

Study 16: Revelation 7:9-17

9 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. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

- This is another reason why the 144,000 figure of verse four in the previous study cannot be literal. Here John saw a multitude that no one could count. 144,000 can be counted.
- Many have said it before me, but it bears repeating: If heaven is made up on every nation, tribe, people and language, shouldn't the church reflect that now? Today there are people saved from many nations, but why don't they worship together on earth? Some have said that the Sunday morning hour of worship is the most segregated hour in the world. Is that true?
- As I am writing this, I finished the classic book by Howard Thurman entitled ***Jesus and the Disinherited***, written in 1949. Thurman wrote:

The experience of the common worship of God is such a moment. It is in this connection that American Christianity has betrayed the religion of Jesus almost beyond redemption. Churches have been established for the underprivileged, for the weak, for the poor, on the theory that they prefer to be among themselves. Churches have been established for the Chinese, the Japanese, the Korean, the Mexican, the Filipino, the Italian, and the Negro, with the same theory in mind. The result is that in the one place in which normal, free contacts might be most naturally established—in which the relations of the individual to his God should take priority over conditions of class, race, power, status, wealth, or the like—this place is one of the chief instruments for guaranteeing barriers.

The enormity of this sin cannot be easily grasped. The situation is so tragic that men of good will in all the specious classifications within our society find more cause for hope in the secular relations of life than in religion.

- While Thurman was addressing American Christianity just after World War II, in some ways things haven't changed. And I find it pretty much the same the world over. Do you agree or disagree?
- What can you do to reach out to and include in your church world someone who isn't like you or from your background or economic "world."
- I am not sure if I will wear a white robe in heaven. This seems to be symbolic. White is of course the color of purity and holiness. The good guys always wear white in shows and movies.
- What is the significance of the palm branches? History shows that conquering armies and peoples cut and carried palm branches as a sign of victory. This

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certainly fits with this verse, for God's people are victorious in His presence and ultimately in history.

10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

- Here is another instance of something being done in a "loud voice." Heaven is a noisy place. I think of the phrase in the great old hymn that says, "Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own."
- No matter how "noisy," how many and serious, even calamitous, circumstances clamor for your attention, the sounds of heaven should drown out everything else. If you set your heart to hear the sounds of heaven, they will come through loud and clear!
- Salvation is in the hands of our God. It is not in money, education, wisdom or strength. He gives it to all those who cry out to Him to receive it. He sits on a sovereign throne of power and oversees His salvation "operation." No one under His care escapes His notice and the Lamb applies His saving grace to all who stand before this throne.
- Salvation is not obtained through a system of works but is a gift under the oversight of the Lamb.
- Again, think of the comfort this gave the early churches to whom it was first written. Think of the comfort that can be to you and me right now!

11 All 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,

- I read this and think of the line from another hymn, "All creation worships You." The angels join in with the elders and living creatures to worship God.
- Falling on your face is another mode of worship, like the lifting of hands, kneeling and dancing. I don't fall on my face enough. This is symbolic that we are but dust and God is far above all flesh and creation.
- It is said that Lucifer was the angel that "coordinated" worship before his fall from heaven. Angels were created to worship but Lucifer wanted the worship for himself. Read Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:1-10 to understand the pride that was involved in his fall.

12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

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- Heaven must be a noisy place! There is always singing from a multitude. I was in Washington DC for the Promise Keepers' gathering of a million men a few years ago. Those men were loud when they sang, not because they were "rowdy" in worship, but because there were so many. I can't even imagine what John heard in his vision!
- John did not receive a general vision. He saw and heard specific things. He heard the words to the songs and beheld the events in great detail. I don't think this was a short vision he had.
- Tradition has it that John received Revelation in a cave on the isle of Patmos. I have been to Patmos twice and visited that cave. I bought an artist's rendition of John in the cave dictating the vision to an assistant. Tradition has it that he received it over a period of time; it wasn't in one session.

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?"

- Sometimes God will ask you a question. One pastor said that God isn't looking for information when He asks. He already knows the answer. The question is for our benefit so we can clearly understand what He is trying to communicate.
- Paul asked many questions in his epistles. As preachers and teachers, we need to ask more questions and hear the thought process of our pupils and disciples. They need to hear our voices less and their own voices more.
- Jesus asked questions, too. "Who do men say that I am?" "What were you talking about on the road?" "Woman, where are your accusers?"

14 I 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.

- The "great tribulation" has been portrayed as a specific historic event, confined to a certain timeframe. Tell someone who was imprisoned for their faith in Siberia during the Soviet rule that the tribulation is yet to come. Tell the saints suffering in China or the Middle East that the tribulation is yet to come. They will probably tell you that the tribulation is a now event, not a future one.
- We read of Paul: **"They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they 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," they said (Acts 14:21-22).**
- That is an interesting way of "strengthening and encouraging" by telling people that they must go through many hardships.

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- If you know tribulation isn't due to lack of faith or some failure on your part, you can endure it much more easily, knowing that God is using it as part of His great plan for you and for His church.
- I remember when I gave my life to the Lord that I had a strange thought. (I've had many more since then!). I thought that since I was now a Christian, I would never again have a flat tire! That's a bit unusual, but I really believed that now that I was serving God, no more "bad" things would happen to me. Well, I've had my share of flat tires since then.
- Just because something happens that is bad to my way of thinking doesn't make it bad. God uses it for good. Is there any hardship in your life at this time? Then you are right where you need to be. Don't agonize over it or think it strange. Remember what James wrote:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him (James 1:2-12).

- It is of note that James included wisdom in the context of what he had to say about suffering. You need wisdom to know what God is doing in and with you when you encounter suffering.
- James paints a similar picture to Revelation, don't you think? The man who perseveres will receive a crown of life! I want my crown, but I must endure to the end, even the circumstances I don't like and would tend to consider "bad."

15 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 spread his tent over them.

- I want God to spread His tent over me, but He does that only when I serve Him day and night as I endure tribulation. A tent is a place of refuge and covering, a place of

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rest and protection. I must stay before the throne, before the place of God's government in my life, if I am to enjoy the benefits of the tent.

16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

- God takes care of His own, both in the next age and the current one.
- The tent of God's covering will protect me from intense heat. The seven churches of Revelation were all located in the Middle East and it is hot there! Imagine how pleasant the imagery of a tent for them that would protect them from the scorching sun! Put yourself in their place, if you can.
- But the promise is for you, too. When we walk with God, we walk in a whole new world! The things that once ruled us like food and the things of this life don't rule over us anymore. I am not saying we don't need them, but we don't follow the fleshly impulses any longer. We are led by the Spirit of God!

17 For 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."

- You see, the water is not literal water in verse 16 because the Lamb will take us to springs of living water. That sounds like the promise Jesus made:
- Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4:10-15)
- Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:38-39).
- Remember, Revelation is a dream, a vision. The book was never meant to be a history book. In almost all cases, the images used are symbolic.
- If you were being persecuted, wouldn't you want a document from John in "secret code" so that if the persecutor read it, he wouldn't understand what it meant? That is in part why Revelation contains so many images. Those images would speak volumes to the "initiated," but would be meaningless to the outsider.