

Pray for the World

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[0 : 00] Hopefully you do, or at least some type of Bible. Maybe it's on your phone or whatever you do. Please open them up to Revelation. Revelation, chapter 7.

In the late 90s, there was a television show called Early Edition. I wonder if any of you have seen it. I just remember glimpses of it when I was a kid on TV.

I don't know if my dad was watching it. I don't even remember anything that happened in the show, to be honest, except for one thing. The basic story of every episode was that this guy would wake up, and he would open his door, and there on his doorstep was the newspaper, except that the newspaper was actually tomorrow's newspaper instead of today's.

And so as he would open this up and read it, he would be able to read all the headlines of what happened in the day that he was about to live. It was a really cool idea for a show.

And best I can remember, there was some tension over, well, can I change the bad things? Can I save the people that were in an accident? And he's running to and fro trying to stop all these bad things from happening.

[1 : 33] And the question is whether he will be able to do that and change the future or the present or whether it's fate. It was a really cool show.

And I remember thinking, wouldn't that be awesome if we had, you know, maybe if God just gave us a news article or a Snapchat or an Instagram from the future where we could just kind of look at that and know that that was coming in our lives, that moment, even if we didn't understand what was in the picture or who the person was?

How would it affect how we live? I mean, if it was a bad thing, but how would that affect how we live? If it was a good thing, you know, how would that affect it? Well, this morning, we're looking at a place where God does this very thing.

He actually gives us a picture of what's coming in the future. And the question that we're going to be considering as we look at that is, how will that affect how we live?

And in this series that we're doing on prayer, how will that affect how we pray? This is the last message in this series. As a bit of a reminder of where we've come from, we began this series with Paul urging Timothy.

[3 : 07] I urge then, first of all, that prayers, petitions, intercession, thanksgiving be made for all people.

And over the last number of weeks, we've been looking at various groups of all people. Who does that include? We've talked about our families. We've talked about our church, one another. We've talked about praying for our community. We've talked about praying for those in our lives that don't believe in Jesus. And one of the anchoring principles that we've kind of held through this whole thing is this truth that we can have confidence in prayer when we ask God to do things that He wills, that He desires to do.

And so we've been looking at each of these groups of people in our lives over the past number of weeks and asking that question. What does God will in my family? What does He will in our church? And, of course, in one sermon on each of these things, we can't really unpack all that He desires for these various relationships that we have.

[4 : 19] But hopefully that's helped to get us thinking in that direction so that we're praying more than just, please bless and be with and bless and be with and bless and be with.

Well, this morning, we come to the final relationship. We're praying about the world. We're talking about praying about the world, about the nations.

And even as I say that, I'm aware that some of us are thinking, oh, the nations, the world. We tend to be more concerned with stuff that goes on right here around us, stuff that's not far away but stuff

that's close, the people that are close to us.

And, well, the people, the nations, you know, the world, the world is so big. Those people are so far away. I have a hard time praying for just my family and my church as it is.

I've got to pray for the world, for the nations. And so this morning, I want to look at, we want to look together at a snapshot that God gives us of the end of the story, the end of our story, that I think will really stir our hearts to see just how important it is that we pray for all people and that that goes to its widest sense to the world and to the nations.

[5 : 50] So, Revelation chapter 7. We're going to be starting in verse 9. But maybe before we do, I should probably just give us a little bit of up to speed on what's going on here.

Revelation is a very unique writing in the Bible. Essentially, the apostle John is on an island where he receives a vision from Jesus Christ, a revelation from Jesus Christ.

And he describes what he sees through this whole revelation. Jesus appears to him. He turns.

He looks. And there's the Lord. But it's not your ordinary kind of meeting with another person. Jesus looks very, you know, there's a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth.

There's all kinds of things. It's a very dreamlike kind of vision. Very strange. Kind of like the visions of the prophets of old or of Joseph back in the Old Testament.

[6 : 50] Jesus appears to him. And Jesus tells him to write down word for word what Jesus wants communicated to seven churches.

And so he goes through this. He writes down the words that Jesus wants to give to these churches. And then in chapter 4, he says that after this, he sees a door open in heaven.

And he's invited by the Lord to come up into heaven. And John describes how in this vision, he sees this great throne in heaven.

And there's one seated on the throne. And around this throne, there are 24 other thrones and elders seated on these thrones.

And there's four living creatures such as we've never seen the likes of on our planet. And these elders and these creatures, they're all worshiping the one seated on the throne.

[7 : 54] And then John notices that in the right hand of the one who's sitting on the throne, there's a scroll. And there's kind of this moment of great lament.

There's nobody who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it and read it. And then all of a sudden, John describes how a lamb comes forward.

And the elders and the angels, they all recognize the lamb is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. There's seven seals on this scroll.

And in chapter 6, John is describing what happens as each of these seals are broken. It's a very interesting vision. It seems as though as the lamb breaks each seal, something is triggered.

An event happens. And so the lamb breaks them one by one, the first six seals. And as he does, things seem to be unleashed or happen on the earth.

[9 : 05] And the first number of things that are described are tragic. They're calamities, war, conquest, plague, killing.

He talks about how there are many who are killed because of the word of God and the testimony that they had maintained.

There's cosmic signs that happen. There's seismic activity. And as it comes to this sixth seal, verse 15 and 16 of chapter 6, we're kind of left with this picture of the people of the world running and hiding, looking for cover.

They recognize it. They anticipate that the wrath of the lamb is about to fall. Judgment is coming on the earth. And they're in deep trouble.

After this sixth seal is broken, there's a pause. And John tells us about how an angel goes out and he puts the seal of God on God's people, on the servants of God, to protect them from the outpouring of God's wrath.

[10 : 31] And then we come to our passage, which is in verse 9. So let's read together. In verse 9, John says this. 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 hands.

And they cried out in a loud voice. Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb.

You can imagine John in this moment just like, what is going on here? This is strange. What's happening here?

We're kind of all wondering the same thing. I mean, this is a very strange vision. The first thing that we notice that John notices is the size of this multitude.

[11 : 46] He uses three different ways to kind of emphasize how big this group of people is. First, there's the word multitude. That's a big crowd. But that's not enough.

It's a multitude of many or a great multitude. But even that doesn't quite do it justice. It's a great multitude that no one could count.

Literally, that to number them, no one was able. We're talking a vast sea of people that John sees standing before the throne.

The next thing that John notices is not the size, but the diversity of this multitude of people. He notices that there's people represented there from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language.

From there, he begins to describe some of the other details that he notices. They're standing before the throne and before the Lamb. And what do they look like?

[13 : 03] He says they're wearing white robes. And they're holding palm branches in their hands. But verse 10 is where John really begins to draw our attention.

He switches to the present tense, which you won't see this in our English. But he kind of wants to invite us into this moment. And they are crying out, he says, in a loud voice.

Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Can you imagine what it would have been like to just hear this sea of people calling out, crying out in a loud voice?

Can you hear the sound of their voices? And what are they saying? Salvation is of our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

They're giving the credit for their deliverance, their rescue to the one who sits on the throne. You are the one who has saved us. You are the one who sits on heaven's throne and rules.

[14 : 28] It's a cry of praise. Of worship. John goes on to tell us in verse 11.

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen.

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength. Be to our God forever and ever.

Amen. So here we have the elders and the creatures and the angels responding to the cry of the multitude.

The multitude before the throne says, Salvation is from you, God, and from the Lamb. And then all the rest of them there.

[15 : 39] I would have loved to have just seen what John saw there. They fall down on their faces like imagine your mouth talking right into the ground. And they say, Amen.

Yes, we agree. Salvation is indeed. From the one who sits on the throne and from the Lamb.

Indeed, he is worthy of praise. I like to call this expression here the ten times better version of long live the king.

You can kind of think back to the old days of when, you know, a good king would do some worthy thing and the people would shout, long live the king. May you continue to rule and be our leader.

This is like the ten times better version of that. Yes, we recognize that you are worthy of praise and glory and honor and thanks.

[16 : 45] May you continue to rule with your great wisdom and power and strength forever and forever. Sometimes we hear those words forever and ever and it's just like, literally in Greek, it's unto the ages of eternity.

May there never come a day when you do not rule with your great power and strength and wisdom over us. May there never come a day when we stop giving you credit and glory and thanks and praise for rescuing us, for saving us.

When people do good deeds, the media gives an appropriate amount of coverage. This is worthy of two weeks, this SNC-Lavalin thing, well, that's stretching out.

But some people are saying, well, we're sick of that. That's had enough time. what these elders, these angels, these creatures are acknowledging is that there is no end to the amount of coverage, to the amount of praise, to the amount of credit that you deserve, God, for what you have done for your people, for this multitude.

It's a beautiful picture. Can you feel the passion? Can you feel the delight and the longing of these expressions to God?

[18 : 26] John's just kind of taking this all in and we kind of get the sense that he's like just staring at all this, watching it going on, speechless. What is happening here?

And then one of the elders, verse 13, one of the elders asked me, these in white robes, who are they? And where do 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 worship him day and night in his temple.

And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst.

[19 : 31] The sun will not beat down on them nor any scorching heat. For the lamb at the center 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.

So, John gets asked the question that we're kind of all wondering. What's going on here? Who is this great multitude? What am I seeing here?

What's the meaning of this? The elder asked John. John says, well, the only thing that really makes sense is, you know better than I do. You could tell me.

And then the elder does. He explains a little bit of who they are. Now, what I'm about to say, I want you to know, is a bit of an interpretive guess.

And sometimes, you know, in this kind of writing in the Bible, when we're looking at visions, we have to guess that the symbolism is here, but there's not the same level of confidence as there is in other places if we're getting the symbols right.

[20 : 49] But what I can't help but notice are some of the details John includes in this vision. This all takes place around this great throne.

A throne. What do the people have in their hands? The multitude, what are they holding in their hands?

Palm branches. Hmm. That kind of takes me back to the triumphal entry. In fact, John is the only one in his gospel who specifies what kind of branch that they were holding.

It's palm branches. And then you've got this ten times better version of long live the king. I'm not going to say this is what this means, but could it be that this is kind of that snapshot that we were talking about earlier, that picture of the future when God's people will get a redo of the triumphal entry.

When we will acknowledge with passion and declare our loyalty, yes, you are the worthy king.

[22 : 09] May you reign over us with all your amazing qualities forever. forever. The question on the table is who are these people?

Who is this multitude? Now, I'm going to, I've been around long enough to know that many of us get excited when it comes to future events and prophecy.

And I'm willing to bet there are some people who think that one of the most significant details of this passage is the first part of verse 14. These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.

And as we hear that, perhaps we're already racing in our minds. The great tribulation. Yes, let's talk about that. What, what is that?

What does it mean that these are they who have come out of the great tribulation? And how does all of this fit with the timeline that I have in my head about the rapture and the second coming?

[23 : 20] But as a shepherd and an elder, I want to humbly suggest that the answer to these questions is the least important detail in this whole section.

please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying it's not important. I'm saying it's the least important. What is this section about?

This section is about the relationship between God and his people. In fact, the elder goes on verse 14 down 15, 16, 17 he doesn't say anything about the fact that they came out of the great tribulation after that.

Everything after that is describing the relationship between God and his people from that day on and forever about how they will never hunger. They will never thirst again.

All their longings will be satisfied once and for all forever. He talks about how the Lamb will be their shepherd, that he will lead them to springs of living water, how God will wipe every tear from their

eyes.

[24 : 44] What is this section about? Look at all the characters in this vision. The elders, the four living creatures, the angels, the multitude.

What is their attention on? all of their attention is in the same place, the throne, the one who sits on the throne, the Lamb.

He is the glory and beauty of this whole passage. what he has done for his people is the crown jewel of this passage.

In verse 15, the elder makes this statement. He says, therefore, or on account of this, they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night in his temple.

On account of what? Why are they there worshiping so intensely? In verse 10, why are they crying out with a loud voice?

[26 : 05] Why are they worshiping him so constantly, day and night? It's not just because they came out of the great tribulation. God has saved them.

It's because in the last half of verse 14, Jesus is the lamb whose blood was shed so that their robes could be washed white.

Take a look back for a second to verse 16 of chapter 6. Where is the rest of the world at this moment in John's vision? They're hiding.

They're seeking cover. They have this sense of dread and anticipation. They say this, fall on us and hide us to the mountains and rocks.

Hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come.

[27 : 19] And who can stand? This multitude can stand before the throne.

That's why they're worshiping. That's why they're praising God. The rest of the world is about to face the final judgment God.

But this multitude stands wearing white and worshiping, praising God because he has saved them from that.

That's why they worship. It's a beautiful picture of the relationship of God and his people, a future picture.

God will take a step back from all of that now, from the glory of that heavenly scene, and consider for a moment, what does this have to do with our world?

[28 : 26] We're talking about praying for our world, and I want to suggest to you that this moment that we see here in John's vision is a snapshot, is a portrait of what's coming in the future.

And it's not just a snapshot of us as the church and God. This is a global picture. Who is this multitude?

Look at what John says. He says that this is a great multitude beyond numbering from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language, all represented here.

What is God doing in our world? What is he working to bring about? This is amazing. We have a snapshot of what's coming.

We can know with confidence what God is up to. And it's not just a plan to save us as a church. It's a plan that's global. Every nation.

[29 : 33] Think about that. People from Germany. People from Iraq. People from Australia. People from Saudi Arabia. People from South America.

Brazil. Every nation. Every tribe. Think about that. That's even more particular. You think of all the different tribes of people in Africa.

You think of the tribes of natives here in Canada. The Cree. The tribes of South America. Every people.

Every people group was represented there. Every language. Chinese. English, of course.

We all believe that. We all know that. Sometimes we think our language is the language. the good one. The one that's becoming the international one.

[30 : 32] How did John know that every language was there? He probably heard people praising, saying this in other languages that he didn't recognize. Chinese. Chinese. Low German.

men. You get the picture. There's one language that I don't know if it will be there.

Think of my grandma who's deaf. Sign language. language. This is an amazing picture. God is working to bring about a people for himself.

To save a people. And nobody is excluded from that salvation on the basis of their nation. Their political country that they live in. Nobody is excluded on the basis of their ethnicity. ethnicity. The language that they speak. God is weaving this incredible tapestry.

[31 : 43] This diverse, beautiful people. For himself. For the praise of his glorious grace. And so we come to the question of prayer.

do the people on the other side of our world matter? Think about this.

Some we would say matter less because of terrible things that they do. You know, I've heard even Christians saying things like just racist comments about people that are Arab.

you know, people that are Palestinian, people that are native. All of those people groups will be represented in this multitude.

God wants to save some from every people. And when we have a picture like this, we should be the first people to move towards those people.

[32 : 51] In that multitude, you may find yourself standing shoulder to shoulder with an Arab brother as you praise the one who has saved both of you.

And so when it comes to prayer, I just want to give a few points of application. Jesus said, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

And so what should we do about it? Just get started and start harvesting? No, he said, pray and ask the Lord to send workers into the harvest field. Part of our regular prayer list, our regular praying should be that God would continue to send people across cultural lines, language lines.

There's not enough workers. We need more. Part of our prayer should be for the missionaries that we know who are already serving there. They're doing this.

They're working to bring this picture about in Lesotho. And so we should pray for those who are serving in those places, that God would continue to do that work of building his church in those places.

[34 : 25] Lastly, we should pray for the people of the nations, the people themselves. We did a little bit of that at World Day of Prayer.

We kind of focused in on one country. As we read the news, different countries come up. We have opportunity to pray for the people there.

One really helpful resource that if you don't have, I really recommend, is this book. It's called Operation World. This is essentially the definitive prayer guide to every nation.

It's got every single country listed in here. It's got the demographics of it generally. It's got exactly how many based on statistics are in each denomination.

It's got a small list of some of the answers to prayer since the last edition, which was 10 years ago, and some of the challenges for prayer. Just very simply, ways to pray.

[35 : 25] If you don't have this, I encourage you to get a copy of this, or maybe just pick a few countries that God puts on your heart, and pray regularly for the people of those countries, and I would encourage you as you do not to leave certain countries out.

There are certain countries in our world that are known for doing terrible things, and terrible things happening in them. We should pray even more for those countries. Love your enemies.

And pray for those who persecute you. God's heart is to save a people for the praise of his glory from all around the globe.

And we can participate in that, even if we don't go and cross a cultural line of some kind, or go overseas. We can participate in that simply by praying and asking God to do it.

And so, let's renew those connections that we have with missionaries that we know of. Those newsletters that we get in our inbox from time to time. I get a few. I'm sure you guys get a few.

[36 : 36] Let's read through that again more carefully. What do they need? How can we pray specifically for them and the work that's going on there? Maybe shoot them an email if you haven't heard from them in a while and ask them, how can I pray for you?

What are some specific needs? things? And all of this we can make part of our regular routine and habit every week.

The nations may not seem important to us, but they are deeply important to God. Amen.