

A Vast Multitude Can Stand (English)

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- [0 : 0 0] We have been ushered into the throne room of heaven. The door was open in chapter 4 and John was beckoned inside.
- And we have been taken along with him to see who is in control. Remember that the book of Revelation is to the benefit of Christians on earth struggling against the might of the pagan Roman Empire.
- And we have seen in the last few weeks that despite appearances on earth, God is enthroned in heaven. He is in control.
- And we ought to be encouraged to remain steadfast in Christian faith on earth, despite opposition. This vision of heaven is God-centered and it is praise-filled.
- And then we saw the drama of heaven begin. God's great and good purposes of this world are represented by the scroll in God's right hand.
- [1 : 0 4] But the initial tragedy of heaven was that none is worthy to open the scroll. God's purposes seem quartered because no one is worthy.
- But the praise of heaven reaches new heights when the lion, who looks like a lamb, appears. A slain lamb standing at God's right hand encapsulates the gospel.
- Jesus died, rose, and is at God's right hand in glory and will bring about the fulfillment of God's universal purposes. While on earth he looked weak and defeated, just a slain lamb, the reality is he reigns in glory from the same throne of God.
- And he is worthy of all praise and honor, unceasing for eternity. And God's purposes for the universe can be fulfilled, but only because of the death of Jesus.
- The praise of Jesus the Lamb in chapter 5, the living creatures and elders sing, in words we use at the beginning of the service.
- [2 : 0 9] You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered, and by your blood you ransomed for God, saints from every tribe and language and people and nation.
- His death was sufficient to ransom from sin any and every person. And so the Lamb begins unsealing the scroll, and the four horsemen of war and death come riding out.
- There is war, famine, pestilence, destruction, persecution, earthquakes, death. It is a terrifying picture, but it describes our world and the world of John's day.
- But the dimension that is made clear here in Revelation is that all the trials and tribulations of our world are under the command and control of Jesus. That's the message of encouragement for Christians facing pressures on earth.
- Jesus is in control. The sequence of six seals in the sixth chapter culminates in absolute terror. The earth seems to be convulsing as the sky literally falls in.
- [3 : 1 9] The great day of the wrath of the Lamb is approaching. The day of judgment has come. And who can stand on that day?

That's the question asked at the end of chapter six. And the implied answer is no one. No one is worthy. And no one can stand before Jesus the judge on their own merits on that great and final day.

Before the seventh and final seal is broken, there is an interlude. On its own, the sequence of destruction in chapter six may offer no encouragement to struggle Christians on earth.

But in the midst of that cosmic of people, John sees and hears angels protecting God's people. So in verse three of today's reading, do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees until we have marked the service of our God with a seal on their foreheads.

Who can stand on that great day of judgment? No one. But only by the merciful protection of Almighty God will anyone be safe on that day.

[4 : 29] Friends, do not presume that God's judgment is just a myth. Do not assume that on that day you'll be good enough to stand. Do not succumb to that Australian ideology, she'll be right.

Only those who are sealed, marked for protection from God's wrath, are those who are ransomed from sin by Jesus' death. Jesus' atoning death is where our confidence must lie.

And only then. Revelation 7 is a wonderful chapter of comfort and assurance. It is to strengthen we Christians on earth who are tempted to abandon the faith, or who are attracted to our world's gods, or whose love for God is becoming lukewarm, or who are tempted to drift in the face of triumphs.

Trust in the Lamb who was slain to ransom you from sin. Then John hears a number. The number of those seals is 144,000.

As is typical in Revelation, the number is symbolic. This type of writing, called apocalyptic, is deliberately symbolic. And that number suggests completeness.

[5 : 47] The point is, no one will be left out. That is, the complete number of God's people will be protected. Protected from wrath on the day of judgment.

This does not only apply to Jewish believers, even though the number comes from the 12 tribes of Israel. The New Testament is full of applying Jewish terms to non-Jewish Christians.

The Church is the Israel of God. And Christians, whether Gentile or not, are those in this complete number. Will God forget or forsake you on that day?

No. Will God overlook you on that day? No. When I lead tours to Israel, my great fear is to leave someone behind.

As those who have gone know, I spend all my time counting up however many people there are in the group. And I don't want to do what happened a few years ago when that couple was forgotten, left behind on the barrier reef, and die.

[6 : 49] This number that John hears encourages us to trust that God will not miss anyone who belongs to Him. And of that we can have great confidence. As that wonderful Psalm 46 says, Though the mountains fall into the sky, though nations in our broad, God is our refuge and strength.

So that ought to be our hope on earth because Jesus has died to ransom us. This is not a promise for freedom from problems or pain.

It is not a promise to escape trials and tribulations, but it is a sure and certain promise of ultimate and eternal protection in their needs. Thus, as this whole book is about, it is an exhortation to persevere, to endure patiently, not to give up faith.

Back in chapter 5, John hears someone say, Lion, and then he sees a lamb. Now John has heard a number, 144,000, and now he sees a multitude that no one can number.

Like the lion lamb, it's the same group of people but differently described. That it is a vast multitude also offers us encouragement. In chapter 5, we heard the lamb was slain to ransom people from every tribe and language and people and nation.

[8 : 18] And now John sees those who benefit from the lamb's death. It is a great multitude, as verse 9 says. There was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

And did you notice, they are standing. Who can stand? We thought at the end of chapter 6 that no one could stand. But in fact, a vast multitude stands. That they stand only because they are ransomed by the lamb's death.

They are sealed by God's angels. They are dressed in white robes given by God. This vast multitude fulfills God's ancient promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars of the sky.

That they come from every nation fulfills another of God's ancient promises to Abraham that all the world will be blessed through him. Here are God's ancient purposes and promises finding their eternal fulfillment and only because of the lamb, Jesus Christ.

Have you ever watched a crowd of people on TV or in a photo and tried to find yourself? I remember finding myself in a football crowd when I was in primary school on TV.

[9 : 40] Friends, you and I are here we are in this vast multitude if we are trusting Jesus' death for our sins. This crowd includes us and you find yourself there.

One of my greatest joys of Holy Trinity has been our ethnic diversity and you can see in this church it is a foreshadow to heaven as it is here in Revelation 7.

We come from Australia, China, England, South Africa, India, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, United States, New Zealand, Germany, France, Indonesia, Brunei, and others.

We are a foretaste of God's glory as heaven. After today, I will never see some of you again on earth. And I leave many of you facing various trials and pressures on your faith.

But with absolute confidence in Jesus by his grace and mercy, we will be together again here in this description in Revelation 7. On Thursday, I said goodbye to one of our old church members in a nursing home.

[10 : 49] She is dying. And I assured her we will meet again in this vast multitude. The same applies to us all. What a glory that will be.

We know that it will only be by God's mercy in Jesus and we will be there. That's why we'll sing the words of verse 10. Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb.

Because salvation is not our own doing. That's why those words will be sung in heaven. Same in verse 12. All the blessing and glory and so on belongs to God, not us.

And if it is not absolutely clear, John now is explicitly told. The end of verse 14. This crowd have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

TV adverts tell us how to get white clothes, washed them in a particular laundry detergent. But these white robes are washed in blood.

[11 : 48] For the blood of Jesus washes whiter than snow. It washes our sins away. And only by the blood of Jesus will any of us ever stand before the throne of God.

But only because of the blood of Jesus will a vast multitude stand there. How do we wash our robes in Jesus' blood? By persevering faith that trusts that Jesus' death takes away our sin.

Maybe you are not, in fact, a believer in Jesus Christ. Well, let me urge you today, my final day here, not to delay. Turn today to Jesus.

Confess your sin and trust in his ransoming, powerful blood. His blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me. Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach the eternal throne. And see here in these last verses the promise of protection.

[12 : 53] Not from hardship on earth, but eternally protected in God's presence. For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple.

And the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them, they'll hunger no more and thirst no more. The sun will not strike them nor any scorching heat. For the lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of the water of life and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

What a glorious picture of safety, provision, comfort and life. No more crying, only joy in the presence of God and of the lamb. It's amazing to think of such a small church at the end of the first century against the might of the Roman Empire.

and they are urged to trust that Jesus reigns supreme. They are urged to persevere in faith to their life's end. What about you?

No more do I have the responsibility as your shepherd under God. No more is it my responsibility to exhort you, pastor you, urge you to persevere in Christian trust and faith.

[14 : 09] Do not give up, drift, or yield to temptation or trial. Keep your eyes fixed on the glorious slain lamb at God's right hand.

In his hand is our eternal destiny. Press on and hold fast. Be faithful unto death. And though there will be great joy at being reunited together in this last multitude, our greater joy will be focused on the throne.

For Jesus is and will be our greatest joy. He will be the object of our unceasing praise. He will be the focus of our eternal hymns.

He will be the theme of our endless singing. When he comes our glorious king, all his ransomed home to bring, then anew this song will sing, hallelujah, what a savior.

Hail, redeemer, hail, for thou hast died for me. Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity. Amen.