

## Revealing Words: Lamb and Shepherd

We came through the tunnel and walked into the middle of the world. That's how it seemed anyway, that we had just walked into a gathering of a convention of the peoples that cover the entire earth. We had just landed at La Guardia airport in New York City and as we made our way into the airport terminal, on what was my first experience of it, and the sounds of the voices and languages and dialects was a shock to my system. I turned to my wife, Jill, and said to her, 'This is not Sheboygan.'

That picture of people who bore every color of God's beautiful design of the human race is what comes to my mind when I read Revelation 7. (SLIDE) John is given a vision by God and in this chapter the vision is of a great multitude of every nation, tribe, people and language. It is a picture of heaven.

The question we need to consider is what period of time this picture represents. Is Revelation a picture of the future, after Jesus returns? Does it reveal the present-time activity of heaven, which is engaged in by our loved ones who have joined the great multitude which has been forming since the first people died? Or is it perhaps a metaphor for what we are to be doing on earth as we try to live out the prayer 'thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'?

For the next several weeks I am going to be preaching on this vision which God gave to Jesus Christ, who in turn gave it to John, who in turn gives to human beings around the world in the form of this mysterious book called Revelation. Revelation means the 'apocalypse', or the 'uncovering', or the 'unveiling'. I have chosen the title 'revealing words' because I want to focus our attention each week on a couple of words which reveal something about God and his creation.

I bring a Reformed understanding of the timeframe of Revelation. Reformed theology answers the question, does Revelation reveal a picture the present heaven, future heaven, or present earth with a resounding 'yes'. The book of Revelation was written to the early Christians who were mostly slaves in the Roman Empire. They were persecuted for their faith, they were often hungry, thirsty, suffering through life. This letter was written to that early church to give them hope; hope that what they are going through because of their faith is not the final picture; hope that their faith will be rewarded with the most exquisite of futures as they stand before Jesus and the Throne of God.

(SLIDE) Revelation is a promise that salvation comes from God, not Caesar. The great tribulation through which they are going is not the end of their experience

of life. Tribulation is a word which captures the idea of grinding grain, a pressing down on that which has life it.

(SLIDE) So, in Revelation, salvation consists of both rescue and peace. Those who follow God are in the process of being rescued and being restored to a life in which they will know not tribulation but peace.

(SLIDE) And here is the key to understanding the Revelation: Salvation's source is our God who sits on the throne and the Lamb. Governments and rulers are not going to bring us rescue and peace. Life doesn't work like that. Salvation does not come from Washington D.C. any more than it came from Rome. Salvation comes from one Throne only: the Throne of God Almighty. So, the letter teaches, place your hope in the one true God because every other source which claims to offer salvation is just a pretender to the throne.

Where do you look for your salvation? The pursuit of happiness takes many paths. Maybe we think for a while that the person with the most toys wins, but in the end we find that the more toys we actually have more stress, not less. Or perhaps we think salvation comes from a fully-funded retirement plan, but then we discover that the older we get the more we still worry about whether we have enough. It is never enough.

Salvation comes not from anything this world can offer. Rescue from the great tribulations of life can come from one source: The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



(SLIDE) Salvation, rescue from death itself, comes at a great cost. And that is why Revelation reveals that Jesus is the Lamb. His purpose in appearing is to shed cleansing blood. Blood is viewed in the Bible as a source of life, bearing life itself. So it is that Jesus blood, shed on the Cross, is not a sign of death but a sign of life. It is life-giving blood which washes away the sin of our filthy rags and makes them gleaming white robes.

The white robes which are the garb of the great multitude are important as symbols of two things: purity and victory. The white robes signify that their sin is gone, that they have been made pure, not by what they did, but by what Christ did. Salvation comes not from anything we can do in this life. Salvation comes from God and the Lamb.

But the white robes also signify victory. You see, life is full of tribulation. We get sick. We lose our jobs. Our relationships suffer, and sometimes end. So, our lives are represented by the sackcloth of those who mourn. But our lives do

not end in sackcloth covered with ashes of despair and distress. Our lives end in white robes of victory.

God has not promised that his children would have no trouble in life, but that they would overcome it. God has not promised that God's children would not suffer, but that they would pass through the waters. God has not promised that there would be no tribulation but that his children would be rise above it to stand at the throne with the Lamb at its center.

(SLIDE) The Lamb sits at the center of the throne. And we surround that throne singing victory songs. "Amen!" the multitude shouts. Imagine a thousands tongues saying 'Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.' Doesn't that deserve and Amen?

You know what the word 'worship' means? It means to give praise to the one who is worthy of praise. And this is the purpose for which Creation, all Creation exists. We, and everything around us, exists to praise the One who is worthy. What we do here in just a rehearsal for the great multitude's song around the throne.

We should practice, right? So, I will say the words of the song and you shout 'Amen!' This is important. My job is to rehearse you for the real thing, so

let's do this! I say 'Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.', and you shout, 'Amen!'

(SLIDE) The Lamb's work is not done though. The Lamb is also a Shepherd. The work of the Lamb is to lead the flock safely through the troubles of life. (SLIDE) Jesus does not rest on the throne in his role as Lamb. He is working as Shepherd because we are still so often lost and confused in this life. Jesus, the Great Shepherd works every moment of our lives to gather and guide the multitude through springs of living water.

As we know, Jesus is in heaven, but that doesn't mean he has stopped gathering and guiding God's children. God has appointed the Church to be the agent of Christ in gathering and guiding, and, of course the work of the church happens through the disciples who come together to form the Church.

If I had to try to state a job description for a Mother in one sentence, which I know is impossible to do, it would be that: to gather and to guide her children. I don't know from personal experience, obviously, but what I have observed shows me that being a Mom is really hard work. Very hard work. But, if you can focus on the tasks of gathering and guiding your children into the Community of Christ, well then, you will have succeeded as a Mother.

No one can do this perfectly, so don't put that burden on yourself, Mom. Only Jesus is perfect. So, if you feel like you have failed your children, I encourage you to stop thinking like that. Your children will forgive you, Jesus has forgiven you, now you just need to forgive yourselves.



So, Mothers, we honor you today for doing the best you can to gather and guide your children to the springs of living water.

This is the symbolism of baptism. Anabella was guided through the baptismal waters today not by her parents, though they brought her to the shore; not by me as her pastor, though I lowered her into the stream; but by the Great Shepherd who raised her from the waters as a victor over the life she is yet to live. No matter what happens to Anabella in this life, no matter her tribulations, today we see the sign of the promise that the Lamb has cleansed her already, that the Shepherd has guided her to victory over death.

The Shepherd has another mission: to wipe tears from eyes. The Shepherd not only protects our bodies, he comforts our hearts. So it will be for all of the baptized. The Shepherd protects her when her heart is breaking, when she dwells in darkness, when her enemies torment her, she will have her tears wiped away.

And here we discover too a Mother's dearest role, wiping away those tears. Those tears of your infant child who cried for food or to get a diaper changed. Those tears on the first day of school, or the day you drop him or her off at college. Those tears when the boy or girl who was their dream suddenly says 'no more.' Those tears when the perfect job is denied her and, 'now what, Mom?' Those wedding day tears. You dried them all.

The Risen Christ, who we celebrate this Eastertide, is the source of our salvation. He is the King who serves his people as both Lamb and Shepherd.

This is a promise made to a great multitude. We can know this salvation promise in this life on this earth, and the bringing of this message is indeed the work of the church in this sad world. To reveal this Jesus.

And this is work of the multitude today. Your mothers who have gone before you are wearing white and waving palm branches singing songs and shouting Amens.

This will be the work of the great multitude forever. Anabella joins that great multitude which worships God on this earth and in heaven. She is not in Sheboygan any longer. She is wearing her white robe, waving her little palm branch, and in her own language, shouting... Amen!