that is what we are in this life. But we are only that because of *the* Lamb who was led to the slaughter for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who was led to the slaughter, and yet was silent. He didn't open his mouth to try and stop what was happening. As brutal and unjust as his enemies were, Jesus willingly let his holy blood flow from his head crowned with thorns and hands and feet pierced with nails. Although already battered and bruised, in the eyes of his followers, Jesus still looked like that pure white lamb with crimson blood flowing down. And quickly, his life is gone. Yet, his life departs in words of victory: "It is finished!" And three days later, that victory is seen and believed by those to whom the Lamb of God appears—alive forever and ever!

Today we are again in the heavenly throne room of God. We follow John into that glorious place and hear and see the amazing reality that the Lamb is also the Shepherd!

"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!'" "

John sees this great multitude of people singing praises to God and the elder explains who they are. "These (in white robes) are they who are coming out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Friends, John sees all the believers in heaven wearing white robes washed in Jesus' blood. It was Jesus' blood that paid for the sins of the world. The white robes symbolize our purity as we stand before God as his people. What's more is that they hold palm branches of victory in their hands and their eyes are unclouded by tears. They have made it through the great tribulation of life lived in a sinful world.

This, friends, is a beautiful sight for us to see when you and I are still in that "great tribulation." We are still in the midst of all the pressures that our sinful souls and this sinful world push on us by trying to turn us away from God and satisfy our sinful cravings. We're still in the middle of the challenges to our faith brought against us by experiences that seem to say that we're losing. Like the spiritual leaders of Jesus' day who pounced on him, trying to trap him in his words, so too the so-called "wise" of our day try to trap us into the corner of unloving bigotry.

Sometimes we can feel so weak and small and hopeless. As Paul said, we are indeed "considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Rom. 8:36). As the pressure grows, tears often cloud our eyes and even our faith. We're tempted to wave a white flag of surrender rather than proudly and confidently carry our palm branch of victory. We get tired of strug-

gling so we're tempted to compromise our faith just so we won't be so abrasive to the world around us. We're tempted to hang our heads in shame and defeat.

But friends, **KEEP YOUR HEADS UP, THE LAMB IS YOUR SHEPHERD!** Amid all the pressures and shouting voices you can hear another voice. A voice that you know. It is the voice of your Good Shepherd! In the presence of all our enemies (Ps. 23:5) you can hear his calm voice say, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (Jn. 10:27-28)



The Lamb who is your Shepherd knows. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your weaknesses. He knows your struggles. He knows your enemies. He knows the "great tribulation" because he lived it too! These

terrors of body and soul can sometimes shake us to the core, but Jesus calms our trembling hearts. In fact, he makes our enemies shake with fear. His enemies already tried taking him on with all they had, and they failed! They put him in the grave, but he walked away from it three days later completely unscathed by their hate. Every enemy we have, friends, both in our own hearts and in the world around us are silenced and defeated as he wraps his nail-pierced hands around us.

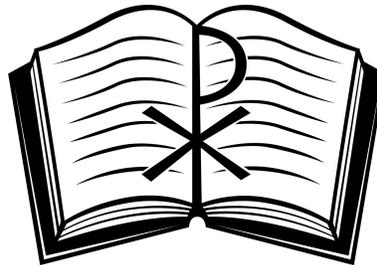
As our Shepherd/Lamb holds us tight, he assures us that we are not helpless victims in this life, but victors! Our hardships and heartaches that fill our eyes with tears don't own us. We are *his* sheep! We aren't going to lose not matter how hard this wicked world tries to snuff us out. No one can snatch us from his hands!

Even though we do not see it now, palm branches of victory are in our hands. Even though we do not see it now, we are already wearing our white robes of righteousness, made white by the blood of the Lamb. Even now we have the assurance that God will completely wipe away every tear from our eyes!

Friends, **KEEP YOUR HEADS UP!** THE LAMB IS YOUR SHEPHERD, and he will guide you home to be with that "great multitude that no one [can] count, from every nation, tribe, people and language." And there you shall stand "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 [you]. Never again will [you] hunger; never again will [you] thirst. The sun will not beat upon [you], nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be [your]

shepherd; he will lead [you] to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes!" Amen.

SDG²



² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

