

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.” (NIV84)

THE SHEPHERD CASTS A GLORIOUS VISION

Vision casting! It’s one of the buzzwords in leadership circles today! Can you cast a vision and can you inspire your people to follow? At work, do you have a plan and are your subordinates on board? If not how do you get them to follow where you know things will be better for everyone? Maybe you aren’t a leader! Maybe it’s just your own life that you are planning for! Do you have goals? A vision? Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? If you are grown up, are you where you want to be, or is there a better place that you could be? What’s the vision? Status quo? Or something better? How do you get there? What steps do you have to take to make the vision a reality?

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In our lesson for today a vision is cast! Quite literally! John gets a vision for the Lord and what he sees is truly glorious. And that he shares it with us is even better! Today we'll see what John saw and we'll rejoice like he did! Today as sheep in his flock as those we long to follow where he leads, we rejoice that **The Shepherd Casts a Glorious Vision!**

You might recall that the book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John. If church history is correct he was the one disciple of Jesus to not die a martyr's death. Instead of killing him for preaching about the Risen Christ, they just exiled him instead – to an island Patmos. It was there on that island that God appeared to John and gave him a sequence of visions and one of those glorious visions is before us today!!

You might also recall that there is a lot of weird and sometimes confusing picture language in the book of Revelation. We call it Apocalyptic Literature – in other words, End Times writings. John sees visions that represent the Church and her struggle and he sees how it all turns out. He's sees the victory that Christ Jesus wins!

Have you ever been intimidated by this book? Maybe it's weird creatures and numbers and pictures causes you to shy away. But there's no need to be scared. It's actually a beautiful book. It might be one that you'd like to have the People's Bible from the Church Library open next to you but that's not a horrible thing either. If you go into the book remembering the theme, "This book is going to assure me and remind me and fill me with joy that Jesus wins in the end, it's a whole lot less intimidating! If you remember that the goal is not to attach meaning to every picture but to see the whole for what it is, Revelation can be a really inspiring book. Let's look at this small portion of this book before us today and see how **The Shepherd Casts a Glorious Vision.**

If you want people to follow you, you have to make public where you are going. Even cults know that, right? No one will follow if you say, we're going to wear our Nikes and drink Kool-aid and then see what happens. That doesn't work! But if you tell people you're going to ride a comet and take them to heaven's gate, some people will follow! Granted, its crazy people that will follow you if that's your vision, but some people will follow!

The Shepherd casts a vision and tell us that the real way to get to heaven's gate is not through a comet, but through the Son – through Jesus. The Lamb is the one who inspires people to follow him because he casts for us the vision of where he's leading, where he wants us to go with him! He wants us to follow him to heaven.

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***“Salvation belongs to our God,
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John sees heaven! He sees the saints, robed in white. He sees those that have accomplished the goal, won the prize, those that are resting in the green pastures of the Shepherd's glory! And what a

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glorious sight! ***A great multitude that no one could count!*** Can you imagine this? So many people in heaven that no one will know how many are there, only God who knows all things! I can tell you how many people are in our church, it's 116. We have almost all of them in worship on Easter and it was pretty exciting to get to worship together. Next October is the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and our church is planning a celebration. They are inviting all the pastors and teachers and any lay members who want to come to attend a gathering and worship service in Milwaukee and I'm hoping to be able to attend. They have already rented out the Bradley Center the arena where the Milwaukee Bucks play for the event. It seats 19,000 people and they are expecting to fill it! That's going to be an event! They say that there are 2.1 billion Christians on earth today! If you could get them all in the same place, that would be monumental. This vision is all Christians throughout all the ages! Astonishing!! Beyond words! And then they speak!

***“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”***

There's something moving when people speak in unison. When 60 Christians read the gospel rich liturgies that speak about Jesus, when they confess their agreement with one another in the Creeds, it's a pretty cool thing. When 40,000 sports fans are cheering for their team, it's moving – as long as their team is your team. When a country unites to cheer USA, USA it gives you the chills! But when the countless throngs of blood bought souls falls in worship of the one who bought them, words can't describe what that will be like!! But I know I want to be there! If that's where the Shepherd is leading, I sure want to follow!!

Yet isn't it remarkable how easily we forget the Glorious Place to which our Shepherd is leading us! We live up to our reputation as sheep, stupid and sinful sheep all too easily don't we? We easily wander from the path. We easily cave to temptation and start to follow. The Shepherd leads his sheep by speaking to them, but we close our ears to the Shepherd's voice and start listening to the voices of our so-called friends instead. We cave to the pressure to follow after their lead instead of the Shepherd's. We listen to the voices in our own head. Has this ever been a good idea? But we do it! When our inner self craves attention and power and fulfillment, we start to make self-gratifying decisions instead of serving the Shepherd. We shut down the lines of communication between sheep and Shepherd because we want to lead instead. When we sin, we are telling the Shepherd that we know better how to lead than he does. When we question his voice and his word, we are telling him that he is wrong and that we know better. When we blatantly ignore his guiding voice, we deserve to lose his words and to lose his leadership. We should be left without a flock and without a Shepherd. We should be left on our own to wander into danger and to aimlessly walk a path of destruction. That's what our sins deserve and that's the end that stupid sheep like us deserve.

But our Shepherd's love is stronger than our sin. He has a plan to gather wandering sheep back to his side. He leaves the 99 behind and comes to gather us in to the fold! An earthly Shepherd would cut his losses and be content to have kept most of the sheep through the night, but Jesus is far better than that! He's the Good Shepherd! He won't ever cut his losses. He won't rest until the flock is whole! He won't ever rest until the flock rests with him in the heavenly pastures. It's that Shepherd's love that caused him to come and be the shepherd to begin with! He came to be born so that he could lead us. He lived a perfect life so that he could guide us to a place of perfection. He shed his blood so that we could be covered by his forgiving grace. He was our sacrifice so that our sins would be paid for. He rose from death so that we would rise to glory everlasting! The Shepherd walked a mile in the

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sheep's shoes, so that we could spend an eternity at the Shepherd's side!! He lived and died so that we could live again! He did it all so that we could be in the crowds that John was able to see! So that we could see John, and Peter and all the saints, so that we could see Jesus and praise Jesus forever! That's where the Shepherd wants you! That's why he guides you! That's the **Glorious Vision that the Shepherd Casts** for you!!

Have you ever seen the commercials for the virtual reality headsets? They make headsets, some of them connected with your smart phone, that you put on like a mask and it puts you in a 3-D virtual reality. You can play golf on world famous courses, you can meet interesting people, interact with celebrities. It's remarkable what Virtual Reality enables one to do.

John's visions were kind of like virtual reality. He didn't just dream it, he was taken there, somehow! It's interesting that he interacts with one the people from the vision.

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

The elder in heaven asks John a question! This place is a real place and God wanted to make sure that John knew it!!

"These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

And John's response you might find a comfort.

14 I answered, "Sir, you know."

That's a polite way for John to say "I have no idea what I'm looking at! So if you don't get a lot of Revelation, if you are confused about a Bible teaching, you are in good company – even the author here didn't know what he was seeing! But the elder took care to explain it!!

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."

The great tribulation – that's the Christian life! That's the hardships and trials and persecutions that God's people face. That's the ridicule that comes your way because you believe in Creation instead of evolution. That's the strife that you feel when you have to choose between your beliefs and career advancement. That's the friends that walk away from you because you will stop at nothing to get them to see the Shepherd's vision and hear his voice. That's the lonely feeling you get sometimes when prosperity and tolerance churches are busting at the seams and you have all the room you need and then come to sit here and listen to the real Shepherd's voice.

It's tribulation living the Christian life! It's not easy, it's not always rose-colored. It's messy and it's hard and sometimes we fail, a lot of times we fail. But the Shepherd picks us up and equips us to succeed in our fight against temptation. The more he speaks in our ears the stronger we are. The more we listen to his powerful words the more powerful we become to serve him and others in our lives. The more he speaks through Word and Sacrament, the more we become like him. The more we remind ourselves that our robes are white and perfect holy because the lamb has covered us in his purifying blood, the more that truth will guide us to follow the Shepherd. The more we are reminded that he has washed us clean the more eager we will be to thank him with praise and thanks and offerings. The more

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we consider that the Shepherd became a Lamb for us, the more eager we will be to lay down our lives for him and his service and to live our lives to the glory of his name.

The Good Shepherd guides us through this world. He feeds and leads! He guides and guides! And he inspires us to follow him by Casting a Vision. He tells us where he's leading us and why we should follow him! Heaven is a glorious place, a place where the following can be said about the flock of God:

*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."

That's a place that I want to be, how about you? That's the place that I want to follow him to. If that's you too, then listen to his voice, follow where he guides, and rejoice in his forgiving love. Share the vision that the Shepherd Casts and don't wait until you get there. Today and every day, worship the Shepherd and rejoice. Join the rest of the sheep of God and proclaim:

*Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.*

Amen!"