

Tribulation Saints

by C.A. Coates

C.A. Coates' sermon emphasizes God's faithfulness in securing a multitude of saints during tribulation, highlighting their victory and service to Him.

Topics: "Tribulation Theology", "End Time Salvation"

Description

C.A. Coates preaches on Revelation 7, highlighting how God will secure a vast company of saints for Himself even in the darkest days of tribulation, ensuring nothing interferes with His purpose to gather a multitude from Israel and the nations. The chapter reveals the sealing of bondmen before universal judgments, indicating a time of sovereign mercy and divine working after the assembly is gone but before the kingdom is established. The vision portrays an elect Israel and a great Gentile multitude standing before the throne, praising God for salvation amidst tribulation, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness, purity, and victory in the face of evil.

Transcript

Revelation 7.

This chapter shows how God will secure vast companies of saints for Himself even in tribulation days. It is a great comfort to see that He will allow nothing to interfere with His purpose to have an immense company both from Israel and the nations. It will be a time when universal judgments will be imminent - "four angels standing upon the four corners of the earth" - but even God's judgments will be held in check until His bondmen are sealed. ...

There will be a great activity of sovereign mercy after the assembly is gone, and before the kingdom is established. We see this very plainly here. We are not shown in this book how these different groups of witnesses are called or by what means God effects His work in them. We may gather this, in some measure at least, from other parts of Scripture. For instance, it would appear from Matthew 10:6 and 23, that there will be a special testimony to the lost sheep of the house of Israel which will not be completed until the Son of Man be come. And from Matthew 24:14 we learn that "these glad tidings of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable earth for a witness to all the nations, and then shall come the end." This testimony will be rendered in such conditions of the world, and in such persecutions, as are in view in Revelation 6-19, as we may see by comparing the Scriptures. In this book we find the product rather than the process of divine working. Certain things which are going on now may have in view the preaching of the glad tidings of the kingdom in a future day. I refer particularly to the widespread

circulation of the Scriptures in almost all languages of the earth. It is bringing some light as to Christ before all nations. If the assembly were translated today there would be a good deal that God could use as preparing the way for succeeding testimony to all nations. ...

The sealed bondmen in Revelation 7 are "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel"; it is not two tribes now, but the whole twelve. Their number is not necessarily literal; it is symbolic of completeness in an administrative way. The fact that Dan is omitted would indicate, I think, that Israel is viewed here with the element of idolatry and apostasy eliminated, so that they can be truly "bondmen of God" and serviceable to Him. It is an elect Israel, for it is twelve thousand "out of" each tribe, and it is seen in moral completeness for administration here. God will begin His work again with Israel, and will use them in blessing among the nations. They will "sow beside all waters" (Isaiah 31:20), and the fruit of their sowing follows. For "after these things" John saw "a great crowd, which no one could number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues". We see here first an elect company out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, and then an innumerable multitude blessed out of the nations. Christ will be known as God's salvation to the ends of the earth even in that day.

I do not think God is presenting to us the millennial result exactly, though what we see here may reach on to that. But he is showing us, through the vision which John saw, what will be secured for Him before the millennium. In the millennium Israel will have the land, and Dan will have his portion in it with the other tribes; Ezekiel 48. But here the moral side is presented - how God will work in an election from the twelve tribes during the time of judgment and tribulation, so that He will have an Israel, purged from the element of apostasy, which He can use administratively towards the nations in the way of testimony. They will be marked vitally by the features of the coming kingdom before that kingdom is established, and God will use them in announcing the kingdom to the nations.

Then a vast Gentile multitude is found "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palm branches in their hands". They are seen before the throne as approved and victorious, and with a loud voice they ascribe "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb". It is a mighty host of Gentiles who have found salvation during tribulation days, and who appear before the throne to give God and the Lamb the glory of it. It is a note of praise such as could not be raised by those who have only known millennial conditions. They are viewed as those who come out of the testing, but they have been in it, and they found salvation in God and the Lamb while they were in it. They come out of it and are before the throne as victors. I do not think "before the throne and before the Lamb" means that they are in heaven; it is rather where they stand morally as victors. Any saints martyred during the great tribulation - and there will be many such - will have a heavenly place. Those preserved right through to the establishment of the kingdom will have blessing on earth of a peculiar character. But it seems to me that the point here is that after all the testing - however it issues - they are before the throne as victors, having become such through finding salvation in God and in the Lamb.

The presence of such a company before the throne causes all the angels and the elders and the four living creatures to fall on their faces before the throne and worship. To witness the triumph of God on such an immense scale where the concentrated forces of evil have had to be encountered in their fullest development and energy, leads all heaven to say, "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and strength, to our God, to the ages of ages. Amen". Surely our hearts add even now their glad "Amen!"

John's interest in this great company was stimulated by the inquiry of the elder as to who they were, and whence they came. He could only answer, "My lord, thou knowest". And he was told, "These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb". What could be more cheering to faith than to see that there will be so much for God even at such a time? No other scripture that I know of tells us of this great multitude, so that this vision is of peculiar interest. It is they who have washed their robes. The act indicates the cleansing of themselves externally - our robes are that in which we appear before men - that is, of their ways and associations. Robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb intimates that they have not only known the redemption value of that blood, but that they have applied it in practical cleansing to their ways and associations. They have held themselves practically as a redeemed people. Washing in water would be moral cleansing - the death of Christ known in the soul as cleansing from the man after the flesh with all his defilement, so that saints may be consciously apart from that man. But washing robes in the blood of the Lamb would rather be that saints realise that they have been redeemed by that blood from the whole power of evil here, and they apply that practically to their ways and associations. They are exercised that there should not be a spot on their robes of the evil from which they have been redeemed. It is instructive to see that when they speak for themselves in verse 10 they ascribe "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb". They gratefully own their deliverance as being entirely God's salvation. But when the elder speaks of them he speaks of what they have done - the exercises by which they have cleansed themselves practically and externally as knowing themselves to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb from all the evils which surround them. The washing of robes is their side, that they may be in practical keeping with redemption, and that they may carry themselves as those who own the Lamb's rights acquired through redemption.

To see all this in such companies of saints suggests an enquiry as to how far we correspond with their faithfulness today? We are not in the great tribulation; our testings are not nearly so severe as theirs will be. But as having the Spirit we carry God's mark in a scene of abounding evil, and it should be plainly manifest that we do so. We, in our time of witness, are to be marked by purity and victory - the evidence of the power of divine salvation from all the evil around us. And it is for us, too, to wash our robes (see chapter 22:14) to keep our ways and associations unspotted by the evil of the world, as holding ourselves redeemed from it by the blood of the Lamb. It is our privilege to come out as distinctly from the evil of the world in our day as they will in theirs. It would be sad indeed if we, with a higher and more blessed calling, and a richer and deeper knowledge of God, did not equal them in faithfulness, purity, and separation. Or if, practically, we were found carrying the emblems of defeat - as overcome by the world - rather than the palm branch of victory.

The faithfulness of this great multitude will have its sure answer and recompense, as faithfulness ever does. They will serve God "day and night in his temple". The phrase "day and night" implies in Scripture unbroken continuity, whether in time conditions or in eternity (see Luke 2:37; Acts 26:7; Revelation 20:10). His temple is not the millennial temple of Ezekiel 40-46, for "no stranger, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter" into that sanctuary, and this is a Gentile company. Temple is used here, I believe, as very often in Scripture, in a moral sense, as indicating service in priestly nearness and intelligence. God will "spread his tabernacle over them"; they will be in a peculiar way under His protection. "They shall not hunger any more, neither shall they thirst any more, nor shall the sun at all fall on them, nor any burning heat; because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes".

It is sweet to think of so vast a multitude coming out of the great tribulation to have this peculiar place and blessing with God. For theirs is not the public and universal blessing of the millennium, but an inside place in the temple, and as overshadowed by God's tabernacle. They are shepherded by the Lamb, and led by Him "to fountains of waters of life". They will be caused to know the very springs of life; not merely earthly blessing in its fulness, but spiritual springs in the knowledge of God. It is precious to know that the Lamb will have such a flock to shepherd, and such a blessed service of love to render that flock. Many scriptures speak of Israel's blessing in the world to come, and of the blessing of the Gentiles in the kingdom when the nations will be healed by the leaves of the tree of life, and will walk by the light of the heavenly city. But I know of no other scripture which gives us what we have here - a Gentile company with such a peculiar place of temple service Godward, and a special leading by the Lamb "to fountains of waters of life". One can understand how a chapter like this will comfort and support faithful saints in tribulation days, giving them as heavenly light what soon will be their part. I have no doubt that, while in the tribulation, they will anticipate in spirit what is here presented, and they will know God as the One who will very soon wipe away every tear from their eyes.

This whole chapter is most comforting and establishing to us in view of the rising tide of evil around us. It assures us that God will secure an immense result for His own pleasure in the very darkest day of the world's history. He will have those then who carry His mark, and who will go through, and come out of, all the tremendous pressure of the power of evil spotless and victorious. His salvation will be with them, and they will work out their own salvation through much personal exercise and suffering. It is for us to do so today. We aren't in the great tribulation (through infinite mercy, we never shall be) but all the principles of evil that will come out in full bloom then are working in the world today. It is for us to find salvation in God and the Lamb, and to wash our robes.

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