

Rev Alasdair I. Macleod: Revelation 7

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Please turn back to our reading in the book of Revelation in chapter 7. I want to look at some of the teaching of that second part of the chapter headed here from verse 9, a great multitude from every nation.

I'll just read again in verse 9. Under 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.

Maybe this is not the best way to begin, but I've always wanted to preach through the book of Revelation and I never have. I have always chickened out.

Every year in my ministry I would say, next year, Cathy will tell you, I would say, after the summer, it's always after the summer, I'm going to study Revelation this year and after the summer I'm going to do a series through the whole of the Revelation of John.

That went on every year for nearly 40 years. Retired and I never did it and I probably won't do it now.

[1 : 31] It's always a sense of guilt about that because I love this book but I don't understand all of its mysteries. But there's one thing I think that you and I do understand very well as we read this often puzzling book and that is the figure of the Lamb who's at the centre of the book.

We know who he is and we trust him and we love him and as we read through the book we keep seeing this Lamb, he's taking the scroll, he's in the midst of the throne.

There's the wrath of the Lamb, there's the love of the Lamb, there are people who sing to the Lamb, there are those who long for the marriage supper of the Lamb and when the city comes down that's the bride of the Lamb and in that city the Lamb is the light, the lamp of the city and so on.

Right through the book we see this Lamb and so even if I and you often feel that we don't quite have the whole book, we know that we have the heart of the book, that we have the Lamb in our hearts and in our lives, we want to follow him.

So today in this passage of scripture I want to look at what it says about the Lamb and about us under four headings.

[3 : 05] First of all the people of the Lamb, secondly the blood of the Lamb, third the throne of the Lamb and fourth the care of the Lamb.

Now this is a vision that takes place I believe for the end of the age, John is seeing now what will be true but he's also in it seeing things that are true already for those who have left this world and fallen asleep in Jesus and he's also seeing things that are true for us even now.

So let's look at that first point, the people of the Lamb. Now here is a great multitude John says in verse 9 that no one could number.

Here I believe John is seeing the whole people of God gathered in and standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

They owe everything to the Lamb and so they stand in respect and reverence and praise and celebration before that Lamb.

[4 : 22] Now it's very important to note that all of these people wherever they come from have the same saviour in common.

We live of course in an age where people will say whatever is true for you. If that helps you that's okay for you or people will try to be so fair to the insights as they see it of other faiths and they will say well that's their way up the mountain, that's their route to absolute being and to God.

But in the Bible there is only one way to heaven and that way is the Lamb and here is a multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and all peoples and all languages and every one of them who has come to stand before the throne of the God of the universe at last has

only done that through the Lamb in whom they trusted.

There is only one saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, there is only one God-man, there is only one sacrifice that was enough, there is only one who has risen from the dead, never to die again and he is uniquely and absolutely the only saviour for all men and women and for all nations, for all generations that is only one and he is Jesus the Lamb.

Also note that this is the fulfilment of the promises of God from way back, the God of the covenant, the God who had said to Abram and to those who followed him, I'll make you a great nation and your people, your seed will be like the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore innumerable and here they are, here is that great company.

[6 : 44] God has been working through the ages, through the generations, through the nations, God is working in people's hearts and lives and at last his whole people are brought in and stand before the Lamb and every one of them acknowledges that they are there because of that Lamb and I want you to see the unity of the people of God around that Lamb and it's a wonderful thing unity, it will be true forever in the world above and the world to come and we should prize that unity now here on earth.

We hopefully have unity in our own congregation here, we have unity hopefully also with the congregation next door some of whom are here today and we want to value that unity as something precious, many things are different in our lives but the Lamb is the same and so when we focus on Him and centre around Him and talk about Him and celebrate Him then we have unity in the key thing, in the key person, in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

So a wonderful picture of unity to come, unity because of the Lamb, unity around the Lamb, unity in the name of the Lamb and a unity that we are called to move towards in our lives and ministries here on earth.

But not just unity here among that people but I want you also to see security that these people have been kept by God and are now safe and sound forever and forever.

We have a God who keeps the people of the Lamb and who keeps them safe forever. Now different people have different views about how this chapter works and the two different visions that we have.

[8 : 57] My own view is that the first part of the chapter verses 1 to 8 is about the people of God viewed symbolically as covenant Israel, the 144,000 I think that is a vision for John with symbolic numbers that he hears of the fact that the whole covenant people of God are there safe.

And then I believe that the second vision that we are looking at is the whole people of God at the end of the age when he sees something and he sees that great company and they are all there together in heaven.

So I think it is two different ways of looking at the same truth. Now you will notice that that first group are on earth and the second group are in heaven.

And you will notice also that that first group are sealed, sign of security verse 3 and verse 4.

God keeps them safe from the judgment that is coming and God seals all of his servants to keep them safe and secure for him on earth.

[10 : 19] So we are sealed on earth and later in Revelation that will be sealed with the name of the Lamb and the Father on their foreheads.

And then here in this second vision of the great multitude you notice obviously that they are safe and secure too. They have been taken through everything and taken all the way to heaven now safe and sound and home.

They are safe because verse 10, a sovereign God whom salvation belongs has kept them safe.

They are safe according to verse 14 because God has taken them through the great tribulation and through all the suffering that they have ever known.

They are safe because they have arrived home. And I don't have time to go into it but I think there is something very significant here that a Jewish reader might have seen when they saw the picture of people with palm branches and saw them celebrating and then at the climax of the chapter C referenced to springs of living water.

And what might have come to a Jewish mind then, palm branches, water, would be the kind of feast that is referred to if you read John chapter 7, remember Jesus on the last and great day of the feast.

[11 : 51] That is the feast of booths or the feast of tabernacles. And it was a feast of ingathering and it was a feast where people made booths with palm branches and other leafy branches, you sort of built an adi at home and remembered the wilderness experience and thank God that they

were in the land.

And every day of that feast there was a ritual to do with palm branches and with water with a priest going to the pool of Siloam and gathering water and then special container and then taking that and pouring it in a special ritual at the temple.

So palm branches and water would make a Jewish reader think of the feast of booths and the ingathering and remembering that they come through the wilderness and now there is water for them.

And so this picture in heaven might resonate with these people as they say, yes, these people have come through the wilderness and have come through it safe and sound.

And this is the ultimate ingathering of all God's people and this is the ultimate ceremony of water and they're taken by the Lamb to springs of living water and everything is sorted for them because they're home and they're home forever and forever.

[13:20] Well much else we could say about the people of the Lamb but I'll leave it there just except to ask you if you see yourself there because if this really is the whole people of the Lamb from every nation who trusted in him, who've been kept sealed and safe and secure and being taken home, then if you're a Christian you are there.

Or if you're not yet a Christian and God is calling you, your picture is here too. Just ask yourself, can I see myself? Not there in that great company because every face that ever trusted in the Lamb is there in the vision that John sees at the end of the age.

But can I put it like this, can you see yourself tagged in God's album? Tagged in God's album because there you are if you're a Christian in that company, your face in the great picture that John sees before the throne.

Let's think secondly about the blood of the Lamb. The blood of the Lamb, referred to especially in verse 14 where people have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The Lamb of course as you know refers to Jesus slain in sacrifice. The Lamb was a sacrificial victim and Jesus on the cross is the victim who a slain who is offered.

[15:02] He is the priest offering himself as a sacrifice. Now think of this theme, I want you to think of the big story as it were of the Lamb and the very personal story of individuals coming to know the Lamb.

The big story is important but the individual story is important as well. I love stories, I'm sure most of you love stories.

If we're ever going to watch TV, Cathy always asks is there a story on tonight? We like to see a story, we like to maybe follow a series, one story after another.

We love stories. Well here's the biggest story of all but a story that we can be involved in. I mean we watch something in a screen and you might feel caught up in it for an hour or 90 minutes but you're not really part of the story.

But here you can see the story unfold and you can also find yourself caught up in that very story and it changing your life.

[16:24] So the big story and then the personal story. The big story of course is the story of the Lamb of God from the very beginning.

We have the Lamb of God we're told who was chosen from before the foundation of the world. And this Lamb is promised right through the Old Testament Scriptures in all kinds of pictures.

Some people want to narrow the picture of the Lamb here to one particular passage of Scripture or kind of sacrifice but I think myself we're meant to see it more broadly.

But this Lamb is picking up on all kinds of things in the Old Testament. Maybe the Lamb in the Abram Isaac story, the animal that becomes a substitute there for the beloved son Isaac.

Maybe as well the Lamb of the Passover story, the Lamb of redemption. These people were kept safe by the blood of the Lamb or you think of the Lamb of Isaiah 52 and 53.

[17:35] The Lamb on whom sin is lain and the one the servant who has led like a lamb to the slaughter and so on. So you have this great story of these lambs and these offerings and these sacrifices that could never take away sin but were pointing something into someone beyond themselves.

Then one day he appears and John the Baptist says, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Lamb of God, that unique Lamb. That Lamb of course is sinless throughout his life as the perfect Lamb.

And that Lamb of course bears sin throughout his life. He's always the Lamb of God and he carries our sin on his own sinless shoulders all the way to the cross and then suffers our punishment, takes the curse due to our sin.

He does that in the place of others. So there were many lambs and many sacrifices but they were all looking to the Lamb to the one final adequate perfect sacrifice who by one offering would end the slaughter of the centuries that at last blood would be found that was precious enough to deal with all of our sins once and for all and forever.

[19 : 10] And Jesus offers himself as that Lamb and his offering is final and completely adequate and perfect and sin is dealt with in one sacrifice by his blood once and for all and forever.

That's the big story of the Lamb that takes us from eternity past when he was chosen to be the Lamb into this eternity future when he's the Lamb, the risen Lamb forever and forever.

And what about our personal story in connection with that Lamb? Well in verse 14 we're being told that these people have made him their saviour and have become caught up in his story.

They have this shared experience. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

These are people like us I hope who saw the relevance and wonder of what the Lamb had done.

They realised their own need of this sacrifice and they committed themselves to this Lamb.

[20 : 34] Notice how active the language is. They have washed their robes and made them white.

This verse is speaking about human responsibility and about a personal response in time to the Gospel.

They washed their robes. They were active, not passive. They had to trust in Jesus for themselves. They had to make this Lamb of whom they'd heard their Lamb and accept his work as done for them.

I think also the language is saying that this was a decisive response once and for all. They accepted his work as done for them.

[21 : 29] And it also meant a complete cleansing you can see. They washed their robes in this world and they became white because of the complete efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

Of course in this world we're not perfect inside. These people in heaven are perfect on the inside as well. But we are robed in the righteousness of Christ in this world.

We are robed and white in that sense in this world. Once you trust in the Lamb of God all that he did becomes yours. He took all the punishment due to your sin and he obeyed God with all the righteousness God could ever require.

So when you trust in Jesus all that righteousness of Jesus clothes you and all your sins are forgiven and forgotten forever.

And you notice that this means also eternal security for these people. The blood takes them to heaven.

[22 : 36] I've always been impressed by the word at the beginning of verse 15. Therefore they washed their robes in this world. They trusted in Jesus in this world.

They were justified in this world. Therefore they are before the throne of God. All it takes is faith in Jesus as the Lamb of God, as your saviour.

And then you're guaranteed to stand before the throne of God. I mean look at the logic yourself in the verse. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

They did that in this world when they trusted in Jesus. Therefore on that ground they are before the throne of God.

So if trusting in Jesus is enough to take you to heaven, surely it's enough to take you to the Lord's table in this world.

[23 : 35] It's all you need. If it's all you need for heaven, then it's all you need for the Lord's table here. If you put your faith in Jesus as the Lamb of God who died for you, then you are guaranteed at one day on the grounds of what he did for you.

You will stand safe and secure before the throne of God with no fear because your standing there is grounded to what Jesus did as the Lamb of God in dealing with your sins.

So the blood of the Lamb is our second theme. Then thirdly the throne of the Lamb. I'd better move on a bit more quickly, the throne of the Lamb.

You can see here that this Lamb is in the midst of the throne. Verse 17, he's at the centre of the throne. He can't be higher.

He can't be more central. He's there now we know and he will be there at the end and forever.

[24 : 47] The Lamb in the midst of the throne. Again, I want to think about a couple of things here. I want to think about his glory and then his humility.

His glory. This is the glory of the Jesus who lived in this world incarnate, the Son of God in human nature here, living and dying and then rising again.

And he is glorified in that body, in that human nature and in heaven he's still physical, visible, still incarnate as the Lamb who died.

Go to the joy of heaven forever but glorify there and transfigure there, dazzling there in all his blessedness and all his beauty glorified forever and forever.

This is what Jesus deserved. He deserved this. Remember, he prays, Father John 17, I finished the work, glorify me.

[26 : 00] He knew that that was the next step and that once he had done his work in this world he deserved glory forever. That's what they sing in Revelation 5.

Worthy are you because you were slain. Because of what he did in this world he was worthy of this honour, worthy of the crown, worthy to rule over everything, worthy to be in charge of the whole universe from his throne and onto final victory.

I don't have time to say anymore about that glory. But I want to say something also about his humility because this is still, as I said, the Lamb.

I know he's glorified but he's still in human nature, still the Lamb, still the one who remembers what it's like to live in this world.

It's amazing sometimes how in a few years you'll meet somebody that you hadn't seen for a while and because of where they've been and what they've done and what they've achieved, it's as if they've wiped out where they came from, you know the kind of thing and you talk to them as if, well, you always used to speak to them because you shared so much years ago but they've become cool, they've become sophisticated, they've changed their accent, they've forgotten their roots and that's all gone and they talk to you as if you belong to another planet, they've moved on.

[27 : 37] Well Jesus physically and in all kinds of other ways moved on but he hasn't changed. His heart hasn't changed, he's still the same Jesus, he still loves in the way that he loved and he still cares in the way that he cared, we'll come to that in a minute or two.

And he hasn't forgotten this world and humanly speaking as a Jewish man, where he came from and what he experienced and what he felt and all the temptations he knew and the assaults of the devil and the pain and the hunger and the sorrow and the things people said about him, the things people did to him and even at last tasting death himself.

He remembers all these things and so he's still the Lamb, he's still human, he's still our Jesus, he cannot but be touched with a feeling of our infirmities and there he is sympathising with us in all that humility, he hasn't gone away to be detached from us and to forget us, he's gone away for us and for our blessing and he's still in contact with us.

And it's important to keep the Lamb and the throne together in this, can we do this way, you can't get closer to you than the Lamb, incarnate, identified with you, that God who still bears the wounds of what he suffered in this world, you can't get closer than the Lamb and yet you can't get higher than the throne.

That's not a choice between the two, the Lamb or the throne, we have the Lamb on the throne so you can't get closer than this Lamb who's touched with our needs but you can't get higher than the throne on where he sits and there he is, the Lamb in the very midst of the throne, Jesus is Lord and there he is worshipped, again we don't have time to go into all these things but you can see from, all the way from verse 10 there's worship and duxology in heaven and jealous duxology and human duxology and in verse 15 the whole place is a sanctuary and God there sheltering with his presence is spreading his shekinah presence over his people to protect them and they're there clothed in white perhaps also that saying they're engaged in priestly service before the throne.

[30 : 24] So it's a picture of a place that's all temple, all sanctuary, all holy of holies indeed and it's a place where a priestly people worship and serve the Lamb in ceaseless duxology day and night it says that's just a way of saying they never tire of it, they do it all the time with gladness and spontaneity and it's a great way to think about our own worship here that when we worship we are adding to that choir in heaven.

I know some of you are singers, I know some of you sing in choirs and the rest and we love to sing even those of us who can't sing very well with myself love to sing and love to hear singing and we sing with enthusiasm as you did earlier three times in this world but you are part of the company that is worshiping the Lamb in heaven and he is surrounded by choirs who praise ceaselessly in heaven and what we're doing on earth is swelling that chorus isn't it we're adding our voices to all the other voices in this world but it's not just this world that's worshiping that world is worshiping so we're adding our voices on earth to the voices of heaven and Jesus the Lamb in the midst of the throne loves the praises of heaven and he loves the praises of earth and all of that praise rises to him and he loves to hear you sing he loves to hear all his people worship he takes such pleasure in what he has done for you and the way that you are able to respond to him in praise and worship well fourthly the care of the lamb my usual time is about up but again a couple of things about the care of the lamb think about his future care here and then a word about his present care for us we've hinted at these things already but his future care here is clear you see verse 16 where these people live a life of blessedness they won't hunger anymore they won't thirst anymore the sun shall not strike from nor any scorching heat so often in revelation it's no more or never again all the bad stuff has gone and you sort of you tear that up and you can put that behind you in the world to come no more of this no more of that no more of the other never again will anything harm why verse 17 for the lamb it's all because of the lamb and it's all ensured by the continuing presence and ministry and blessing of the lamb why all these things why are they gone because the lamb dealt with why all the blessing of heaven because it's been blood bought by the lamb and why the continued enjoyment of heaven for the lamb leads them and ensures that everything you die to procure for them will be theirs forever and he leads them to springs of living water this is this is saying lots of different things but one key thing it's saying is that the life of the future is not static it goes on in continual refreshment and pleasure they go to fountains of living water they're being blessed again and again and over and over and over it's an active busy life in fact it's a life where we grow it's a life where we learn more because only God knows everything about God so we will always be learning new things about the lamb for example because only God knows everything about himself and his lamb and we will be learning new things about the lamb forever and forever in that world where everything in CS Lewis imagery every chapter is better than the one before so is that future shepherding ministry of the lamb which in itself is such an irony isn't it I'm sure some of you have sheep and you do not expect that your shepherding will be over because one of the lambs from the spring will be a shepherd next year lambs don't become shepherds shepherds are shepherds lambs are lambs that's it but here the shepherd of the Old Testament became the lamb of the New Testament the son of God shepherding is people in the Old Testament amazing thing isn't it the shepherd became the lamb and he lived and he died and he ascended still the lamb in the body with the marks of what he suffered as the lamb but that lamb is the shepherd now and it's an amazing thing for a shepherd to have been and to be a lamb and there our shepherd is the lamb who cares for us in this world and who does all the things that are said here as a model shepherd I'd like to take you to some of the pastures in scripture that talk with what it means to be a shepherd why don't you read yourselves in I can't remember if it's Ezekiel 34 I think it is the beginning of Ezekiel 34 where it talks with good shepherds and bad shepherds and later on it talks to it the king who will come as a great shepherd that whole chapter and it's a picture of the kind of shepherds we don't want the kind of shepherds we do want and Jesus obviously is the ultimate shepherd who does all the right things you know the bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34 I found it now they do not strengthen the weak they don't heal the sick they don't bind up the injured they don't bring back the strays they never search for the lost but they're harsh and brutal but Jesus is the opposite of these shepherds because he's the good shepherd and the Jesus who pastures his people in heaven as their shepherd forever is the Jesus who pastures us now because he's the shepherd and overseer of our souls now one day that shepherd who shepherds us here will appear as the chief shepherd and will take us to this place to shepherd us where the lamb will shepherd us forever and forever so it's a great thing to be among the people of the lamb it's a great thing to know that we owe everything to the blood of the lamb it's a great thing to know today that our savior is on the throne as the lamb and it's a great thing to know that we here enjoy the shepherding of the lamb that those who have left us and gone to glory are now awake conscious there enjoying the shepherding ministry of the lamb that one day all the people of God will be gathered in and will sit at the marriage supper of the lamb and will enjoy his shepherding I believe in the new heavens and the new earth forever and forever so we are called today to trust in

this worthy lamb and to know our little story caught up in his great story to become part of his story forever and we're called if we've done that to come forward to his table and sit and remember what the lamb has done for us because all that we have now and all that we will have tomorrow and all will have an eternity we owe it all to the lamb every privilege we have is blood bought and he asks us to go to his table and say thank you to him for all that we owe to him because he was willing to be the lamb of God who not only takes away the sin of the world but takes away my sin and your sin and he deserves that we say thank you to him

to the lamb at his table as he requests let's pray well we thank you for your word and for the riches of this book and above all the riches of the lamb and all that we can enjoy in him help us to know him as our own personal savior and help us to enjoy his shepherding ministry here knowing that because of our security in him we will enjoy that shepherding ministry of the lamb forever and forever so bless us and hear our prayers in Jesus name Amen.