



Joining the Multitude

Revelation 7 verses 9 to 17

Being in a large crowd can be exciting – it can also be a bit daunting. The multitude here is ‘countless’ (v9) and described as being from ‘every nation’. The impression given is that millions are gathered to worship at the heavenly throne. The number of Christians living at the end of the first century (when Revelation was written by John) was relatively small. So, John must have been encouraged by this ‘end of times’ gathering – gospel ministry had really worked – millions are following Jesus and gathered to worship him.

‘White robes’ are appropriate for worship. They could be the robes of victors but later we read that they were washed in the Lamb’s blood (7:14) which refers to the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. There is also a possible connection to the blood of the martyrs – by this time there were many Christian martyrs. Palm branches were used at the Feast of Tabernacles which recalled the deliverance of God’s people from slavery in Egypt. So, Palm Sunday says -here comes the Saviour/deliverer.

The outburst of verse 10 is an acknowledgement that our God is a God of salvation – HE DELIVERS. Whether it is from the bondage of Egypt or the bondage of sin, God saves his people. The deliverance from Egypt (a place of bondage) to a place of God’s choosing (Canaan) has always been seen as an event pointing to the deliverance his people can experience from sin into a place of eternal salvation.

How do you see SALVATION?

What are you saved FROM?

What are you saved FOR?

There seems to be an uninhibited outburst of praise in this passage. We have a large gathering of people; angels are in attendance and they cry out in a loud voice.

What does this have to say about our styles of worship?

Are we too inhibited - too British?

Are we allowed to say, it depends on your personality?

If you feel able to why not read together the two praise sections in verses 10 and 12.

Clearly this points to what heaven will be like. We will be there to worship because all the pain and frustration of living in a fallen world will be no more.

What do you look forward to most about going to heaven?

How do you keep the balance of longing for heaven and serving God on this planet?

Then a rather abrupt shock. One of the elders gathered around God’s throne asks John a question. ‘Who are these people and where do they come from? You may say, surely he knew. But Revelation is written in an apocalyptic style and questions were often used. A silly example – if we all walked into Christ Church one day and said ‘who is this man at the front, we could all cry out – ‘It’s SIMON’. We know the answer but the question has prompted us to respond together.

So, the answer to the elders’ question is ‘those who have come out of the great tribulation’. These are the people who have been faithful to the Lord Jesus through the suffering they have endured. It perhaps sounds strange to triumph in martyrdom but apocalyptic literature is full of such oxymorons. Similarly, how can white

robes be made clean by washing in blood. It doesn't work in our rational scientific world but it does work in the rich imagery of the apocalypse. These people in white robes had refused to deify the temples of Caesar and other false gods – now they serve continually in God's new place of worship. Many suffered economic deprivation for refusing to serve their world system – now all their needs are provided.

When we worship God with others of God's people, do we realise that it is a foretaste of the delights of worship in heaven?

Do we sometimes worry that heaven will be all about singing and dancing? (the Bible never says it will be)

We are sometimes led to these ideas by verses like 7:15. We will be in the temple 'day and night'. But this is only a copy of what the priests and Levites did in the temple. The priestly order always had someone on duty but this does not mean that everybody in heaven will always be there at the throne.

'Spreading his tent over them' (v15) picks up an idea in Isaiah 4:5 & 6 where God promises to restore his people and cover them with his protective glory. Worship in this context is a reminder that God is always with us and we need not fear. One day that will be perfect.

It is worth reading the list of all the things that will not happen in heaven such as hunger and thirst. We are told the Lamb will be their shepherd echoing Jesus' claim to be our Good Shepherd.

How much does this forward thinking enter into our daily lives?

Is it encouraging us to keep going?

Should we fix our eyes on this heavenly hope more often?

Would it change our view on suffering? – i.e. it's only for a season

What is the most important lesson we can learn from this passage about our own worship of God?