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He had been deployed to Afghanistan three months ago. He was proud to serve his country. He used his skills to the best of his ability and tried to focus on doing his duty. He could count on his fellow soldiers to watch out for him. But it was starting to wear on him. The constant alertness to threats. The heat and the dust. The MRE’s in the field weren’t the tastiest, and they sure didn’t measure up to mom’s cooking. He started to dream about home. In his cellphone he had a folder with pictures that reminded him of home. A picture of the house he grew up in. A picture of his family. A few shots of the ball field where he played. A picture taken from his favorite hiking spot. Pictures of home. That’s where he belonged. That’s where he felt the happiest. Home.

Have you ever felt like a soldier on deployment? If you have, it’s no wonder. As believers we are soldiers in God’s army, serving His will in this sinful world. We have a job to do. We have been deployed by God to spread and defend the truth about God. And sometimes we get weary. Sometimes we get tired. Maybe one of those days is today.

Today God reminds us that we’re not home. Our home is in heaven with Him. **“HE’S LEADING US HOME”** my friends. It may be a rough road that we’re traveling, but home is paradise! Come with me today in God’s Word and look at the picture that He paints for us of our home.

### ***Part One: It may be a rough road***

You know the old phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words.” A vivid picture, a well crafted story is often the thing you remember long after you forget the words that accompanied it. As we continue our dive into the book of Revelation, we see how true this is.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John uses pictures and symbols to get God’s message across. And, we get it. In this section of Revelation, John reminds us that life in this sinful world is going to be rough. The believers that first read this book understood what John was saying. They were being persecuted, physically, economically and spiritually. They may have been wondering why. Why were they suffering because they were believers? Because they believed in Christ.

God wanted them to understand that suffering for your faith in this sinful world is to be expected. Jesus said it time and time again when He was here visibly on earth. And now, John paints a picture to say the very same thing. Last week, we heard about the scroll and the seven seals. In that scroll was a general outline of what would happen until Judgment Day. As the scroll was unsealed, we met the 4 horses that ride in this world. Each one depicts a force that we all meet from time to time. The white horse, representing the drive for power. The red horse of war. The black horse of economic hardship. The pale horse of death. They all ride into our lives at times, don’t they?

Our Shepherd, through John, tells us that this life will be a rough road. If you’ve lived for more than a few years on this earth, you know what Jesus is telling us. Life isn’t a stroll through the peaceful garden of life. Uncertainty, pain and worry are constant. We worry. Will I get into college? Will I find a job I can enjoy? Will I find a partner to marry? Will I have a peaceful, secure and enjoyable life? We worry, and then we have the 4 horses gallop through our lives. Friction with our boss or our friends. Sickness, cancer, accidents, and job losses. Our best friend dies early in life on the battlefield. Our company goes bankrupt. There are tornados, earthquakes, fires and famines. Bad stuff happening all over the globe.

Then, piled on top of it all, our own sins destroy any peace we may have. Greed, envy and laziness. Gossip, apathy towards the Word and ignoring the Law of God. We give in to temptation and get drunk, have an affair, get arrested for tax evasion. Our sinful nature is hostile to God, and constantly strives to put distance between us and our Lord. Oh, it’s a struggle to live in this world as a Christian, isn’t it? Then, piled on top of the pile we already have, comes our guilt. We know we haven’t lived up to God’s commands. We know we haven’t done what our faith wants to do.

How do we keep going when all this stuff is happening? That’s one of the reasons that Jesus had John write this book. He is our Good Shepherd. He’s leading us through this valley of the shadow of death, this **“great tribulation”** we’re all too familiar with. He’s the One who is doing all the work to get us through this painful, sinful life.

In all these events in our lives Jesus is both the Lamb and our Shepherd. He is the Lamb of God, who died to pay for the eternal effects of sin. As verse 10 says **“Salvation belongs to our God.”** He earned it. He gave it to us. He is also our good Shepherd, guiding and comforting us as we muddle our way through the pain of life. We were lost, but now we are found by Him and are being led home by Him.

John Wiersema decided to go for a 2 hour hike in Bryce Canyon, Utah on Monday, April 29<sup>th</sup>. Carrying no food or water, he quickly became lost. 2 hours stretched into 4 days. He couldn't find his way back home, no matter what he tried. On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, 3 men found him and brought him to safety. He couldn't do a thing to save himself. It took someone else to find him and lead him to safety.

That's what Jesus does. He finds us. He leads us. He give us what we need to arrive safely at home. Today we are privileged to witness in God's Word that final destination, the day we arrive safe in our Father's throne room. Safe in paradise.

### ***Part Two: Home is paradise***

John had a front row seat at the Judgment Day Celebration. **“<sup>9</sup> After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”** So many people, so many souls saved! So many believers praising the Lord on that day! All were wearing white robes, symbolizing that they had been washed clean of all sin by the Lord.

**“And they cried out in a loud voice.”** This scene in heaven on Judgment Day reminds me of a city's celebration after a championship has been won. People are wearing the team colors, waving banners and flags to honor the champions. Notice the cheer that believers will raise on that day. **“Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”** Seven words of praise. Seven is the number of perfection. Perfect praise, complete praise. No boos, just cheers giving it all up for our good Shepherd. He's done it all! He deserves everything we can give Him, including our voices!

In the midst of our troublesome life, as we endure the great tribulation, Jesus our good Shepherd wants us to remember what's waiting for us at the end. Paradise. Then, we can serve Him with everything we have. Then He can fully show us His love.

To comfort us, Jesus lets us know what He will do for us in paradise. He uses some quotes from the Old Testament to show us that He will complete His promises. One of the elders in heaven on Judgment Day tells the apostle John what the future holds for him and all believers. Listen to his testimony. **“he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 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.”** Life will be perfect. Life will be wonderful. We will be with the Lord forever, forever refreshed, forever glad.

“I want to go home.” Those were the first words Angie said to her mom when she called her from summer camp. “I don't like the food here. My bed's too lumpy and it's cold at night. Some of my bunkmates don't like me and they pick on me. I want to go home now.” She missed her family and all the comforts of home. She missed her friends and that sense of belonging we all crave. “It's just two weeks,” her dad said. “Call me every day if you want, and know that I'll be there to bring you home when your time there is done.”

So often we feel like Angie. Life is rough. It's not always enjoyable and there are times we want to go home. But the Lord has a purpose for us here on earth, and when that purpose is completed, he'll come pick us up and take us home. But until then, we can call Him every day in prayer. We can hear His comforting voice as we read the Bible. We can be sure that our good Shepherd will always be with us as He leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, the great tribulation that we call life on earth. He's leading us home.

AMEN