"Who Are These Arrayed in White Robes?"
(Revelation 7:9-17 – All Saints – November 1, 2026)

Revelation 7:9-17 – *[9]After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10]and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" [11]All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12]saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." [13]Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" [14]And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and 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 dwell among them. [16]They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; [17]for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Dear Redeemed, Saints of God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ:

There are few occasions in life when we might wear white robes. We may think of our Baptism. Often it is a tradition for the baptized to be clothed in a white gown or dress. It reminds us of the purity and holiness in which God clothes us as His children. Galatians 3:26-27 says: *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* Or we may think of a wedding in which a bride may wear a white dress. More importantly, we are reminded of the purity and holiness in which Christ clothes us as His Bride, the Church. Ephesians 5:25 says: *"Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."* As believers, Christ has cleansed us of sin and clothed us in His heavenly white garment, pure and holy in His sight.

Therefore as we observe the Festival of All Saints, we are led to see ourselves in that great multitude in our text. The apostle John is given a vision of all the saints, gathered from *"all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* John is asked by an elder: **"Who Are These Arrayed in White Robes?"** Then he is given the answer, which includes you and me, whom God counts His saints in Christ.

1) They are the ones coming out of the great tribulation

"Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"... The first part of the answer says: *"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation."*

In heaven, they swing high their palms and lift up their song, rejoicing in their God and Savior. On earth they had glimpses of that heavenly joy, knowing salvation was theirs in Christ. Yet on earth, that joy was mixed with trouble and sorrow. The word for *"tribulation"* literally means "pressure." How often as believers in Christ, as strangers and pilgrims passing through this world, we feel pressured and afflicted by many troubles.

First, there are afflictions and troubles common to all people in a fallen world. Since our first parents fell to Satan's temptation, life is cursed by the thorns and frustrations of work, by the pains of childbirth and the pains of aging. Because of sin, all creation groans in bondage to corruption (Romans 8:21-22). All that lives and flourishes eventually succumbs to death and decay. Because of sin and evil, there are wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines (Matthew 24:7). Such troubles are felt by all children of Adam.

But in addition, believers in Christ will experience particular tribulations. Because you believe and are baptized into Christ, you bear the sign of His cross. As a soldier of Christ, the evil enemy has you in his crosshairs. Because you are the Bride of Christ, the Tempter seeks to you seduce you away. Satan wants to destroy all Christ gives you, all that is pure and holy. Therefore you will feel tribulation, pressures, and afflictions from Satan and those under his influence. There will be pressures to give up the truth of God's Word, to fit in with the world. For the sake of Christ, some have lost friends and family, some have lost jobs and income, some have lost house and home, and some have lost life and limb.

Yet Jesus says of His saints experiencing tribulations in this world: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:10-12).

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, saints of God in Christ! Though we live in the great tribulation of these last days, though lawlessness abounds in Satan's kingdom; yet we are baptized into Christ and united with Him who has conquered Satan and death, who lives and reigns over all things for our good. *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:35-39).

Therefore, see yourself in that great multitude, gathered at last around the heavenly throne. Join prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all faithful saints in Christ through the ages: *"clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*

2) They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb

Here we are reminded why they all are brought to heaven. The victory song of the saints is all about the salvation God gave them through the Lamb, His Son Jesus. *"Who are these arrayed in white robes?"* Now we hear the second part of the answer: *"These are the ones who… washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*

The popular image of a saint is one who lived such a holy life in this world as to merit a place in heaven. But who fits that definition? What fallen child of Adam has ever lived the sinless life by which God could declare him fit for His holy courts? Isaiah 64:6 says: *"We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."*

Imagine if parents clothed their child in a pure white suit or dress. They told their child to keep those clothes clean, because soon they would go to a wedding. But that child went outside to play and began to make mud pies. When it came time to go to the wedding, that white suit or dress was filthy, unpresentable for such a special occasion.

God's Law commands us to be pure and holy, as He is pure and holy. Yet even our best efforts to keep ourselves clean are like that child making mud pies. Out of our sin-corrupted heart come filthy thoughts, words, and deeds. Day by day, we play on our sinful desires and soil our garments. When it comes to attending the heavenly wedding banquet, our unclean and unholy lives render us unpresentable. We would be shut out forever.

Not even our best efforts to clean up our lives, not even our most righteous acts before God, can remove the sinful mess we have made of our lives. There is only One who can cleanse us of all sin and present us pure and holy before God – Jesus, the Son of God. We have been redeemed by *"the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:18-19). He came into this fallen world clothed in His heavenly righteousness. From His sinless heart He kept His life spotless in thought, word, and deed. Even after years of tribulation, temptation, and affliction by the enemy, He remained pure, always doing the will of His Father. Yet this pure and holy Lamb of God took all our sins on Himself. He went to the cross bearing all our filth before God. He suffered as the sinner in our place. He shed His holy, precious blood that cleanses away all our sins.

In our crucified and risen Savior, God forgives us. He no longer counts our sins against us, but Jesus' righteousness to us. By Baptism and faith in His Son, God has adopted us and clothed us in the pure white garment of His holy children. In the washing of water by His Word, Christ has adorned us in His pure white wedding garment as His holy Bride.

"Who are these arrayed in white robes?" It is all sinners who have *"washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* That is you and me! God calls us His saints, His holy ones in Christ!

3) Therefore they are before the throne of God in perfect joy

Now the elder concludes: *"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 dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

When our last hour in this world comes and God sends His holy angels to bear us home, all the tribulation of this world will be forever behind us. All the frustrations, pains, and sorrows caused by sin will be gone. In the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells, all the joys of Paradise will be restored in the presence of our Savior.

Already, the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne is with us as our Good Shepherd. Jesus leads us to green pastures and still waters; He restores our souls, bringing His salvation to us in Word and Sacrament. He is the Bread and Water of Life; giving Himself to us that our souls may never hunger nor thirst (John 4:14; 6:35). One day, what we now receive by faith will turn to sight. 1 John 3:2 says: *"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* Like Jesus, we will be given a glorified heavenly body. There at our Savior's side, we will drink from the pure water of life flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. We will eat from the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7; 21:6; 22:1-2).

Already in our worship, having washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, we join that heavenly song of praise: *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* One day we will join that great multitude, swinging high our palms and lifting up our songs around the throne of God and the Lamb. As the children of God made perfect, as the Bride of Christ adorned in His holiness, we will join all the saints and angels in that joyful heavenly song: *"Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.