November 1, 2026
“The Faithful’s Reward”
Revelation 7:9-17

Intro:
What motivates people to stick with something? What motivates you to stick with something? Being able to give a thoughtful answer to that would require clarification around what that “something” was. The motivation for sticking with a job for some people could be very different than what would motivate those very same people to stick with a relationship. What about fan loyalty to a sports team? Some people remain loyal to their team because they are consistent in winning. The rest of us are Rider’s fans and it would seem we just like to suffer. (Is this too soon after yesterday’s defeat?)

When I was working at Birks Jewellers in the late 90’s, one of the car dealerships in the city would put in an order every year for a few watches to be awarded to employees who had reached 25 years with the company. As I understood it, for anyone to stay for any length of time with the same car dealership was unusual. To stay for 25 years (and more) was very rare indeed. For this company, such loyalty was worth acknowledging with a $900 watch.

There are other factors to consider, such as what levels of difficulty one has had to face in their particular scenario. It seems to me that people today have less capacity to manage when things get difficult, so rather than push through, they just move on. I remember a commercial for a TV show from way back that ran on the slogan “When the going gets tough, the tough move.” It was a clever spin on the old slogan “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Meaning that when things become difficult, those with real strength just dig deeper and power through it. The phrase in the TV commercial evoked a sense of it being better to just cut one’s losses and move on to something else or better. The actual meaning of the commercial’s wording was that the show was moving to a new night and time slot.

When it comes to loyalty, longevity, and faithfulness, is there such a thing as "just rewards"?

John's Vision:
The book of Revelation is one of those books in the Bible that most people don't spend a lot of time reading. Not because it is full of lists that begin to run together, but because it is full of imagery that doesn't make sense to our understanding. It also speaks into the future, but without giving any sense of definitive timelines, which contributes to the confusion. Finally, much of what is written in Revelation has strong connections to what is written in the book of Daniel, which is just as confusing with all of the end-times imagery used there. So it is hard to find clarity and make sense of what is happening and the timeline that it is happening in.

Nevertheless, we are going to look into it today and try and find some meaning and clarity for our lives.

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John has been invited into a vision of Heaven and given a glimpse of the future when Jesus will return and the fullness of God's plan to redeem and restore creation will come about. It starts out with some warnings and encouragements to seven churches relevant to John's day, and then moves to a lengthy drama that unfolds from the throne room of heaven. It is in the throne room vision that we find ourselves as we dive into chapter 7.

At the start of the chapter, John hears the number of those who will be marked with a seal on their foreheads. These are the faithful servants of God, and the mark will be the sign of their being set apart and saved from the calamity that is to come. The number that John hears is 144,000 – 12,000 people from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Honestly, if that is all we read about – and ignored much of the messaging of the New Testament especially, this would be very discouraging. Only 144,000 people are going to saved in the end? What is the qualification? How fierce will the competition be to secure one of those spots? It seems quite a small

number in the context of the sheer number of people who have been faithful followers of Jesus over the past two millennia.

But then the scene shifts ever so slightly. John is still in the throne room, he is still seeing the strange and wonderful angelic beings going about their specific roles of worship, but he now also sees a vast crowd of people – so great a crowd that it is impossible to count them all. This is a mixed crowd from all nations on the earth, not just the Israelites. And these people are clothed in white and praising God with all they are worth ("shouting with a great roar" – v10). Clearly, there are more than 144,000 people in this vision – which prompts one of the elders who is part of this drama of worship to ask John who he thinks that vast crowd of people are and where he thinks they came from.

The question paves the way to reconcile what John had heard with what he is now seeing. Wisely, John doesn't presume to know the answer (maybe he really doesn't) and defers to the elder to provide the answer for his own question. Who answers isn't the important thing; what is important is that there is an answer and that John receives that answer so he can record it in what will become the book of Revelation.

These people, says the elder, are those who died in the great tribulation. They are the ones who remained faithful. They have been washed in the blood of Christ and now, as they stand before the throne, they understand the fullness of all that God has done, is doing, and will do – and their only response can be to offer praise and blessing to God for how good and wonderful He is.

Clarifying two points:
Let's pause here for a moment to clarify a couple of things.
The first thing has to do with the number (144, 000) that John heard just prior in verses 4-8, and the countless multitude that he is now witnessing. On one hand, a person could argue that actually counting 144,000 people would seem like an impossible task and that that many people would seem to be a vast crowd. It would be like over half the population of Regina all gathered in one place – quite

impossible to get a solid count there. The other approach, and this is what many commentators take, is to take the number of 144,000 as being symbolic and to mean that God has in his mind a number of how many people will remain faithful to Him, and until that number is met, the conclusion to all that is seen in Revelation will not come about.

The second thing has to do with this idea of "the great tribulation". Most Christians, when they hear words like "tribulation" think of some far-off future occurrence where there will be a massive spiritual and physical war, a period of time where the Anti-Christ reigns supreme, followed by the complete and final victory of Christ. Within that time is the rapture – when all those who are still faithful followers of Jesus are physically taken from the earth to heaven. Just when and how all that is to take place, no one knows and scholarship is very much divided on the details.

According to New Testament Scholar G.K. Beale, the tribulation is not an event that happens at the end of time, but has been happening since the church first began. "The great tribulation…began with the sufferings of Jesus and is now shared in by all believers, who are, with John, fellow-partakers 'in the tribulation and kingdom perseverance which are in Jesus.'(Rev 1:9)"[1]

In this line of thought, the tribulation that believers have gone through, are going through, and will go through, is one that attacks their faith. It is hardships that are aimed at eroding the trust and faith in Jesus that mark a Christian. Satan wins when Christians walk away from Jesus because following him is too hard. Beale adds to this that "tribulation (also) consists in pressures from the religious system to compromise one's faith and pressures from the world, which may include economic deprivation."[2]

Conclusion:

[1] G. K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 158.
[2] Beale, *Revelation*, 157–58.

But there are those who remain faithful. In spite of all the efforts and attacks on faith from within religious systems and without, there are those who do not compromise on the truth of God's Word or on carefully following God in living that out. This is not a militant religious stance; it is a faithful stance. It is a stance that says "I might not know everything, but I do know that God loved the world so much that He sent His son Jesus to stand in our place of punishment, so that I might be forgiven and be restored to Him in relationship." It is a stance that holds on to the promise of hope and a future.

It is this future reward that John, in his vision, is witnessing the faithful enjoy. It is not a reward of power or treasure or anything like that. It is the reward of provision and protection that only the Good Shephard can give. It is a reward that says all the hardship that has been faced, is now ended. It is the reward of life everlasting in His presence, and in that presence every tear born from weariness, grief, pain and suffering will be wiped away.

This is the Good News – Amen!

Let's pray.