The Goal of our Faith
Revelation 7:9-17

Introduction
If you know the name Stephen Covey, you likely know his best-selling book "*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.*" It is a classic leadership development book, one I highly recommend.

As the title suggests there are seven habits. I won't go over them all right now, but I do want to point the second habit. According to Covey, people who are highly effective:

> Begin with the end in mind.

We understand that. For many of us that comes somewhat natural. When I am talking with a person who raises an issue or situation they want to discuss, I ask them to describe the perfect outcome. I call that the "desired future." What does the "end" look like?

When Karen and I are talking about a home improvement project – say, remodeling a bathroom – she starts to collect pictures and images that capture what she wants the final version to look like. That way she can see it. More precisely, that way I can see. She always knows what the end result will look like even before demolition begins.

When we know where we are going, we are better able to stay on course. Knowing the destination helps us say "no" to some things and "yes" to others.

- Example: As you know, I am teaching a class on 1 & 2 Thessalonians during Adult Sunday School. Because Advent is almost on us, it is important that I stay far ahead of the class schedule. My calendar is going to get even busier in a few days and I don't want to cheat my prep time.
    - This week I was determined to get three lessons completed. To make that happen – which it did – meant I had to push everything else to later in my schedule. I knew where I wanted to be … and could say "no" to everything else.

In this current series of sermons, our "end" is the coming of Jesus both as King of kings on Christ the King Sunday AND as the coming Savior when our time here on earth ends. That's where our faith is pointing us.

- Today we focus on the end goal of our faith, beautifully depicted in the passage read earlier from Revelation chapter 7.

Even beyond the words of the book of Revelation, the Scriptures are filled with imagery that helps us to visualize what that end goal may be like. You know many of those texts, words like:

> Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for

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> you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

And

> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

And today's first text gives us a picture of those who have achieved that faith goal.

PICTURE #1: THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT
In Christian theology, the term "Church Triumphant" refers to the portion of the Church that has "triumphed" over the trials of earthly life and now dwells in heaven in God's presence.

Do you ever think about what that will be like? Your first day in heaven.

There is an old Southern Gospel hymn that says:

> It's a great, great morning.
> Your first day in heaven.
> As you stroll down the golden avenue.
> There are mansions left and right.
> And you're thrilled at every sight.
> And the saints are always smilin'
> Sayin' "How do you do?"

I don't know if that's true or not, but isn't it an amazing thought? What will your first day in heaven be like? That day when you become part of the Church Triumphant.

An artist captured that moment like this:

> <Show painting>

Look how the text describes these people:

(1) They were redeemed.
These inhabitants of heaven stood before God's throne and the Lamb. They made it.

> 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. (Revelation 7:14)

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They may have been rejected on earth – something we get from the references to the time of tribulation. But they are in heaven, wearing white robes that had been washed by the blood of Jesus. They were waving the palm branches of victory. And they were there!

(2) They were rejoicing.
As they stood before the throne that sang praises to God, and their worship was joined by all those who surrounded the throne.

> Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. (Revelation 7:10).

Worship is always presented as the central activity of heaven. Dr. David Jeremiah calls our worship here on earth the "dress rehearsal" for what we will do in heaven. We don't know what the songs will be like, but we know we are going to sing.

- That's why I always tell people "Don't insist on worship being done in a particular way" because you might be surprised when you get to heaven!

(3) They were rewarded.
I love the last two verses of this reading:

> Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. 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. (Revelation 7:16-17)

These people that we meet in this passage are the *CHURCH TRIUMPHANT.* That's what we commemorate on this All Saints day. Those who have gone into heaven before us are among those in that throng. Using words we read from the Apostle Paul:

> (They) have fought the good fight, (They) have finished the race, (They) have kept the faith. Now there is in store for (them) the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to (them) on that day—and not only to (them), but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

That's the goal. That's what is set before us. As we live out this life of faith, we will join that throng. I hope you look good in white!

PICTURE #2: THE CHURCH MILITANT
The other group we commemorate this day is those who have now entered the *CHURCH MILITANT.* We do so as we remember those baptized. But the church militant is everyone who is a believer and is moving forward on their journey of faith… moving toward the goal already achieved by the church triumphant.

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- In other words … right now we are the Church Militant. Some day we will be the Church Triumphant.

Our challenge now is to remain faithful. And we do that with our eyes firmly fixed on the goal of our faith.

The old Jim Reeves bluegrass gospel song says it simply:

> This world is not my home I'm just a passing through
> My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
> The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
> And I can't feel at home in this world anymore
>
> Oh Lord you know I have no friend like you
> If heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do
> The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
> And I can't feel at home in this world anymore

The passage from 1 John that we read reminds of our identity:

> See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

And the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel remind us that God's children live differently than the rest of the world does. And in so doing, we are blessed.

APPLICATION
One day heaven will be ours, but until then … we keep pursuing the goal. We live with the end in mind. That's a good habit to have.

Amen.

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