

The Great Multitude

Text: Revelation 7.9–17

Theme: God protects His own so they will be able to praise Him forever

Introduction — Let's pray

Father in heaven, make us a people of faith, who are sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. Give us confidence that we will one day receive our inheritance. Give us assurance that You exist; that You love us; that You lead us into truth. May it be said of us, that though we have not seen Jesus, yet we love Him. And even though we do not yet see Him, we are filled with joy inexpressible and so full of glory. With Your Son Jesus Christ interceding for us, we pray, Amen.

Walking thru Revelation of Jesus Christ given to Apostle John

- After opening of book of revelation (1:1–8), John's vision begins with glorified Christ (1:9–20) addressing the seven churches (chapters 2, 3).
- Then John is invited into heavenly throne room, where he sees God and Jesus being worshiped (chapters 4, 5).
- In chapter 6 Jesus opens the first six seals on the scroll that He took from the hand of God, and in chapter 7 God seals the saints.
- This chapter is important because we will see later in 9:4 that those who are sealed will not be harmed.
- We'll see also in 14:1–5 that this group stands with Jesus, redeemed, on Mount Zion.
- The fact that God seals His servants also informs the number of the beast in Revelation 13:16–18, which seems to be a satanic imitation of God's sealing of His servants.

Six Questions of Ch. 7

- originally was going to ask seven, trying to fit with “sevens” of Revelation
- but found my last was a bit of a stretch, so, back to six it is

Does chapter 7 follow chronologically from chapter 6?

- answer: no; ch 7 is response to cry at end of ch. 6: “Who can stand?”
- ch 7 answers: taking us prior to the last judgment, shown in 6.12–17, shows us the sealed

Who are the 144,000?

- we saw, on basis of the text itself, they are not a Jewish remnant
- this is a symbolic number for all of God's redeemed people, both Jew & Gentile alike

What is the seal on the foreheads of the servants of God?

- seal is a spiritual mark (invisible):
- name of the Lamb & God, done by the Holy Spirit
- it is a mark of authentication, telling us that we belong to God

This morning, I want to ask three more questions

- Who are the great multitude that no one can count? v. 9
- What is the Great Tribulation? v. 14
- What is our great reward? vv. 16–17

I. WHO IS THIS GREAT MULTITUDE?

- John writes in 7:9, **“After 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, closed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”**
- once again, note the **“after this I looked”**
- John’s way of saying “I saw one thing, then another thing, and then, I saw yet another thing”
- No one can number this multitude
- Does it seem to you that there are only a few who are saved?
- It did not look that way to John.
- God’s mercy is incalculable, and He has spread it widely.

1. Is there a difference between this multitude and the 144,000?

- wording is very helpful here
- v. 4: I *heard* the number 144,000, but in v. 9, John *sees* the great multitude
- this pattern started back in ch 5 where John is *told about* a Lion, but he *sees* a Lamb slain
- John hears about and then sees the very same Person: Jesus Christ, resurrected & glorified
- here, in ch 7, it works the same way: he hears about a great number but sees great multitude
- 144,000 are those of God’s people those kept safe while they witness to gospel
- great multitude: those already worshipping around throne in heaven; those who persevered & made it

2. What does this tells us?

- it tells us God is faithful to fulfill His promises
- in Genesis 15.5, Abram is told his descendants would be numerous
- more than stars in heavens
- in Genesis 28.14, he is told they’d be more than dust of the earth
- but not just an innumerable multitude, also all other peoples on earth blessed
- **“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”** (Galatians 3:8 ESV)
- and the 144,000, as well as great multitude are of one offspring
- **“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”** (Galatians 3:16 ESV)
- in other words, we are all in Christ, both Jewish believers & Gentile believers

3. Who makes up this great multitude?

- The innumerable multitude is from **“every nation”** and **“all tribes and peoples and languages”** (Rev 7.9).
- pay attention to the “Four Corners” and “Four Winds” in 7.1
- number four symbolically points to the whole world
- the same dynamic is at work here where these four terms
- **“nations...tribes...peoples...languages”**—point to people from all over the world.
- Look at where they are: they have joined the scene that was set for us in chapters 4, 5
- here, they stand **“before the throne and before the Lamb”** (Rev 7.9).
- brothers & sisters in Christ, we will stand there one day!

4. How can they stand there before the throne?

- **“white robes”** tell us they have been washed in blood of Lamb, as we’ll see again in v. 14

- the mention of the white robes they wear reminds us of the promise of this reward to those who overcome in 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. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.”** (Revelation 3:5 ESV)
- in Rev 19.14 **“the armies of heaven”** are **“arrayed in fine linen, white and pure,”** and they are **“following [Jesus] on white horses”** into battle.
- so, they have been cleansed, purified by Jesus Christ & they have overcome & persevered
- the **“palm branches”** they hold (v.9) call to mind the crowds at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem from John 12.13
- and they are also reminiscent of the Feast of Booths, which celebrated God’s provision for Israel in the wilderness on the way to the promised land
- this countless host who have received their reward are celebrating the triumph of Jesus
- and they are celebrating His provision on way to land of promise, new heavens & new earth.

5. What do they do there?

- they give credit where it is due in Rev 7.10, **“crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”**
- they do not credit themselves for overcoming. God sealed them.
- they state plainly that salvation belongs to God.
- this means that their salvation is not due to the right choices they made
- didn’t come from the virtue of their character
- definitely not the superiority of their wisdom, or the strength of their will.
- **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”** (John 1:12–13 ESV)
- salvation belongs to God. God saved them. So they praise God.

6. Who else is there with them?

- then John gives us the rest of the heavenly scene in Rev 7.11, 12:
- **“And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’”**
- the heavenly host praises God for His work in saving this innumerable multitude of human beings.
- they ascribe seven things to God:
- 1) **“blessing,”** 2) **“glory,”** 3) **“wisdom,”** 4) **“thanksgiving,”** 5) **“honor,”** 6) **“power,”** and 7) **“might.”**
- once again, we see how number seven shows us fulness, completeness
- this is God, who has not weakness or lack; He is perfect in all His perfections
- look at way humans praise God in Rev 7.10 & way heavenly host praises him in Rev 7.12.
- the heavenly host says **“Amen!”** to the praise of the humans.
- so the humans God saves praise him (Rev 7.9, 10)
- and then those humans become reasons for heavenly host to praise God also (Rev 7.11, 12).
- who gets your instinctive praise?
- are you someone who knows you deserve no credit for the redemption you have,
- or are you someone who expects to stand before God and be commended
- commended by God and by others

- commended for having made the right choice
- commended for having been generous
- commended for having been a good person?
- do you feel that you should be commended
- or do you feel, deep down in your soul, that if you got what you deserved you wouldn't be commended, you would be condemned?
- salvation belongs to God.
- everyone stands in need of salvation because everyone deserves to be condemned
- no one is commendable to God
- remember what we saw at the end of chapter 6 in v. 17: **“who can stand”** before the wrath of the Lamb?
- the answer: no one
- the redeemed proclaim that salvation belongs to God (Rev 7.10)
- and then the heavenly host of angels, elders, and living creatures say **“Amen!”** (Rev 7.12).

Let's move on to the fifth question next...

II. WHAT IS THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

- if you're not a believer, you may be wondering
- how this innumerable multitude stands before God declaring that salvation belongs to him
- I've just said that no one is worthy to stand before God
- and yet, here are these people standing before Him. How?
- the answer is given to us in the exchange that follows.

1. Who are these people?

- John is about to be taught a great lesson, and we get to join in the tutoring process
- **“Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?”** (Revelation 7:13 ESV)
- John responds in v. 14: **“I said to him, “Sir, you know.”**
- John does not pretend to know, he will not guess, but rather, he pleads ignorance of answer
- and this angelic being, the elder, answers him:
- Rev 7.14b — **And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”**

1) white robes washed

- this reference to blood of Lamb is reference to Jesus' death on cross
- we know this is not a literal washing
- we sing:

*Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing pow'r?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

- then we respond by singing:

*Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

- and do we not rejoice in singing this glorious truth:

Are you washed in the blood, in the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?

*Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

2) saved by grace of God in Christ Jesus

- Jesus paid the penalty our sin deserved
- His blood was the propitiation for each one who believes
- all these here have trusted in His mighty name to save them...and He has!

2. Where did they come from?

- answer seems simple: “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.”
- I believe this is the time between the two advents of Jesus Christ
- when we went through Daniel last year, we saw in Daniel 9, this was going to be so
- Daniel’s 70th week is not the final seven years of human history
- rather, it pointed ahead to the time from Jesus’ ascension to His return again to earth
- at the resurrection of Christ, the “last days” began in earnest
- Peter confirms this in Acts 2:16, 17

• “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;”

(Acts 2:16–17 ESV)

- then Peter told the crowd that the last days had come to pass, even then
- Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:11: **“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”**

1) we live in these last days

- Christians live in the last days: this is the final period of human history
- this means, then, that the whole period of time between Ascension & Second Coming...
- is a period of “tribulation”
- **“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**(John 16:33 ESV)
- Paul said, in Acts 14:22, **“...saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”**
- we’ve already read, in 1.9, that John said he was the churches **“brother and partner in tribulation”**

2) but this is the “great tribulation”

- this is spoken of in Daniel 12:1: **“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”**
- then Jesus referenced this in Matthew 24:21: **“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”**
- but none of these passages say that this time of great tribulation is exclusive to a final 7 years
- Jesus threatened to throw those in church at Thyatira into “great tribulation”
- and that was during John’s own day
- New Testament helps us see this “great tribulation” is actually whole period of church history
- time between Jesus ascension and return
- as we saw, and will see, from seals to trumpets to bowls of judgment, it intensifies

- but this does not force us to declare a literal seven years before 6.12–17, 16.17, 20.11–15

3) what this means

- I believe these verses before us tell us great tribulation is time from Ascension to Jesus' return
- this 144,000 and this great multitude are all believers in Jesus Christ
- and all these believers come out of the great tribulation
- they patiently endure to the end, thus standing before the throne because God has sealed them
- and this is what is so encouraging to the seven churches & ought to be to us today
- they faced great tribulation—don't ever downplay martyrdom into less than great tribulation
- and God sealed them with His Holy Spirit, preserving them and now they are there
- even though many of them were killed for their faith, they were overcomers
- so be encouraged
- some of you wonder: how is knowing we're in the great tribulation now encouraging?
- ask yourself this:
- who am I trusting?
- am I trusting in my ability to stand before God?
- or am I trust in the sacrifice of Jesus
- am I trusting my ability to keep myself from falling away?
- or am I living in the truth that God has sealed me and will preserve me?

Oh, the time, the time! Here is the last question simply put...

III. WHAT IS OUR GREAT REWARD?

- I really don't need to explain any of this, do I?
- vv. 15–17
- **“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 shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”**
(Revelation 7:15–17 ESV)
- what a catalog of biblical promises!
- those who trust in Christ will receive everything God has promised and so much more
- beyond anything we can think, imagine or even ask

Conclusion – remember our song

- in Revelation *we see our Sovereign God's glorious justice and steadfast mercy strengthening us to live lives of worship and persevering faith in Jesus until He comes again*
- all this has been on display in ch. 7
- He seals His saints and His saints praise Him forever