

Who are these?

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- [0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help this evening, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. The book of Revelation.
- Revelation chapter 7. And if we read again at verse 13. Revelation chapter 7 at verse 13.
- Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these clothed in white robes, and from where have they come? 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.
- But particularly that question, verse 13. Who are these clothed in white robes, and where have they come from?
- [1 : 02] As you know, over the past number of weeks, we've been repeatedly reminded as congregations and as communities, that eternity is only a breath away.
- Eternity is only a breath away. You know, it was King David who said, when speaking to his closest friend, Jonathan, he said, There is but one step between me and death.
- There is but one step between me and death. It was Moses who, having witnessed thousands of the Israelites die in the wilderness, he wrote in Psalm 90 that our life is just like a tale that is told.
- Therefore he prayed, Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our heart unto wisdom. But you know, when it comes to the death of a Christian, Paul gives this beautiful illustration of our body, a body that is frail and fragile, like a jar of clay.
- It was Isaiah who prayed, as you know, he said, O Lord, Thou art our Father, we are the clay, Thou our potter, we are the work of Thy hand. But Paul went further when he said that as frail and fragile jars of clay We're troubled on every side, yet not distressed.
- [2 : 25] We're perplexed, but not in despair. We're persecuted, but not forsaken. We're cast down, but not destroyed. It's a beautiful image of frail and fragile jars of clay.
- And you know, as a minister, when you're given the privilege of visiting the bedside of a Christian who's nearing the end of their pilgrimage in this world, You know, you see Paul's words coming to life before your eyes.
- Because Paul said, Though our outward man perish, we have been renewed, the inner man, inward man has been renewed day by day.
- For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, it is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.
- For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal. And in many ways, that's what we have here in Revelation chapter 7, where the veil has been pulled back.
- [3 : 33] The veil of heaven has been pulled back, and the Apostle John is given a glimpse of the eternal. He's given a glimpse of the unseen.

What is the eternal and unseen? And yet, John is given a glimpse of glory itself. But you know, all that we see in this chapter, particularly chapter 4 and 7, all that we see in this chapter is just what Jesus promised.

It's what Jesus promises to His people. You know, as you know, Jesus said in John 14, He said, Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me.

In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there, you may be also.

And so as we consider John's glimpse of glory this evening, I want us to think about heaven. And I want us to think about it under three headings. A great assembly, a great amen, and a great assurance.

[4 : 48] A great assembly, a great amen, and a great assurance. So if we look first of all at a great assembly, a great assembly, look at verse 9.

John says, The Apostle John, he wrote the book of Revelation towards the end of the first century.

And by that time, almost, if not all of the other apostles, they had died a martyr's death for preaching the gospel. But instead of being executed by the Roman emperor, John was exiled by the Roman emperor to the Greek island of Pamos, and he was left there to die.

And yet, as John explains in chapter 1, he says that while he was praying on the Lord's day, he was in the Spirit, and he heard a voice like a trumpet behind him saying, Write what you see in a book.

Write what you see in a book. And John writes, Write what you see, in a book.

[6 : 43] But as you know, the book of Revelation has often been considered to be a book of hidden meanings and messages. And there's no doubt that it's full of mystery. It's full of metaphors. But unfortunately, many people spend their time trying to decipher all the mystery and to decode all the metaphors.

And they do so in this vain hope that they'll work out when Jesus is coming again and when the end of the world is going to take place. But as Jesus said, Of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

But that's not actually what the book of Revelation is about. Because the book of Revelation, it isn't meant to be shrouded in mystery and metaphors. No, as it says in the title, it's a book of Revelation where someone is being revealed.

And that specific someone is Jesus. The Revelation is a revelation of Jesus Christ. And its purpose is to exhort and to encourage us here on earth to be committed and consistent in our Christian character, conduct, and conversation.

That's why the whole book was written, that we would see Jesus and imitate and emulate Him in our lives. But as we read this revelation of heaven, it begins in chapter 4 where John writes, After this I looked, and behold a door standing open in heaven.

[8 : 15] And the first voice which I heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. So John sees in this revelation, he sees what will take place when the world as we know it comes to its climax and conclusion.

But in the here and now, in the midst of all the grief and groaning in life, with all the sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow, all the heartache and helplessness, all the trials and tribulations, John is given this revelation to remind and reassure the Lord's people that it will be through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, we must trust the Lamb who is seated on the throne. We must trust the Lamb who is seated upon the throne and know that in Him and through Him the best is yet to come.

The best is yet to come. You know, you know, this world may feel isolated. We may feel isolated in this world or even insignificant or even irrelevant.

But you know, in Christ and through Christ, this chapter reminds us we are part of a great assembly. We are part of a great assembly.

[9 : 44] And that's what Jesus revealed to John in verse 9. He said, 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.

We're part of this great assembly. And Jesus here, He reveals an innumerable multitude in heaven. But what's remarkable is that this innumerable multitude, multitude?

They're a promised multitude. They're a promised multitude. Because that was the Lord's covenant promise to Abraham. Way back in Genesis chapter 12, the Lord promised to Abraham then.

He promised him that through your seed, all the nations, all the families of the earth will be blessed. And the Lord said to Abraham, I will bless you and make your name great and you shall be a blessing.

I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore. So there are promised multitude. This great gathering, this great assembly is a promised multitude from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language.

[11 : 03] They're a promised population of every color from every country, of every race, from every region. But you know, what's beautiful about this promised multitude in heaven is that they're all one in Christ Jesus.

They're all one in Christ Jesus. There are no divisions, dissensions, or denominations. There are no separations, splits, or schisms.

They're all one in Christ Jesus. And you know, it should remind us that we should live life with an eternal perspective because life is too short for spats and squabbles.

Life's too short for friction and fighting. Life's too short for conflict and chaos. Because as the church of Jesus Christ, we are all one.

We are one in Christ Jesus. And as one, we're not only part of this promised multitude, we're also part of this praising multitude.

[12 : 13] Because this innumerable multitude in heaven, they're a promised multitude, and they're a praising multitude. You know, as we sang earlier, that was the great missionary vision of Psalm 100.

The missionary vision of Psalm 100 was that one day, all people that on earth do dwell would sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

And that's what this promised multitude in heaven is doing. They're a praising multitude. They're singing together. And they're singing this song in verse 10, salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

But did you notice that this promised and praising multitude, they're holding palm branches. They have palm branches in their hands. And the palm branches are symbolic.

They're symbolic of a royal celebration. And that's why they were waving palm branches on Palm Sunday as Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

[13 : 20] It was a triumphal entry. That's what it's called, a triumphal entry. It was a royal celebration. And the multitude who were going into Jerusalem with Jesus, they were singing Hosanna.

They were singing salvation, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And that's what this promised and praising multitude are singing in the new Jerusalem. They're singing Hosanna.

They're singing salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. And of course, we want to be part of that promised and praising multitude.

We want to be in Emmanuel's land when the role is called up yonder. We want to see Jesus face to face because the promise of God's Word is that when we see Him, we shall be like Him.

We want to see those, do we not? We want to see those who went before us, whom we miss every day of our lives.

[14 : 28] We want to see those who prayed for us. Do you know, I was thinking about that today. Our longing is to see those who prayed for us to be saved, and yet they never lived to see it.

That's an amazing thought, and yet we'll see them face to face. You know, I love what John Newton said about heaven. He said, if I ever reach heaven, I will expect to find three wonders there.

First, to meet some I had thought not to see there. Second, to miss some I had thought to meet there. And third, the greatest wonder of all, he says, to find myself there.

The greatest wonder of all, to find myself among this great assembly. So we see a great assembly. Then secondly, a great amen.

A great amen. Look at 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, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever.

[15 : 54] Amen. You know, when Jesus revealed the throne room of heaven, John saw that the promised and praising multitude, they weren't the only ones who were gathered for worship around the throne.

Because as we read there, there are the angels, there are 24 elders, and there are four living creatures. They're all there around the throne of heaven.

And of course, the angels are there because, well, they're singing and celebrating with the church. They're singing and celebrating what Jesus has accomplished and applied through redemption.

And as you know, the angels, as Peter tells us, the angels are amazed at God's grace towards sinners. The angels desire to look into the work of salvation and how God has been so gracious towards us and how God demonstrates His love towards us in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The angels desire to look into these things and they're amazed at God's grace. So they're singing and celebrating with this praising and promised multitude.

[17 : 04] But John also sees 24 elders around the throne. And we read about those 24 elders in more detail in chapter 4 because we read there that around the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the thrones were 24 elders clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads.

The first question that comes to your mind is, well, why 24 elders? And it's because the 24 elders, they represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles.

They represent the leaders of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. But what's fascinating about these 24 elders is that they cast their crowns.

They're given crowns when they enter glory. But they don't see themselves as worthy of this crown. They cast their crown before the throne and they sing, worthy are you, O Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things and by your will they existed and were created. So they're casting their crowns before the Lamb because He is worthy.

[18 : 25] And so amongst this praising and promised multitude there are angels, there are 24 elders. But John also sees four living creatures around the throne. As we also read in chapter 4, these four living creatures, they're depicted and described one is like a lion, another is like an ox, another is like the face of a man, and the other is like an eagle in flight.

And each of them we're told that they're full of eyes and they all have six wings. But you know, we're not to focus on their appearance. Instead, we're to focus on their announcement.

Not the appearance, but the announcement. Because day and night we're told they never cease to say, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

And you know what I find absolutely amazing about that? It's that about 900 years earlier, the prophet Isaiah was given a revelation of heaven.

You can read about it in Isaiah chapter 6. And in Isaiah's revelation of heaven, Isaiah saw creatures appear before the throne of heaven with six wings.

[19 : 50] And they made the same announcement. They made the same announcement as John saw and heard here in the book of Revelation. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of His glory. And you know what's absolutely amazing is that in that 900 year period from 800 BC to 90 AD when the book of Revelation was written, in that 900 year period, those in heaven, they haven't aged in appearance and they haven't altered their announcement.

It's still the same. they're still singing the same song around the same throne. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

And you know, when you think about it, is that not what John Newton said in his hymn, Amazing Grace? He said, 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.

You're my Christian friend, heaven is a place of worship because the Lamb is worthy of praise. And when we gather with this promised and praising multitude, we'll discover that there's no time restrictions.

[21 : 27] and we'll discover that we'll never tire of worship. We'll never tire of singing. We'll never look at the clock or lose concentration. Instead, we'll ascribe and attribute glory to God.

Glory to the one who sits upon the throne. We'll celebrate our salvation by singing the great Amen of verse 12. Amen.

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen. And so in this glimpse of glory, we see a great assembly.

We see a great Amen. And then lastly, we're given a great assurance. A great assurance. Now look at verse 13.

Then one of the elders addressed me saying, who are these clothed in white robes and from where have they come? Do you know, I think this is one of the greatest questions in the Bible because it's followed by one of the greatest answers which gives to us the greatest assurance of our salvation.

[22 : 48] Who are these clothed in white robes and where have they come from? who are these promised and praising? Who is this promised and praising multitude?

And where have they come from? And John says to one of the 24 elders who asked the question, John says to him, sir, you know, you know who they are.

You know who this promised and praising multitude are. And the elder, he confesses, ah, yes, these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, for they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

And that's what Jesus promised. Jesus promised that in this life, this life that we're in, there will be trials and tribulation. He promised that there will be struggles with sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow.

Jesus promised that there will be days of groaning and grief, there will be heartache and helplessness, there will be conflict and chaos, there will be obstacles and opposition. But Jesus also promised, in this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, take heart, I have overcome the world.

[24 : 15] Jesus promised that it will be through much tribulation, that we will enter the kingdom of heaven. And that's who this promised and praising multitude is. They're the Lord's redeemed.

They're the Lord's redeemed. They've washed their robes, they've made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They've been redeemed and rescued and restored, not with the corruptible things of this world such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ.

Blood just like a lamb, without blemish and without spot. That's our great assurance. That's our great assurance that through the precious blood of Christ, as our catechism teaches us, through the precious blood of Christ, the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and they do immediately pass into glory, and their bodies, their bodies still being united to Christ, still belonging to Jesus, still redeemed by Jesus, their bodies do rest in their graves until the resurrection.

You know, my friend, in this life we walk by faith and not by sight, but at death faith finally gives way to sight.

And when we see him, we will not only be like him, but we will see our shepherd face to face. He's the good shepherd, the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

[26 : 00] He's the good shepherd who promised his sheep that nothing and no one will be able to separate them from him or snatch them out of his hand. And from that first moment we came to claim the shepherd and cling to the shepherd and confess with David in Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd.

From that first moment, you know, my friend, we have not been in want. That was our confession. The Lord's my shepherd. I'll not want.

And we have not been in want because the shepherd, as you know, he's gone before us into new pastures. He's always walked beside us through the valley of the shadow of death.

And he has always followed behind us with his goodness and mercy all the days of our life. But you know, when the days of our life in this world come to an end, the wonder is his promises don't end.

His promises continue. God's promises us, and we read it there in this passage, in verse 15, he'll shelter us.

[27 : 11] He'll shelter his people with his presence. And 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, shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Do you know, my friend, it's just as Paul said to us, set your affection on things above where Christ is seated.

Set your affection upon Jesus, because it's there that there's a great assembly, there's a great amen, and there's a great assurance, an assurance that nothing and no one will be able to separate you from the love of Christ.

That's our great hope. That's our great assurance as we consider this glimpse of glory. Who are these clothed in white robes, and where have they come from?

[28 : 26] 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.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the great assurances that are found in thy word.

And Lord, we pray that day by day in this wilderness journey, when we might be buffeted and beaten by the devil, when we might be struggling with sin or sickness or sorrow.

But Lord, we do pray that we would always cling to our shepherd, that we would keep confessing the Lord as our shepherd, and be assured that every great and precious promise in his word is all ours.

Every blessing is ours in Christ Jesus, that it is all ours we have received an inheritance that is incorruptible undefiled, that fadeth not away, but is reserved in heaven for us.

[29 : 34] Help us then as thy people, day by day, to keep looking to Jesus, to know him and to love him and to confess him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

Bless us, Lord, we pray. Bless our worship this evening, that as we meet with a grieving family, we pray that everything that is done, that it will be done to thy glory, to the furtherance of thy kingdom, and to lift up the name of Jesus, because as Jesus promises, if I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself.

Lord, bless us then we pray, go before us, lead us and guide us by thy spirit, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

We're going to sing the words of Psalm 17. Psalm 17, it's in the Scottish Psalter, it's on page 217, if you have the blue psalm book. Psalm 17, we're singing verses 5 to 9, and then the last verse, verse 15.

Psalm 17, verse 5, hold up my goings, Lord, may guide, and those thy paths divine, so that my footsteps may not slide out of those ways of thine.

[30 : 58] I called have on thee, O God, because thou wilt me hear, that thou mayst hearken to my speech, to me, incline thine ear. And we'll sing down to verse 9, and then also verse 15, where it says, but as for me, I thine own face in righteousness will see, and with thy likeness when I wake, I satisfied shall be.

So we'll stand to sing if you're able these verses to God's praise. Amen. Hold up my coax, Lord, be guided, O side pass divine, so that my curse can't do not shine, burnt of those ways of thine.

I call it by only, O God, God, because thou will be here.

Let thou mayst pocket to my speech, turn me in thy line air.

Thy wondrous loving kindness show, the God by thy right hand.

[32 : 49] Tis have the trust in he from those that have against them stand.

As the upper longing I may keep, in thy wish it be close, from youth oppressed church down passing, we even dust and he pours.

But as for me I thine own face, then my justice will see.

But with thy eyes when I wait, I satisfy shall me.

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.