NO MORE TEARS

May 5, 2019 Rev. 7:9-17

 Dear Christian friends. A great multitude that no one could count. The God of the Universe is so awesome. Here He is giving us a glimpse of what is in store for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and give Him all glory, honor and praise for saving them from a horrible, impossible –to-imagine future.

 But, we’re not there yet, are we? We live in this world that we call a vale of tears----for obvious reason. One of the elders answered his own question to John in v. 14. He asked John: “Who are these , clothed in white robes and from where have they come?” John said to him: “Sir, you know.” The elder said: “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.”

 Notice that he says—these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. The verb coming out is a present tense, indicating that believers are continually(daily) being delivered from their sufferings that this sinful world inflicts on them. The militant Muslims calling themselves the called of God target Christians. They have murdered thousands.

 In the days of the Romans, thousands of Christians were thrown to wild beasts in the arena to the delight of the crowds. We today have no idea of what those before us had to endure. It all really started with Emperor Nero who blamed the fires in Rome on the new Christian Church people. Thus began a 200 year persecution of the Christians. There were 10 different times when violent persecution broke out.

 Can you imagine anything more horrible than to be nailed to a cross, covered with pitch and set on fire? Or to be thrown into an arena with no way of escape and being eaten by lions? Or to be torn apart with ropes pulling your limbs in different directions? Christians endured all these things and more for the name and sake of the Lord. Some could not stand the torture and gave in to their tormentors. This usually meant that they brought a sacrifice to the emperor, thus denying their faith.

 But, by far the majority remained loyal to their Lord and praised Him in spite of the pain and suffering and death.

 Eleven of the 12 Apostles died a martyr’s death. Paul was beheaded on the orders of Nero. James was killed by the Jews.

 You may have not heard of Polycarp. He had been a pupil of the Apostle John. He became Bishop of Smyrna. When persecution was coming his way, his congregation urged him to get away to a safe place. He refused, surrendering to the officers of the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who sought him out because he was known to be a fearless Christian leader.

 In the presence of the Roman consul he was commanded to curse his Lord and worship the emperor. His simple reply was: “Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has never done me harm. How can I curse my King, who has saved me?”

 The order was given that he be burned. A high wind arose and drove the flames away from him. The executioner was ordered to put him to death with the sword. The blood from his wounds almost put out the fire. Polycarp’s dying prayer was this: “Lord God, father of our blessed Savior, I thank Thee that I have been deemed worthy to receive the crown of martyrdom and that I may die for Thee and for the cause.”

 This book, ‘Voices of the Martyers’ covers the time period from 33 A.D. to 2006. Christianity is truly under assault by the forces of darkness, led by the diabolical devil.

 Christians are good people who want to help others, be charitable, loving, forgiving and have a good influence on society. For this we suffer persecution at the hands of evil people.

 Should we be surprised? In this world you will have many troubles, said Jesus. He also said thru the Apostle Peter in his first letter, Ch. 4: “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

 Now, we may not be thrown to the lions or get crucified---but the devil is still after each one of us thru temptation after temptation. He wants you and me to fall away from following our Lord Jesus Christ. Many do. How many people who are members and should be here today, are not?

 How many have been confirmed but no longer come to church? The war rages all around us and how often are we even aware of the battle for the souls of people we know?

 Meanwhile, they too are living in this evil, hostile to Christians world but are not aware that they themselves are the target in this war between the forces of God and the forces of satan. There is more than enough sadness and tears to go around. One by one our families get smaller. My dad and his 3 brothers are all gone. You experience the same thing as you think of all those who have slipped away.

 But, enough of sadness and tears. My dad and his 3 brothers----they are in that too large to be numbered crowd in heaven praising God for saving them from the fires of hell. When Pastor Deitrich Bonheiffer was led to the gallows by the Nazis in 1945 he was heard to say: “Today, my life begins.”

 My friends, we have not lived yet. This world is tainted with sin and evil with the result that our lives are marred with unhappiness in families, in church, in society, in all the world. This presidential contest has seen mud-slinging and name-calling like never before. Don’t you just get tired of all the meanness, dirt and filfth that seems to surround us like a dark cloud?

 Well, we have something better to look forward to, don’t we? The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, has been victorious over sin, death and the devil. In order to build up our spirits; to keep us focused and on our toes; to keep us looking toward our goal-----heaven, He has given us a peek at what is going on there as I speak.

 The saints of God, your relatives and mine, are up there praising God right now, just as we are praising God here on the earth. They are crying tears of joy. So will we one day. May the God of our salvation keep us focused like a lazer beam on the goal of every Christian------the beautiful halls of heaven with our risen and reigning King-----Jesus Christ. Amen