

November 1, 2015 – Revelation 7:9-17 (Epistle: 1 John 3:1-3 Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12)

The Blessings of Heaven are Possible Only Through Jesus Christ

Chapter 7 of Revelation comes after the first six seals of the heavenly scroll have been opened. It is a welcome interlude after the horrifying visions of God's wrath that John saw when these seals were opened. The two visions in this chapter provide comfort and encouragement to John before he sees the rest of God's wrath unleashed upon the earth.

The first vision in this chapter is a vision of the church on earth symbolized as 144,000 children of Israel who are sealed and set in order to go forth in battle. This is the church *militant* – the believers on earth. We battle not against flesh and blood, “*but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 6:12). We are sealed as God's own to protect us in our time on earth and to equip us for the battle.

The vision we consider today is even more comforting as it shows the church in heaven – the church *triumphant*. It shows all those who have come out of their warfare into the glory of God. This vision shows us that the fight is worth it. It shows us how we get to heaven and it gives us a picture of what we get in heaven.

John sees here “*a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb*” (v. 9). The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that only 144,000 will go to heaven and the rest will live here on a purified earth. This verse shows us that their teaching is wrong. This uncountable, great multitude is standing in heaven before the throne of God and before the Lamb (see Psalm 11:4, 103:19; Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:34, 23:22; Revelation 4:2). The 144,000 in the first part of this chapter, as I said before, symbolizes the church on earth – the church in this world.

This vision shows us that heaven is not limited by space. There is no maximum capacity. There is plenty of room in heaven for all. We also see here God does not show partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17, 2 Chronicles 19:7; Romans 2:11); “*all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues*” are welcome before God's throne. He is the God of all.

But that does not mean that everyone will go to heaven; unfortunately, not everyone will be a part of this great multitude. One of the elders asked John, “*Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?*” (v. 13). When John said, “*Sir, you know*”, the elder explained, “*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (v. 14). The key that opens heaven is “*the blood of the Lamb*” – the blood of Jesus.

Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). None of us are good enough to be included in this multitude. We have all failed to love God above all things and all people, and we have failed to always love others as we love ourselves. Instead we often have put ourselves first. Because of our sin, we do not deserve a place in heaven. “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (John 1:8), but “*if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

God forgives your sins and cleanses you from unrighteousness because He sent His only begotten Son to suffer and die on the cross for your sins. And not only for your sins, but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Because Jesus shed His blood for you, you have a place in heaven.

As the elder says here, this multitude is made up of all those who have “*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (v. 14). “*Therefore they are before the throne of God*” (v. 15). By believing in Jesus’ sacrifice for your sins, your sins are washed away. “*Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool*” (Isaiah 1:18).

This washing is a gift from God. Salvation is a gift from God. Isaiah says in chapter 61, “*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels*” (Isaiah 61:10). We see this here in that the great multitude is “*clothed with white robes*” (v. 9). They do not clothe themselves, but God clothes them with His righteous – the righteousness of Christ. The multitude acknowledges this when they cry out, “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*” They give God the credit for their salvation. Salvation comes only from God and from His Lamb, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ, God offers the world a “free ticket” to heaven. But so many refuse it. Our sinful nature does not want to admit we are sinful. We would like to think that we are good people – good enough, or at least better than some than we could name. So people refuse the white robe of righteousness God offers them through Jesus, and they seek to get in to heaven with their own clothes. By comparison to what God offers, these clothes are just filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). And many only focus on this world and never even consider where they will spend eternity.

Jesus illustrated this with the story of the king who gave a marriage feast for his son (see Matthew 22:1-14). Those who were invited refused to come. Instead they went their way to take care of their day-to-day business. The king then sent out his servants to gather all those whom they could find and bring them to the feast. But when the king came into the hall, he found a man who was not wearing a wedding garment. The king had the man cast out into outer darkness.

May you gladly let God clothe you with the righteousness of Christ, and by trusting in Jesus’ death on the cross in your place, may you wash your robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb!

This vision shows us not only how we get to heaven but blessings we will have when get there. We will be “*before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.*” Some may hear this and think, “that doesn’t sound very appealing!” Serving the Lord is not attractive to our sinful nature. But it is a great blessing. Think of the joy you have experienced in the calling God has given you as a mother or father, as an employee or employer. That joy that you have experienced in carrying out the work God has given you is a taste of what it will be like in heaven all the time. Serving God is a joy and not a burden. All the things that make our work here difficult will be gone. You will be free to serve the Lord with gladness.

You will have “*come out of the great tribulation*” that you now experience here on this earth. All the troubles and trials you now face will be no more. You “*shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore*” (v. 16). Think of that! All your bodily needs will be taken care of! And there will be no more sunburns or heat stroke.

He who sits on the throne will dwell with us. The verb used here at the end of verse 15 literally means “to set up a tent”. It is the same word used in John 1:14 of Jesus, the Word, becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Verse 15 has a different preposition however: instead of “among”, it says “upon”. A more literal translation of this verse would be: “And He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.” This means that God will not only dwell with us, but He will

shelter us from all harm. He will cover you with His dwelling. He will cover you with His blessing.

And the Lamb will be your Shepherd. That is a striking image, isn't it? The Lamb of God, who was lead to slaughter, is now the Shepherd. Jesus, Himself, will shepherd you and lead you to the fountains of the waters of life. This brings to mind the words of Psalm 23: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake"* (Psalm 23:1-3). Your Lord Jesus will lead you to the fountains of living water that spring up to everlasting life (John 4:14).

In this vision, we see the *"great multitude...standing before the throne and before the Lamb...with palm branches in their hands"* (v. 9). The only other time palm branches are mentioned in the New Testament is when a great multitude welcomed Jesus as He rode on a donkey into Jerusalem on that last Sunday before His crucifixion (John 12:12-15). Here the uncountable multitude celebrates in heaven the salvation won by Jesus' triumphant victory on earth when He died and rose again.

A final blessing we see here is that God Himself will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Think of all the things that have caused you tears during your life: the pain others have caused you, the hurt you have cause others, the sins you have committed and struggled with, the sorrow you've felt over the sins of others, the sadness from loss, and the grief at the death of a loved one. All these things will be gone! *"There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). God, Himself, will wipe away every tear from your eyes!

Did you notice that almost all of these things describe what won't happen in heaven? We will not hunger, or thirst, or be struck by the sun or heat, and there will be no more reason for tears. Standing before God's throne day and night will be so wonderful that it defies description! It seems that God can only tell us what won't be there, because what we will experience is so beyond our ability to understand. God can only give us a glimpse of the glory of heaven, because that is all we can fathom.

But may this distant triumph song encourage you when the fight is fierce and the warfare seems long. *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb"* (v. 10). He will bring you safely to His throne where you will join with the angels in saying:

*"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."*

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