

A biblical perspective in a troubled world

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[0 : 00] Revelation chapter 7 verse 9 to the end of the chapter. After this 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 before the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hats, and they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

All the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen, praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

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.

And he said, 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. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple.

[1 : 28] And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Let's just turn to God for a moment before we turn to his word. Almighty God, what we have not, give us.

What we know not, teach us. What we are not, make us. And may your word speak to us, O Lord. Show us yourself, show us ourself, show us the Saviour.

And may your word speak to us, O Lord. Amen. Well, friends, we've got a bit of work to do this evening, so please have your Bibles open.

[2 : 41] We're going to be doing a wee bit of jumping around, but we're principally going to focus upon the verses that we read just a few moments ago and also a couple of other verses from the end of the book of Revelation, chapter 21.

Revelation is, I think, a greatly neglected book amongst many Christians. It's perhaps not so in some places of the United States where they obsess upon it.

And if some of you, as I was, was brought up with a family background of brethrenism and dispensationalism, then you will have heard many, many times the book of Revelation being preached.

But for many of us, and certainly for many of the last couple of generations, this is a book that I think a lot of people feel afraid of at times.

They feel a little confused about, and they then tend just to veer away from it. And the sadness of doing that is that it deprives us of one of the most important and fundamental aspects of our Christian life, namely a biblical perspective on our world, and more importantly, where our world is going, and perhaps even more importantly, how this will all come to a completion.

[4 : 20] And that is an important choice of language there, because although many people believe that the world is going to end, we certainly believe that the world that this is will end, but that end will be a completion and not simply an end.

And so what the book of Revelation does is, and in the context of all that I said this morning, it gives us a biblical perspective and a much-needed biblical perspective in our distorted world.

In all my years of pastoral ministry, as I've spoken to people, and many people do ask you about this book of Revelation, I've found that an awful lot of people find it helpful to think of the book of

Revelation like one of the great art galleries in our great cities.

And you go into these art galleries, and sometimes there are specific rooms that are dedicated to a certain period or to a certain artist, and you go in, and in there are that selection of pictures that are consistent with what is on the title of the room.

And I think you will find to have that picture in the back of your minds as you're going into the book of Revelation, you'll find it enormously helpful that you are effectively walking into an art gallery called the book of Revelation, and as you look round the walls, you see many pictures of what is there.

[6 : 22] Now, lest you think I am simply hawing here and making this up, let me show you how that's a key and important understanding of what is going on in this book.

If you turn in your Bibles to the very first verse of the very first chapter of the book of Revelation. And there we read the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants the things that must soon take place.

And so, it is not only helpful, but it is also biblical to see that what is actually being put down under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in writing is actually a description of what someone was shown first and foremost, and not first and foremost what somebody was told that was then written down.

And if we were still in doubt about that interpretative tool, we turn to verse 9 of the chapter that we read this evening, chapter 7.

And there again we have, after this, I looked and behold. And he then goes on to describe what he had seen.

[7 : 57] So, let's keep that at the very forefront of our mind as we try and make our way through this chapter.

To see this as a picture. And to imagine we were in that art gallery looking at this picture. picture. What would we see?

Well, I think it's plain for us all to see that there are two things that stand out in this chapter and a third just for the purposes of completion that I'm going to identify later on.

Now, we will spend most of our time looking at the first of these. So, I don't want you to think that after I've been at this an hour and I now say secondly, we're going to be another two hours to get through the three of them.

Hopefully, it will not take that length of time anyway. But as we think about this picture, let me suggest to you, and do you notice, there are two things in these verses that stand out.

[9 : 18] One is the Lamb and two is the multitudes.

And the first thing I want us to notice then is the Lamb. Verse 9 tells us that we are before the throne and before the Lamb.

verse 10 crying out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Verse 14 they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Verse 17 for the Lamb is in the midst of the throne and will be their shepherd and will guide them to the springs of the water of life.

three things then that I want us to notice about the Lamb which is very clearly identified as being of importance and significance in these verses.

[10 : 30] The first is that the Lamb saves by substitution. second, the Lamb sits in victory.

And thirdly, with reference to chapter 21, the Lamb secures His bride. So, first of all then, the Lamb that saves by substitution.

If you look and you will see in verse 14 that there is this notion of being washed and cleansed.

The notion of being covered by some other means other than something that you do for yourself.

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

The Lamb is the one who saves by substitution, who covers their sin and washes them clean in the blood of the Lamb.

[11 : 54] Now, one of the important things to realize is, and here I mix the picture, the Lamb is not some rabbit out of the hat.

This hasn't just appeared in the book of Revelation. This notion that God provides a covering for sin or a propitiation for sin or a sacrifice or a substitute by sin is a notion that runs right through the whole of the Bible.

If you want to flick back in your Bibles to Genesis 3, 21, we couldn't get perhaps any more nearer the start than we do there. And there we have the story of Adam and Eve engaging with God and

Adam and Eve have sinned and disobeyed God and they go hiding and they make for themselves a covering out of fig leaves and God goes and looks for them and susses them out and provides for them the clothing that they need because of their awareness of their nakedness.

A covering that God provides. Flick on to Genesis 22, Abraham, the great son of God's promise that is his son.

God says to him, I want you to take Isaac and sacrifice him. Chapter 22, verse 7 comes that question that's full of poignancy and pathos.

[13 : 36] Father, we have the fire, we have the wood, where is the lamb? And then the answer that echoes through time, God will provide for himself the lamb.

And then in verse 13, we have that moment when Abraham is about to sacrifice the son of God's promise, and God stops him and tells him to look in the bushel, and there is the ram provided for the sacrifice.

But notice the ram, not yet, the lamb. And then we could go into Exodus, where very clearly and specifically we have the lamb taking center stage, the lamb that had to be slain so that the lintels of the doors of the people of Israel in Egypt could be scattered with the blood of the lamb, and therefore the angel of God's wrath and God's judgment would pass over the doors that had been protected by the covering of the shed blood of the lamb.

And if we were in any doubt, and surely we can't be, but if we were in any doubt the great prophetic book of the Old Testament that looks very specifically towards Jesus, the book of Isaiah 53, as it prophetically describes the Lord Jesus Christ, Isaiah 53 says, he will be led like a lamb to the slaughter.

And in chapter 53, 10, the lamb who makes an offering for guilt. God's love will be saved.

[15 : 43] And again, this is true in many ways. Part of the job and the work of the Old Testament is to create the expectation of what would come.

And so, we have the law, what would come that would fulfill the law. and we have the notion of kingship. When would the ultimate king come?

And the notion of priesthood. When would the ultimate priest come? And the notion of prophecy. When would the one come who would not only be the prophet of God, but would actually be the Word of God?

And so, too, in connection with this Old Testament teaching on the Lamb, when would one come who would be the ultimate Lamb of God, who would make the ultimate sacrifice?

And then after a hiatus of 400 years, we open up the Gospel of John. And in chapter 1, verse 29, as Jesus appears on the scene in John's Gospel, we can be left in no doubt that we are understanding properly where the Bible is leading in all this.

[17 : 15] As John says, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

God is in Jesus Christ stripping away the fig leaf that He provided as a crude garment clothing to now clothe us in the costly attire of the white robes that have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

For that, you see, is the very clear and biblical identity of the Lamb as the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is and He dies as the Lamb, as the substitute. He dies a saving death.

death. He dies a saving death for sinners. This is our God.

[18 : 34] This is who the Lord Jesus Christ is. He's not a cheerleader. He's not a life coach.

He's not some therapeutic moral philosopher that we admire His teaching but don't acknowledge who He is as Savior. He's not a casual friend who sits on the park bench and chats with us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is God incarnate who comes and hangs on a cross and dies a saving death. death. The Father lovingly sent the Son to die that death in our place, to be our substitute.

The Father punishes our sin even when it is born and manifest in the person of His own beloved Son hanging on the cross.

[19 : 44] for as we saw this morning, God hates sin. Not to judge it would be to go against His character and His being and His integrity, but in His love and grace, He makes the provision for the dealing with that sin to His own glory through the saving death of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross.

The Lamb who saves by substitution. Secondly, then, the Lamb who sits in victory.

Do you notice that very specific description in verse 15 of chapter 7 of the book of Revelation?

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.

Now, what is the important and vital significance of that very detailed description there of the Lord sitting?

Well, and it really will be helpful if you find this, if you turn with me to the book of Hebrews. So, just flick back, so you've got John, Jude, and Revelation.

[21 : 42] I can't do it backwards. And then you've got Peter, James, and then you'll find Hebrews. Chapter 10, and then let's read from verse 8.

Now, what is happening here is the writer to the Hebrews is contrasting the Old Testament system with the New Testament system.

And we need to remember that when we talk about the Old Testament system, that was very much of God. It was God who established prophets and priests and kings.

It was God who established the sacrificial ceremonial engagement with sin by the slaughtering of animals.

So, that was an Old Testament God-given mechanism to deal with sin. But, as we will see in a moment, what the writer to the Hebrews is doing is to show how that has been now taken away and replaced.

[22 : 57] And he does that by the mechanism of comparison, you will notice. So, verse 8 says, when he said, above, you have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings, these are offered according to the law.

Then he added, before, I have come to do your will, he does away with the first in order to establish the second.

So, it's very clear what is going on here. This is a transition that does away with the first and introduces the second.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

So, this is underlining for us that what we talked about in the first part of the sermon that the Lamb who saves by substitution, we are talking about salvation here.

[24 : 10] We're talking about the offering of the body of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross as that Lamb that was slain. But now we have it here, verse 11.

And every priest, so we're now back to the description of the Old Testament ceremonial sacrificial system, where the priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.

But when Christ, in comparison to the priest, offered for all time, in comparison to daily, a single sacrifice, in comparison to repeating the same sacrifices, he sat down at the right hand of God, as opposed to the priest who stands daily, offering these sacrifices that can never take away sins.

And do you see what the comparison is? It's numerous, but it is pictured for us in the Lord Jesus Christ now sitting down.

You see, he sits because the work is done. The task is completed.

[26 : 17] The victory is secure. I don't want to offend, but it's important that we recognize that this, of course, is the grave error of the Roman Catholic Church, when it engages in mass.

And they actually believe that every time they engage in mass, the priest is standing as he breaks the bread and as he pours the cup, that these are actually the actual event of once again breaking the body of Christ and once again shedding his blood.

And what's wrong with that, you see, is not that they have Catholics and we have Protestants and everything they do is wrong just because they're Catholics. It is wrong because it represents that old form of sacrificial understanding, where the priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sin, in comparison to an understanding that Christ, by his saving death on Calvary's cross, now completes and finishes the act of saving grace.

He saves by substitution, and he now sits in victory. The work is done.

The sacrifice, once for all and never to be repeated, is now complete. you will notice also, just in passing back to Revelation 7, that he shepherds his people.

[28 : 18] This, of course, refers back so that we've got no doubt as to the identity of this lamb. He is the lamb who is also the shepherd, the good shepherd who secures his people and watches over them and cares for them and nurtures them.

And the fourth thing that I want to tell you about this lamb is, and again, we're now going on to chapter 21 here, is that the lamb secures his bride.

Chapter 21 tells us that he now saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

It's a beautiful picture that we have here, a beautiful painting that is before our eyes here, that gives us yet another insight into what the lamb has achieved and has accomplished.

The bride shall see her prince. Often I have stood and prepared for weddings with couples, and the final stage of that preparation is to arrange for a rehearsal to take place.

[29 : 55] And we go through the whole thing, and they turn up, and we go through all the motions and do all that. And I'm standing with the groom and the best man, or the future groom and the best man at the rehearsal, and that's the time for questions.

And invariably, he turns to me and says, when she's coming down the aisle, can I turn round and look at her? Of course, the answer is, of course you can.

She has prepared herself in all the beauty and splendor of her wedding garments for you.

And that is the picture here, that we have been prepared by that saving death of the lamb on the cross for the lamb to now secure his bride.

What a picture! What a perspective! And this picture here is just the astonishing picture of the great transformation that the gospel brings about in your life and in mine if you are in Christ.

[31 : 17] Christ. Quite often at the rehearsals, the couple and the party who comes are just come from work or they've been out in the golf course or they've just come from home and the bride turns up in her flat shoes and her floppy sweater and her ripped jeans for the wedding rehearsal.

But then, three days later, there is this amazing transformation.

the girl at the rehearsal in jeans and flat shoes now walks down the aisle in the radiant beauty and splendor of her wedding garments.

brothers and sisters, you and I are transformed. We are the girl who stands at the wedding rehearsal in our jeans and in our scruffy garments.

and as we are presented to our prince, we are transformed into the radiant beauty and splendor of the bride.

[32 : 58] you once were this, but in Christ no more. What we have here is a transformation that is unambiguously different from what we used to be.

There is the Lamb. Back to chapter 7 and very finally and briefly, there is a multitude.

After this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number. From every nation, from all tribes and peoples and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hand and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

What a picture. What a perspective. All that was broken in the Garden of Eden.

All that was divided at the Tower of Babel, dividing people up into languages and tribes. All that we now know in our society today of the brokenness and the division between black and white and male and female and generations.

[34 : 59] Here is unity. Here is peace. Here is harmony. a great multitude that no one can number before the throne and before the Lamb.

But let me finish with this. Imagine you have gone into that art gallery and into that room marked the book of Revelation and you go to one of these benches that is before the great picture that is the second half of this chapter of the book of Revelation 7.

You are looking at this picture and you sit there for a while and you begin to see the Lamb and you see all the things that we have thought about tonight. And then you look at this multitude of people. the elect of God presented before the throne and before the Lamb. And you begin to focus in on that multitude and you begin to realize that what has been before us is actually not a multitude but a multitude of individual people and faces.

And here is the question. is your face among them? As you survey that multitude, as you look at that picture, do you see your face?

[36 : 58] Because, friends, that is what the gospel is about, to ensure that you and I, through God's grace and His goodness, sacrifices Himself on Calvary's cross, so that as we embrace that gospel in saving faith, we then are numbered among that multitude.

Let's pray. And in the quietness of this evening hour, as the day turns to night, let's just quietly, before God in our own hearts, answer that question.
Are we sure that we are numbered among that multitude? are we the bride prepared for her prince, clothed in the very garments of the righteousness of Christ?
Do we display the radiant beauty of the transformed girl, to the bride arrayed in the splendor and glory of salvation?
the bride views not her garments. Her eyes are only for her bridegroom's face.
[39 : 07] grace. And on that day, we will not be distracted by glory, but on the King of grace.
grace. And so, Heavenly Father, we pray this night that we may be found with our eyes fixed on Jesus, that by grace we will be numbered among that multitude.
to the glory of God and to the praising of His name. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord, we pray this.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.