

Revelation 7:9-17

There are some books that, when reading them, we take our time enjoying each and every chapter. We smile, we chuckle, we frown, we shed a few tears. The book draws us out of our daily life for those few minutes each day when we open its pages.

But then there are those books that grab us. They plunge us into the plot as if we ourselves become one of the characters in the story. And the plot thickens, so much so, that the drama becomes too intense and we cannot take it anymore. And so we cheat. We sneak a peek at the end of the book. We cannot go on with the story unless we know that everything will turn out and be okay in the final chapter.

My friends, in Revelation the seventh chapter, we are given such a peek. God knows that we need it. The story is simply much too intense. There is too much drama. It causes our emotions to run wild. The book is not one that you and I are currently reading. It's the one that we are living. You are the main character in your story as am I in mine.

It's an amazing story, the story of your life. It's an intriguing story, and one that is unique. Your story is very personal. But it's more than that because you share your story with others, many others. There are heroes in your story, and there are villains. There are characters in your story that you love and characters that are hard to love. For some, your story has taken you around the world. For others, your story is mostly set right here in east-central Missouri. Some of your stories have many pages which have already been read. Some of you have only read a few pages; the story of your life has only begun.

Even though each of our stories is unique, they are all very similar in many ways. There is a repeating pattern through all of them: sin and grace, sickness and healing, sorrow and joy. There are days when we want to put our book down and stop reading. It's too sad, too difficult for us to endure. A loved one develops cancer. How will it turn out? We want to jump ahead, but we can't. We want to know what the future holds, but we have to stay on that page of our life we are currently living.

What about all the drama going on around us? Our nation is divided. There is so much anger everywhere. Innocent people are shot to death while shopping, or while watching a movie at a theater, or listening to a concert. Others are mowed down as they walk or ride their bike. Fires run wild and destroy homes and lives. Hurricanes slam into our coasts. Our world is in turmoil. Villainous rulers are getting their hands on nuclear weapons. Will they aim them at us?

All of these events and patterns are found in each of our stories. These are in your book and also in mine. And we cannot tear these pages out, nor can we read around them. NFL players are taking a knee whether we read that page in our book or not. Babies are murdered in the wombs of their mothers whether we ignore that page or not.

But it's not just out there. The sin, trouble, and grief is also in here; in my heart and life, and also in yours. If we honestly analyze our stories, we have to place the blame with ourselves. We cause our own messes, not others. We are not innocent characters in our stories. We are sinful,

disobedient. We are born this way. Our books begin with sin, and there is guilt written on every page. Oh we try to re-write the pages of our book. We try to blame others for our troubles. We make ourselves out to be the hero and heroine in our story. But in truth you and I are more the villain than the hero. We're not the victims as much as we are the perpetrators. We can't even blame Satan. He tempts, but we are the ones who give in.

Yet along with the theme of sin in our book, there is also the theme of grace...God's grace. That page where you are baptized into Christ...that page is written in blood. And that blood seeps through your book so that all the others pages are affected. That's Jesus' blood. You are one, as our text says, who has washed your robes in His blood and made them white. And so each and every page of your life is white. That's what Jesus' blood does for you. You read of all the sin and guilt in your past, but those pages are white in your story because God forgives you. You are baptized into Christ. His blood was shed on the cross for you. And your life, your book, your story is redeemed and washed clean in His blood.

Every page of your book, and my book, is filled with disobedience toward God; filled with selfishness and lust. But every page is covered in the blood of Christ. No page is left out. Every sinful thought, word, and deed...whether it was written on yesterday's page, or on a page written decades ago, is completely forgiven. You are washed clean in your baptism. You, your life, your story...God forgives.

And for you God does an incredible thing. Because your story is in Christ; because your pages are made white in the blood of the Lamb, God gives you a sneak peek at the final chapter. Right here in Revelation 7 He shows you the past page of your book.

You see that multitude dressed in white? That's you. You are there standing before the throne and before the Lamb. You are one who has suffered tribulation in life because you are a Christian. But on the final page of your last chapter that tribulation is over. You are there in heaven in perfect joy. No more sin or trouble. No guilt. No tears or grief. You are there with all of God's saints. You are there because of Jesus. He brings you there. And there He will shelter you. There He will be your source of perfect peace and bliss.

That, my friend, is what is written in the last chapter of your book. And that chapter does something that no other chapter does. It goes on forever. Every other chapter in your story comes to an end. But your final chapter has no end to it.

This is the joy that awaits you. This chapter is worth waiting for. This final chapter is worth all the drama and heartache you endure now. Be encouraged therefore. Stay in the faith. Remain in Christ. Be in His words and at His table often.

Whatever chapter you are in right now; whatever difficulty you are enduring right now, that chapter has an end to it. Your final chapter is coming. It will be here soon. And when God turns that last page for you, here is how it will read; here in Revelation 7 is how it will turn out.

Today God gives you this little peek, so that in the days ahead, you can live each page of your book with peace in your heart, joy in your life, and with hope in Christ Jesus. Amen.