

All Saints Observed / November 3, 2024

Revelation 7:9-17

*“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.”*

In God’s presence in robes made white in the blood of the Lamb.

Have you ever wondered what heaven is like, who is there and what people do in heaven? Our reading from Revelation gives us a glimpse of heaven, what it is like, who is there, why they are there and what they do in heaven. John sees the redeemed in Christ before the throne of God. The essence of heaven is to be with God and dwell in His presence without shame, guilt or fear. The first people were in a heaven like state before they sinned. They were with God in the garden, heard His voice and had no fear of His presence. There was no sin. Shame, guilt, fear and death came with sin. The people in heaven have no fear of death, feel no shame and have no tears. Sin, death and the devil have no place in heaven. They can no longer harm the children of God. He who sits on the throne shelters them with His presence and wipes every tear from their eyes.

The people in heaven serve God, day and night. We might think that would get tedious after a few thousand years, but the people in heaven share in God’s eternity and have no sense of time. Their service of God is not onerous, but rather the pinnacle of blessedness. They see His face and bask in the light of His presence. The people in heaven are numerous, so numerous that John says they are beyond numbering. I bet you didn’t think there were that many good people! There are not. In fact, there are no good people in heaven. The people in heaven are all sinners, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They got into heaven not because of their innate goodness, or their relative goodness in comparison to the sins of others. John says they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. That’s why they are in the presence of God. We go to heaven, into the presence of God, for the sake of Jesus. His blood cleanses us of sin. We wear His righteousness as a garment.

People have speculated about the number of the saved, most leaning to the low end. People came to Jesus and asked, *“Will those who are saved be few?”* Notice they didn’t say ‘many or few.’ They assumed the number would be few. A fair assumption according to appearances. The devil seems much more successful in destroying souls than Jesus in saving souls. Things were so bad at the time of Elijah

that the prophet thought he was the only one left who worshiped the Lord and believed His promises. It is significant that John sees a number that cannot be counted. This is a reflection of the power of God's grace and the effectiveness of His word. Even if they seem powerless to our eyes and ineffective from our perspective, they are not! God's grace is powerful like dynamite in breaking through sin hardened souls. His word never returns empty, but always accomplishes what He desires and achieves the purpose for which He sends it; the salvation of the human soul and the inclusion of an uncountable number in His presence.

Not only is the population of heaven astronomical, it is diverse. Heaven's human residents come from every nation, tribe, people and language. This is significant. It shows God's grace is not just for the children of Israel. It is for all the children of Eve and Adam. By the first century AD the nation of Israel, once twelve tribes, had been reduced to the tribe of Judah. There was a remnant from other tribes, but they were small in comparison with the number of the tribe of Judah. Israel came to be referred to as the Judeans or Jews. Many Jews thought only they could be saved. Salvation was from the Jews, and salvation was only for the Jews, was the assumption of most Jews including Jesus' disciples. They were surprised when the Holy Spirit fell upon Samaritans. That meant they could be saved. They were amazed when the Spirit fell upon Gentiles. That meant salvation in Jesus was for everyone. Jesus is the Saviour of all people. He died for the sins of all. He calls all people to Himself through the gospel. He is especially the Saviour of those who believe. Faith receives the promises of God in Christ Jesus. These things are written that we would believe and have life in His Name.

Jesus told a parable about a wedding banquet in which all the guests were clothed in wedding garments, except one. People have wondered what those garments were and if it was the custom of first century Jews to wear special garments to weddings? That's really beside the point. The parable of the wedding banquet is about heaven and by what means we stand in the presence of God. John's vision explains the parable, where he says that everyone in heaven is clothed in garments cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. The garments are the robes of Jesus' righteousness by which our human unrighteousness is replaced with His perfect divine righteousness, which makes us fit to stand in the presence of God and to endure His righteousness, which burns hotter than the sun. Paul wrote in Corinthians that God made Jesus, who had no sin to be a sin offering that in Him

we would both receive and become the righteousness of God. The robe of Jesus' righteousness makes us fit to stand in the presence of God before His throne.

The man in Jesus' parable attempted to enter heaven and stand in God's presence on the basis of his human righteousness. He was a good man, but there are no good people in heaven, only sinners redeemed of their sin by the blood of the Lamb. There are no good people in heaven because there are no good people on earth. No matter how well we compare with others, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. There are no good people in heaven, because in comparison to God there are no good people on earth. In heaven there are only the redeemed, clothed in garments of Jesus' righteousness. The man in Jesus' parable wasn't denied a garment. Jesus offers His righteousness for all to receive. The man in Jesus' parable chose not to receive a wedding garment. Jesus gives the garment of His righteousness to all who believe. He calls us to believe and receive! All who believe receive Jesus, His righteousness and place in His Father's presence forever.

Heaven is to be in the presence of God. We are already in God's presence through faith in His promises. We find God and experience His presence in His word, through His sacraments and in our worship and fellowship with other believers. God speaks to us through the words His Spirit inspired prophets and evangelists to record. These things are written that we may believe Jesus is the Christ and have life in His Name. God washes away our sins in Holy Baptism and clothes us in robes of Jesus' righteousness whenever we confess our sins and seek His absolution. Baptism now saves you as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God nourishes our faith and gives us a foretaste of the wedding banquet of the Lamb and His bride as often as we eat His body and drink His blood in His Holy Supper. Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. We experience heaven whenever we gather as members of the body of Christ in worship, fellowship and prayer. Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them. Jesus is with us when we gather in His Name. What John saw and recorded in Revelation we experience now through faith, but one day, face to face.

As we observe the festival of All Saints, we remember that saints are sinners made holy in the righteousness of Jesus, whose blood paid the debt of human sin. There are no good people in heaven, only sinners who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. We remember that we receive Jesus' righteousness through faith and baptism into His dying and rising. Jesus said,

*“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”* The festival of All Saints is a time to remember the grace of God and the power of His word. As His grace was sufficient for the salvation of those who have gone before us, it will be sufficient to bring us through all the trials of life to the destination of our faith before the throne of God.

We remember that in Christ we are always in the presence of God. Now through faith. More fully when we pass into His presence in death. Completely when Christ speaks His almighty word and calls our bodies to rise from the earth to share in His resurrection to a new eternal life, where sin, death and the devil are forever gone and God wipes every tear from our eyes. God in His mercy bring us to that day. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.