

Revelation 7:9-17
Fourth Sunday of Easter—Confirmation Sunday
April 25, 2010

Revelation 7:9-17 (New International Version)

The Great Multitude in White Robes

⁹After 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. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" ¹³Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "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. ¹⁵Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For 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."

We hope that worshipers who arrive early use the time to prepare for the service. If you did so and glanced at the theme for the sermon, you might have thought it was a commercial for the Praise Singers. Or knowing that it was Confirmation Day and that our thoughts would be directed toward a group of young people, you might have thought I was giving advice about signing up for high school activities. While both of them might be worthy endeavors, I have a grander message in mind. Based on the scene of heaven John was privileged to view we urge

- JOIN THE CHOIR, Do so**
I. Wearing your white robes
II. Praising your great God
III Enjoying eternal blessings

It was a grand view John received, one you might think you are already part of because you are wearing your white robes. It's much bigger. "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." What an amazing view! The number of people in the scene was beyond counting. If you are ever frustrated with the progress of mission work or the response to the preaching of the gospel, take encouragement from John's vision. To say there will be lots of people in heaven is an understatement. They will come from all over the earth. The varied background of the crowd emphasizes that God loves all people. However you might subdivide the world's population, by race or nationality or ethnic heritage, all are represented. This multitude is gathered before the throne, the seat of God in all His majesty. The Lamb is there also. That's Jesus, who sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world.

The throng is in proper attire. They are wearing white robes. Although our confirmands also are wearing white robes, you aren't there yet. This isn't heaven. The mention of white robes serves to remind us that wasn't what we had been wearing. Our garments are soiled by sin. We mess up plenty. There is our treatment of others. You know the commandments and how they identify our sins of disobedience to authorities and against the life, marriage, property, and reputation of others. We violate God's law in our thoughts, with the attitudes of our hearts like greed, lust, and hatred. What evil our tongues can speak or spark! We break the ninth and tenth commandments by coveting, wanting things God does not want us to have. Our behavior toward God is no better. We place self and other things first in our lives, while His name is misused and His Word is neglected. But that's not what John saw. The residents of heaven "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood

of the lamb," he later learned. Blood normally stains cloth but His blood cleanses, so that our clothes are white as snow. Jesus has removed every sin we will ever commit.

The throng of heaven dwellers was holding palm branches. Those fronds were a sign of victory and celebration. People of John's day viewed the palm as the perfect tree, with long life, lasting as much as two hundred years.

The people were also using their voices. A loud sound boomed throughout the scene as they were holding nothing back. They cried or gave a yell. It isn't identified here as singing. I mention that as some people don't enjoy singing and think heaven won't be much fun. John heard a mighty cheer like bursts forth when your team scores a buzzer beater basket from half court that wins the game or a touchdown as time runs out or a walk off grand slam. You are filled with emotion and excitement. That's the way we will feel in heaven.

What excites is this: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" The Lord is the source of our salvation. It is His work from start to finish. Removing sin was impossible for the best of human efforts, but He planned already in eternity what to do about it. He carried out that plan by sending His own Son into the world in human flesh. That astounding task required the miracle of the virgin birth. In love Jesus died for us. His resurrection affirmed the payment was complete. The Lord brought the message of Christ's work to you in the gospel. He planted faith in your heart, likely by the miraculous act of baptism. He has fed your faith and kept you in it to this day, and will continue to do so as long as you stay close to His Word and sacraments. Then He will one day bring you into the choir we view in this text.

II.

There you will be praising your great God. His greatness is also acknowledged by others. Angels were mentioned. They make up another huge crowd—earlier John saw thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand of them. Angels are spirit beings which the Lord used as messengers and as protectors for His people. They rejoice when one sinner repents, so imagine the joy expressed in this scene. They were joined by elders, twenty-four of them, which leads us to think of the Old and New Testaments, with twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles.

The four living creatures were also present. They were mentioned earlier in Revelation. They were full of eyes, one having the face of a lion; another, of an ox; the third, of a man; and the last, of an eagle. They have six wings. They are likely a special type of angel. Their faces reflect the four divisions of life inhabiting our planet so they may depict God's governance of the earth. These creatures fell upon their faces in humility before the throne of God.

This group extolled God's deserving qualities. They began and ended their chorus with, "Amen!" They expressed their agreement: it is absolutely true.

They gave God praise and glory. He deserves every syllable of the acclaim offered for His lofty position above all else and for His marvelous deeds for us.

He has wisdom. He is all-knowing. He devised the plan to save the world. He knows our thoughts and our needs and how to address them. He knew how to design the universe. So they give Him thanks and honor, an expression of gratitude.

He has power and strength. He can do all things. Nothing is impossible for God. He directs history, limits the forces of evil, and redirects even bad events to serve our good. With reason the praise rings out forever, without end.

It will be a thrill to be there, hearing these praises echo throughout heaven and joining in offering them. And we will be there. It is not a result of our own doing but is all to His credit. Remember that fact always. Our natural mind likes to claim credit for what we have. Yes, you did work to prepare for this day and you did well Wednesday evening in the examination, but that's only learning of His greatness, not contributing to it. Join the choir and praise your great God.

III.

The thrill increases as we see what we will have. We will be enjoying eternal blessings. One great aspect is what will no longer be with us. When the elder identified for John the people in white robes,

he said, "These are they who have come out (literally, are coming out) of the great tribulation." That's life now. We experience the consequences that sin unleashed on our world. Life growing up is not easy. Each stage of life has its challenges. As you stand up for the Lord Jesus, you will face opposition. In your vows you express a willingness to do so, even to suffer death rather than to deny your Savior. That's how some will enter heaven—by being martyrs for their faith. Once there, all the troubles will be behind us.

Instead we will be in the presence of God. We will share in His holiness so will be able to stand before Him.

We will serve Him, not in slavish duty but as a joyful privilege, expressing our gratitude. The elder told John that service will go on day and night. It will be continuous because you just can't say or do enough to thank the Lord for His blessings, which will also be endless.

There in heaven we will be under God's care, protected, with His tent spread over us. He provides safety and security, whether it is from the elements or opponents. He will supply our needs. The Lamb (Jesus) is also the Good Shepherd as this week's readings describe. Included: "He will lead them to springs of living water," life-giving, soul-satisfying refreshment.

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." No sadness will cast a shadow over our enjoyment. Can you imagine that? So many experiences now produce heartaches and tears. Not one bit of disappointment or grief will happen then.

The scene encourages us. When we are struggling with a difficulty, we realize it will all end. We can persevere. We have something good to look forward to. It also motivates our dedicated service. All that John described is definitely yours, provided by God. We will want to remain faithful. We want to fight the challenges to drift from our Lord and His ways.

So start rehearsing for this choir. Enjoy the Christian fellowship into which the Lord has placed you. Support one another in your faith. Keep growing in certainty. Know that heaven is your home. Hear the Word, which maintains faith. Use your privilege to receive Holy Communion, which makes God's gospel message personal. Voice your praises in worship and witness and live in service to your Savior.

This day is special and exciting, but it is only a start. Keep growing in your faith and one day you will be coming out of the great tribulation to this glorious scene of beauty and joy that never end.