

The End of Tears

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

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After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 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 shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; 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, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Rev. 7:9-17

For those who do not know me well, I have lived in Chesterland for a long time, but I have not always lived in Chesterland. I spent several years of my life in Euclid, Ohio. When my mother remarried, my new dad built a home on Chillicothe Road here in Chesterland, not far from this church. We moved there when I was between 10-11 years old.

It was not long after that that we were sitting at the table having dinner. The phone rang and my mother went into the hallway to answer it. I could not hear every word she was saying, but I heard part of it. From the part I heard, I knew something was very wrong, but I did not know what. When she got off the phone, she told us that my Granddad Mc Vey had just died from an automobile crash in Florida. He failed to control his car at a sharp curve on the way home.

We were in total shock. I can still remember it as clearly as if it happened yesterday. My Granddad McVey was not just any grandfather. After my parents' divorce, my mother had a very hard time making ends meet. Granddad McVey bought a two-story home in Euclid and allowed us to live upstairs while my uncle and aunt and cousins lived downstairs. Without his support, I don't think our family would have been able to stay together.

I am sure that many of you can share some shocking stories of unexpected death in your family too. The death of a family member or friend can bring sorrow in any situation, as the Dean family is experiencing now. But an unexpected death often leads to serious questions and doubts about God. "If there is a good God who loves us, why does he allow things like this to happen to us?" some people have asked me.

That's where knowing the important things about God and having a biblical worldview can be a tremendous help. Actually, God has revealed the answer to that question in the Holy Scriptures. God speaks to us through Ezekiel 18:4 and says, "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die."

God had given a warning about this to Adam in the Garden of Eden many, many years earlier. God had provided a beautiful garden with fruit for food. Man was to work in the garden and take care of it. But God gave Adam a warning along with it. God said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die." Adam, and the wife God gave him named Eve, disobeyed God and thus brought sin and death into this world. They destroyed the holy state in which they had been created, and they also destroyed the close relationship they had with God. As a result, children were no longer born in the image of God, they were born in the sinful image of their parents. Children that are born are still under the curse of sin and the penalty of death today, and that will continue to be the case until Jesus returns and puts an end to the mess that mankind has created.

Now I have had people tell me that they don't think it's fair that we should all be punished for what Adam and Eve did. We all better get something straight. God created us and all that there is, and he cannot be expected to conform to our sinful conclusions about what is fair and what is not fair. Instead, we need to understand the nature of God and do everything we can to conform to His holiness. Even if we do, that is not going to save us. We probably will be better off for doing what God wants, but only Jesus can save us. He is quoted in Luke 19:10 as saying, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." God still cared for His creation, and He provided a solution to our problem that was acceptable to him and met his standards of a holy sacrifice for our sins.

Benjamin Franklin once summed up what is really important about life. He said, "Think of these things, (from) whence you came, where you are going, and to whom you must account." It is certainly not a good thing to dwell on death all the time, but to ignore the reality of it and not be prepared is just plain foolish. Someday we will depart this world and stand before God. God had a warning for Adam and Eve, and he has a warning for us. We are not all going to the same place. There is a place called Hell. Jesus himself tells us that unless we repent we will go there.

Too many people today are pursuing an earthly paradise. They need to be warned. If you do not have Jesus Christ as your Savior, you don't really have anything for long. You may have a wonderful house, a fancy car, and all sorts of cash in the bank, but all of that could be gone by tomorrow. You won't be taking any of that with you. But if you have Jesus, you have heaven, and you are even richer than Bill Gates. You have an invitation to enjoy eternal life.

God gives us a picture of that today in Revelation 7. God the Father will be close by and so will Jesus. God gives us the assurance that there will be nothing more of which to be afraid. We won't have to worry about some fanatic from ISIS driving a truck or car into a group of people and killing them or a bomb blowing us up. We will be at peace.

There won't be any more babies or kids dying. We won't have to worry about aches and pains and getting old. There won't be family fights, failures, and letdowns. There won't be any more rejection, racism, and loneliness. The Apostle John in Revelation shares his special vision of the future, and he says of God's people, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; 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, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." For those who believe in Jesus, it will be "the end of tears".

Meanwhile, all of us will have trouble at some time. Some of us will have more than our share of trouble. To many, life will not be fair, as we labor together all having this spiritual disease we call "sin". But stay close to the things of God and stick with Jesus. He gives us some words of comfort in his words from Matthew today: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Finally, we have the words of encouragement from 1 John 3 (v. 1-3) to keep in mind. John writes, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know when he appears, we shall be like him..."

So you see, God has been fair to us after all. What Adam and Eve lost, we can reclaim through our Savior Jesus Christ. Hold onto Him no matter what happens, and you are promised a great inheritance and a wonderful future. Amen.