

The Gathered Church (8) - Gathered in Glory

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship now singing in Psalm number 30. Psalm number 30, that's in the Scottish Psalter, the tune of St. Minver, and verses 1 to 5. Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and over me thou to rejoice, made'st not mine enemy.

O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee with loud cries, lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me. So on to the end of verse 5, Lord, I will thee extol.

If you're able to stand, please stand for the singing. Over me thou to rejoice, made'st not mine enemy.

O thou who art the Lord my God, I am in distress to thee.

With light I've lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me.

[1 : 44] O Lord, my soul, thou hast brought down, and rescued from the grave, that I to pray, should not go down, how life thou didst be saved.

For ye that have his holy wants, sing grace unto the Lord, and give unto him thanks, where ye his holiness reward.

Are but a woman, that is strong, like in his labor light.

We think before a night in dew, but more of joy arise.

Let's call upon the Lord now in prayer. Let's join together in prayer. We give thanks to thee, O Lord, our God, as we come to sing these words we have sung in your praise, that you are the God who rescues sinners from their plight, the God who lifts us out of the pit of our own making, and sets us upon the rock that is Jesus Christ.

[3 : 56] We give thanks, O Lord, tonight, that we face once again the wonderful teaching of your word, that reminds us of all that it took and cost to provide us with such a rescue and redemption.

We pray, Lord, tonight that we may come before you, celebrating the fact that you are this God who saves, who comes to be with your people, and who will bring them at last to dwell with you forever.

O Lord, our God, we give thanks. You are the God also of comfort and compassion, one who makes himself known to us, having come to know you as our God.

Lord, we give thanks that you remain to be the comforter and companion and friend of your people. Lord, how much we need to know and to be assured of that comfort and that friendship throughout the course of life.

For we know from our experience, as well as the teaching of your word, that we meet with many tribulations, many things that cause us distress and pain, many things that sometimes, Lord, bring us to question our very relationship with you and your view of us.

[5 : 09] But we give thanks for the way in which your word redirects us. We give thanks for the ministry of your Holy Spirit. Lord, not only do you bring us to know you through the work of that Spirit, but your Spirit dwells within your people, and your Spirit will ever be in your people's souls, all the way through time and into eternity.

And we give thanks tonight for that ministry of your Spirit, a Spirit that keeps himself so much in the background in order to elevate and bring Christ out for us.

And Lord, we pray tonight that your Holy Spirit will apply your word to us, that your Holy Spirit will open our minds and grant to us once again to triumph in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith.

And we pray, Lord, that you would grant to us, even this night, anew, the sense of your presence here with us, the knowledge that you are here, and that you are here as you have stated in your word, that where your people are gathered together in your name, so you are there in the midst.

And we give thanks for the many ways in which, as we have seen, O Lord, your word teaches us of the importance of gathering your people together and of them seeing themselves as the gathered people of God.

[6 : 29] We give thanks that all the way down through the Old Testament years, your people knew themselves as the assembly of God's people, an assembly of people with whom you had entered into covenant, an assembly that gathered regularly to worship you, to give to you the praise, the sacrifices, all that you had required of them.

And we give thanks, O Lord, that we have entered into the way in which we relate to you, entered into that same experience, but even in a higher way.

For you have come to reveal yourself to us, Lord, not merely through symbols and signs and sacrifices, but through the person of your Son.

For in times past you spoke to the prophets and the fathers through various visions, and revelations of yourself. But in these latter times, you have spoken to us and continue to speak through your Son, one who has been made heir over all things.

Bless, we pray, your word to us then, Lord, tonight. We represent a great variety of needs and of experience in your presence. And even tonight, Lord, we know that we vary so much, one from each other, in the things that we are going through in life.

[7 : 52] But we give thanks that all our needs are met in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we'll be so abundantly and triumphantly throughout eternity. When you're gathered, when you're gathered, people will forever be in your presence.

And when nothing will intervene with their perfect knowledge of you and their celebration of your salvation and also of the rejoicing in the salvation that you have procured for them.

And bless us each one, we pray, and bless us together this evening. Bless us in all that we seek to do in your name from day to day and week to week. Lord, we give thanks for all the activities of the congregation.

We know that being busy and having all these activities are not in themselves a sign of life, but yet, Lord, we are encouraged that there is surely life when we have a relish for these things and when we seek to pray over them and find that they are of benefit to us as a people.

And, Lord, we pray that all of these activities, along with our services of worship, will continue to be blessed and owned by you. And so, encourage, we pray, those who lead up all of these activities and meetings.

[9 : 08] We pray that you bless them from the meetings of the youngest right through to the over 55s. We encourage, Lord, as we seek your encouragement to continue to look to you for your blessing through these things and upon these things.

We ask especially, again, that you'd bless our children, our young people. And we ask that you would further establish them in the knowledge of your name and in your salvation. Lord, we pray this for them.

We know that it is above everything else that we could ask for them and anything else that they could value and know, that they would know the Lord Jesus for themselves, that they would know the treasure of his salvation, that they would come, Lord, to rejoice in him as their Redeemer and as their Lord.

And we pray, Lord, for all the work that goes on to bring that great message of the gospel to them. And we ask that you would continue to bless them. Bless the world in which we live, our own nation and all the other nations of the earth.

Lord, it is so evident to us that it is a world in turmoil, a world that shows all the evidence of its fallenness and sinfulness and a typhathy to God, a world that departs so much from your ways, not only into other religions and other ways of life that cannot ever bring us salvation and satisfaction, but a world that is so largely and sadly set on violence and war, and a world that is, Lord, so much given to uphold the things that we should despise and despise the things that we should uphold.

[10 : 52] Forgive us, we pray, for the way in which we are continually in a departure from you as a nation, as a people. But, Lord, we ask that you would bless your church, that you would bless all who witness to you through this generation.

We pray that you would encourage them, for they meet with much, Lord, of opposition and discouragement, and we do pray that you would continue to own and acknowledge the testimony of your people.

We pray that wherever that is set forth, whether it be in church meetings or places of work or other gatherings, Lord, we pray even in terms of private conversation, we pray that your blessing will always accompany what we seek to do in expressing our faith in Christ and our hope and

confidence in him.

Bless tonight those who mourn the passing of loved ones. We pray for them again and continue to bear them in your presence, O Lord. Bless to those who are ill, those who are seriously ill, those laid aside in hospital, in the hospice, in care homes or at home.

O Lord, bless, we pray, each and all of these circumstances to those involved and to their families. And continue to guide us, Lord, in that way of your truth.

[12:10] And in all of this, we do confess our sins, seeking your cleansing and acceptance of us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise.

We're singing this time from Psalm 36. This time in Sing Psalm, Psalm 36, verses 5 to 10. The tune is Torwood. Your steadfast love is great, O Lord.

It reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky. Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep. Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast. You keep, Dunesvah, verse 10, to those who know you as their God, your steadfast love impart. Maintain your righteousness to those of pure and upright heart.

So these verses, your steadfast love is great, O Lord. Amen. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky.

[13:43] Your righteousness is very great, by mountains high and steep.

Your justice is like ocean depths, O plan and beast you be.

How precious is your steadfast love, What of it, dense it brings, O higher love, more on your queous kinda suprest, of pure imagines.

O fashion nights In your house and drink From streams of pure delight For with you is the source of life In your light we see light To those who know you are, dear God Your steadfast love impart Maintain your righteousness To those of pure and upright

Let's turn now to read God's Word. Our reading this evening is from the book of the Revelation of John, the last book of the Bible, and chapter 7.

[16:03] And we're going to read from the beginning through to the end of the chapter. So Revelation chapter 7 from the beginning.

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on the earth or sea or against any tree.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun with the seal of the living God. And he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

And I heard the number of the sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel. Twelve thousand from the tribe of Judah were sealed, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, and twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

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, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

[17:53] And all the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom, and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come? I said to him, Sir, you know. 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. 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 any more. 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.

Amen. And again, may God follow with his blessing our reading of his own precious word. Let's sing once again this time in Psalm 107. Psalm 107 in the Scottish Psalter, Verse 1-9 And the tune this time is Newington Praise God, for he is good, for still his mercies lasting be.

[19 : 31] Let God's redeemed say so, whom he from the enemies handed free, and gathered them out of the lands from north, south, east, and west. They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest.

For thirst and hunger in them faints their soul, when straight them pressed they cry unto the Lord, and he them frees from their distress. Them also in a way to walk, that right is he did guide, that they might to a city go, wherein they might abide.

And so on down as far as verse 9, Praise God, for he is good. Praise God, for he is good, for still his mercies lasting be.

Let God's redeemed say so, whom he from the enemies handed free, and gather them out of the lands, from north, south, east, and west.

They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest.

[21 : 13] For thirst and hunger in them faints, their soul rents, their soul rents, their soul rents, their soul rents, they cry unto the Lord, and he, and peace of their distress.

them also in a way to walk, that right is he did guide, that they might to a city go, wherein they might abide.

O that men to the Lord would give, praise for his goodness then, and for his works of wonder done, and to the sons of men.

For he the soul and longing is, that fully satisfy, with goodness in a hungry soul, that filled abundantly.

Let's turn together now to Revelation chapter 7, and especially the second half of that chapter, from verse 9, particularly verses 13, through to the end of the chapter.

[23 : 27] This is really the apex, or the terminus, of the gathered church. We've been looking at some aspects of the gathered church, and some of the features the Bible tells us are important in terms of our thinking of the church as the gathered people of God, not just gathered in terms of gathered for worship, as we are tonight, but other aspects of the way in which God's people are gathered or united together, as he himself gathers them together into the body of being his people.

But this is really the church gathered in glory. This will be our final study, this time on this short series of the gathered church. The church gathered in glory.

On earth, we have the church in an admixed form. The church gathered on earth is always comprised of people who are saved and people who are not saved.

And the church in the widest sense of it, and that has been the case all the way through, from the Old Testament days right through to our own age as well. But in this gathered church in glory, there are no one saved.

They are all redeemed people of God, enjoying the salvation that God has procured for them through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 54] And you'll notice it says that when the elder actually addressed, one of the elders addressed him who they were, and I said to him, Sir, you know, in other words, John himself at this position was unwilling or unable to say who exactly they were, but he knew that this elder who spoke with him from heaven, this one in this wonderful scene that he sees here before him, he said, these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Now, there's a lot of speculation over the great tribulation down through the years. Some people have said and continue to say that that is a specific time in the history of the world or in the history of the church, that it refers to a specific time of tribulation as part of the end times.

But it's better, I think, to take this reference, the great tribulation, to be a reference to the sum total of the tribulations of God's people down through the ages of the church.

And that as this is bringing us to the final state of the church and the final state which here in chapter 7 anticipates what you later have in the final two chapters of Revelation.

Revelation is difficult in some ways to work out just where the pauses are, and it seems that we can take it as we are tonight, taking it that it reaches this point, and then it resumes some of the teaching before reaching again on account of the final state of things in chapters 21 and 22.

[26 : 37] Well, be that as it may, we're taking that this as a description of the church in glory, and that John is given to see some wonderful aspects of God's people together in glory.

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. Down through the whole of history, the tribulation that has affected the church in different degrees and different ways from year to year, from century to century, as far as this scene is concerned, that's in the past.

And they are coming out of that great tribulation as they enter into the final state of heaven. We could take it that this, in fact, is a pre-resurrection state as well, but whatever we take it, whether it's pre-resurrection or following the resurrection and the final glory, the principles of it really, in a sense, are the same because he's describing the conditions, describing the state in which they're found, and describing some of the features of that gathered church here in glory, as we're calling it. Well, there are two things that arise from this part of the chapter. First of all, we can look from verses 14, from verse 13, really, but 14 especially, to the end of the chapter, verses 14 to 15 especially, at the qualification for life in heaven.

The qualification for life in heaven. And then from verse 16 to 17, to the end of the chapter, the quality of life in heaven.

[28 : 19] Because you'll see that the word therefore connects very closely to what's in the previous verse regarding the washing of their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb.

That's an aspect of the way that God brings them to be qualified to be in heaven, to enter into the state of glory, of salvation in heaven. And then the word for in verse 17 is itself intimately connected with what he calls, what he says there in verse 16, which talks about their peace and talks about the way in which none of the things of this tribulation, of this life, that the experience will evermore enter into their experience.

Why? For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and so on. So the qualification then for life in heaven. What are the qualifications?

What is this qualification made up of? What is it comprised of? Well, two things. There is on the one hand purity and on the other hand there is victory. You can see here that they are people who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Now, of course, that presupposes their need of cleansing or their need of being cleansed. It presupposes that they were in need of washing. It presupposes that they had something about them that did not fit them for life in heaven, that did not fit them for being in the presence of God as they are here.

[29 : 48] And that, of course, is our sinfulness and the defilement of our sinfulness. One of the features of our sinfulness, as the Bible often describes, it is that we are polluted as sinners in the presence of God.

Sin has left us defiled and the defilement of sin needs to be washed away and that's why Jesus died. So that, among other things, we would be washed from our sins.

By the death he died or through the death he died. And that's the picture that you have, that's the point that you have here with regard to purity. It presupposes that they themselves are polluted, defiled, guilty, and so on.

And it reminds us that we are actually saved from all of that. We are saved from what we are in our natural state, in our sinful state. Salvation is salvation from before.

It's salvation to. It's salvation from our lostness, from our sinfulness, from our defilement, from our guilt, as well as being salvation into the opposite of all of these.

[30 : 53] Salvation into justification and forgiveness and peace with God and everything else the Bible mentions. And these two sides of it are always important to hold together.

You can only appreciate, or begin to appreciate, the wonder of this salvation and the wonder of this peace, the wonder of this cleansing, the wonder of this washing from our sins when we really come to grips with what sin is.

And when we accept the Bible's definition of sin and descriptions of sin, and when we take on board and take to heart that we are in need of being washed.

It's not talking about people who have actually made some great achievement. It's not talking about people of great natural ability. It's not talking about people who had made great progress morally in

their lives and were able to keep things pretty secure and pretty wholesome in their lives. Decent people. It's not talking about everyone who is a sinner and needs to be washed, and that's you and I. These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

[32 : 06] They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. You remember how Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, described things for the Corinthians. And of course, the Corinthian church was a church that had so much going on there that really was offensive to God.

and that was a departure from all the things that God himself had set out by way of purity of life and holiness of life. Well, in chapter 6, and this is what Paul said, in chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians, this is, and from verse 9, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Not very popular when you try and fit that into the world in which we're living as a description of the world as it undoubtedly is. But you see what he's saying? And such were some of you.

Not some of you are still like that, but he's saying such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

[33 : 32] You see, Paul is not sparing them the description of what they were. He describes the kind of lifestyles that they once lived in and set about in their lives. You were that, he says, but you're not that anymore.

In other words, here is the gospel giving hope to people who still have these kinds of lifestyles. And the only hope for us, whatever our lifestyle may be, and however decent and upright we may be in the world, we're still fallen, sinful, defiled sinners.

This is our hope, that there is washing for us, that there is in Jesus Christ for us, salvation from our sins. And that's why you find here the description in Revelation, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Sounds strange, doesn't it? Blood is usually something you regard as causing defilement or besmirching of clothes. But of course by in the blood of the Lamb, what he means here is of course the death of Jesus.

And it's through the death of Jesus that they have come to wash their robes and made them white in the provision that's in the death of Jesus. That's how their clothes were made white.

[34 : 56] And you do notice it's they have washed their robes. And that doesn't mean that we have the capacity to save ourselves, that we have the capacity to wash ourselves from our sins.

It is God who gives us the wherewithal, the ability to do that. We are washed because he brings us this salvation, because his Holy Spirit effects that salvation in us personally, in our experience. But the Bible always addresses not only our need but our responsibility. And we cannot just say, well, it's up to God really to wash us and if he doesn't wash us then we're going to remain unwashed forever.

Some people take that legalistic view that if we're going to be saved, we're going to be saved anyway, so what can I do about it? Well, you can come to God seeking his forgiveness, expressing and confessing your sins, your defilement, and seeking that he would wash you and that therefore you would be washed and wash your robes, wash your persons in the blood of the Lamb in the death of Jesus.

They are God's imperatives. They don't address our ability when it talks of our salvation. These imperatives that you have in the Bible, what are they?

[36 : 23] Well, there's these repent, believe, be washed. All of these imperatives address our responsibility to look to God to do what our power itself cannot achieve.

But you see, here's the wonderful thing. The provision is already made. In the Lord Jesus Christ, death for us. We don't have to set about washing ourselves by our own ability.

The means is already there. The fountain is there. The blood of Christ is available to us. And through faith, we come, in that sense, to wash ourselves in the death of Christ.

Christ. But you see, also, it's not just washed and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They have palm branches in their hands. You read of that earlier in the chapter.

They were there and from every nation, people, and languages, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. And when you read that, you are reminded of a very important feast or festival in the Old Testament.

[37 : 43] You'll find it described the likes of Leviticus chapter 3 from verse 39 onwards. A series there in that chapter of the feasts or the festivals of Israel. And this was the Feast of Booths, Feast of Tabernacles, if you use the old translation.

The people were celebrating for all of these days. They built booths out of palm branches for themselves as God had ordered them and instructed them and they celebrated.

It was a time of great joy, that week of joy. It's so interesting that that feast follows immediately from the previous one, the Feast of Atonement.

Where you find that atonement that God himself had required of the people and specified for the people. And in chapter 23 of Leviticus you find that Feast of Atonement mentioned, the shedding of blood, the sacrifice to deal with sin.

And then it's immediately followed by the festival or the Feast of Booths. The feast that celebrates not just the taking in of the harvest at that time of year, the harvest safely gathered in, but especially looking forward to the harvest of righteousness, the harvest that comes to the shedding of the blood of sacrifice, pointing forward to the death of Christ.

[39 : 04] And here you find this wonderful description of the church and glory, the church enjoying that state of glory. Here you find they are before God and serve him day and night in his temple.

temple. And the word temple there really means more specifically the holy of holies. And you know from the Old Testament onwards that the holy of holies was not accessible to the people themselves.

And in fact the only person that could go into the holy of holies once a year on the day of atonement was the high priest to make an atonement for the people as God had instructed him.

But now you see the holy of holies is open. They are in the presence of God. They have access in Christ to God's immediate presence.

And they stand in his presence and they serve him day and night in his temple. They are before the throne in God's presence. And the wonderful thing is that had the high priest himself gone into the holy of holies other than as God instructed he would have died.

[40 : 18] Had anybody else gone into the holy of holies but the high priest with the blood of atonement they would have died instantly. But here they are sheltered with his presence.

He who sits on the throne because the atonement that is in Christ's blood is their refuge. And that refuge is actually being exercised if you like in heaven because that's what God has created for them.

They are before the throne. They are in the presence of God. They have this as their refuge. They have their ultimate security. And their palm branches the scene with palm branches in their hands is not just a sign of celebration going back to the feast of booths.

It's also a sign of victory. Palm branches in their hands were a sign of being victorious. Of having this wonderful wonderful victory through what God had provided for them in sacrifice.

And there is the church gathered together. Palm branches in their hands as the vision goes. The church victorious. The church triumphing over death.

[41 : 36] The church gathered together. Remember it's gathered together. This is not just a host of individuals who have very little to do with each other. This is all of God's people individually yes but collectively and united together in Christ rejoicing in the salvation that he has procured for them.

Celebrating the fact that they are victorious in him. That's their qualification. They have washed their robes and made them white. They have been cleansed from their sin.

And they are victorious in Christ. They have overcome death in him. He has done it for them. And when they have embraced him by faith they share in that great victory that he has achieved.

Friends this is not wishful thinking. This is not something that's just drawn for us as if it was just a cartoon type of scene.

this is not something that you need to question whether or not it's really a scene of something that is true and lasting. It is.

[42 : 45] It is fact. It is reality. It's not wishful thinking. Whatever the world might say about it. Whatever unbelievers might say about it.

However much they might refuse to accept it altogether as reality. however much they might insist that when you die you die and there's nothing beyond it. You know from the Bible that that's not the case.

And you know from the Bible that it's the case that there is a hell as well as a heaven but here as in keeping with the whole run of salvation the overwhelming emphasis while by no means neglecting to emphasize the reality and the awfulness of hell it is especially concerned God and his truth to emphasize the wonder of heaven the wonder of salvation the triumph of redemption over sin and over death and over Satan and that's for the gathered church in heaven to enjoy forevermore and remember this as well this book was written mystique as though much of it is it was written to comfort to guide to console those who were facing severe adversities in this life for living as people of God living as Christians living as people who worshipped

Christ that's why you find in it references to the beast the dragon all of these representations of evil and of huge evil and of powerful evil but they don't have the last word the last word is with the lamb and with his followers and they overcame the beast and they overcame these powers by the blood of the lamb are you despondent tonight over the condition of the world to a degree I'm sure I am when you look out over the world and see its turmoil when you see its pains when you see the awfulness of war when you see the devastation of lives lost and children and young people and adults actually taken away so soon out of life through the ravages of war are you despondent yes you're sad of course you're sad we're all sad war is a terrible thing war itself is an awful thing oh that there were a world without wars the bible tells us there never will be till the end of time don't be despondent as if it's a world totally out of control maybe out of control as far as human beings are concerned but there is one that's holding the reins of the world and the book of history is in his hand as you see from chapter 5 the scroll was placed in the hand of the lamb who sits on the throne and he began to open the scroll what does that mean it means the unfolding of history it means that he's in charge of everything that happens it means that in his plan our present tiny slice of history with all its awful things is not outwith his purpose his plan his great control and so this book is for our comfort it's a book to assure us that Jesus is the king and as the king he holds the whole world in his hand the qualification for life in heaven purity and victory in Christ secondly and briefly the quality of life in heaven well when you go forward and see how this passage is very like the final chapters of the bible verses chapter 21 verse 4 where he says he will wipe away every tear from their eyes death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away chapter 22 verse 3 same idea no longer will it be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the lamb will be in it and his servants will serve him they will see his face his name will be in their foreheads and night will be no more they need no light of lamp or sun for the

Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever isn't it wonderful how often the bible describes heaven by telling us things that are not there because we cannot take in in this life if God was to try and describe for us what is there more than he describes it in the bible because we're on this side of death this side of time this side of perfection how could we possibly take all that in even though we know it's real no God tells us very often this is what heaven is like there is no pain there is no death there is no suffering there is no sorrow there's none of those things that mark tribulation these are all gone they're all behind heaven is the absence of these heaven is the opposite of these heaven is the fullness of everything that's different to these it's beyond sufferings beyond pains beyond sorrows beyond partings beyond bereavements all of these things are no more they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat you see he's saying here there's also an abundance of life they serve

[48 : 34] God day and night in his temple we could go into that a bit more but just look at it in passing there's work and there's worship together what does that remind you of it reminds you of God in the beginning creating mankind and giving Adam to till the garden to work the garden of Eden until he fell and was driven out of it it was always God's intention that man should work and that he should worship at the same time and of course all of that has been marred by sin spoiled by sin the relationship between work and worship is so defiled and so defective but not in heaven you see it's come back to what it should be what it was always meant to be that his servants shall serve him they serve him day and night in his temple there is an activity for them to engage in and along with the activity there is worship the activity of worship itself and they never tire and there is never an interruption nothing breaks in to spoil the sequence of their activity in heaven and their worship of God and they are lovingly shepherded that's one of the features of the quality of heaven as well

you can see what it says here the lamb who is in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water isn't that a wonderful thing that the lamb who died on the cross is the same lamb the same person who is now pastoring his people in heaven it's a picture here of that wonderful combination of the king of heaven also being a pastor and a pastor in a way that none of us can possibly match he is the pastor par excellence you know that pastoring all of you who know him as your savior know of his hand pastoring your life in this world through his word through his spirit bringing you comfort leading you on giving you guidance strengthening you confirming you but in heaven it's constant perfect pastoring in a way that we don't know of in this life and of course there is as we saw the lamb in the midst of the throne significant that it's a lamb that's mentioned there is atonement in the sense of its ongoing power and protective care of

God's people the atonement that is now finished that Christ has rendered by his death on the cross but it's still there a feature in himself because he's there that atonement that he completed that sacrifice of himself is a feature in heaven because there's a perfect understanding on the part of the gathered church that this is the basis of their salvation and they sing the praises of the lamb and the redemption they have by his blood and he leads them to springs of living water see what you have here in chapter 21 as we mentioned in verse 6 especially where you find I am the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment or freely one of the great features mentioned about heaven is that all our needs are met perfectly and constantly without fail of course

God meets all our needs anyway in this life but we haven't got that perfect state of mind or of body and soul where we are able to enjoy and exercise the capacity God has given us so as to enjoy that salvation to the full but we will in heaven in the pastoring guidance and leading of the shepherd he will lead them and guide them to springs of living water ever fresh never old never ceasing never needing replaced never needing replenished never needing additives constant flowing freshment refreshment from the streams of life that are in Jesus that are flowing constantly to God's people in heaven the gathered church is constantly being refreshed and will forevermore be refreshed from the water of life that's in Christ himself and flows from the throne of God total satisfaction all our needs met what does the catechism tell us in the first catechism that we learned most of us as children what is the chief end of man man's chief end is to glorify

God and to enjoy him forever not just to glorify him but to enjoy him forever how are we going to enjoy him only by being freed from our sins washed from our sins brought to know him in Christ brought into heaven in Christ enjoying him there without interruption in these wonderful springs of living water this life that Christ gives that go on forevermore and comfort us as it says in the final verses God will wipe away every tear from their eyes that's in many ways a picture more of a mother than a father because you know what it's like I'm sure we've been there or seen our children or grandchildren in a position where they've just woken up from a nightmare something that's whatever has caused the nightmare but they wake up and they're upset and they're crying and they're startled and they come and mother usually comes and reassures her and says no it's alright I'm here there's nothing wrong it's fine and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes like the mother that wipes away the tears of the nightmare the child has just been through that great tribulation is over the tears are done

God himself is the great comforter and these streams of living water these springs of living water they contain that element of comfort for all eternity not just to offset the discomfort the tragedies the bereavements the sorrows you've had in this life but to actually rise above them to outdo them if you like God will wipe away every tear from their eyes heaven is rest comfort comfort it's all that this world cannot be it's Jesus Christ and all that he is to his people pastoring them with comfort with reassurance with ongoing flow of life which will never end and that's the church together the Lord says in chapter 14 it's true of us all individually as well isn't it we find these words to be very precious for us chapter 14 verse 13

[56 : 48] I heard a voice from heaven saying write this blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on blessed indeed says the spirit that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow them blessed indeed the gathered church in heaven the gathered church in glory as John Logan the hymn writer from the 1700s put it a man who was a minister in the church of Scotland South Leith Leith in Scotland a hymn that's usually referred to as the comfort take comfort Christians but it ends like this they're well known words I'm sure together to their father's house together to their father's house with joyful hearts they go and dwell forever with the Lord beyond the reach of woe a

few short years of evil past we reach the happy shore where death divided friends at last shall meet to part no more the gathered church gathered by God glorified by God enjoying

God in fellowship with God where are your hopes tonight will you be part of that gathering and if you're saying yes on what basis are you saying yes I hope you're not saying no nobody in here wants to miss out on heaven nobody wants you to be short of it but here is the qualification that you wash your life in the death of Christ that's your qualification and that you come at last with God's people to be gathered beyond suffering and in an abundance of life gathered together in glory forever may God bless these thoughts let's pray Lord our gracious God we give thanks that in your truth you bring to us these great realities that lie beyond this present world this present life but we give thanks that they are true for you have said so they are true because the

Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again to bring them to us freely in the gospel Lord we thank you tonight for heaven we thank you for all that it is beyond our very reckoning we thank you for all that has gone towards creating it for your people oh bless us we pray as we hear the gospel as we know the gospel as we treasure the gospel make us more than gospel hearers Lord make us to be a gospel receivers to in such a way that would ourselves come to place our trust and confidence in you daily and so be able to say I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have deposited with him against that day hear us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen our final psalm this evening is psalm 23 these well known words of psalm 23 we're singing the whole of the psalm in the

Scottish Psalter I'm singing to the tune St. Columba the Lord's my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by well I need hardly remind you of the nature of this psalm speaking about God the pastor of his people and finishing by that reference to God's house as a dwelling place forevermore we'll sing to these verses to the tune St.

Columba the Lord's my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie and clouds to screen he leadeth me that quiet waters by my soul he doth restore again and need to walk that way within the paths of righteousness in for his own his name has said

[62 : 37] O'er the work with thee and Thyromf Rieseth with thee to trust?

In the love of us furnish it, in presence of my foes, My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overdoeth.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me, And in God's hands forevermore.

My dwelling place shall be. After the benediction I'll go to the main door.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen.

[64 : 29] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.