

A Vision of Heaven

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Revelation, this time in chapter 7, Revelation chapter 7, and if we take as our text the words of verses 13 and 14, Revelation 7 and verse 13.

Then one of the elders addressed me, that is John, saying, Who are these clothed in white robes, and where have they come from? I said to him, Sir, you know, and he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Who are these clothed in white robes, and where have they come from?

There's a group of American gospel singers called the Rochesters, and they're a family group, and they've grown and developed over the years, because there's now three generations who are part of this singing group.

But one song which the Rochesters are famous for singing is a song called Highway to Heaven, and I've put it down in the intimations this morning. And in that song, it's a song which tells the story of an old preacher who remained faithful to the word of God throughout his ministry.

[1 : 40] And the lyrics of the song, they read as follows, if you have it in front of you. The old preacher man stood there in the pulpit. The church house was empty almost. His eyes filled with tears.

His mind filled with memories. Of not so long ago, when the church house was full, not one pew was empty. The altar was stained with saint's tears. As he stands there this morning and sounds out the warning, once again letting them know, there's a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

The way is still straight. There's a race to be run. You can live as you please, but you must pay the cost. And the highway to heaven still goes by the cross. Some of the members thought he was old-fashioned, unwilling to change with the times.

So they found a new church with more modern-day preachers who were willing to let things go by. But the old preacher stood for what he believed in and what he had preached 40 years.

As he stands there this morning in a near-empty church house, his opening remarks are these words. There's a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. The way is still straight.

[2 : 48] There's a race to be run. You can live as you please, but you must pay the cost. And the highway to heaven still goes by the cross. And you know, it's that message of the old preacher which I'd like us to consider today.

Because I want us to see that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. The way is still straight and there's a race to be run.

You can, if you wish, to live as you please, but it will cost. You must pay the cost. But this highway to heaven, it still goes by the cross.

Friends, I'd like us to think about heaven this morning. And consider who will be there and what it will be like. Who will be there and what it will be like.

And I'd like us to think about heaven by just considering three things. A great assembly, a great amen, and a great assurance.

[3 : 56] A great assembly, a great amen, and a great assurance. So if we look first of all at this great assembly. A great assembly. If you look at chapter 7 at verse 9.

John says, After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number. From every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. Standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. And crying out with a loud voice. Salvation belongs to our God. Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Now I'm sure that we've all heard the expression. Don't be so heavenly minded. That you're of no earthly use. But of course an expression like that one.

It's completely unbiblical. Because the Bible repeatedly reminds us. That to be of any earthly use. We must first of all. Be heavenly minded.

[4 : 57] In fact the Apostle Paul. He urges us. He says, seek the things that are above. Where Christ is seated at the right hand. Set your affection on things above. And not on things on earth.

And so we must be heavenly minded. In order to be of any earthly use. And that's what we see when we come to the book of Revelation. Because the book of Revelation.

It was written when the Apostle John. When he was exiled to the Greek island of Patmos. And it was there on the island of Patmos. That John received this revelation from the Lord.

On the Lord's day. He was caught up in the spirit. And this revelation was to encourage. And it was to challenge persecuted Christians. Who were living in the first century. Because at that time.

Many Christians they were being oppressed. And persecuted by the Romans. And especially the Roman Emperor. But the book of Revelation. It's often considered to be a book with hidden messages and meanings.

[5 : 59] And there's no doubt that the book of Revelation. It is a book full of symbolism and metaphors. But unfortunately many people. They have spent their time.

And maybe even years. Trying to work out all this symbolism. And to decipher all the metaphors. In order to try and understand the meaning of the book of Revelation. Revelation. But what we have to see is that the book of Revelation.

It is a revelation. It's not meant to be a book of mystery and skepticism. It's a book of revelation. Which means that something is being revealed in the book.

Yes there are difficult parts of this revelation. That we struggle to understand. But the purpose of the book is to reveal. It's not to conceal. It's to reveal.

Because it's a revelation. And it's a revelation of who Jesus is. As our glorified and exalted Savior. And so the book of Revelation.

[7 : 00] It was written to challenge and encourage us. To set our affection on things above. It's to challenge us. And to encourage us. To be so heavenly minded.

That we are of earthly use. To our Lord. We are to be so heavenly minded. That we are of great earthly use. And that's why John was given this revelation.

Of the throne of God in heaven. And John's detailed account. It began as we read back in chapter 4. After Jesus. In chapters 2 and 3.

Jesus addresses the seven churches in Asia. But in chapter 4. John begins by saying. After this. I looked and behold that door.

Standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard speaking to me. Was like a trumpet. And it said. Come up here. And I will show you what must take place.

[8 : 00] After this. And from that point. John is given this revelation of heaven. And what will take place. When this world as we know it. Comes to its conclusion.

And you know. The greatest encouragement. Which the Lord could give his people. When they're suffering in numerous ways. Is to remind them of what the future holds for them.

The greatest encouragement. For the Lord's people. Who are struggling and suffering. Is to remind those. Who are going through all these trials. And tribulations of life. It's to remind them to trust the Lamb.

Who is seated upon the throne. To trust him. Because he promises to us. That the best is yet to come. And that's the vision which John gives to us here.

Where this great assembly of people. Have gathered together. After this I looked and behold. A great multitude. That no one could number. From every nation.

[9 : 00] From all tribes and peoples and languages. Standing before the throne. And before the Lamb. And what we ought to notice from this description. Of the multitude.

Is that it's a multitude that no one could number. It was a multitude. Multitude that no one could number. And yet it was a multitude that the Lord promised. Would be there.

That was the great vision. That the psalmist had in Psalm 100. That one day. All people. That on earth do dwell.

Would sing to the Lord. With cheerful voice. That was the vision. That from every nation. Tribe. People. And language. They would all come. And worship the Lord.

As the covenant king. And that's why they all came. To worship the Lord. They all came. Because of the covenant promise. Of the covenant king. You'll remember that when.

[9 : 59] Way back in Genesis chapter 12. When Abraham was called by the Lord. He was given the covenant promise. Abraham received the promise of blessing. That through his seed.

All the nations of the earth. All the families of the earth. Would be blessed. The Lord said to Abraham. I will bless you. And I will multiply your offspring.

As the stars of heaven. And as the sand of the seashore. My friend. The covenant of grace. God's covenant promise. Of gospel blessing.

Was that the message of salvation. Would spread throughout. Every nation of the world. And that there would be this. Great assembly one day. In the courts of heaven.

When this multitude. Would be gathered together. From every nation. Tribe. People. People. And language. Abraham received. The covenant promise.

[10 : 55] That through him. Through his offspring. Jesus would come. And that through Jesus Christ. All the nations of the earth. Would be blessed.

Christ. But you know. Even though Abraham. Wouldn't see it. In his flesh. He never saw. The fulfillment. Of the promise. Even though he.

He wouldn't see it in the flesh. Abraham rejoiced. To see the day. When there would be a great assembly. In glory. and you know that's what it will be like for all the apostles and all the preachers and all the evangelists who down throughout the centuries they spent their lives faithfully sowing the good seed of God's word that's what it would be like for the missionaries who poured out their lives for the Lord's cause those who went to the far corners of the earth and in some cases they gave their lives in order that the gospel of Jesus Christ would spread to these unreached peoples that's what it will be like for parents who prayed earnestly for their children for so many years but they never saw their children converted that's what it will be like for the faithful Christian witness in the community and in the workplace who lived and spoke about the Lord but always thought that these people were uninterested my friend like Abraham we might never see the fulfillment of the promise in this life we might not see the harvest we might not see the conversions we might not see the blessing but we can rejoice knowing that the Lord will always remain faithful to his covenant promise he will always remain faithful to his covenant and you know I love what John Newton says about heaven he says if I ever reach heaven

I expect to find three wonders there first to meet some I had not thought to see there second to miss some I thought to be there and third the greatest wonder of all to find myself there and you know that should be our priority to find myself there our priority is to make sure that we will be there when the role is called up yonder we often stress the importance of our children we want our children to be saved but you have to start with yourself you are the priority you have to be right with the Lord you have to make sure that you are there when the role is called up up yonder our priority is to make sure that we are found within this multitude that no man can number our priority above everything else is to know Jesus in life and in death but you know what I find fascinating about the description of this great assembly is that they are not only clothed in white robes we will come to that later on but they are standing before the throne and before the lamb but what is interesting is that he says that they are holding palm branches they are holding palm branches that is what he says in verse 9 they are before the throne and before the lamb clothed in white robes holding palm branches in their hands and they are crying out with a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb and that description of palm branches it is significant because there is only one other place in the Bible where there are people holding palm branches and that is at the triumphal entry of Jesus you remember in the gospel the gospel accounts of when Jesus is entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey he is riding on a donkey and there is crowds of people going out before him people coming behind him they are all surrounding him and we are told that they were holding palm branches and they are all crying out

Hosanna salvation blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord the King of Israel and what we have to see is that the palm branches that is mentioned here they are symbolic of this royal coronation and that is the imagery which has been given to us here as this great assembly gathers around the throne of heaven there is praise and rejoicing there is this celebration of the King who is sitting upon the throne and we can see that this great assembly they are all singing and they are singing similar words to those who were rejoicing as Jesus entered Jerusalem similar words but you know they are singing now in the new Jerusalem and they are singing Hosanna salvation belongs

to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb it is a beautiful image of this great assembly a great assembly that we have to be part of we have to be part of it and so that is the first thing we see here as we are given this vision of heaven a great assembly but secondly we witness a great Amen a great Amen it says in verse 11 and all the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying

[16:37] Amen blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever Amen and you know as the Apostle John as he continues to explain to us what he saw in his revelation of heaven he highlights in these verses that the worship in heaven it's not just confined to the multitudes that no man could number John tells us that this symphony of singing this singing which would have been incredible it will not only come from this multinational choir it also comes from all of the Lord's creation all of his creation and you know it's this should make us realise that we were not the only ones who were created to glorify God and to enjoy him forever we're told that the angels the 24 elders and these four living creatures they all fell down on their faces and they worshipped the Lord and you know it's interesting that the angels are mentioned because throughout the book of Revelation and throughout the Bible as a whole angels are revealed as the messengers of God and that's what the word angel means it means messenger and the angels of the Lord they're depicted in the Bible as ministering to the Lord's people sometimes they're delivering messages to the Lord's people and other times they're executing judgment upon the Lord's people but what John reveals to us here is that the one thing these angels want to do more than anything else is to gather around the throne of God along with the glorified church of

Jesus Christ and they want to celebrate what the Lord has done in the work of salvation the apostle Peter he reminds us that when it comes to the work of salvation the angels are left as bystanders they're left looking into these things the angels marvel at what God has done they look at salvation and the work of salvation and they they look at God taking to himself our humanity and becoming a servant and being obedient this obedient servant who was mocked and scourged and hated and being obedient unto death even the death of the cross they look at it and they marvel at it they marvel at the work of God's salvation and Peter says that the angels they desire to look into these things they want to understand it they want to comprehend how glory could become man and save sinners they marvel at all these things but it's not only the angels who are marveling and giving this resounding amen to the Lord's salvation

John tells us that there are also elders gathered around the throne of God there are elders there and back in chapter 4 when John began to explain his vision he said that there were 24 elders gathered around the throne he says there are around the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the thrones were 24 elders clothed in white garments with crowns golden crowns on their heads but you know well the question that comes into my mind well why 24 why is there 24 elders and the reason for the 24 elders is because at the end of the book of revelation there's this description of the heavenly city and it has 12 gates and there are 12 foundations and we're told that on the 12 gates are the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and on the 12 foundations are the names of the 12 apostles and all together they make up the 24 elders seated around the throne and they're around the throne of

God and of the lamb and they're clothed in white garments and they have crowned golden crowns upon their heads and the 24 elders are there and they're there as representatives of all of the Lord's people from the Old Testament and the New Testament before and after the death of Jesus Christ but what's fascinating is that we're told at the end of chapter 4 that the 24 elders they fall down and worship the lamb seated upon the throne and as they worship him they cast their crowns their golden crowns before the throne saying worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power because you created all things and by you they existed and were created but you know there's one more thing one more part of this choir which is singing the great amen around the throne and around the lamb and it's these four living creatures and the description we're given of these four living creatures it seems so unusual to us we're told in chapter 4 that one is described like a lion one is described like an ox another has the face of a man and another like an eagle and each of them we're told they have six wings and they're full of eyes before and behind but you know we shouldn't get too caught up with what they look like rather we should focus upon what they're saying because we're told that night and day they never cease to say holy holy holy is the Lord

God almighty who was and is and is to come and what's remarkable is that this song of the four living creatures it echoes the song of the seraphim in Isaiah's heavenly vision in Isaiah chapter 6 and you know I love Isaiah's vision and what he says about heaven in Isaiah chapter 6 it begins in the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple and above him he says stood the seraphim and each had six wings and with two he covered his feet with two he covered his face and with two he flew and it says that one seraphim called to another and they said holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory but you know what's incredible about these two visions of John's vision and [23 : 36] Isaiah's vision it's that Isaiah received his heavenly vision in 800 BC and John received his heavenly vision in 90 AD Isaiah and John received their heavenly visions nearly 900 years apart and yet in all that time those gathered around the throne of God they were still singing holy holy holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come it's beautiful to think that nothing had changed and as I know what John Newton draws attention to in his hymn Amazing Grace when we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun my friend in the realms of eternity where there's no time there's no change there's no decay those around the throne of God and of the

Lamb they will never tire they will never lose their concentration they will never lose interest they'll never look at their watch or get fed up just like we do we will continue it says that they will continue to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and you know it makes me think of the words that we were singing in Psalm 84 blessed are they in thy house that dwell they ever give thee praise blessed are they all of God's creation praising him day and night in his temple and they're singing to him the great amen amen blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever amen it's a great it's the great doxology in which they adore and worship the Lord as the one who is glorious and altogether lovely but you know the question we have to ask as we think about all those in heaven and what they're doing and what they will continue to do we have to ask well how does all this connect with us we're not in heaven we're not in heaven today we're still surrounded by sin we're still bound by time we're still restrained by our limitations we're still overwhelmed by sickness and illness and we're continually confronted with death yes this vision of heaven is majestic and it's glorious but how does that connect with me how does that connect with us how does this help us in the here and now living in a world of chaos and confusion how does it help us live our day to day lives how does this thought of heaven help us to be a committed

Christian and live out our faith in a fallen world well that's what I'd like us to consider last of all from this section because having given to us this description of a great assembly who's gathered in heaven and there's this symphony of singing the great amen John then gives to us a great assurance a great assurance you look at verse 13 chapter 7 then one of the elders addressed me saying who are these clothed in white robes and where have they come from I said to him sir do you know and he said to me these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat for the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes who are these clothed in white robes and where have they come from you know

I love that question because it leads on to an answer which gives to the Christian the greatest assurance of their salvation because this vision of heaven is to encourage us to keep going it's to lift us up when we're downcast it's to push us forward if we're just stationary it's to make us look ahead if we're looking back and it's to challenge us to make sure that we will be there when the role is called up yonder who are these clothed in white robes and where have they come from my friend this question is to make us so heavenly minded that we are of the greatest earthly use to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ because when this elder realises the identity of this innumerable multitude gathered in heaven he describes them so beautifully he says these are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation and Jesus said that for the

Christian there would be great tribulation and there would be opposition to their faith there would be trials and temptations he said in the world you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world the apostles they often encouraged other Christians by assuring them that it will be

through much tribulation that they will enter the kingdom of God even Paul assured us in Romans chapter 8 that the tribulations in this life they will never separate us from the love of Christ but what we have to see is that when this elder describes the multitude as those who have come out of the great tribulation he's not only referring to the trials and tribulations of this life he's also referring to the second coming of Christ and the day of judgment because Jesus said that at the great tribulation the son of man will come in his glory and he will sit upon his glorious throne and he says that before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate one from another as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats and he will place as he says the sheep on his right and the goats on his left then the king will say to those on his right come you blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation from before the foundation of the world and he will say to those on his left depart from me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels and you know when we consider what the great tribulation really is what becomes apparent is that the multitudes gathered around the throne of heaven they are there only because they have washed their sin stained robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb they have escaped the wrath of

[31 : 22] God against sin by being washed in the blood of the lamb and that's the challenge to everyone to me and to you who is everyone who has not yet come to the lamb for cleansing that's the challenge we must come we must wash we must come to this lamb for cleansing you have to flee from the wrath to come and come to him for cleansing because there's no other way there's no other provision which has been made for your sin stained garments to be made white no other way no other provision apart from the precious blood of the lamb nothing else will save you apart from the precious blood of the lamb but we also have to see that the whiteness of their garments it represents the holiness and the righteousness of Jesus Christ you remember when Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration and he appeared before the disciples and we're told that his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light there's nothing brighter than white light and you know that's the imagery which has been used to describe the multitudes who are in heaven those who are in heaven they're reflecting the brightness and the glory of the lamb who is seated upon the throne they are the mirror image of

Jesus who's sitting upon the throne they have washed they've been washed from their sins their clothes have been clothed in Christ's righteousness they've been made holy they are glorified they've been made to be like Jesus they've been made like Christ himself and was that not the promise which John gave to the church on earth when we see Jesus in heaven he says when we see him we shall be like him for we shall see him even as he is and that's the same sentiment echoed in the words of Psalm 17 which we'll be singing shortly the psalmist says but as for me I thine own face in righteousness will see and with thy likeness when I wake my satisfied shall be my friend this is a great assurance to the

Christian that when the faith we have today that we have to walk by faith with every day without seeing when this faith one day gives way to sight we shall see Jesus in all his beauty and all his glory and we will worship him as John says there we will worship him in his temple day and night throughout the endless ages of eternity but more than that more than that we're told that this lamb of God who washed us in his own blood and made us white in his own precious blood he says that he will continue to be our shepherd he was the good shepherd for us here on earth he was the shepherd who found us in our lost condition he was the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep he's the shepherd who brought us into the fold and today he's still our good shepherd who provides for us and promises to us goodness and mercy to follow us all the days of our life but more than that he says that when we enter the palace of the shepherd he will shelter us with his presence and we shall not want we shall not want he says we shall never hunger anymore neither thirst anymore the troubles and tribulations of this life will not hurt us or hinder us anymore because the lamb who is in the midst of the throne he will be our shepherd and he will lead us to springs of living water and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes and you know that's a great assurance to us that even though we will appear before the throne of god and of the lamb and although we will appear washed in his blood clothed in white robes he says that we will appear with tears in our eyes tears in our eyes tears from the pains of this life tears from the ills that we have suffered tears from the regrets and the fear of the tears of loss the tears of failures the tears of our loneliness the tears of our brokenness and even the tears of death that we had to encounter but as we appear in heaven we're told that we will not only have tears of past sorrow we'll have tears of future joy joy

and thankfulness tears of thankfulness tears of happiness tears of blessedness tears of reunion with the lord's people tears of seeing jesus face to face but when he sees you we're told he will wipe away every tear from your eyes and he says death shall be no more neither mourning nor crying nor pain any more for the former things have passed away oh my friend today set your affection on things above where christ is seated because it's there that there is a great assembly and it's around the throne that there is a great amen and it's because of that we are given a great assurance a great assurance of what is yet to come for everyone who lives and dies in the lord lift your eyes heavenward today lift them heavenward be heavenly minded that

you're of great earthly use while you're here and be assured that you have the promise of grace by the way and glory in the end but what about those who are not going to heaven the old preacher in that hymn he still wants to remind you there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun the way is still straight there's a race to be run you can live as you please but you must pay the cost the highway to heaven it goes by the cross he's the only way Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life no man no woman no boy no girl comes to the father except through me you seek him with all your heart and when you find him you have the great promise the promise of what is yet to come for every one of the lord's people may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord our gracious god we all we give thanks to thee for the reminder in this life that the best is yet to come how often lord we get caught up with the here and now and all that is surrounding us but help us we pray to lift our eyes heavenward this morning to set our affection on things above and to know that christ is seated enthroned that he is sovereign that he is ruling and overruling in every experience of our lives that nothing is without his care and without his keeping and lord help us then to trust him to trust him in time and to trust him for eternity to know that oh lord to know that here we have no continuing city but for those who are in christ they await the one that is to come a city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is god go before us then we pray part us with thy blessing and do us good for we ask it in jesus name and for his sake amen we shall conclude by singing the words of psalm 17 psalm 17 in the scottish psalter page 217 psalm 17 we're singing verses 5 to 9 and then the last verse verse 15 psalm 17 verses 5 to 9 and then the last verse verse 15 hold up my goings lord may guide in those thy paths divine so that my footsteps may not slide out of those ways of thine down to well 4 to 9 and then verse 15 but as for me

I thine own face in righteousness will see and with thy likeness when I wake I satisfied shall be these verses to God's praise to God's praise God else she call my footblade Good steps made of life upon those grave of ice.

[42 : 12] I thought that Thou won me, O God, because Thou wilt me hear, That Thou hast harkened to Thy speech, To me in cry, My ear.

Thy wondrous loving kindness show, Thou that by Thy right hand, Sist them that trust in Thee from those That up against them stand.

At the upper of the ivy key, Then Thy wings shed me close, From little pressure compassing, May round us deadly close.

But as for me I Thine own face, Then righteousness will see, And with Thy likeness when I wait, I satisfy shall be.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.