

7 - Living Faithfully through the Holocaust (Revelation 7:1-17)

Some preachers speak of the Christian life as one great success story. They say that if we attend church, live right, tithe and exercise faith we will prosper financially and be free of illness and distress. But the relative peace some of us enjoy at this moment is exceptional in the world and in history. From the ascension of Christ to his return, the normal lot of believers is tribulation. Most of the Christians John pictures for us are martyrs. They are dead to the threats of this life but gloriously alive to God. Their experience reminds us that the call to discipleship is a call to radical obedience.

- 1.** What feelings do you have when you hear of Christians today who lose their jobs, are thrown into prison or are martyred for Christ?
- 2.** Read Rev. 7. In Rev. 7:1-8 an angel seals 144,000 people. What do you think "the seal of the living God" means (Rev. 7:3; Rev. 9:4)?
- 3.** If every Christian has been sealed by God (see Ephes. 1:13-14), what comfort and assurance should that give us—especially during perilous times?
- 4.** Some people interpret the 144,000 literally, as believing Jews living during the great tribulation. Others see it as a symbolic number of all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, living during the tribulation. What do you think John means, and why?
- 5.** In Rev. 7:9 the scene shifts from earth to heaven. How did the great multitude in Rev. 7:9 come to stand before the Lamb?
- 6.** Why does the multitude cry out with praise, worship and thanksgiving (Rev. 7:10-12)?

7. How do the blessings these martyred Christians enjoy compare with the tribulations they suffered (Rev. 7:13-17)?

8. How does their experience help us understand the ultimate benefit of being a faithful Christian?

9. In the first century, persecution of Christians came from three basic sources: emperor worshipers, heretics and those whose commercial interests were threatened by the radical lifestyle of Christians. Why might faithful Christians suffer today?

10. This vision comes at the point of maximum dramatic intensity: between the sixth and seventh seals. How can the vision encourage us to be faithful no matter what happens in the world?