

Fourth Sunday of Easter

FIRST READING – Acts 20:17-35

¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. ²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. ²⁵ “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. ³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

20:17 *elders of the church.* The importance of the leadership of elders has been evident throughout Paul’s ministry. He had delivered the famine gift from the church at Antioch to the elders of the Jerusalem church (11:30). He had appointed elders on his first missionary journey (see 14:23) and had addressed the holders of this office later in Philippi (Php 1:1, “overseers”). He requested the Ephesian elders to meet with him on this solemn occasion (see v. 28). Some years later he wrote down instruction about the elders’ qualifications (1Ti 3; Tit 1). (CSB)

The pastors of the Church at Ephesus, whom Paul had appointed by the authority of the Holy Spirit (cf v 28). (TLSB)

The church at Ephesus was made up of a number of local churches or congregations. The elders were the leaders of those churches, men chosen for their mature judgment and spiritual knowledge. They were “overseers” and “shepherds”. That can only mean that they carried out the pastoral ministry in those churches. (PBC)

20:18-35 The only address recorded in Acts that Paul makes to a Christian audience. Paul recalls the work he did among the Ephesians (vv 18–21) and then speaks of the imprisonment and afflictions awaiting him in the future (vv 22–24). Since the Ephesian Christians will encounter similar trials (vv 29–30), Paul encourages the elders to watch out for the sheep under their care, faithfully exercising their office (v 28), as Paul had been faithful in the exercise of his office (vv 26–27, 31, 33–35). The power and strength to carry out their duties comes only from God and His Word (v 32). (TLSB)

20:18-19 *tapeinophrosunēs . . . dakruōn . . . peirasmōn*. Paul’s recollection of his time among the Ephesians brings forth the memories of his “humility,” “tears,” and “trials.” We need not deny the emotions that spring forth from years of ministry. As the unchanging truth comes to people in such varied circumstances, it is not without struggle and heartache that lives are changed (or not) by the Gospel. Paul’s first point is the humility that would make most important the message and not the messenger. However, it is also hard to separate the joy of receiving the message from the faithful servant God may choose to bring it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

20:19 GREAT HUMILITY – Reflects the true servant attitude with which Paul carried out his apostolic ministry (cf 2Co 10:1; 11:7). (TLSB)

with tears. See v. 31. Paul’s ministry at Ephesus was conducted with emotional fervency and a sense of urgency. (CSB)

Due to Paul’s love and compassion for the Ephesians. (TLSB)

Perhaps he sometimes worked himself to exhaustion in trying to prepare them for their work as overseers of the flock. In their work they must never forget his warnings. (PBC)

TESTED – Acts records no specific trials of Paul at Ephesus, but the apostle alludes to them in 1Co 15:30–32 (and possibly in 2Co 1:8–10). (TLSB)

PLOTS – Luke records no specifics, but since such plots had occurred in other places, it is not surprising that they would happen in Ephesus as well. (TLSB)

20:20-21 Three pairs of ideas comprised Paul’s ministry among the Ephesians. First, Paul highlights that his teaching was to both large *and* small groups *dēmosiai kai kat’ oikous*); for the modern pastor, the call is Sunday preaching and teaching and also to visit his people in their houses. Second, the Word was proclaimed to diverse groups—Jews *and* Greeks—not just one or the other. Third, the ministry was a call to repentance *and* faith (*metanoian kai pistin*)—the initial connection to God and that which follows and sustains (Law and Gospel). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

20:21 REPENTANCE – “*To repent* means nothing other than to truly acknowledge sins, to be heartily sorry for them, and to stop doing them” (FC SD V 8). (TLSB)

FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS – After turning away from sin, one turns to the Savior, trusting in Him for forgiveness and eternal life (cf 16:31). (TLSB)

20:22-24 Paul affirms that when we are attentive to the Spirit's leading, uncertainty is certain. Faith goes forward "constrained," *dedemenos*, by the Spirit. We don't seek out crosses or trial (or new ministry situations!) but are led into them by God. As Paul considered going to Jerusalem, it certainly would have called to mind Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem to complete his saving work (recorded in Luke's first book to Theophilus, Lk 9:51)—not that Paul would elevate his work to the level of Jesus', but that here he also saw the culmination of his ministry. It is good to note how profound and difficult it is to discern the Spirit's leading in individual or specific situations; there is not often "writing in the sky." Suffice it to say that the Spirit doesn't always lead us to the easiest (or necessarily the hardest) situations in life or ministry, but where we, like Paul, can "finish [our] course . . . to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (v 24). Faithful years of ministry are a blessing to both shepherd and flock. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

20:22 *compelled by the Spirit*. Paul did not go to Jerusalem against the direction of the Spirit, as some have suggested, but because of the guidance of the Spirit. People pleaded with him not to go (21:4, 12), not because the Spirit prohibited his going but because the Spirit revealed the capture that awaited him there (21:11–12). (CSB)

Luke often emphasizes how the Holy Spirit directs Paul (cf 13:2, 4, 9; 16:6–7). (TLSB)

20:24 FINISH THE RACE – Paul uses race terminology to describe his ministry (cf 1Co 9:24–27). (TLSB)

TASK GIVEN ME – ESV has ministry. Cf 9:6, 15; 26:16–18. (TLSB)

LORD JESUS HAS GIVEN ME – Christ Himself made Paul an apostle (cf 1Co 1:1; Gal 1:12). (TLSB)

20:25-27 Paul's sense of never seeing the Ephesians again appears to have turned out to be wrong (1 Tim 1:3 seems to support Paul being in Ephesus after this) and thus would not have been a part of the Spirit's revelation to him (v 23). This reinforces how unsure we are of what the future will bring. Paul is quick to declare that he did all he could. Those who didn't hear the Word bore their own guilt. What he thought was his final accounting to the Church in Ephesus was that he had preached to them the "whole counsel of God." By God's grace, it seems he did have another opportunity to be with them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

20:25 *none of you . . . will ever see me again*. Not a message from God but what Paul anticipated. He had been mistaken before in his plans: He had intended to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, but he had to leave earlier (see v. 1; 1Co 16:8–9). His prophetic power was not used to foresee his own future, just as his healing power was not used to heal his own disease (see 2Co 12:7–9). As it turned out, it seems that Paul did revisit Ephesus (see 1Ti 1:3). (CSB)

Paul is offering his own opinion here; he did return to Ephesus later. (TLSB)

20:26 INNOCENT OF THE BLOOD OF ALL – He was saying that no one would go to eternal death because Paul had failed to preach the truth to him. (PBC)

Paul knows that in the future, some of the pastors will fall away from the faith. Cf vv 29–30. (TLSB)

20:27 WHOLE WILL OF GOD – Paul proclaimed the entire OT Scriptures, as all pastors, preachers, and teachers of God’s Word should. (TLSB)

29:28-31 Paul’s admonition is for the overseers, *episkopous*, to watch not only for the flock but also for themselves. Paul sees the process of men becoming church leaders as God-directed: “The Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” While some manuscripts say “the Church of the Lord,” *kuriou*, the likely reading is the “Church of God,” which speaks of God shedding his own blood, affirming even more Jesus’ oneness with the Father. Shepherding and protecting from wolves is a bloody business that brings death! It is Jesus’ blood first and foremost and also the blood from times when the wolves would tear apart sheep. The call to alertness and what is at stake is a job for watchmen who don’t slack off, as Paul did not stop “night or day” to admonish with tears. His tears now are of the anticipated reality of what he had feared previously for those who reject or are led astray from the Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

20:28 FLOCK – Common biblical term for God’s people (cf Jer 23:1–4; Jn 10:11–16). (TLSB)

overseers. Be shepherds. The “elders” (v. 17) were called “overseers” and told to pastor (“shepherd”) the flock—demonstrating that the same men could be called “elders,” “overseers” or “pastors.” *his own blood.* Lit. “the blood of his own one,” a term of endearment (such as “his own dear one,” referring to his own Son). (CSB)

Same as “elders” (v 17); both are common NT terms for the pastoral office (1Tm 3:1; Ti 1:5, 7). (TLSB)

BOUGHT WITH HIS OWN BLOOD – The Church consists of those who believe in Jesus as Savior; they were ransomed with the very blood of the Son of God. “God’s Son truly suffered for us. However, He did so according to the attributes of the human nature, which He received into the unity of His divine person and made His own. He did this so that He might be able to suffer and be our High Priest for our reconciliation with God” (FC Ep VIII 14). Chemnitz: “*Ekklēsia* [is used] of citizens when a citywide gathering is held of those who, bound together by certain laws, are citizens of one commonwealth.... Therefore in order to distinguish the New Testament church from other gatherings, in Scripture the term ‘church of God’ is used” (LTh 2:693). (TLSB)

20:29 SAVAGE WOLVES – Used also by Jesus to describe false teachers and their destructive nature. “Just as the Church has the promise that it will always have the Holy Spirit, so it also has warnings that there will be wicked teachers and wolves [Acts 20:29]. Yet, the Church in the proper sense has the Holy Spirit. Although wolves and wicked teachers run rampant in the Church, they are not properly Christ’s kingdom” (Ap VII and VIII 22). (TLSB)

20:30 Paul graphically contrasts his message of the whole counsel of God (v 27) with what the false teachers will proclaim: malformed messages that will mislead the faithful. (TLSB)

20:31 *three years.* See note on 19:10. (CSB)

Time Paul spent in Ephesus. (TLSB)

20:32-35 Paul's conclusion is an apt one for pastors to follow; we always commend our hearers "to God and to the word of his grace." The juxtaposition of grace, that which is freely given and received, and how it comes, is noteworthy. It is through hard work of ministry by which the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed. But when all is said and done, it is not the sweat and blood and tears of us that we highlight, but the blood, sweat, and tears—the saving work—of Jesus that must be called to attention. Finally, if Paul's reference "It is more blessed to give than to receive" is a literal saying of Jesus, it is not one recorded in the Gospels. The sentiment, however, fits very well with Jesus' teaching and brings to mind many blessings experienced in the work of ministry. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

20:32 COMMIT YOU TO GOD – Who could keep the elders faithful in their work and protect the church from the savage wolves? Only God. How would God do that? Through the word of grace, the Scriptures. (PBC)

Paul entrusts the welfare of the Ephesians to God Himself. (TLSB)

BUILD YOU UP – God's Word is powerful (Rm 1:16). Through it, He makes Christians strong in their faith. (TLSB)

AN INHERITANCE – Final goal for Christians is the gift of eternal life in heaven. (TLSB)

are sanctified.† Justified through faith (see 26:18; see also note on 1Co 1:2). (CSB)

Paul refers to Christians, those who have been "made holy" through faith in Jesus. Chemnitz: "In order that there may always be a church, so also there will always be true teachers, but these promises are not tied to certain persons, to a certain succession, or a certain seat" (*LTh* 2:711). (TLSB)

20:34 *supplied my own needs.* Paul had worked in Thessalonica (1Th 2:9) and Corinth (Ac 18:3). (CSB)

Paul did not want to be a burden to those he served with the Gospel (1Th 2:3–10; 2Th 3:7–9). (TLSB)

20:35 HELP THE WEAK – The "weak" here probably means those who are weak in understanding, people who would not realize that they ought to be helping support those who preach the gospel. (PBC)

People who cannot support themselves because of sickness. All others are to support themselves (1Th 4:10–12; 2Th 3:10–12). (TLSB)

remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said. A formula regularly used in the early church to introduce a quotation from Jesus (1 Clement 46:7). This is a rare instance of a saying of Jesus not found in the canonical Gospels. (CSB)

Though not recorded in any of the four Gospels of the NT, the saying is nevertheless genuine. This demonstrates that Jesus' sayings, and stories about Jesus, continued to circulate among believers and were regarded as authoritative, useful admonitions. (TLSB)

MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN RECEIVE – The Gospel Paul preached centers on giving: God gives forgiveness and eternal life through His Son, Jesus; God's heirs give to others based on what God has given them (Mt 25:35–40). (TLSB)

SECOND READING – Revelation 7:9-17

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ 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, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" ¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are 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 them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

7:9 *great multitude*. † Identified in v. 14 as those who have come out of the great tribulation described in ch. 6. (CSB)

Likely the 144,000 described in vv. 4-8. Later they are identified as believers who have survived "the great tribulation" (v. 14). (TLSB)

The second scene in this great interlude is in sharp contrast to the first. "After these things" (μετὰ ταῦτα) in 7:9 (cf. 4:1) indicates a fresh and new sight to be viewed, a sight that probably none on earth had ever been permitted and privileged to behold. The church militant on earth appeared as the 144,000. Though symbolic, this number suggests a much smaller crowd of people than the great host in heaven that is too numerous to count (7:9). In addition, the church militant on earth (as witnessed by the orderly arrangement of the twelve tribes) was prepared to march out in mission. In contrast, the great multitude of people before the heavenly throne of God is at rest and peace, celebrating the results of the mission of the church on earth. As the 144,000 stand poised to be launched out into a world of turmoil and suffering, they are quite aware of the peril they face, though they are confident of God's sealing protection. But the church triumphant, at rest and peace and awaiting the final act of God's judgment and the resurrection at the End, will never again experience tribulation and persecution on earth. For

them the latter part of Paul's words has come true, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18). (CC pp. 193)

The crowd of people before the throne of God is *countless*. This may have reminded John of the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would be beyond counting—as numerous as the sand of the seashore and as the stars in the heavens (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 32:12; cf. Heb. 11:12) And this crowd standing before God's throne is not only from the ethnic people of Israel, but from every ethnic group of people on earth. Certainly this demonstrates that the true Israel of God, represented on earth by the 144,000 and in heaven by this countless crowd before God's throne, is all those who have the same faith as Abraham, both Jews and Gentiles. That faith alone justifies, the faith in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21–31; 9:7–8, 30–31). (CC p. 193)

"A great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" refers to all believers in Christ in the Church Triumphant. Vv 9–17 deal with the Church Triumphant just as vv 2–8 deal with the Church Militant and, more precisely, how God treats each. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

every nation, tribe, people and language. All four are mentioned together also in 5:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6. Cf. 10:11; 17:15, in which one of the four is changed. (CSB)

WHITE ROBES – The great crowd is *arrayed in white robes*. This is the third time that John sees heavenly figures dressed in white robes. The first time was the twenty-four elders sitting on thrones around God's heavenly throne (4:4). The second was the souls of the martyrs beneath the incense altar in heaven, to whom were given white garments (6:11). And now again John sees heavenly figures so clothed. In addition two earlier references mention people *on earth* wearing white or white robes. In 3:4–5 and 3:18, in the fifth and seventh letters, members of these two particular churches wear white garments; they are those who remained faithful to their Lord. In these two references God's saints *on earth* are referred to as wearing white. Here in 7:9 (as in 4:4 and 6:11), those who are so dressed are before God *in heaven*. As in the instances of the elders and the martyrs, the white robes here in 7:9 symbolize the purity and righteousness of Christ, which purity and righteousness have been given to his people because of his blood (7:14). (CC p. 193)

palm branches.† Used for festive occasions (see Lev 23:40; Jn 12:13) and as symbols of victory in Greek literature. (CSB)

Symbol of victory. They were displayed when victorious kings were welcomed, most famously when Jesus entered Jerusalem. (TLSB)

The heavenly crowd is also *carrying palm branches* in their hands. Palm branches appear only twice in the entire NT, here in Rev 7:9 and in Jn 12:13. This is the first time that John sees heavenly figures with palms, though Jewish tradition about palm branches goes back to the OT. (CC pp. 194-195)

Palm trees were quite prevalent in the Near East, even in oases in desert regions (Ex 15:27). The city of Jericho is frequently described as the “city of palms.” (Deut. 34:3; Judg. 1:16; 3:13; 2 Chr. 28:15) Deborah held court underneath a palm tree (Judg 4:5). Solomon’s temple had palm trees carved on the walls and doors (1 Ki. 6:29, 32-35; 2 Chr. 3:5; cf. 1 Ki. 7:36). Because of the abundance of palm trees in the Near East, they had many uses, especially in decorative applications, as in Solomon’s temple and in the visionary temple of Ezekiel (Ezek. 40:16,22, 26; 41:17-18, 25-26). They were also used in figurative language, as in Ps 92:12 (MT 92:13), “the righteous will flourish like the palm tree.” In Song 7:7 (MT 7:8) the bearing or stature of a beautiful woman is likened to a palm tree. (CC pp. 194-195)

But it is with their use in sacred rites or symbols that is of most interest. For example, in the ancient Near East the palm tree often appears in artistic form as the tree of life on cylinder seals. In the OT palm branches are associated with the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (Lev 23:40; Neh 8:13–17). In Jewish celebrations, as when Simon Maccabaeus delivered Jerusalem from the pagan enemy, palm branches were used in the victory celebration. In 2 Macc 10:5–8 palm branches were carried at the celebration of the purification of the temple; the people were thus reminded of the Feast of Tabernacles (10:6). (CC pp. 194-195)

John would have been aware of this tradition. As he reflected on the sight of the palm branches, he may have thought of the crowd that went out to meet Jesus as the King rode *triumphantly* into Jerusalem (Jn 12:12–13). Whatever their thoughts or the motivation of their actions, including their waving of the palm branches, they were consciously taking part in a celebration. A celebration of a triumphal entry of a king? A celebration of rejoicing over a promised deliverance? A celebration of a rededication of the temple? With the palm branches they were participating in a godly reception of the promised King, the Son of David, who would cleanse the temple (Jn. 12:13-15; cf. Mt. 21:9, 12-13; Mk. 11:9-10). (CC pp. 194-195)

Now John sees again palm branches in the hands of celebrants. Only this time the crowd is much larger, and a host of people from every nation is in heaven before God. As Morris states in connection with Jn 12:13, “Palms were an emblem of victory, and in John’s mention of them here we must detect a reference to the triumph of Christ.” *John now views the result of Christ’s triumphal victory on earth: a host waving palm branches in heaven.* (CC pp. 194-195)

7:10-12 God’s Church Triumphant shouts a hymn of praise to God and the Lamb, to whom they attribute their salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

7:10 *Salvation belongs to our God.* See Ge 49:18 (“deliverance”); Jn 2:9. (CSB)

The “Hosanna!” cried on Palm Sunday means “Now save us.” In this vision, salvation is acclaimed as an accomplished fact. (TLSB)

John hears the multitude shouting a *hymn of praise* in which God’s people attribute their salvation (σωτηρία) to God and to the Lamb (7:10). No greater praise can be given to God than that his creatures attribute their salvation to him and to his Christ (cf. 5:9–14). This hymn of praise for salvation is a new stanza to the great Te Deum begun in 4:8. In the glorious vision of God’s throne in heaven and of the enthronement of the Lamb in Revelation 4–5, the heavenly

host added new stanzas of praise to the Te Deum, a stanza giving glory to God for creating all things (4:11); two stanzas lauding the Lamb for the salvation purchased by his blood (5:9–10 and 5:12); and another stanza extolling both God and the Lamb (5:13). Similarly now in 7:10 a great heavenly crowd adds yet another stanza in praise of God and the Lamb for their salvation. Their voice was a great shout of praise which can be imagined to have shaken the rafters of God's heavenly tabernacle. And as John hears the large crowd thus crying out their stanza of praise, he most likely thought of the twenty-four elders and the four winged creatures and their stanza of praise to the Lamb, in which they exclaimed how the Lamb had purchased for God a people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9). Is this that same redeemed people from all nations now standing before God in heaven which John sees in 7:9–10? For they are a people "out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues" (7:9). The same words are used to describe the diverse people in 5:9 and 7:9, though in a slightly different order. (CC p. 195)

7:11 *elders*. See note on 4:4. (CSB)

four living creatures. See note on 4:6. (CSB)

WORSHIPED GOD – As in the vision of God's heavenly throne and the coronation of the Lamb (Revelation 4–5), so also here in Revelation 7 all the angels around the twenty-four elders and the four winged creatures hymn a stanza of praise (5:11–12; 7:11–12). And similar to the stanza in 5:13, sung by "all creation," "[all] the blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength" are ascribed to God (7:12). But here the stanza of praise is given only to God the Father. Why is the Lamb not also the object of the praise, as he is together with God in 5:13? Perhaps the reason is that here we can imagine him presenting this great crowd (7:9), washed in his shed blood (7:14), to his heavenly Father. For as their Shepherd he now leads them to the "fountains of the waters of life" before God in heaven (7:17). However this is interpreted, the heavenly Father is singled out as the object of the heavenly host's praise, for he as their Creator is the source of the salvation of his people through the blood of the Lamb. He sent the Shepherd to the earth to gather his people (Jn 10:14–18, 27–30). Now the Shepherd, as the victorious Lamb (Rev 5:9–10), presents the flock to his heavenly Father. At the end of the stanza of praise by the angels to God, as at its beginning, "amen" (ἀμήν) is spoken (7:12). In 5:14 the four winged creatures spoke it. Here in 7:12 "amen" is spoken by the host of angels at the end of their stanza of praise. (CC pp. 195–196)

7:12 *Praise ... strength*. The sevenfold list of attributes expresses complete or perfect praise (see note on 5:12). (CSB)

The company of heaven repeats their refrain (cf. 4:11). (TLSB)

It is worth emphasizing here that it is *the angels* who sing to their God and Creator this hymn of praise (7:12). In 5:12 the host of angels around the throne of God and around the four winged creatures and around the twenty-four elders also sang the praises of the Lamb because of his victory for God and his people (see also 5:9–10). Now here the angels around the throne and around the winged creatures and elders again sing a hymn of praise, but this time to God the

Father (7:11–12). This great Te Deum, begun in 4:8 by the four winged creatures, has stanzas throughout Revelation. Some are sung by angels, some by the saints of God, and some by the whole heavenly host. One can imagine this heavenly choir of God singing the Te Deum antiphonally, stanza by stanza. The angels praise God and the Lamb for the salvation of human beings; they praise God for rescuing a fallen humanity through his Son, who is also their Lord. There comes to mind the praise of the angels at the birth of Christ (Lk 2:13–14). What does this all mean, this praise of God in which the angels give thanks because God’s people are brought back to him? Certainly it suggests that the angels praise God for his every action. *But in particular it points out that the redemption of God’s people in Christ is the most important action since his creation of all life.* The glory of God’s grace moves his angels to rejoice in this great mystery (Eph. 3:8-12; Col. 1:26-27; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). (CC p. 196)

7:13-14 The “great tribulation” is the worst of the tribulations all Christians experience throughout history for the sake of the Gospel, which will take place immediately before Christ’s second coming; it will be cut short for the sake of God’s people, and it includes all tribulations Christians go through at all times in history for the sake of faithfulness to God’s Word. The Church revealed to John here is the entire Church of God as it will appear on Judgment Day. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

7:13 *white robes.* See note on 6:11. (CSB)

One of the twenty-four elders asks John, “These who are clothed about with white robes, who are they?” (7:13). Of course the elder himself knows, for he, together with the other twenty-three, represents all the saints before God’s heavenly throne (4:4). One would have expected John to have asked the question. The perfect tense (εἶρηκα, “I say,” 7:14) may indicate that John had indeed already asked the question, but to himself. He was perhaps so awe-struck by the appearance of the great crowd in heaven that he had said to himself, “Who are these?” The elder then sensing John’s private wonder asked the question for him in 7:13. John responded, “My lord, you—you know” (7:14). The elder not only asked John who this great crowd was, but also, “whence have they come?” (7:13). When John saw in Revelation 4–5 the vision of God’s heavenly glory and the enthronement of the Lamb, he beheld the elders and the winged creatures as well as the thousands of angels, but he did not see a multitude of people. So in chapter 7 he evidently was wondering not only who they were but also from where they came. The elder included this in his question to John, as if John had asked, “From where did these people come, for I did not see them before?” (CC pp. 196-197)

An elder, and not an angel, attends John in this vision of the saints in heaven. This is the second and final time that an elder stands with John as he looks at a vision or a scene within a vision and helps interpret it for him. The first time that an elder thus attended John in a vision was in 5:5, when he served John by pointing out to him the victorious Lamb. Both in 5:5 and now here in 7:13 the scene or vision has to do very pointedly with the victory of the Lamb *for the purpose of God’s people.* So in both instances God gives to one of the elders, *representatives of God’s people,* the honor of attending John as he views the scenes. All the other times throughout Revelation it is an angel, or angels, who accompanies John to help him interpret and understand the visions and their scenes. (CC pp. 196-197)

7:14 *the great tribulation*.† Described in ch. 6. No passage of Scripture teaches that the church will be “raptured” out of this world for seven years. Jesus also spoke of great distress in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and the final destruction of the world (Mt 24:15–28). Nowhere in Scripture are the words “great tribulation” used in connection with a reference to “seven years.” (CSB)

Because John’s vision includes the faithful from every nation and every time, it is appropriate to see those who yet live faithfully here on earth as part of that gathering. In fact, when Christians gather for worship in this world, they may be understood as participating by faith in the ongoing heavenly praise. (TLSB)

In answer to the question of the identity of the crowd and its origin, the elder states, “These are those who are coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). John had already observed the tribulations and the horror caused by the four horsemen (6:1–8), and he had seen the souls of the martyred saints in heaven praying to God for vengeance, which vengeance would come only after their brothers and sisters had endured the horror of the same persecutions and sufferings (6:9–11). Are the things described in Revelation 6 “the great tribulation” (ἡ θλίψις ἡ μεγάλη) that the elder speaks about here in 7:14? (CC pp. 197-199)

Elsewhere Revelation pictures tribulation as a continuing reality for all Christians. In 1:9, at the beginning of John’s description of how the exalted Christ commissioned him to write Revelation (1:9–20), John states that he was sharing “in the suffering/tribulation” (ἐν τῇ θλίψει) that other Christians were experiencing at that time (1:9). Certainly his exile to the island of Patmos was a part of that tribulation. John had likely suffered other forms of persecutions and tribulations in his long life of witness to Christ. He was not unfamiliar with hardship; his own brother James had suffered martyrdom (Acts 12:1–2). In one of the letters to the seven churches, the Lord Christ acknowledged that his people on earth were and would continue to experience “suffering/tribulation” (θλίψις), part of which was the suffering of persecution and imprisonment (Rev 2:9–10). But these tribulations were not described as “the *great* tribulation” (ἡ θλίψις ἡ μεγάλη as in 7:14). Christians of all ages are always suffering tribulations of one kind or another, including persecutions. In encouraging the Christians in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Paul once stated that “through *many tribulations* [διὰ πολλῶν θλίψεων] it is necessary for us to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22; cf. Jn 15:20; 2 Tim 3:12). (CC pp. 197-199)

The fact that the tribulation here in Rev 7:14 is called “great” (μεγάλη) seems to indicate that it is the worst of the common tribulations that all Christians in general experience throughout history. The “*great* tribulation” is the time toward the end of the “thousand years” (the millennium, which is the NT church age) when Satan will be let loose for a short time (20:7). (CC pp. 197-199)

In Mt 24:15–31 (cf. Mk 13:14–27; Lk 21:20–28) Jesus describes the terrifying days before the end of this present world, and before his second coming, in which he says that there would be a “great tribulation” (θλίψις μεγάλη) as had never been experienced before since the beginning of the world’s existence (Mt 24:21). This “great tribulation” would be so horrible that even God’s own elect would not be saved unless those horrific days were cut short for their sake (Mt 24:22). And the Lord Christ said (Mt 24:15) these last days of this “great tribulation” would be introduced

by the “abomination of desolation” (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως) prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; cf. 1 Macc. 1:54; 6:7). Jesus’ discourse concerning the sufferings of the last days before his second coming is concluded with these words (Mt 24:29–30): (CC pp. 197-199)

And immediately after the tribulation of those days [εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων], the sun will be darkened and the moon will no longer give its light and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers [δυνάμεις] of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven [καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῶ], and then all the tribes of the earth will wail and they will see the Son of Man [καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου] coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory.

The evil days *immediately before Christ’s second coming*, together with their sufferings and persecutions, are called the “great tribulation” (θλίψις μεγάλη, Mt 24:21) and “the tribulation of those days” (τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων, Mt 24:29). (CC pp. 197-199)

Is the “great tribulation” of Mt 24:15–31 the same as that of which the elder speaks in Rev 7:14? It certainly seems so, for the Lord’s words in Matthew locate the “great tribulation” in a sequence of historical events leading up to the return of Christ at the End (cf. ὅταν, “when,” Mt 24:15; εὐθέως, “immediately,” Mt 24:29). However, the elder’s words in Rev 7:14 (especially the present participle ἐρχόμενοι in the phrase “those who *are coming* out of the great tribulation”) also suggest that the picture here is of a condition out of which all the saints are being delivered, not only through the “great tribulation” just before the End, but also through tribulations throughout the whole time period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation. (CC pp. 197-199)

Thus this vision of the church triumphant has a message of comfort for all Christians, including those who go through death long before the “great tribulation” at the End. Since every Christian experiences testings of faith and witness, every such trial points to the future “great tribulation” at the End and becomes at that moment in time existentially a great tribulation for that believer. For example, when Jesus describes the last days before his second coming as the “great tribulation,” he speaks also of the destruction of the temple and the evil days of suffering preceding it (Mt 24:1–14). Jesus uses the word “tribulation” (θλίψις) in referring to those days of sufferings and persecutions which the residents of Jerusalem and Judea would endure. The foretelling of the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem, and the preceding days of tribulation, while serving as an admonition *then*, serve in turn also as a *prophetic type* of the end of this world and of the days of the “great tribulation,” which will come right before the End. Immediately following Jesus’ warning about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is his discourse about the last days of the “great tribulation” and his second coming at the End (Mt 24:15–31). It is evident that, *for the people of Judea and Jerusalem*, their sufferings preceding the fall of the city in A.D. 70 were their “great tribulation” before the end of their lives in the holy city. (CC pp. 197-199)

The picture of eternal glory of Rev 7:14 is for the comfort of all Christians of all times as they experience whatever tribulations sorely test their faith and patience. Some tribulations and sufferings will be so piercing and poignant that the very faith and foundation of the believer’s

hope will be severely tried, almost to the point of despair and defeat. For that Christian at that moment, his sufferings and trials are his great tribulation. And every Christian will experience tribulation. (CC pp. 197-199)

WHITE IN THE BLOOD – A PARADOX. White is the color of purity, and Christ’s people are purified by His blood shed for them. (TLSB)

The people in the great crowd which John sees before the throne of God in heaven have already experienced “the great tribulation” (7:14) and have come out of it. The present participle in the phrase οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ, “those who are coming out” (7:14), suggests that Christians are continually emerging from this tribulation, adding to the crowd in heaven. *John is looking at the whole people of God entering and becoming the church triumphant. The crowd that John sees represents the whole church as if it were already triumphant, as if it were already complete, as it will be at the resurrection at the End* (Cf. Rev. 6:9-11; 14:1-6; 15:2-4; 20:11-15; chapter 21). In contrast, the souls of those who had been martyred, which John saw in heaven at the foot of the incense altar, were not yet complete in number (6:9–11). Also only their “souls” (6:9) were mentioned, which implied that the resurrection of the body had not yet taken place, while in 7:9–17 no such differentiation between body and soul is made concerning the great crowd before God’s heavenly throne. This suggests that the great crowd of the church triumphant is complete in number, but uncountable. *John is looking at the church in its eschatological state, which state the souls of all Christians enter the moment of their death and which is consummated at the resurrection of the body at the End.* (CC pp. 199-201)

The crowd of saints comes out of the great tribulation victorious because of *the blood of the Lamb* (cf. 15:2–4). They had “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). Because of the redeeming death of Jesus Christ and because he now as the victorious Lamb presents them to the heavenly Father, the crowd of people stands pure and holy in the presence of God (cf. Rom 3:21–26; Heb 4:14–16). With sins forgiven by the blood of Christ (1 Jn 1:7–9; 2:1–2), and covered now with the righteousness of the Lamb (Rom 3:22; 10:4), they share in the victory of the Lamb before the heavenly Father. The *active* Greek verbs “washed” and “made ... white” (7:14) with the people as the subject suggest that the saints did the washing. They were the recipients of God’s grace, with the result that as they held to Christ in repentance and faith, they “washed” their garments and “made them white” in his blood by means of Word and Sacrament (Mt. 26:27-28; Acts 2:38-39; 22:16; Rom. 10:14-17). Yet there is no contradiction between passages that speak of Christians washing their robes (active forms of πλύνω in 7:14; 22:14) and those that refer to Christians washing themselves or being washed. Since salvation is by grace alone, it is impossible for a person to wash himself or his clothes so as to (actively) achieve the forgiveness of sins (e.g., Jer 2:22; Job 9:30–31). God alone can turn scarlet sins to “white” (Is 1:18). God must wash the sinner clean from sin (e.g., Ps 51:2, 7 [MT 51:4, 9]; Is 4:4), as confirmed by the baptismal language about God’s “washing” of his church (the verbal noun λουτρόν in Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5). Therefore when God calls for people to wash themselves clean from sin (Is 1:16) or “be baptized and wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16), and when Christians are described as having washed their robes (Rev 7:14; 22:14), it is always with the theological understanding that God is the one who instills the desire, prompts the action (Phil 2:13), and accomplishes the result: forgiven sins and eternal glory. (CC pp. 199-201)

7:15–17† The perfect bliss of the heavenly host is described in a series of 10 statements. The first three lines of the poem describe the blessedness of believers in the presence of God. The next four lines depict the freedom of God’s people from the effects of sin. The last three lines give the source of their bliss: the Lord will shepherd them to the water of life (cf. Jn 4:14). (CSB)

7:15 SERVE – Greek *latreuo*, a verb associated with worship and religious service. (TLSB)

The crowd of saints shares in the heavenly celebration of the victorious Lamb (cf. Rev 5:8–10). As they stand before the throne of God, “they worship him day and night” (7:15). As the four winged creatures “do not cease, day and night,” singing the Trisagion (ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος) of the great *Te Deum* (4:8), so now the saints of God continually participate in the heavenly worship. Certainly a part of that worship includes their joining the winged creatures and the elders and all the angelic host in the singing of that glorious *Te Deum*, as is attested by their shout, “Salvation is with our God” (7:10). However, here their worship is noted but not described in any detail. Rather, their relationship to God and the Lamb is emphasized. (CC p. 201)

temple. All 16 references to the temple in Revelation use the word that designates the inner shrine rather than the larger precincts. It is the place where God’s presence dwells. (CSB)

spread his tent. The imagery would evoke memories of the tabernacle in the desert (Lev 26:11–13). (CSB)

σκηνώσει—In classical Greek this literally meant “to pitch a tent, to encamp, to live or dwell in a tent.” As time went on it began to be used for dwelling in any kind of lodging. The noun σκηνή was thus used to refer to a “tent,” and then also to any kind of an “abode.” The LXX uses σκηνή for both **ןַשָּׁמ** and **לְהָא** when they refer specifically to the tabernacle that Moses was instructed to erect so that God would have a dwelling and sanctuary among his people Israel (e.g., for **ןַשָּׁמ** in Ex 25:9; 26:1, 13; for **לְהָא** in Ex 26:9, 12, 13; cf. Heb 8:2–5; 9:2–21). While σκηνή, the noun, appears regularly throughout the LXX, the verb, σκηνώω, is used very little. An example is in LXX 3 Kingdoms 8:12–13 (MT/ET 1 Ki 8:12–13), where Solomon mentions how the Lord had said that he would “live, dwell” (τοῦ σκηνώσαι) in darkness, but Solomon had now built a royal house or temple (οἶκος, translating **בַּיִת**) for God’s everlasting dwelling place (ἔδρασμα τῆ καθεδρα). (CC p. 179)

The one who sits upon the throne “will spread his tent over them” (7:15). The verb σκηνώω (“pitch a tent,” “live/dwell in a tent”) points to an earthly dwelling, a dwelling in which people share the intimacy of family living. In biblical literature it carries an incarnational idea of God living in an earthly form or abode that can be experienced through the senses. In Jn 1:14, when the Logos (λόγος) became flesh (σάρξ), he “tabernacled” or “tented” (ἐσκήνωσεν) among God’s people. The verb emphasizes a familial, intimate dwelling together in an earthly sense. Even when it is used of those now in heaven dwelling with God (Rev 12:12; 13:6) and the emphasis is on the familial, intimate manner of living together, the earthly, sensory connotation is not totally lacking. It could be that, in using this word, God is condescending to our human understanding of existence and manner of speaking. But more likely, the word is used to direct attention to the fact that God’s people, considered in their eschatological existence, raised from the dead, will

live intimately *in the flesh* with God in the new heaven and new earth (21:3), and in a familial, intimate way, he will dwell with them sensately, that is, in a manner that can be experienced also with the human senses (see 1 Jn 1:1–3). The future tense of the verb emphasizes the “not yet” aspect of this promise. *Now* this is understood and experienced only through the mind and eyes of faith, but *then, after the resurrection*, it will be a sensory reality (see Job 19:25–27; 2 Cor 5:1–5; cf. 2 Pet 1:13–15). Here in Rev 7:15 John is assured that God will dwell with his saints who have come out of the great tribulation. God dwells with them forever in a manner that is in keeping with what Jn 1:14 reveals: the Word became flesh and came to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ. (CC pp. 201-202)

7:16 NEVER AGAIN WILL THEY HUNGER, THIRST, NOR ANY SCORCHING HEAT – Because God will tent among his saints in heaven, “they will never again hunger nor ever again thirst” (Rev 7:16). This description and those which follow are to be received in an eschatological, incarnational sense. The state of existence that is being described, though true now for all the saints before God’s heavenly presence as “souls” (6:9), will reach its final and full meaning *at the resurrection of the body in the new heaven and new earth*. For example, in describing life with God in the new heaven and earth, John says that every tear will be wiped from the eyes of God’s people (21:4), and all who are thirsty will drink from the fountain of living water (21:6). While Revelation 21 does not explicitly speak of never again being hungry nor thirsty, it does say that in the new heaven and earth there shall never again be any pain or sorrow or death (21:4). Again, while all this is understood as true *now for the souls* of God’s people with him in his heavenly presence, it finds its final and complete meaning *after the resurrection of the body* in the eternal life with God in the new heaven and earth. (CC pp. 202-203)

Though 7:16 describes the blessed state of existence as the *absence* of physical traumas, it touches the very core of natural human life and needs. Hunger, thirst, and burning, scorching heat are especially applicable to living in a desert-like wilderness as the children of Israel did (Ex 16:1–3; 17:1; cf. Rev 12:6). They are, nevertheless, woes common to all life in this fallen world. These words of Rev 7:16 call to mind the promise that God gave through Isaiah (49:8–10). God said to his people that in the day of his salvation he would help them and restore them to their land. When that happened they would not hunger nor thirst, nor would the heat of the desert or the sun smite them (Is 49:10). What John heard in Rev 7:16 may have reminded him of the manna in the wilderness and the miraculous way God provided water (Ex 16:4–5; 17:3–7). It also may have evoked his memory of Jesus feeding the five thousand (Jn 6:1–15). And John must have remembered the words of Jesus to the woman at Jacob’s well that whoever drinks the water he gives will never thirst again (Jn 4:7–15). Jesus also said that because he is the bread of life, whoever comes to him will never hunger again, and whoever believes in him will never thirst again (Jn 6:35). (CC pp. 202-203)

As John reflected on what he had heard in Rev 7:16 and related it to such words and deeds of the Lord, he must have been comforted with this thought: God always keeps his promises. *For John now sees and hears the final end of God’s promise concerning his people*. Now in their existence as “souls” (6:9) in heaven before God and the Lamb, and in his vision of the future final fulfillment after the resurrection of the body in the new heaven and earth, John sees God’s

people at rest, never again to be pained by the harshness of life as they formerly experienced it in their earthly existence. For in their new life with God—now before his heavenly throne and then in the new heaven and earth—the Lamb “will shepherd them, and he will lead them to fountains of the waters of life” (7:17; cf. 21:6). (CC pp. 202-203)

Images recall Israel's wilderness wanderings and the hardships of the Church's earthly pilgrimage. It anticipates a peaceful existence without the hardships of this fallen world. (TLSB)

7:17 *shepherd*. Ancient kings often referred to themselves as the shepherds of their people. (CSB)

Before his death and resurrection Jesus had identified himself as the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11–14). In the OT Yahweh had promised his people that like a shepherd he would look after them in order to rescue them and care for them (Ezek. 34:11-16; cf. Ps. 28:8-9; 78:52; 80:1 {MT 80:2}; Jer 31:10-11; Micah 7:14). In order to carry out this word, God then promised to provide his people with a shepherd who would tend them. This promised shepherd would be his servant, a new David (Ezek. 34:23-24; cf. Is. 40:9-11; Ps. 78:70-72). According to Jesus' own words, Jesus himself is this servant, this David (Mk. 12:35-37; cf. Mt. 1:1; 15:21-22; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8). It was also well known at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry that the Messiah would be born at Bethlehem from the seed of David (2 Sam. 7:11-12; Ps. 89:3-4 {MT 89:4-5}; Micah 5:2 {MT 5:1}; Mt. 2:5-6; Jn. 7:40-42). The relationship between God and his people, as pictured by his being their shepherd, was revealed so beautifully in the twenty-third psalm. In this psalm, as the psalmist declares that Yahweh is his shepherd, he says that his Lord will lead him to “quiet waters” and thus restore his soul (Ps 23:2–3). Now in Rev 7:17 John sees and hears the final outcome of these promises in the OT and of the Lord Christ himself. The shepherd of Yahweh has now been provided. By his death and resurrection, the servant David has rescued God's people (5:5–6). And as their Good Shepherd he tends the flock, caring for them and leading them through “the great tribulation” (7:14) to the quiet waters of eternal life—already now on earth, then in heaven with God, and finally forever in the new heaven and new earth. (CC p. 203)

SPRINGS OF LIVING WATER – Jesus spoke of this gift during His earthly ministry (cf. John 7:37-38). Note that whereas v. 16 describes heaven as being devoid of anguish, this verse describes heaven in positive terms. Luther: “While worms and rottenness are before our eyes, we cannot be unmindful of them, nevertheless there will be a time when God will wipe away every tear, as is stated in this verse. Therefore faith should begin to forget tears and dishonor which it does not see. Although the eyes see the rottenness, the ears hear the complaints and sobs, and the noses smell the stench of the corpses, nevertheless it is the part of faith to say ‘I do not know this. I see nothing. Indeed, I see a multiplication and a brightness surpassing the sun itself and the stars.’ Therefore, such examples are set before us in order that we may learn that God is the Creator of all things, restores the dead to life and glorifies worms and the foulest rottenness. And He wants this to be acknowledged and celebrated by us in this life of faith. Later, however, in the future life, we shall experience it in actual fact” (AE 7:210-211). (TLSB)

“Fountains of the waters of life” (7:17) is an expression for the source of life. God himself is that source of life (Ps 36:9 [MT 36:10]; cf. Rev 21:5–6). Jesus Christ leads the flock to God for the gift of life. For as God the Father has life in himself, he has also given to his Son to have life in himself (Jn 1:4; 5:26). In order to give the gift of life to God’s people, the shepherd laid down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). And in his resurrection he received his life back (Jn 10:17–18) so as to lead his followers to God, the ultimate source of life. (CC p. 203)

WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR – A final truth describes the rest and the peace of the crowd of saints before God’s throne in heaven: “God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:17). Tears and laments are part of the experience and character of the faithful people of God while on this earth. Tears are shed over one’s sins and the sins of others (Is 22:4; Pss 6:6; 39:12 [MT 6:7; 39:13]), over the ruin and sufferings experienced by others (Jer 9:1, 18 [MT 8:23; 9:17]; 13:17), over one’s own afflictions (Job 16:16; 30:31), when confronted with God’s anger (Ps 80:5 [MT 80:6]), when alone and in sorrow (Ps 102:9 [MT 102:10]). In the OT David mourned over the death of Absalom and would not be comforted (2 Sam 18:33–19:4). Rachel in Ramah wept over her children (Jer 31:15; cf. Mt 2:16–18). In the NT we are told that Mary shed tears at the death of her brother Lazarus (Jn 11:33; cf. Lk 8:52). The women of Jerusalem wept over Jesus as he went to the cross (Lk 23:26–27), but Jesus urged them to weep for themselves and their children because of the coming afflictions (Lk 23:28–31). The sinful woman shed tears of sorrow over the feet of Jesus (Lk 7:37–38). Both Paul and the elders of Ephesus shed tears at their final parting (Acts 20:18–19, 37–38). Paul wept tears over the Christians of Corinth (2 Cor 2:4), and Timothy wept over Paul (2 Tim 1:4). Jesus warned his disciples and followers that they would weep and mourn while the world would rejoice (Jn 16:20). And the Lord Jesus wept tears over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41) and at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:35). (CC p. 203-204)

In this life the shedding of tears is as much—at times even more—the experience of Christians as are joy and laughter. In fact, tears precede the joy (see Jer 31:15–17; Jn 16:20–22). While it is of the nature of the people of God to weep and lament, it is the gift of God’s grace to turn the weeping and sorrow into joy (Jn 16:20). Still on earth, tears will flow together with the godly joy. And the tears of God’s people are precious to him in his love for them (Ps 56:8 [MT 56:9]). But God will turn the weeping into joy (Ps 126:5), for he has promised a day when “the Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from all faces” (Is 25:8). *John now sees (in Rev 7:17) the complete and final fulfillment of this promise of God. The final word describing the peace and joy of the saints before God in heaven says it all: “and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”* (CC p. 203-204)

Conclusion: An Interlude of Comfort and Encouragement

While the inaugural vision of God’s heavenly glory and the coronation and enthronement of Jesus Christ (Revelation 4–5) controls and dominates the prophetic message of Revelation, the vision of the church militant sealed by God and of the church triumphant shepherded by the Lamb encourages and nurtures a comfort and hope that permeates the same prophetic message. *The purpose of Revelation 7, the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, is to encourage John and his hearers—despite the fears and horrors already introduced by the first six seals and also in view of all the tribulations yet to be revealed.* While John and the seven churches have experienced the sufferings and persecutions revealed in Revelation 6—and will

continue to experience them until the end of this world, when Christ returns—they are not to forget that what they had seen in the inaugural vision (Revelation 4–5) controls everything for the sake of God’s glory and that of the Lamb, and for the benefit of God’s people on earth. And now for their own encouragement and comfort and hope, they are also not to forget what they had just seen and heard in this interlude. God will protect his people as they carry out the mission of their Lord here on earth. He will not forsake them. He will not permit them to lose their faith and hope. And he promises soon to conduct them to the glorious citizenship of the church triumphant. That is to be their end—not the suffering here on earth, but instead the glory of God and of the Lamb. How much John and his hearers will need such knowledge and encouragement in their faith, for even more dreadful portents are yet to be revealed after the seventh seal is opened! (CC p. 204)

GOSPEL – John 10:22-30

22 Then came the Feast of Dedication^a at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

10:22-30 The larger context begins in chapter 9 with the healing of the blind man, as Jesus reveals himself as the Son of Man. In chapter 10 Jesus identifies himself as the true and good shepherd (10:1–18). Jesus spoke the language of double talk: both by his miracle that restored sight and by his teaching, he gave insight as to who he was—the Son of Man. The Jews are divided as to his authenticity; some say he is demon-possessed; others know demons do not open the eyes of blind people (vv 19–21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

Jesus has been declared by some Jews to be demon-possessed and raving mad. Why? He has opened the eyes of the blind. He has talked openly about his unity with the heavenly Father and his mission as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Although Jesus is still in Jerusalem, there is a lapse in time between vv 21 and 22 of approximately two months (Feast of Tabernacles [7:2] to the Feast of Dedication); however, there is no break in thought from the first half of ch 10 to 10:22. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

10:22-24 The setting of our text is Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication—an eight-day feast also known as the Festival of Lights. It commemorated the great Jewish victory under the Maccabees and the rededication of the desecrated temple on Kislev 25,164 B. C. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

It is winter—December. Jesus is at the Jerusalem temple, walking in Solomon’s Colonnade (cf. Acts 3:11; 5:12). The Jews gather around him. They have a burning

question on their minds: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (v 24, as if he had not already done so!). Our text is his plain, clear answer. The problem was not that Jesus had failed to demonstrate he was the Messiah, but that he was not the type of Christ they were expecting and wanting. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

10:22 *Feast of Dedication.* The commemoration of the dedication (see NIV text note) of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in December, 165 B.C., after it had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. This was the last great deliverance the Jews had experienced. (CSB)

Also called Feast of Lights or Hanukkah. Celebrated the rededication of the temple in 164 BC, following its desecration by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The festival was joyous and included recitation of Ps 30. (TLSB)

John puts our text on the calendar by mentioning the Feast of Dedication (Jewish Festival of Hanukkah), in mid-December. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

The annual celebration lasted eight days beginning the 25th of Chisleu (about the middle of December) and was observed throughout the country, a special feature consisting in illuminating the houses from which fact the festival was called “the Lights.” When John adds to the mention of the festival the phrase “in Jerusalem” to designate the place, this would be superfluous if Jesus had spent the intervening two months (7:2, end of October to the end of December) in the city. He left shortly after the October celebration and had now returned. This is substantiated by what is now reported. The new situation and the new testimony Jesus utters connect directly with the last that He spoke before leaving the city (19:1, etc. in regard to His sheep). Where He broke off two months ago there He now begins. The situation highly strained during the last visit (chapters 7-10:21), now reaches its climax (10:39), the Passover in the spring, when He will enter upon His passion and His death. (Lenski)

It was winter. A description for those unfamiliar with the Jewish calendar. – This is the Jewish Festival of Hanukah in mid-December. (CSB)

The remark that it was winter is not intended to inform us about the season of the year but to explain the next statement that Jesus was walking in a sheltered place in the Temple. (Lenski)

10:23-24 Perhaps Jesus is alone as he walks Solomon’s colonnade, perhaps the disciples are with him, but the Jews surround him determined to get an answer to their question. J. B. Phillips says, “They closed in on him” (*The New Testament in Modern English* [New York: Macmillan, 1958] 211). There seems to be frustration here from those who are blinded by their own unbelief: “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Opponents declared Jesus a demon or a madman. He declared himself the Messiah. Logically, those are the only two choices, although a third is added today—that of great Teacher. That declaration makes no sense if one reads Scripture. Either Jesus is the Messiah or he is a madman. To claim to be the Messiah without really being the Messiah would hardly qualify one as a great Teacher. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

10:23 *Solomon's Colonnade*. See Ac 3:11; 5:12. It was a roofed structure—somewhat similar to a Greek stoa—commonly but erroneously thought to date back to Solomon's time. (CSB)

Sheltered area on the east side of the temple, with a roof supported by columns that provided some protection from the weather. Popular place for rabbis and their disciples to gather. (TLSB)

This covered colonnade offered some protection from the weather on that wintry day. Josephus says that this portico was the only part of the old Temple of Solomon left standing after the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar, and was thus named “the porch of Solomon.” (Lenski)

10:24-25 In a common move made by the author of the Gospel, the Jews represent opposition to Jesus' words (10:19) and works (v 25). The request of the Jews for a plain word from Jesus regarding his identity as the Christ is met by a strong word from Jesus, which convicts them of their unbelief (vv 24–25). They have already heard Jesus' plain words (“I told you,” v 25) but have attributed them to demon oppression or insanity (10:20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 20, Part 2)

10:24 GATHERED AROUND HIM – By concerted action they surround and enclose Him, meaning that he shall not again get away. No friendly multitude is at hand to support Him and to stay their hand. Jesus is suddenly face to face with His bitter enemies, who are now bound to force the issue. The moment is charged with the gravest potentialities. (Lenski)

KEEP US IN SUSPENSE – The question charges Jesus with keeping the Jews on tenterhooks by not coming out fairly and squarely on the main question. What that question is their demand states, “If thou art the Christ etc. ‘tell us plainly’ (“with openness”) means: then we shall know how to act.” The implication is by no means that these Jews would believe if Jesus would say in so many words, “I am the Christ.” Nor is the idea this that the Jews would use such a plain statement as a political charge on which to bring Jesus to trial. Still less may we assume that the Jews are seeking to ease their own consciences in regard to their treatment of Jesus by casting the blame on Him for not speaking out plainly. They are long past such scruples. The suspense to which these Jews object is that of thrusting the fact of His Messiahship into their consciences in such a way as to cause divisions in their own ranks (9:16; 10:19) yet without giving them the chance they are determined to have to bring to book for His claim. They mean that this is now to end; they are determined to end it right here and now. (Lenski)

the Christ. See note on 1:25 and cf. 20:31. This was the critical question, but it was not easy to answer because of the different ideas of Messiahship then in vogue. (CSB)

10:25 *I did tell you*. Jesus had not specifically affirmed his Messiahship except to the Samaritan woman (4:26). He may have meant here that the general thrust of his teaching made his claim clear or that such statements as that in 8:58 were sufficient. Or he may have been referring to the evidence of his whole manner of life (including the miracles)—all he had done in the Father's name (for the name see note on 2:23). (CSB)

Not an explicit statement, but His deeds (the signs) and His teaching spoke a clear and unequivocal yes. (TLSB)

It was no secret who Jesus was. He had told them before. In Jn 4:26 Jesus said plainly to the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah. In Jn 5:18 the Jews were about to do him in for “making himself equal with God.” In Jn 8:58 Jesus speaks the truth plainly, identifying himself as being from eternity: “I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

Jesus indicates to them not only by words but also by deeds who he is: “The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me.” This is what we mean by double talk: both his words and his deeds proclaim him as Messiah. It takes more than words; false Christs tell people who they think they are, but their deeds fall short of verification. In contrast, the works of Jesus substantiate his words. By this model Jesus establishes for us the importance of our words supporting our works, and of our works supporting our words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

erga is translated in the NIV as “miracles.” Perhaps “works” is a better translation. Miracles would certainly be included in works but not limited to what one normally connects with the word *miracle*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

YOU DO NOT BELIEVE – The trouble lies not, even in the least, with Jesus but with these Jews. After all His telling,, including the present word, they do not believe (durative present). All His telling is in vain – in vain through fault of theirs; is so even now. (Lenski)

“You do not believe” places the blame for unbelief—on the individual. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

MIRACLES – *erga* – These included other works besides just miracles. His deeds had spoken for him.

IN MY FATHER’S NAME – This reference to His father again tells these Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Once more He asserts His mission for the Father, the mission which makes Him the Christ. (Lenski)

10:26-27 In addition to listening to Jesus’ words, the Jews have seen his works but do not believe (vv 25–26). Jesus draws a contrast between those who do not believe because they are not part of his flock (v 26) and the sheep who hear his voice and follow him (v 27). If the Jews represent the unbelieving world in the Gospel, here the sheep represent the believing flock. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 20, Part 2)

10:26 YOU DO NOT BELIEVE – He places the blame where it belongs, squarely on them as individuals. (Lenski)

Ylvisaker: “They believed neither His words nor His works. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

The fault lies not with Jesus; his confirmation is like a two-edged sword, by word and deed. No, the fault lies with their own stubborn unbelief. Convincing evidence has been presented. It is not believed. The problem lies not with the evidence; it rests with the evaders of truth: “but you do not believe.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

Sheep that belong to another shepherd will not recognize, follow, obey, or believe this good shepherd. They don't believe in him because they are not his sheep. The Jews should be asking two questions, not just one. They should not only be asking who he is, “Are you really the Christ?” They should also be asking, “Who are we? Are we the sheep of this shepherd?” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

10:27 *voice* Cf. vv. 3-5(CSB)

The characteristics of his sheep are that they hear the shepherd's voice and follow him. Luther notes, “This lovely, delightful picture you may, if you wish, see for yourself among sheep. When a stranger calls, whistles, coaxes, ‘Come sheep! Come sheep!’ it runs and flees, and the more you call, the more it runs, as if a wolf were after it, for it knows not the strange voice; but where the shepherd makes himself heard a little, they all run to him, for they know his voice. This is what all true Christians should do, hear no voice but their shepherd's, Christ, as he himself says” (quoted in R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943] 753). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

I know them. Cf. v. 14. (CSB)

Jesus reminds them incidentally of the occurrences at the feast of the Tabernacles in the month of October. On that occasion (10:1-21) He had given a description of His true sheep, and had thus – indirectly -- indicated that they did not belong in this category. Lenski: “The sense is ‘Since you are not my sheep you do not believe’ and not ‘Since you are not my sheep you cannot believe.’” (Exegetical Notes – Bultmann)

Jesus gives them the answer. Jesus shows them the way. Jesus sets up an open-book test and shows them where to find the answer. What do his sheep do? “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” The voice is crucial. Two shepherds can utter the same words, but the sheep will follow the one and not the other, not only because of the content, but also the tenor and tone of voice. Something spoken harshly will drive the sheep away in fright. The same word spoken in tender care and compassion will cause them to nuzzle up and obediently follow onward. They hear! They know! They follow! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

Note the singular and the plural. There is only one shepherd; there are many sheep. There is only one who calls; there are many who respond and follow. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

they follow. Cf. vv. 4–5. (CSB)

I call, they come; I choose the path, they trust and come after; I lead, they are safe in my care; I command in love, they respond in obedience and love. If this at times means the cross, they do not waver. (Lenski)

10:28-30 The sheep are a gift from the Father, who is the source of all gifts (“My Father, who has given them to me,” v 29). The Good Shepherd (Jesus), who “lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11), gives them the blessing of eternal life (10:10b: “life . . . abundantly”). There is another blessing that comes from the sheep’s association with their Good Shepherd: “No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (v 29). Such benefit can be described as protection from the wolf that snatches (10:12) those who do not know the Good Shepherd (10:14) or listen to his voice (v 27). If wolf language refers primarily to false prophets, Jesus is drawing a contrast between listening to the words of the false prophets (cf. 10:5, “strangers”), which results in one’s death, and listening to the words of the Good Shepherd, which brings abundant or eternal life. This line of thought can also be extended to include a contrast between the works of false prophets, which point away from life in the Son, and the works of the Son, which reveal both the Father’s will to care for the sheep (v 29) and his oneness with the Father (v 30) or his being in the Father (vv 37–38). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 20, Part 2)

Reflecting on John 10, the Lutheran Confessions speak of the Father’s protection of the sheep in the language of election. No greater comfort can be given to “troubled, afflicted people” than the assurance that “salvation is in God’s gracious election, which He has revealed to us in Christ, out of whose hand no person shall snatch us” (FC SD XI 90). Christians “must seek eternal election in Christ and His Holy Gospel” (FC SD XI 89), for God has called and saved his sheep through his Word (FC SD XI 29–30). Because “through the devil’s and the world’s craft and might [salvation] could be snatched and taken from us,” God has guaranteed our salvation by placing it “for safekeeping in the almighty hand of our Savior, Jesus Christ, from which no one can snatch us” (FC SC XI 46). The confessional teaching on election corresponds to John’s portrayal of the Good Shepherd’s identity as one who “calls his own sheep by name” (10:3) so that they might “be saved” (10:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 20, Part 2)

10:28 *eternal life*. Christ’s gift (see note on 3:15). (CSB)

A uniqueness of this Shepherd is that he not only lays down his life for the sheep but also gives life to his sheep out of grace. To perish is more than temporal death. It is eternal. No enemy can snatch us from the Shepherd’s grasp, but we ourselves can turn from him and reject his gift of grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

This is the very principle of life which flows from God, is grounded in God, joins to God, and leads to God. No earthly shepherd is able to give life to his sheep. This reveals all the richness, greatness, and attractiveness of our Good Shepherd. The incomparable Giver stood there before the Jews and was actually offering them His divine gift of grace. But they would have none of His greatness and riches. (Lenski)

never perish. The Greek construction here is a strong denial that the sheep will ever perish. The sheep's security is in the power of the shepherd, who will let no one take them from him. (CSB)

To perish is to be separated from God, life and blessedness forever. (Lenski)

Hus: "Because Christ and his Father are one with Holy Spirit – who is Christ's gift, by whom the church is knit together with him – therefore, no one is able to pluck his sheep out of his hand" (The Church, p. 34). "Predestination, or God's eternal election, covers only the godly, beloved children of God. It is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides. He plans what belongs to it as well. Our salvation is founded so firmly on it that the gates of hell cannot overcome it" (FC Ep XI 5). "God's eternal election does not just foresee and foreknow the salvation of the elect. From God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus, election is a cause that gains, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what belongs to it" (FC SD XI 8). (TLSB)

If there is one thing sheep need it is security. They need to be protected. They are unaware of imminent danger. They are passive to the problems around them. They are focused on food. They are oblivious to the dangers that stalk them. How much danger to our soul's welfare is out there of which we are unaware? How many times have we walked into dangerous situations, ignorant of their eternal dimensions? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

There is a basic theological gem here. "I give them eternal life." How could he be any clearer? Eternal life is given to us as a gift. Eternal life comes from the great "I," the one who stands alone, the one who alone is big enough to make such an offer to the world, the one who alone is able to deliver on his word. Eternal life is his to give. It is more than protection in life. It involves provisions for eternal life. It is his to give; it is ours to believe and receive by faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

The second basic implication in this verse is solid assurance that the "warranty" of eternal life will not expire: "they shall never perish." Death has been destroyed. The soul will not perish. The resurrected body will not perish. They have both entered into "never-never land": they will never perish. To perish is to experience life without God, this is hell. It is life separated from God with all the implications of a life that fails to meet our multiple needs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

The truth is supported and expanded by the next thought: "No one can snatch them out of my hand." In the first phrase the sheep are held in the hand of the Shepherd; in the second reference they are in the Father's hand. There is no greater security! Our spiritual proximity to God does not depend on the hold we have on God, but on the hold God has on us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

Perhaps you have read the anonymous story entitled "Footprints." "One night a man dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For many scenes, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to him, and the other to the Lord. But he saw that many other times along the

path of his life there was only one set of footprints. Those were the lowest and saddest times in his life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

He questioned, 'Lord, you said that you'd walk with me all the way. But during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. Why, when I needed you most, did you leave me?' (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

The Lord replied, 'My precious child, I never left you. During your times of trial and suffering—when there was only one set of footprints—it was then that I carried you.'" (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

10:29 *My Father*. See note on 5:17. (CSB)

can. The Father's power ("hand") is greater than that of any enemy, making the sheep completely secure. (CSB)

The Father is "greater than all," and "all" must be masculine and denote persons, for includes the masculine *tis* in v. 28 and *oideis* in the present verse. While "greater" is broad, here it must refer especially to power: the Father exceeds in power every being arrayed, against the sheep (Satan, demon, spirits, human foes however mighty). (Lenski)

How can we be so sure that we will remain secure in the arms of God? "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." (Note that the best Greek reading is actually "What my Father has given me *is greater than all*," with *ho*, "what," denoting believers, as in Jn 17:24. This highlights the superlative value of the sheep in the shepherd's eyes.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

10:30 ARE - Plural verb, which presupposes the distinction of persons in the Trinity. (TLSB)

one. The Greek is neuter—"one thing," not "one person." The two are one in essence or nature, but they are not identical persons. This great truth is what warrants Jesus' "I am" declarations (see 8:24, 28, 58 and note on 6:35; see also 17:21–22). (CSB)

Not merely one in will and work, but one in being or essence (v 38). The Pharisees immediately recognized the nature of Jesus' claim—He declared Himself equal with God (v 33). (TLSB)

The unity of the Trinity is complete; the persons cannot be separated in God's outward works toward the world (*opera ad extra indivisa sunt*, F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1950] 1.415–27). Jesus and the Father are one, one not only in essence, but also in purpose. Jesus has been sent by the Father as the true shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

