

Thankful Worship

Rev 7:9-17

SS Lesson for 05/15/2011

Devotional Scripture: Ps 96:1-13

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson detail and outline came from a previous SS Lesson dated 04/29/2007. This week's lesson examines **Thankful Worship**. The **study's aim** is to show that true worship comes from a heart that abounds in thanksgiving. The **study's application** is to know that when we are truly thankful to God, it will be easy for us to worship Him.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Stain Removal

Have you ever noticed how many products and how-to guides there are that deal with the removal of stains? Typing “stain removal” or “stain remover” into an Internet search engine will yield several hundred thousand hits! Stains ruin things. Faced with the choice of either replacing the ruined item or attempting to remove the stain, it's almost always more economical to do the latter. Thus stain removal has become big business.

Stain removal is also God's business. Sin causes unholy stains on our souls. Christ gave his life for his church so “To present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27). God does not treat us as something to be discarded automatically because we bear the stain of sin. He wants to remove the stain, and the cross of Christ is his tool for doing so. The final result of God's stain removal efforts is the subject of today's lesson.

Lesson Background

A lot happens between Revelation 4 (last week's lesson) and Revelation 7 (this week's study). Chapter 5 continues the theme of worship in Heaven, even though the opening of the 7 seals of judgment is imminent. The angels, the living creatures, and the 24 elders all participate in worship of God. Chapter 6 then describes the opening of the first 6 seals of judgment. When a seal is broken in Revelation 6, various symbolic things happen. The opening of the first seal is accompanied by the appearance of a white horse, which represents the lust for conquest; a good example of this is the Roman Empire (6:1, 2). The opening of the second seal is accompanied by the appearance of a red horse, which symbolizes war; this is both the ancient and modern plague of humanity (6:3, 4). The opening of the third seal is accompanied by the appearance of a black horse, which stands for famine; this is a usual consequence of war (6:5, 6). The opening of the fourth seal is accompanied by the appearance of a pale horse, which denotes death; this is the ultimate result of war (6:7, 8).

The opening of the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9–11) is accompanied by a question from the people of God: “How long, Sovereign Lord?” (6:10). The answer is that they must “wait a little longer” (6:11). While they wait, their confidence is found in the way they address God: “Sovereign Lord, holy and true” (6:10). When the sixth seal is opened, the events that unfold are such that people attempt to hide from the wrath of God (6:15–17). The opening of the seventh seal, which introduces God's final judgment on the wicked and unbelieving, is delayed until Revelation 8:1. Thus chapter 7, today's study, functions as an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. As we read of God's stern judgment that manifests itself with the opening of the seven seals, we may wonder, “What about the people of God?” or, as John notes the wicked saying in the last phrase of 6:17, “Who can stand?” The interlude of chapter 7 provides the answer: it is God's people who can stand!

In the first eight verses of chapter 7, we see that God seals 144,000 of his people to protect them from the tribulations that the first 6 seals inaugurated. The number 144,000 is not to be taken literally, as if Heaven were run by census takers. The number 12, which occurs 35 times in Revelation, is an important number relating to God's people. (See the discussion of the 24 elders in Lesson 10.) The number 144,000, or 12 times 12,000, refers to the ultimate, multiplied people of God. These are pictured as coming from the nation of Israel, but they are not alone.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Thanksgiving is an integral part of worship. In fact, worship is impossible unless one has a thankful heart. A person who fancies himself to be self-sufficient will see no need for either thanksgiving or worship, for he thinks he has earned and deserves all the blessings he enjoys. When tracing the downward spiral of sinful men, Paul wrote that when they knew God, "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful" (Rom. 1:21). This was the first step into idolatry and corruption. Thanksgiving is the saints' appreciation for the God who created a good world and provides for all His creatures. It is a thread that runs through the Bible in the saints' prayers, Israel's offerings and festivals, the book of Psalms, Jesus' example, and the apostles' exhortations. It is the proper attitude of Christians because everything they receive, including their salvation, is a gift of God's grace. Even suffering and hardship are proper occasions for thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is also part of worship in heaven. They acknowledge divine grace as the source of all they are and have. When was the last time you were in the midst of a large crowd? It may be you were at a football game, or maybe you were caught in the middle of a riot! Whatever the occasion, it is possible that there was hardly any room to move about. There were hundreds of people all around you, and you were hedged in on every side. Everyone was there for a common purpose. In our text this week, John described a huge multitude, all praising God with gratitude. Is there a connection between thankfulness and worship? Our lesson this week answers this question for us. We continue looking at worship from the Apostle John's perspective.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Thankful Acknowledging of Jesus (Rev 7:9-12)

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Acknowledgement from the multitude (9-10)

Acknowledgement by bowing down before God (Ps 22:27)

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

Acknowledgement by many people coming to the mountain of God (Isa 2:3)

3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Acknowledgement by inhabitants of many cities coming to entreat God (Zech 8:20-22)

20 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, 21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' 22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him."

Acknowledgement by Gentiles singing praises (Rom 15:8-11)

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." 10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

Commentary about the palm in their hands (from Barnes' Notes)

[And palms in their hands] Emblems of victory. Branches of the palm-tree were carried by the victors in the athletic contests of Greece and Rome, and in triumphal processions. See the notes on Matt 21:8. The palm-tree-straight, elevated, majestic-was an appropriate emblem of triumph. The portion of it which was borne in victory was the long leaf which shoots out from the top of the tree. Compare the notes on Isa 3:26. See Eschenberg, Manual of Class. Literally, p. 243, and Lev 23:40: "And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees," etc. So in the Saviour's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-13) - "On the next day much people took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna."

Acknowledgement from the angels (11-12)

Acknowledgement from the angels who are present at the assembly (Heb 12:22)

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,

Acknowledgement from the angels who obey God's word (Ps 103:20-21)

Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. 21 Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.

Acknowledgement from the angels singing about the worthiness of Jesus (Rev 5:11-12)

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Acknowledgement from the angels whom God commanded to worship Jesus (Heb 1:6)

6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

Thankful For The Blood (Rev 7:13-17)

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 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 dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Symbols (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

A white robe is the customary baptismal garb in many churches. The color white has long symbolized purity. One of the grim ironies of life is how symbols of goodness and holiness have been misappropriated by the forces of evil. An example is how white robes became a symbol of virulent racism. After America's

Civil War, men dressed in white robes and wearing white hoods brought a reign of terror on African-American citizens. Such ideology continues to have influence even in the early twenty-first century. How ghastly it is that some members of such organizations even thought of themselves as “good Christians.” Some even were ministers! In today’s text John sees a multitude of God’s people dressed in white standing before his throne. Their robes are a symbol of the righteousness they had found in Christ; their robes are not cloaks for evil deeds and attitudes. Can you think of other ways in which holy symbols are misappropriated to disguise sin?

Washed in the Blood (13-14)

Commentary on Rev 7:14 from Barnes Notes

The word rendered "tribulation" - thlipsis - is a word of general character, meaning "affliction," though perhaps there is here an allusion to persecution. The sense, however, would be better expressed by the phrase great trials. The object seems to have been to set before the mind of the apostle a view of those who had suffered much, and who by their sufferings had been sanctified and prepared for heaven, in order to encourage those who might be yet called to suffer. In reference to their robes being washed in the blood of the Lamb, there is some incongruity in saying that they had made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and the meaning therefore must be, that they had cleansed or purified them in that blood. Under the ancient ritual, various things about the sanctuary were cleansed from ceremonial defilement by the sprinkling of blood on them—the blood of sacrifice. In accordance with that usage, the blood of the Lamb-of the Lord Jesus-is said to cleanse and purify. John sees a great company with white robes. The means by which it is said they became white or pure is the blood of the Lamb. It is not said that they were made white as the result of their sufferings or their afflictions but by the blood of the Lamb. The course of thought here is such that it would be natural to suppose that, if at any time the great deeds or the sufferings of the saints could contribute to the fact that they will wear white robes in heaven, this is an occasion on which there might be such a reference. But there is no allusion to that. It is not by their own sufferings and trials, their persecutions and sorrows, that they are made holy, but by the blood of the Lamb that had been shed for sinners. This reference to the blood of the Lamb is one of the incidental proofs that occur so frequently in the Scriptures of the reality of the atonement. It could be only in allusion to that, and with an implied belief in that, that the blood of the Lamb could be referred to as cleansing the robes of the saints in heaven. If he sheds his blood merely as other people have done; if he died only as a martyr, what propriety would there have been in referring to his blood more than to the blood of any other martyr? And what influence could the blood of any martyr have in cleansing the robes of the saints in heaven? The fact is, that if that were all, such language would be unmeaning. It is never used except in connection with the blood of Christ; and the language of the Bible everywhere is such as would be employed on the supposition that he shed his blood to make expiation for sin, and on no other supposition. On the general meaning of the language used here, and the sentiment expressed, see the notes on Heb 9:14 and 1 John 1:7.

Commentary on Rev 7:14 from Tony Garland

the ones who come out

ἔρχόμενοι [erchomenoi] , present participle. They are continually coming out—probably the result of ongoing persecution resulting in martyrdom, although the text does not explicitly indicate martyrdom. “Present middle participle with the idea of continued repetition. ‘The martyrs are still arriving from the scene of the great tribulation.’ ”² “Therefore the Rapture of the church is not in view in this verse, since it is a single, instantaneous, and sudden event (cf. 1Cor. 15:51-52).”³

the great tribulation

Literally, the tribulation, the great. “ ‘The tribulation,’ points to a definite prophetic period, and not simply to tribulation in general in which all saints shared. ‘The great tribulation’ cannot be the general troubles that affect God’s people in all ages. The insertion of the definite article marks its speciality.”⁴ This is the unique time of intense tribulation which Jesus predicted (Matt. 24:21). During this time, multitudes will die; both unbelievers in judgment and believers through

martyrdom and harsh conditions (as these, Rev. 14:13). “And unless those days were shorted, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matt. 24:22). This is the “hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 3:10). This time of trouble will be especially difficult for the Jewish nation (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1, 7; Matt. 24:16-20). Yet even this Great Tribulation cannot separate the faithful from the love of Christ, for they are overcomers (Rom. 8:35-39).

As we have discussed elsewhere, the Church is not appointed to God’s wrath and is exempted from this “hour or trial which God brings upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 3:10). These believers are those who come to faith after the rapture of the Church.

It is interesting to note the accuracy which attends predictions made by those who take Scripture at face value. Walter Scott (1796-1861), writing well in advance of the establishment of Israel in 1948, says of this verse: “ ‘The great tribulation’ is yet future. **It pre-supposes the Jewish nation restored to Palestine in unbelief**, to serve Gentile political ends, and brought there by the active intervention of a great maritime power (Isa. 18).” [emphasis added]⁵ Since 1948, Scott’s words, which reflect God’s Word, have come to pass.

washed their robes

NU has “freed” (λύσαντι [lysanti]) whereas MT has “washed” (λούσαντι [lousanti]) - a difference of a single Greek letter. Scripture describes both as being true of the believer who has been set free (Matt. 20:28; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; 1Ti. 2:6; Heb. 9:12; 1Pe 1:18; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4) and washed, a picture of spiritual cleansing (Ps. 51:4; Isa. 1:16-18; Eze. 36:25; Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 3:5; Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 2Pe. 1:9). The imagery of the immediate passage, in His own blood , argues for the latter as does internal evidence elsewhere in the book (Rev. 7:14).

Whereas loved us is in the present tense, washed us is in the aorist tense. The provision for our redemption, His death on the cross which washes away all our sin both past and future, is accomplished and its full merits are applied in full the moment we believe. Yet He continually loves us.

A bloodless gospel is an ineffectual gospel. For it is by the spilling of blood that God has chosen to atone for sin (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22).

Why did God choose blood for this purpose? Ultimately, we may never know, for the “secret things belong to the LORD our God” (Deu. 29:29). Scripture reveals that the use of blood for atonement is related to its life-giving qualities (Gen. 9:4). The “life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11). “Life” in this verse is Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ [nephesh] , the same term which is translated “soul” where Scripture records the once-for-all atonement made by Isaiah’s Suffering Servant: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin” [emphasis added] (Isa. 53:10). By His blood atonement, Jesus was prophesied to “sprinkle many nations” (Isa. 52:15), thus fulfilling the many OT types pointing to Him.

It was by blood sacrifice that the first man and woman were covered in response to their sin (Gen. 3:21). It was by blood sacrifice that the first men were to approach God (Gen. 4:4). It was by a blood sacrifice that God established His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:9-21). It was by blood placed on the door posts and lintel that the Jews were “covered” from the destroyer Who passed over Egypt taking the firstborn of each family (Exodus. 12:23). It was by the sprinkling of blood that the Mosaic Law was ratified between God and the Israelites (Exodus. 24:8). Ever since the bloodless offering of Cain (Gen. 4:3-5), man has attempted to approach God by some other means than that which God Himself has established. These would try to circumvent the single path which God requires: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’ ” (John 14:6)

This necessity of blood offering is offensive to man, and we believe intentionally so. For it is a messy business and continual reminder of man's lack of righteousness (Rom. 3:23) and his desperate need of the "righteousness of God," a righteousness which is freely given rather than earned (Rom. 3:21-26; 2Cor. 5:21; Php. 3:9). Yet many prefer to continue in the way of religion rather than relationship, offering up their own puny works in a vain attempt to justify themselves before a perfect and Holy God (Rom. 10:3). Religion preserves our pride, whereas relationship requires us to cast it aside.

made them white

Ἐλευκάναν [eleukanan] , used to describe making blood-red stains due to sin become white (Isa. 1:18).⁶ It may picture not only their salvation (washing away their sins), but also the exchange of garments bloodied by their persecution on earth for clean garments from God.

in the blood of the Lamb

The garments of many were no doubt stained with their own blood. Still, it is the blood of the Lamb which is required for salvation. Their blood, while precious to God (Ps. 116:15) and spilled as a testimony to God, lacks any redemptive power. See commentary on Revelation 1:5 and Revelation 5:9.

Notes

2 A. T. Robertson, Robertson's Word Pictures in Six Volumes (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group, 2003), Rev. 7:14.

3 John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), Rev. 7:14.

4 Walter Scott, Exposition of The Revelation (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 163.

5 Scott, Exposition of The Revelation, 163.

6 Frederick William Danker, and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 472.

Washed in the blood to make them holy (Heb 13:12)

12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Washed in the blood for redemption (1 Peter 1:17-19)

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

We were purchased by the blood that is used for the washing (Rev 5:9)

9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Washed in the blood to overcome Satan, the accuser (Rev 12:10-11)

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Washed in the blood for sanctification (1 Cor 6:11)

11 And that is what some of you were. 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.

Washed in the blood to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death (Heb 9:13-14)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Washed in the blood to obtain fellowship with God (1 John 1:7)

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Blood of the Lamb (15-17)

Commentary on Rev 7:17 from Tony Garland

the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne

Not only the Father dwells among them (Rev. 7:15), they will also be in intimate association with the Son who Himself is in the midst of the throne. Because of their faithful witness amidst chaos and intense persecution, they now enjoy the benefits which many others will not experience until the eternal state (Rev. 21:3; 22:3).

will shepherd them

In place of the worthless shepherd who feeds himself on the sheep (Zec. 11:15-17), they will be led by the True Shepherd out of Judah who was stricken on their behalf (Matt. 2:6; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; John 10:2-16). God, who scattered the sheep of Israel, will one day gather them again (Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Eze. 34:11-31; Mic. 5:4; Matt. 2:6).

living fountains of waters

He leads them to the still waters which restore the soul (Ps. 23:1-2). This is the living water which the same Shepherd promised the Samaritan woman (John 4:10-11) and which believers in the church age experience through the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39).¹ This water is available freely to all who thirst (Rev. 21:6). It is the river of life which will ultimately be found flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, watering the tree of life (Rev. 22:1-2). In the Millennial Kingdom, a fountain of living water will flow from Jerusalem and revive all that it touches (Eze. 47:12; Zec. 14:8).

wipe away every tear

Many of the tears they had shed were due to their experience of death—both of loved ones and themselves. But God has swallowed up death forever and promised to wipe away every tear (Isa. 25:8). In their joy, their sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isa. 35:10; 51:11). Even in the Millennial Kingdom, great joy will be experienced (Isa. 65:19). Ultimately, in the eternal state, there will be no more pain and the former things (e.g., sin and the curse) shall pass away and all cause for tears will be gone (Rev. 21:4).

Converts during the tribulation will have to face fierce and bestial persecution at the hands of their fellow-men, and also have to endure the natural tribulations which God will unleash on all mankind as a consequence of the sins of the human race. Yes, it will be possible to be saved during the tribulation, but it is infinitely better and imminently sensible to accept Jesus Christ as one's Savior now, before the tribulation. [emphasis added]²

Notes

¹ He Who is the Living Water thirsted in dying (John 19:28): “He who began His ministry by hungering (Matt. 4:3), ended it by thirsting (John 19:28). He who was the Rock whence Israel in

the desert was refreshed (1Cor. 10:4), and He who turned the water into wine (John 2:1-25), now thirsts.”—Graham W. Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995, 1948), 587.

2 Monty S. Mills, *Revelations: An Exegetical Study of the Revelation to John* (Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries, 1987), Rev. 7:17.

Blood of the Lamb that paid the guilt offering (Lev 14:25)

25 He shall slaughter the lamb for the guilt offering and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

Blood of the Lamb that takes away sin (John 1:29)

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Jesus is our Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7)

7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Why do we praise God? That’s an important question. Alongside it, we should also ask When do we praise God? The two questions actually are interrelated. The why question can be answered only in the context of answering the when question. It is easy to praise God when things are good in our lives, but it is a different matter when the storms of life arrive. When times are great, God is so good! When times are tough, when we are being hammered everywhere we turn, then it’s tempting to think that maybe God is not the God who is faithful. But God is always faithful. Thus we praise God continually, regardless of our circumstances or the season of life we find ourselves in. If we are honest with ourselves, then we will admit that our reasons for praising or not praising God often are linked to our circumstances. Often our focus is on ourselves, on our own limited outlook, and not on the nature and character of God. We may become tempted to compromise our faith when it seems that God is not listening and the prayer door to Heaven is bolted shut. We may question whether the Christian life is worth the cost when we find ourselves unemployed, persecuted for our belief in Christ, or suffering through a family breakup. Although the first century was a different time from cultural, political, and economic standpoints, at our core we are not much different from John’s original audience. Human nature doesn’t change. Our study of Revelation 4 (Lesson 10) taught us that we worship God because of his holiness and his sovereignty; Revelation 7:9–19 further teaches us that we find hope that God will lead us in victory through our trials. Thus we continually praise and worship him regardless of circumstances. Romans 8:28 tells us that God will work all things for the good of those who love him and are called to his purpose. The key is that we have a choice in how we respond when life goes awry. Believers are not immune to storms in life. Will we choose to face these times with God and his promises by our side?

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

In this week's text we get the privilege of looking in on another worship scene in heaven, compliments of the Apostle John. The prophetic context of the scene is important, and the identity of the worshipers is vital. In addition to the heavenly beings and elders, John described a group as "they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. :14). This group of worshipers is made up of the martyrs who will die for the faith during the Great Tribulation. They apparently are the result of one of the greatest evangelistic outreaches I since the world began, the witness

of the 144,000 Jewish believers who will spread the gospel during that time. There are several important things to notice about this worship gathering. The first is that this is such a large group. John described them as "a great multitude, which no man could number" (Rev. 7:9). There have been several times in history when there have been large responses to the gospel: Pentecost, the Reformation, and the Great Awakening in America. Faithful men and women of God continue to pray that there will be such an evangelistic fervor and numerical results in this generation. However, the soul harvest John described will outnumber them all. Second, notice that this is a group of martyrs. They worship God and flank Him for the honor of having lost their lives because of their faith. They do not question His purposes but are thankful for His providence. They will not ask for explanations but will rejoice. Only those who have been willing to give their very lives can understand thankful worship as these men, women, boys, and girls will. Their very response will acknowledge the sovereign justice and holiness of God in bringing judgment on the earth. Finally, notice they are from every tribe, language, and nation and will worship God corporately, unaware of their differences, oblivious to questions of race and distinction. They will represent the work of God throughout the world in bringing back together those who were separated by their languages at Babel (Gen. 11). True worship brings God's people together in thanksgiving and praise. True worship centers on Him. Throughout the history of the church, Satan has sought to divide believers over issues of worship, types of music, instruments, and styles. But someday the family of God will gather in worship, and the differences will not matter. Perhaps we will all be surprised at the style of worship that pours forth freely from God's family in that day. It will not matter if on earth one's worship music was the "Hallelujah Chorus" or "Kumbaya." In heaven we will join in singing praise to God the Father and His Son.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Christ's church includes all races and cultures; so there is no room for bigotry (Rev. 7:9)
2. The white robes of the multitude should remind us that our lives should always reflect God's holiness
3. The testimony that unifies the church focuses on God, Christ, and salvation (vs. 10)
4. One day we will join the celebration around God's throne (vs. 11-12)
5. Those washed in Christ's blood have suffering in this world but eternal triumph and blessing in the next (vs. 13-14)
6. As believers we can rejoice that we will bask eternally in the glory of God (vs. 15-17)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

As we continue to study the matter of worship, we see in this week's text that worship is connected with thankfulness. That is as it should be. Inherent in worship is gratitude for all that our great God has done.

Praise from a crowd (Rev. 7:9-10)

The vast multitude in heaven praises God here for one very important thing: salvation. As Christians, we know that salvation comes from God. We know that there is nothing we could ever do to gain salvation by ourselves. Yet how often do we praise God for this? It would be good for each of us to begin his day thanking God for the salvation He has so freely given. Another point we should focus on is that this crowd acknowledges that salvation comes from God and from "the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10). The Lamb is Christ (cf. John 1:29). The juxtaposition of these two terms shows that they are connected. And they should be. God the Father and God the Son are two Members of the Trinity.

Praise from angels (Rev. 7:11-12)

We know that the angels praise God, and we certainly expect that they would. Yet when we examine what they praise Him for, it is astounding. Seven characteristics are mentioned in verse 12. These are said to belong to God. Seven is the number of perfection, and certainly God is perfect. We know that He will always be worthy of every praise.

Praise from elders (Rev. 7:13-14)

No one knows for sure who these elders are, but the fact that there are twenty-four seems to relate them to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. The important point is that they are elders. They are important in God's kingdom. They have an important ministry in heaven. One of them introduces John to another group that is praising God.

Praise from triumphant saints (Rev. 7:15-17)

One of the elders told John that the believers here are a group of tribulation saints (vs. 14). These are men and women who were saved after enduring much hardship. They are washed in the same blood of the Lamb as you and I. There are some interesting observations that the elder makes to John about these believers. First, they will serve God day and night "in his temple" (Rev. 7:15). As we have noted in a previous lesson, a 24/7 schedule is hard for us to comprehend. But things are very different in heaven. The inhabitants there will not get hungry or thirsty or tired; so they do not have these concerns that we have. God will also "dwell among them" (Rev. 7:15); He will be a shelter to them. God will also be their sustenance. He will "feed them" (vs. 17). This phrase could be translated "the Lamb will shepherd them." That is quite a delicious irony: the Lamb is the Shepherd. Finally, God will "lead them unto living fountains of waters" (Rev. 7:17). That may not appear to fit with the fact that they will not be thirsty, but these waters give eternal life. We have so much to praise God for! And as we have seen, we are not alone. Every creature has much to praise God for. May we demonstrate praise to God each day of our lives. To use the words of Psalm 150:6, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord! Praise ye the Lord!"