

Heaven's Rest

Revelation 7:9-17

INTRO

Do you ever feel out of place? Like you don't fit in? Christians have always felt the tension of being "in the world" but not "of the world." Today more than ever this is true for us. Our world is becoming darker and darker. Shootings and terrorism on the one hand and continuing racial tension and injustice on the other.

We have gone from a traditionally Christian nation to a godless land – it seems, and Christian morality has been left behind in the dust. Holding to the Bible's clear teaching on marriage, and the sanctity of life is openly spurned as immoral. Even listening to the traditional Christian position on these points is unsafe – and people are losing jobs and more over this.

Telling others about Christ has always been hard, but now the gospel message we share is seen as strange and bizarre, if not dangerous. Our American freedom of religion is increasingly threatened.

There is a positive outcome from all of this, however. We are feeling like strangers and pilgrims again!

There's an old hymn that starts like this:

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore. *-Traditional*

If we stay true to God's Word, we will increasingly live out that song: we won't be at home in this world.

We still have a temptation to feel at home in this world, it calls for us to compromise and let down our guard. It wants us to just fit in, enjoy however much prosperity we can and just lay low. Live it up, enjoy life. Be happy and carry on.

Yes but, Christ wants more of us than that. He wants us to enjoy His blessings and also obey His commandments. He wants us to worship him and live lives that please him – and that spread his light in an increasingly dark world. We are to be ambassadors for Christ, not worldly saints.

The message I have this morning is hopefully a blessing to you who are not at home in this world. I want to focus on "heaven's open door" – the place where our treasures are laid up "beyond the blue." The stranger this world becomes, the greater our longing for Home – for Heaven. We are like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we "[acknowledge] that [we are] strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:14), and we desire a "better country... a heavenly one." (Heb. 11:16)

PRAY, READ: Revelation 7:9-17

TITLE: "Heaven's Rest"

- 1) Great Peril (6:17)
- 2) Great Praise (7:9-12)
- 3) Great Perseverance (7:13-14)
- 4) Great Prize (7:15-17)

I. Great Peril – “*great day of... wrath*” (6:17)

A. Background

1. Revelation is a book of symbols (Rev. 1:1 – “made it known” = “signified” or “communicated by signs”) = apocalyptic genre.
2. There are a variety of positions and most agree that chapter 7 is an interlude/parenthesis that shifts the scene from the 6 seals and adds context before the seventh seal.
3. “sealing of 144,000” in 7:1-8 highlights that God’s people are protected through these great punishments; and the “great multitude” of 7:9-17 points forward to the ultimate end (after the final judgments) when the whole number of God’s redeemed have passed through this great tribulation (and all the tribulation down through the ages that the church has endured, more on that later).
4. the great multitude of 7:9ff. includes those martyred (6:11) during the time of tribulation depicted in chapter 6 and elsewhere in Rev. But it is not limited to just the martyred (as it does not explicitly mention that they have been martyred). And everything said of this multitude will ultimately be true of all the redeemed by the time you get to Rev. 21-22.
5. <takeaway, don’t need to argue about our particular understanding of Revelation – as this message should apply to everyone....>

B. Recap of 6th seal – 6:12-17

1. This is a climactic judgment with:
 - A great earthquake
 - Sun turning black
 - Moon looks red like blood

- Stars falling like figs
- Sky vanishes like a scroll being rolled up
- All mountains and islands removed
- [all of this is apocalyptic style language, seen elsewhere in prophetic passages in Scripture, but the point is this is truly “end of the world” level judgment]
- Key point for us is in 6:15-17: all the unsaved hide in the caves and say, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and **who can stand?**”
- **Who can stand** – on the great day of the Lamb’s wrath (- *great peril*). <Lamb = Jesus>

2. The answer to who can stand – is Rev. 7

- The great multitude is “standing” before the lamb – unharmed!
- They were rescued from a Great Peril. (and that is why there is Great Praise – as we’ll see).

C. Application

1. There is peril for those who do not believe in Jesus.
 - The Bible tells us that there is a Hell, a literal place where God’s wrath is on the unbelieving.
 - The unbelieving are judged for their evil deeds
 - They suffer eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:8-9; Matt. 25:46; Mk. 9:43,48; John 3:36)
2. A big part of the joy of salvation, is that we are “[delivered] from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10), and “saved... from the wrath of God.” (Rom. 5:9)

3. Entering Heaven means we have escaped Hell.
4. The bleak reality is there is only Heaven and Hell, and so we should certain we of our eternal destination.

Jonathan Edwards: "It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven... to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life." (quoted in Heaven by Randy Alcorn, pg. 5)

In light of the Great Peril, the Great Multitude's praise is all the more amazing.

II. Great Praise – "*great multitude...*" (7:9-12)

A. The Make-up (Description) of the Multitude

1. IMMENSE "no man can number" - Fulfillment of Abraham's promise:
 - Gen. 13:16 "I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted."
 - Gen. 15:5 "number the stars, if you are able to number them... so shall your offspring be."
2. DIVERSE "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" – Fulfillment of Abraham's (& Jacob's) promise
 - Gen. 17: 4 "you shall be the father of a multitude of nations."
 - Gen. 35:11 "A company of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your loins"
3. Believers from the worldwide church – Fulfillment of Christ's promise:
 - Matt. 24:14 "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a

testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

- The Church is called "Abraham's offspring" (Gal. 3:29) and follow their "father Abraham" (Rom. 4:16)

B. The Victory of the Multitude

- Palm branches signify victory and festal celebration – tokens of joy and triumph
- They also were part of victory/hero parades (Palm Sunday)
 - Kings / conquerors
 - Victors in the games
- They also remind us of the Feast of Tabernacles (festival thanking God for provision and remembering dwelling in tents under God's protection) – Lev. 23:40

C. The Location of the Multitude

- The stage is similar to Rev. 5 – but grander
- 5:11 "many angels – myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands (millions)
- The enigmatic 4 beasts/living creatures (seraphim?) and the 24 elders
- Now – unlike in Rev. 5, we have the redeemed throng present (in Rev 5 they are just mentioned)
- The throng say "Salvation belongs to our God... and to the Lamb"
- The angels then repeat what was said in 5:11 (but replace "wealth" with "thanksgiving")
 - The living proof of the people ransomed for God from every tribe and language and people and

nation (5:9) is now here – so it is appropriate to not just praise – but to THANK God.

D. Application

- The Saved will be Innumerable
- Heaven is no small place! And God is not cheap Savior. He saves uncountable throngs from all nations! True diversity and racial harmony will be realized.
- This is where you want to be – the center of the universe and the center of authority and power – in front of the Risen Lamb of God who was slain – who is also the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and Ruling with Power – to be in front of Him and Praising and Singing, and hearing the Millions of Angel voices, and the uncountable throng of the redeemed around you declaring: “Amen – “Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might be to our God forever and ever Amen!”

Since the Multitude is Before the Throne – the question arises – who they are and how they got here (where they came from).

III. Great Perseverance – “great tribulation...” (7:13-14)

A. They Endured “the great tribulation”

1. This is a phrase from Dan. 12:1 (Greek OT – LXX).
2. It is used to refer to the time of great trial mentioned in Revelation (the judgments poured out, but also the judgment threatened – 2:22).

B. Believers are called to endure “tribulation” or “suffering/trial”

1. Acts 14:22 “encouraging [the disciples] to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”
2. Matt. 24:9 “They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.”
3. John 16:33 “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart I have overcome the world.”

C. Their Perseverance through “great tribulation” was due to their being truly saved

1. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.
 - The Lamb’s suffering and death, atoned for their sin. They received whiteness (righteousness) because of His grace.
 - This connects them to the martyrs in chapter 6:11 who were given white robes and told to wait until the full number of martyrs was completed.
2. White robes also symbolize righteousness that is given to us when we believe and Jesus’ righteousness is credited to us:
 - [Background of Eden, Sinai and Priestly garments...]
 - Rev. 19:8 “it was granted her [Bride of Christ] to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”
 - Rev. 3:5 “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.”
 - Rev. 22:14 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life.” [also Zech. 13:1 fountain opened...]

D. Application

1. Endurance of suffering is accomplished not through a great feat – but by patiently waiting and depending on Christ's righteousness.
 - *Rev. 12:11 "they have conquered him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb & by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."*
2. Dirty robes don't normally get clean when dipped in blood. A symbol showing the power of atonement.
 - *Rev. 1:5b "[Jesus] loves us & has freed us from our sins by his blood."*
4. Heaven is not earned – it is given as a free gift. We trust in the Lamb of God & come to him for forgiveness and cleansing of our sin. [The blood = substitutionary atonement, 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9.] We love Him more than life, & so persevere in faith no matter what trials we face.

A Great multitude is praising God for having endured Great tribulation and being rescued from the Great Day of God's wrath. Now we get to glimpse (or rather hear) about their Great Reward.

IV. Great Prize – "before... God" (7:15-17)

A. They Enjoy God's Presence (vs. 15)

- They are with God all the time (day/night)
- They serve in his temple (Rev. 3:12 "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it...")
- Even though ultimately – there is no temple anymore (21:22) [the final New Jerusalem is modeled on the

sanctuary – holy of holies {cube shaped}, so in a sense God's presence is envisioned here as a temple.]

- Enjoying God in the temple also means serving him as priests (Rev. 1:6, 5:10... Ex. 19:6/1 Pet. 2:9)
- Literally the verse ends with: "He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them" – alludes to Ezek. 37:26-28 Greek OT/LXX "I will establish my sanctuary in the midst of them forever. And my tabernacle shall be over them... when my sanctuary is in the midst of them forever"
- <restoration of Israel passages, applied here to the Church>

B. They Experience no Want (vs. 16, 17b)

- This quotes Is. 49:10 (restoration/new exodus)
- "they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them & by springs of water will guide them."
- The springs of water are changed to waters of life in Rev. – hearkening to Ezekiel 47:1-12 Temple with a life-giving stream flowing from the temple) and Jesus' use of that in John 4:14 and 7:37-38 – which symbolizes the life-giving power of the Spirit (Jn. 7:39).
- [I did an entire sermon on a few years ago: "Rivers of Living Water"....]

C. They Follow their Good Shepherd Forever (vs. 17a)

- Looks back to Is. 49:9 "they shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture" & Ps. 23:1-2 "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."

- In Heaven, we will still be guided – we will continue worshipping and following and learning and growing and increasing in our happiness and love (but never being disappointed)...

D. They Have no More Sorrow (vs. 17c)

- This looks back to Is. 25:8 “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces...” (cf. Rev. 21:4)
- No more death or sorrow. [...only rest Rev. 14:13...]

E. Application

- The chief Joy in Heaven is our relationship with Christ. Even in the provision of our wants – we are being fed from our shepherd – the Lamb. God wipes away our tears – there is a closeness with God and not a separate enjoyment of blessing apart from Him.

Sam Storms: "The essence of heaven is the vision of God and the eternal increase of joy in him. Heaven might well be summed up in the declaration: 'They will see his face' (Rev. 22:4)!" (One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God by Sam Storms pg. 164)

- Right now, many of us are not prepared for the enjoyment of heaven – we could not enjoy the constant presence of God – because of our wayward hearts, our distracted minds, our weary bodies, our human weakness – but all that will be remedied in heaven. Our capacity will be increased, and we will love Him so much more than we do now.
- Even so, if we are looking forward mainly to seeing our old pets/having fun in heaven, more than seeing Christ's face – we may need to evaluate our selves. Of

course longing to be reunited with family is not wrong, but our longing should be even greater to see Christ.

- We can study heaven and the blessings in store for us as a way to awaken in us a longing for God and for heaven that will help transform us more and more into the true citizens of heaven that we should be.

Richard Baxter: "[In Scripture] heaven is set open, as it were, to our daily view [for our encouragement, that we might long for the city of God (Heb. 11:10) and enter therein.]" (quoted in The Future of Everything by William Boekestein, pg. 111).

CONCLUSION

Paul reflected much on heaven as he lived out his Christian life. He was a stranger and pilgrim who faced an awful lot of suffering and tribulation in his life. But this is how he talked of heaven:

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

He was mindful of glory beyond all comparison. Heaven was so great that it made suffering for Christ in this life worth it. He said, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom. 8:18)*

We may be tempted to fit in with the world – to laugh at those jokes, to not speak up when we should – to be loose with our morals, or to entertain the thought of throwing in the towel. Following Jesus isn't easy, and He actually promised it would require that we give up our life in order to save it (Mk. 8:35). Faced with these trying days – I believe we can find hope by focusing on our Heavenly rest. There is coming a day where we won't have to fight our own sinful flesh, where we won't have to feel out of place or ashamed of our Lord. There is coming a day when what we are meagerly laboring for will happen – the lost will be saved, and all nations will gather around Christ's throne.

We have read the end – Christ wins, and we are on His side. Let us not grow weary but press on knowing that “in due season we will reap if we do not give up.” (Gal. 6:9).

PRAY -----

END-----

BENEDICTION

Rev. 22:14, 18, 20-21 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.... The Spirit and the Bride say Come. And let the one who hears say Come. And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price... He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen, Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”