

“Pick Up the Palm”

Revelation 7:9-17

4/10/22 Epicenter/BAC

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

On Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem – the fanfare of people laying down palm branches on the road before Him shouting, “**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!**” (John 12:13). Both Matthew (21) and Mark (11) also refer to branches, but they don’t specifically identify them as palms. In fact, besides John 12, the only other place in the New Testament that palm branches are named is in Revelation 7:9, in which John is blessed with a vision of the heavenly kingdom. Every chapter in Revelation is rich with symbolism and meaning, but it can feel overwhelming to try and take it all in. So, we’ll focus our attention on the fanfare and celebration in heaven that we see in today’s verses.

Palm branches are a traditional Jewish symbol for victory, hearkening back to their deliverance from Egyptian slavery and the annual celebration known as the Feast of Booths. In both instances in which palm branches are specifically named, there is the waving of palm branches, cheers and shouts, and Jesus is at the center of it all. But there are also a number of differences. For example, one group was composed of both saints and sinners, while the other is composed exclusively of believers and the heavenly host. One group was anticipating political deliverance, while the other was experiencing spiritual deliverance. One group looked forward to what might be, while the second looked around at what is. Today, let’s examine some of the wonderful promises about our heavenly home that we can look forward to, as described in Revelation 7:9-17.

The first is that we will experience God’s people as never before. 7:9 refers to a great multitude; too many to count; from every nation and all tribes and peoples and languages. It is clear that there is great diversity in the kingdom of heaven. This verse does not give credence to the false teaching known as *Universalism*, which teaches that all roads, or all faiths, lead to heaven. This is simply not true. What this verse tells us is that there will be some representation from each people group. This is a great fulfillment of the promise that the Great Commission will succeed, as written in Matthew 24:14 – “**And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**”

A second promise is that we will experience God’s presence as never before. In 7:10, this great multitude is shouting, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” This may remind you of the shouts of the crowd in John 12, when they cried out “**Hosanna,**” which means, ‘Save us!’ Now, in Revelation 7, the shout arises, ‘You have saved us!’ As such, we have in Rev. 7 hints of that which was longed for in John 12; the dream of salvation has become a reality. The difference is far greater than even the difference between talking about the birth of your first child and actually holding him/her in your arms. We talk about sin and grace and God’s presence, but in the here and now, we can only experience a

small part of it; when we are with Him, face to face, we will know His presence in a way that you can barely imagine now, and as we do...

In the midst of this great experience of worship, we will experience God's praise as never before. Not that God is praising us, of course, but that we are praising Him! 7:12 shows the response by those who are closest to heaven's throne to the multitude's declaration of worship, as they cry out, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Saying amen is often the way you might conclude a prayer or designate agreement with a statement. Those around the throne are saying, 'We agree! Salvation does belong to, and only to, God, and in addition, so do blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might.' You sing your best for the Lord every Sunday morning, right? Just imagine singing with the Pittsburgh symphony orchestra or the New York Philharmonic. Now multiply that by 1,000,000 and you start to get the idea. It's going to be awesome! We'll sing like never before in the presence of our eternal family and before the throne of God above, where we'll worship and serve and celebrate forever.

Fourth, we will experience God's provision as never before. 7:15-17 records a conversation between one of the elders in the heavenly throne room and John, in which those in the great multitude are described as having come through great trials and difficulties, and having placed their faith in Jesus Christ, and have therefore had their sins forgiven. These 3 verses get better and better the more you read them. Sit down with them sometime and just read through them from start to finish half a dozen times (if you can manage to stop after that few times, that is.)

As you read these verses, you will perhaps soon discover that there are four things in life that we will never have to deal with again. Let's explore each of these briefly. The first is that we will not worry. 7:15 says, "He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence." Literally, this means that the Lord 'shall tabernacle over them.' This is a statement of God's defenses – a shield that cannot be broken (see Isaiah 54:17.) We don't worry because we know our destination. Maybe it's a bit like watching a movie for the 50th time – you may still jump at the scary parts, but you don't worry about how it's going to end. When we join together with the great multitude, we will never again have reason to worry (and no, there won't be any scary parts!)

Secondly, we will not want. 7:16 assures, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore." How blessed it will be to never wish you had more; to never want something you don't have. No, indeed, on the other side of our struggle, there will be plenty! Think of the comfort that is found in Psalm 23:1 – "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Jesus shepherds us even now; watching over us, protecting us, guiding us, providing for us. But on that side of glory, you will never wish you had more time, more energy, more money, more intelligence, more, more, more – never again shall you want! What a glorious promise indeed!

Besides not worrying and not wanting, you will also not ever grow weary. Think of a time when you worked really hard, maybe outside in the sun all day – your pillow was pretty soft that night, wasn't it? Now imagine being out in the desert all day, where heatstroke can set in, in a matter of minutes (according to cdc.gov). 7:16-17 assures us that, "...the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water." What causes you to grow weary?

The heat? The cold? Hard labor? The evening news? The relentless assault of time on your body and on your will to even go on? Rest assured; a day is coming in which all of those struggles will be no more. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28 – “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**” God will give you rest; rest from guilt... from shame... from weariness... from sorrow... forever!

And finally, we will never again weep. 7:17 concludes, “**...God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**” Life brings tears – tears of sorrow, of pain, of guilt and of shame, but in the life that is to come, those tears will be no more. One of my favorite verses is Rev. 21:4 – “[**God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**” I’ve heard this described as, ‘God will wipe away every tear with His finger.’ What a beautiful picture of God’s tender care.

So in light of these great promises, consider how you would answer two questions. The first is, which crowd are you a part of? Are you a part of the John 12 crowd, who wanted Jesus to fulfill their own expectations, that laid down the palms, or are you part of the Revelation 7 crowd, who celebrated the victory that Jesus had won, taking up palms and waving them in an act of worship? If you are not certain that you are part of the multitude standing before the throne, shouting the praise and glory of the risen and coming King, Jesus Christ, stop what you’re doing right now and pray; tell Jesus you’re a sinner and ask Him to forgive you, asking Him to be your Savior, come into your life, and help you live differently.

And that’s the second question; how will you live differently? Is your focus on the here and now, a never-ending, never-satisfying quest to obtain more stuff, more recognition, more pleasure, more money, or is your focus on the hereafter and forevermore, a never-ending, always-satisfying eternal life of joy and worship and service to our King, Jesus Christ? If you lost everything this world can give you but have Jesus, then in the light of eternity, you’ve lost nothing, but if you’ve gained everything this world has to offer, but say no to Jesus, then in the light of eternity, you’ve lost it all. How will you live differently? Which crowd are you a part of? Pick up the palm! Jesus has come! Let us celebrate His victory, now and forever!

Takeaways from this message.

4 Promises of Revelation 7

- **We will experience God’s PEOPLE as never before.**
- **We will experience God’s PRESENCE as never before.**
- **We will experience God’s PRAISE as never before.**
- **We will experience God’s PROVISION as never before.**
 - **We will not WORRY.**
 - **We will not WANT.**

- We will not WEARY.
- We will not WEEP.

Which CROWD are you part of?

How will you live DIFFERENTLY?

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. How does the diversity of God's kingdom affect your mindset toward outreach?
2. What diversity exists within the community you live in? Does the church body reflect that diversity? If not, what will you do about that?
3. What's better on a hot day, iced tea or lemonade? Why?
4. How does knowing the promises of Revelation 7 help you define (or refine) what you regard as important?
5. How does this passage help you deal with difficult circumstances (or people) differently?
6. Which of these promises is the most meaningful to you, personally? Why?
7. For further study, check out Matthew 24:14, John 12:13, Isaiah 6:1-7, Isaiah 54:17, Psalm 23:1, Matthew 11:28, Exodus 33:14, and Revelation 21:4
8. What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?