

Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17

Dear Christians who know what the future holds in store:

People have been saying, “*Wow. There sure have been a lot of funerals here lately.*” Their observation is correct. In 2017, St. Paul’s had 8 fellow believers go home to heaven. Last year, 2018, we had funerals for seven members. Through just the first 4 months of 2019 eight of our brothers and sisters have been called home to live in heaven with Jesus. God’s ways and wisdom far surpass our own.

Did you ever wish you could see heaven -- just catch a glimpse of it? Wouldn’t it be awesome to get a preview? Well, we’ll have to be content to *read* what God’s Word says about heaven for now, because we can’t go there for a sample. Our simple human minds cannot grasp what heaven is like. The Apostle Paul quotes Isaiah when he writes: “***No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit***” (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Today, then, revealed to us by the Spirit, we have a beautiful revelation of heaven. At a time when many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are going there, it’s good for us to hear what God says. After all, we’re all just a heartbeat away from going there ourselves.

Today let’s ***Glimpse Heaven with John*** (1) ***See the victorious multitude;*** (2) ***See their eternal happiness.***

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The book of Rev., written by senior citizen John while in exile on the Island of Patmos, is a symbolic account of the struggles of God’s Church Militant in the NT era, and it also provides a few brief glimpses of the joys of heaven (Church Triumphant). One such glimpse is before us today. John writes, “***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.***” John saw heaven filled with believers, “***A great multitude that no one could count!***” Those words remind us about the Lord’s promise to Abraham and Jacob that their descendants (not by blood, but by faith) would be as innumerable as the “***stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore***” (Gen. 15:5f).

That’s encouraging! In a dying world where we often lament the direction of things and the moral decline, it’s wonderful to know that the number of precious souls being saved and going to heaven is many.

John also tells us how and why this multitude got there in heaven: “***They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.***” Palm branches were symbols of victory and life. He continues: “***Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes -- who are they, and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’***” In other words, “***Sir, you’ll have to answer that question for me!***” So he did: “***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.***” This multitude dressed in white are people washed clean from sin by the blood of the Lamb of God. Normally we don’t think of blood making something clean. But that red blood is Christ’s blood, holy blood. As John wrote, “***The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin***” (1 John 1:7). As we will sing in few minutes as the offering is returned, “***Behold a host, arrayed in white, like thousand snowclad mountains bright; with palms (of victory!) they stand, who is this band before the throne of light? These are the saints (God’s believing children) of glorious fame who from the great affliction came and in the flood of Jesus’ blood are cleansed from guilt and blame.***”

The multitude in white robes are all the redeemed in Christ in heaven: your believing parents or grandparents, all the believing men & women of the Bible we learned about in Sunday School; the 8 fellow members who preceded us into heaven so far this year. Jesus assures you that one day you, too, will stand hand-in-hand with this multitude before the King’s throne waving your palm branch of victory filled up with joy as you’ve never felt joy before!

That joy is the subject of the next portion of John's vision. As we glimpse heaven we also glimpse the happiness that will be ours. When you look closely at verses 15-17, the bliss of heaven is described in 10 statements that come rapid fire. (It's interesting that in Rev., the #10 is the number of completeness -- perhaps here indicating the fullness of joy that will be ours when we are completely released from evil in us and evil around us when we are in heaven.)

Because of the Lamb, those robed in white:

- (1) ***"Are before the throne of God"*** -- because Jesus made us sinless, we are able to be in God's presence. We are not cowering before a stern, frightful judge, but we stand gratefully before a kind, benevolent, gracious King/Father who has forgiven our every offense and sin.
- (2) ***"They serve him day and night in his temple"*** -- Here on earth, our Christian lives and best efforts to use our gifts are interrupted with fear, doubts, and worry. But in heaven, we will be able to use our gifts to serve God in unending praise and glory.
- (3) ***"He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them"*** -- The point is, we will be with God and he will be with us every moment. No separation anxiety. Satan will be nowhere to be found to attack us. Our hearts will be filled calm and peace as we rest under the protecting tent of God's love.
- (4-7) The next 4 lines depict the freedom the multitude has from all the effects and consequences of living in a sinful world: ***"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat on them or any scorching heat."*** When God cursed the ground after the fall in sin, it became troublesome for people to gain, ***"by the sweat of their brow,"*** their daily bread. Hunger and thirst, unknown before Adam and Eve's sin, became a common source of suffering in a fallen world. The sun, created to serve humankind, can harm us with its burning rays. In heaven, that will all be a thing of the past. Nature and mankind will be in perfect harmony again.
- (8) ***"The Lamb at the center of throne will be their shepherd."*** A lamb serving as a shepherd is a strange concept. But we know this Lamb. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God who gained our salvation, and earned our trust. So we gladly follow this Shepherd to the lush, green pastures and meadows of heaven. It's as Psalm 23 says, ***"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever"*** (Ps 23:6).
- (9) And there ***"He will lead them to springs of living water"*** -- In the arid climate of Palestine a dependable water source is all-important. It means life and death for every living thing. In heaven, our source of life continually flows to us through Jesus. Our loved ones there are like palms planted by the oasis -- always green and flourishing -- no wilting, no death.
- (10) ***"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*** How often here in this world don't we shed tears of sorrow, regret, and grief? How often aren't our hearts weighed down by fear, mental and emotional anguish, or anger? How often don't bad memories burden us and physical pains torment us? When we get to heaven, all that -- gone in a moment! ***"Never again..."*** John says. Never again.

These words of John must have brought great comfort to his fellow believers in the 90s AD living under persecution. These words have brought comfort to Christians all over the world for 2,000 years. And today, I pray that John's glimpse of heaven has brought relief and comfort to our hearts as well. One day, perhaps soon, we'll get more than a glimpse. When we finally join our 8 brothers and sisters who went home to heaven so far this year (and all those who have gone before), what a joyful reunion it will be with them and Jesus!

Amen.