

Revelation 7:9-17

The Book of Revelation is considered by most people to be one of the most **difficult** books of the Bible. However, I would be willing to say that **most** of it is not really that difficult at all - it's just **misunderstood**. The great **majority** of the book is only as difficult as you **make** it. Many of the things John wrote about sound **strange** to us, but that's only because they are part of a **vision** - and in his book, John tells us about what he **saw** or **heard** in his vision by making use of **symbolic** language. Unfortunately, many individuals and many church bodies try to **squeeze** the words of John's vision into specific events, specific times, and specific places in our **present** world, when in reality the words were written **specifically** for congregations in **John's** day, and for believers in the New Testament **era** in **general**. In most instances John clearly tells us the **meaning** of many of the symbols in his vision at a later point in his book.

Today's text is one of those explanations. John relates to us **The Happiness Of God's People In Heaven**. He reveals **who** these people **are**, **how** they **got** to heaven, and also **what** makes them so happy to **be** there.

The hymn which we just finished singing began, "*Behold a **host**, arrayed in **white**.*" Who **are** these people? They are a **host**, an **army**, or as our text says, "*a **multitude** that no one could **count**.*" This is John's **explanation** for the 144,000 people whom he mentioned in the verses just **preceding** our text. He tells us that the number is **not** to be taken **literally**, but rather it is to represent the number of **all believers**. He goes on to tell us that these believers would be found from **every** nation, **every** tribe, **every** people, and **every** language. This is directly in keeping with the promise that God had made to **Abraham** - the spiritual **father** of all believers when He said, "*I will surely **bless** you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore ... In your seed **all the nations** of the earth will be blessed.*"

The fact that the number of believers is a **great** number ought to encourage us in our **mission** efforts. Telling others about Jesus often meets with a **negative** reaction, and at times we may think that our efforts have been **fruitless**. Why even bother if so **few** are going to respond? But God says to **continue** with our efforts anyway. He will **bless** them in His own way and in His own time, for God is the Author and Finisher of **our** faith, and **everybody else's** too. He will not allow His Word to be shared in **vain**. It will **always** accomplish His purpose!

Notice that the people in our text are clothed in **white**, and were waving palm branches. The Bible uses the color white as a symbol of **purity** and **joy**. That is why we use white altar paraments and stoles for occasions like Christmas and Easter. That is why many brides wear a white wedding dress. That is why our 8th grade confirmands wear white robes. And that is why your **pastors** regularly wear a white robe too. The color **white** is used to focus your attention squarely on the **purity** of the **Gospel** as it is proclaimed to you, and to help you be even **more joyful** in your worship. The palm branches in our text are also a symbol of **joy** and **honor**. These branches were typically gathered and laid in the pathway of **kings**. The scene is somewhat reminiscent of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as we hear the people in our text cry out, "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*"

This picture of **joyful** worship is surely a **beautiful** one, but how did those people **get** there? That is the same question which **John** asked to one of the elders in his vision. His reply was, "*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.*" That raises **another** question. What is this great **tribulation**? Many would have us believe that it is some ultimate confrontation between nations here on the earth - perhaps one last battle pitting the "good guys" against the "bad guys." But that's not it. Rather, the great **tribulation** is very simply the **typical struggles** which we encounter throughout our earthly life. It is the hunger and thirst, the hardships and trials, the pain and tears which we have **all** encountered. It is also the **spiritual** struggles of this life - our Old Adam fighting against our New Man. These spiritual struggles are battles which every disciple of Christ must endure. In the Book of Acts Luke wrote, "*Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to **remain true** to the faith. We must go through **many hardships** to enter the kingdom of God.*" We must keep on drowning our Old Adam every day by contrition and repentance. This **internal battle** will not be over until the Lord Himself chooses to end it **for** us, by taking us to Himself in heaven.

Jesus has won this great victory for us through His perfect **obedience** to all of God's laws. And, He **gave** that victory to **us** when He shed His **blood** on the cross. We must always remember that the only way we will ever get into heaven is by washing in the **blood** of the Lamb of God, who takes away the **sin** of the world. It seems strange that we should want to **wash** with **blood**. Normally blood **stains** our clothing, and those stains are quite **difficult** to **remove**. But the blood of **Jesus** is very special. It **cleanses**. It does **not** stain, but rather it makes our souls **pure**

and **clean** in God's sight. The Christian is **wise** who makes every day a **wash** day - ie. A day to wash away our **sins** with the precious **blood** of our Savior.

So, we have seen this great multitude in heaven and we have found out how they got there. Now, what **is it** about heaven that makes them so **happy to be** there? First of all, they are in the presence of **God**. Our text says, "*They are before the throne of God and serve Him **day and night** in His temple.*" Since there will be no day or night, nor **any** designation of time in eternity, we conclude that this means they are **continually** in God's presence. In other words for believers, heaven will be like an eternal **Easter**, for we will be able to see and serve our **Risen Lord** forever and ever.

Secondly, while we are in God's presence He **protects** us. Our text goes on to say, "*Never again will they **hunger**; never again will they **thirst**. The **sun** will not beat upon them, nor any scorching **heat**. And God will wipe away every **tear** from their eyes.*" All of the trials of **this** life will be gone, because God's people have been brought **through** that great tribulation. In heaven we will experience the final, complete, and perfect **fulfillment** of Jesus' words, "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go **hungry**, and he who believes in Me will never be **thirsty**.*"

And finally, in heaven we will be led by the **Good Shepherd**. Our text concludes, "*The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their **Shepherd**; He will lead them to springs of **living** water.*" King David summed it up very beautifully in the words of our Psalm for the day - Psalm 23 - a Psalm which we usually think about when we need **comfort** and **reassurance** in our **present** life here on the earth. Yet, the words apply **equally** well to our life in **heaven**. There we will always be able to proclaim, "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall lack **nothing**.*"

This is **The Happiness Of God's People In Heaven**. They have been filled with **purity** and **joy** - they have been **removed** from the difficulties and trials of the great **tribulation** - and they have been **protected** from all harm and danger, so that they will never lack **anything** again. Thanks be to Jesus that we will be **among** that happy multitude in heaven, for Jesus has also washed **our** robes, and made them **white** in His **blood**. Amen.