

When We All Get to Heaven

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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We have been on a journey of faith together. We as a family of faith have been walking through the scripture typically one, sometimes two chapters a day, and we've purposefully planned that the last book of the Bible that we would address would be what we know as the book of Revelation. So we're almost to that proverbial finish line and today we're going to be in Revelation 7.

As you turn to Revelation 7, there's some of you that have asked me now that we're at the end of the Bible reading plan, what is next? Well, we are going to this next summer season roll into studying through a very particular book of the Bible and, yes, there will be a complementary Bible reading plan. Many of you said how grateful you are that we provide that for you. Many of you do your own independent study and that is great, but we want you to know that we're going to continue to provide a walking through the scriptures at a variety of paces.

But in Revelation 7, we get a picture of what it will look like one day when we all get to heaven. Now when we think about the book of Revelation, typically what we think about are those things that are apocalyptic, end times. We think of the famous seven seals, the vials, the trumpets, the mark of the beast, the antichrist, the two witnesses with fire breathing out of their mouths, Armageddon, the valley of Megiddo, all those things rightfully so. In fact, the overwhelming majority of what you and I know as the book of Revelation actually takes place on the earth, much of it the judgment of God of those who are on the earth, but today we're going to take a glimpse of what it looks like above. In fact, chapter 7 is one of the places in the book of Revelation that technically we call parenthetical. Now I know that's a big fancy word but what it simply means is out of the chronology thereof. As you're reading through all the judgments of God, as you're reading through all of the toil and the turmoil that is happening on earth in a variety of places, chapter 7 as well as 10 and 14, we discover that God kind of takes a step back and gives us kind of the behind-the-scenes. It's almost as if we need a breather of sorts, where we've been engrossed with so much activity we need just to take a pause, we need to take a deep breath and chapter 7 serves that purpose for us for we get a glimpse not into the judgments that are taking place on the earth but we get a glimpse of the scene in heaven.

Here in chapter 7, beginning in verse 9, we will read to the end of the chapter and see what it looks like "when we all get to heaven." It says,

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. 11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. 13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? 14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Now as we take a glimpse into the heavenly realm in the midst of a book of the Bible that is known for earthly judgment, I think it does us well or serves us well just to kind of look at this much from an investigative perspective, just ask kind of the critical questions that need to be asked so that we can get a complete picture of what lies before us.

Let's begin with the when, when does this, shall we say, passage take place? And I want to address this from two perspectives. I mentioned earlier that this is a parenthetical chapter, this is one of those sections in the book of Revelation where we're pulled out of the chronology of events, so to speak. In fact, if you go back to chapter 6, you have the beginning of the famous seven seal judgments. It begins with those famous horsemen of the apocalypse, but by the time you get to the end of chapter 6, there's only been six seals that have been broken. When you open up chapter 8, the seventh seal is opened. And so when you look at the timing of this passage, we find ourselves very specifically in a time period that not just the Bible but Jesus Christ himself in Matthew 24 called the great tribulation. In fact, in the gospel of Mark, he said this time period which lies ahead in the future will be worse than any time period since the creation of the creation. This is a significant time period that this is happening so in the midst of the chaos, we have this glimpse of the body, in the midst of the chaos, we have this glimpse into the heavenly realm.

But this passage is not just relegated to that time period that according to Daniel and Jeremiah is but seven years in length. In fact, we discover that everything we're going to

speaking about this morning is timeless. Notice that in this passage, you've got the elders that are represented, you've got the angels that are represented, you've got those who were actually slain for their faith during this very specific time frame. Why is that significant to us? Because when we get to what we know as heaven, there is no demarcation by the time and the age or the time or the place in which you were alive on planet earth. Those, the angelic beings who have been there from time beginning to you and I who have been there just but a few days, find themselves in a situation, in a place that is timeless.

Speaking of that place, let's talk about the where for a moment. Even the great songs that we've sung of our faith today talk about the great mansions of glory, the streets of gold. Jesus prophesied this in John 14, he said, "If it were not so, I would tell you for I go to prepare a place for you and when I come back, I will take you with me." Those famous mansions, those famous streets of gold, the imagery that you and I often associate with heaven is actually not a part of Revelation 7. Now don't be dismayed because all that imagery that we love to talk about, we love to sing about is actually found in the last two chapters of your Bible. Don't worry, it is coming because in chapter 21 it says, "I saw a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem for the former things were passed away." And what we know as those very, shall we say, visual aspects of our eternity are going to one day be a part of it but you don't hear of them in chapter 7. There's nobody that's going in and out of their mansion, there's no mention of streets of gold. In fact, one of the parallel passages of this back in chapters 4 and 5, there's the throne, there's the crystal sea, there's lightnings and thunders and noises, basically what we see when the Bible speaks of a believer in Jesus Christ as being absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, the scene is very similar to what we have here in chapter 7. There is this gathering around the throne room. There is this great worship service that we'll discuss in just a moment that is taking place. But all the dwelling place, the streets of gold, all that imagery actually comes at the latter part of your Bible with the new creation for all of eternity.

So we know that even though this is a specific time in history, it's a timeless message. We know that it is describing that which we as believers in Jesus Christ will experience the very moment we pass from this life. But it's the last three questions that are the most significant. Who's going to be there? What are they going to do? And why should it change our lives today?

So let's talk about the who. Go back to verse 9. You go back to verse 9 and it says, "And after this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." I want you to notice how the Bible quantifies this audience or this group of individuals. It said there will be those that no man could number. Back in Genesis 12 when the Lord called Abram to initiate that formal, shall we say, family line that would bring us eventually Jesus Christ the Messiah, he said, "Do you believe that though you and your wife are childless, you will have descendants that no man could number?" He said, "I believe." In Hebrews 12 when it speaks of the angelic beings it says they are so numerous that no man could number.

Why am I reemphasizing this? Don't try to put a number on this. Don't try to finalize it. It says it is so vast that nobody could number. In fact, it also says from all people, all kindred, all nations, and all tongues. Now those of you that may be guests with us today, just indulge me in somewhat of a rhetorical activity here. You do know what the Greek word for "all" means, right? It means all without exception. Oftentimes we think, well, heaven's gonna have them but not those others. Oftentimes we think, well, it'll be this group but not that group. It says that all nations, all people, all kindreds, and all tongues will be represented.

Now this may not be a good visual for you here in our culture, but some years ago I had the privilege of spending a significant time in Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, the population is a lot greater than here, it's more dense than it is here, and unlike our culture, their vehicles, their cars are a little bit smaller. Over there, what we would call an SUV is more of a Jeep, so to speak. Now you think about some of the vehicles that you drove up in this morning, many of them are designed to seat 7, 8, some of them 9 individuals. Most of the cars and the vehicles over there are designed to sit maybe 5 to 6 at the most. I don't remember a single trip that I took in what we know as an SUV, forget the rickshaws, the motorcycles and all the other entertaining activities, but just the vehicle, we had at least 11 and sometimes up to 14 or 15. Now you don't see it in our culture, I'm talking about guys hanging onto the side, riding the luggage rack, laying across laps. I mean, but one of the things that I discovered in Southeast Asia is it didn't matter if you were in a public bus, it didn't matter if you were in a tiny rickshaw, it didn't matter if you were in what we would call an SUV, if somebody needed to get from point A to point B and they stopped your vehicle, it didn't matter if there were guys hanging off the luggage rack, they always had this one statement to say, "There is always room for me."

Isn't that interesting? When you're the one who's in need of a ride, there's always room for you, right? You realize that when we talk about heaven, when we talk about eternity, based on verse 9 hear me clearly, there is room for you. There is room for you. I've met people throughout the years who say, "Well, if you knew my story, if you knew my background. I just don't think God has room for me." There is always room for you but here's the hitch, here's where we struggle. It's not based just on the fact that you desire it, that you want it, or it's something that you would find pleasing in your life. In fact, it's qualified, go down to verse 14. It says, "I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes," listen to this last statement, they have "made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Now you and I live in a culture today that prides itself on inclusivity and diversity. That's what we, we have departments of that within large organizations and companies and such. We've already addressed the fact that the Lord is very inclusive. He says all people, all tongues, all nations, anybody who wants to go can be there, however, the Lord is very exclusive in the means by which. Notice he says the blood of Jesus, this same Jesus in John 14 when speaking about those famous mansions said, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me." Just because you want to go to heaven doesn't mean you get to go to heaven. Just because that is your hope and your desire does not mean that that is your future. According to verse 14, the only way we get

the opportunity and the privilege of dwelling in a place the Bible calls heaven is through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Why is that critical? Because the Bible says without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. You see, the thing keeping us out of heaven is our sin problem, our rebellion toward God problem and, guess what? No amount of good deeds, works, religious endeavor, activity, giving, serving, no matter what it may be is going to solve that sin problem. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for our sins and three days later the resurrection of Jesus Christ that gives us the opportunity and the privilege to one day be a resident of a place that we collectively call heaven.

Now I know that that's not very "inclusive" talk but I've got news for you: truth is very exclusive. We live in a world today that no matter what the subject matter is, we want to propagate that the right answer is whatever you want it to be. The problem is that's a man manufactured concept and not a God-ordained idea. One day the Bible says in Matthew 7, that we appear before him and many people say, "Hey, I thought I got to come?" He says, "I never knew you." "But we did this and we did that and we practiced this." He says, "It's not what you did. I never knew you." So when we talk about heaven, this glorious place that we have all type of ideas about, please understand that anybody and everybody can have access to but you have to go through Jesus Christ alone.

Now the next question is a great question: what are we going to do? Now we have all these images that unfortunately, I think, are erroneous. I don't know who came up with the idea of sitting on a cloud playing a harp. I don't know who came up with that but that's the idea that we have but I want you to notice what it says in verse 12, actually back up to verse 11, they worshiped God. Now those of us who are non-musical, when we hear that phrase we think, "Okay, I hope somebody teaches me to sing when I get there because I've got nothing here." Now don't get me wrong, singing is a part of worship, in fact, chapter 5, verse 9, it says that we sing a new song when we're there, but I want you to notice the very first word in verse 12, after it says we worship the Lord, "saying," declaring, shouting. Yes, singing will be a part of it but notice what this worship is: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, might. Let me define what worship is in our lives. It's our response, our willing response to a self-revealing God. Now I want you to think about the words that are listed there: blessing, honor, thanksgiving, power, might. When we "all get to heaven," what is it that we're seeing? What is it that we're experiencing that would cause us to use those words?

Now think about that. Obviously when you see the Lord in his grandeur, in his glory, it might make you respond by saying glory or honor or thanksgiving, but last time I checked, when you use the word "power" or "might," it is a response to something that is incredible, something that is majestic. In fact, back in chapter 4, it talks about thunders and lightnings that are coming out before the crystal sea. I can't even imagine how great it's going to be, but think about it. If you've ever been in any kind of an event whether it's a sporting event or a large venue of any kind, when something happens in front of you that is just incredible, we have a tendency to respond, do we not? We shout back. We proclaim what we think of what we just saw. Notice what they say: mighty, power. This

idea of sitting on a cloud playing a harp may be part of the equation but for us to declare that's mighty God, that is powerful God, means that we have seen him do that in the heavenlies which we rarely if ever got to see in the earthly.

But there's another aspect of what we "do." Look in verse 15, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." Now this may seem a little bit odd to you, the idea that for all of eternity we worship by responding to what the Lord is doing and then we "serve" him, however I want to put it in a little bit of context here. I know all of us if we were to have an interpersonal conversation, at least in our own world, we could do the proverbial name-dropping. You know what that is, your respective of industry or your respective education, your respective hobbies or interests, you all have those people that in your things of importance are celebrities, they're significant, they're powerbrokers, they're movers, they're shakers. Have any of you ever had the opportunity to be in their presence? Have you ever been at a conference or maybe a convention or whatever it may be where all of a sudden you noticed that individual, that one who you've admired from afar, that one who you've spoken so highly of for so long and all of a sudden you're there, you're within just a few feet and you find yourself kind of gathered on the outer rung of somewhat of a conversation? I've been there and can I tell you how I've responded? Here I am in admiration of whoever this individual is, and maybe they're signing an autograph or maybe they're making plans, and all of a sudden they'll say, "You know what? The pen's not working." "I'll get you one!" Why? Because of your admiration for whoever that is, there's no task you wouldn't do. "Well, we're running a little bit late." "I'll go get your car! I'll get it!" You just want to be a part of whatever that person is doing. It doesn't matter how trivial, does it? It doesn't matter how mundane or how ridiculous it may be. I've seen people carry other people's bags for hours just so they could be somewhere in the vicinity of them.

So when it says there that we're going to serve the Lord for all of eternity, think about what we've seen, his glory revealed, his might revealed, his power revealed. I don't know about you, but I want to be a part of that. I want to be a part of whatever comes with that. So when it says we serve him day and night, in our language, if he needs a pen, I've got it. Clipboard, got it. Park a car, I've got it. I don't care what it is, we're going to want to be a part of it. Now by the way, those illustrations are trivial, are they not, particularly in light of what we will experience.

The last question, not just who or what but why? Why is this passage so critical to our lives? Why are these words so important? Look in verse 16 and 17, it says, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Now if you live in this part of the world, you know the weather changes every 15 to 20 minutes. Imagine an environment that's condition is perfect. Imagine an environment where there is no toil, there is no heartache, there is no pain. Imagine an environment where you never need a nap because you're tired. Imagine an environment where everything works and nothing is broken.

You know, they say that confession is good for the soul, so I'm going to confess to you today there are two places that I frequent often that are discouraging to me, they're

somewhat depressing to me. Now don't overanalyze this, alright, just work with me. One is either a bookstore or a library, and the second is a large hardware store. Now I know what you're thinking, "What do you mean? You read all the time. You study all the time. Why could a library be discouraging to you? Why could a large bookstore be discouraging to you?" Let me tell you why. I often enter the library, I mean, I'm excited, look at all the books, look at all the knowledge, but I usually leave somewhat despondent. You say, "Why?" Because I can't read them all. They won't let you check them all out. They won't let you, well, I guess they'd let you buy them all but I can't, so nonetheless... And so anytime I'm in an environment surrounded by all that knowledge, it's frustrating because I know deep down inside I could never acquire all of it and I wish I could.

The second one, large hardware stores. You're thinking, "Why is that depressing to you?" It's not really depressing because I actually enjoy home fix-up projects, restoration, landscaping. I actually enjoy that but do you know why I get a little despondent? And I do this when I'm by myself, not so much with the family, I'll just kind of walk up and down the aisles and look at all the things that are available. Do you know what it says to me? That every dollar that is spent there, every minute that is utilized making those repairs is an attempt at what I call fall control. You say, "Fall control?" You do realize if humanity had not fallen in the garden of Eden, our plumbing would always work, our machinery would never break, we would never have to repaint, fix or remodel. Think about that. A multi-billion dollar industry that's based on the fact that we got kicked out of the garden. We wouldn't have to fix any of that. Think about that. That proverbial mansion we talk about all the time, never going to have to be repainted, never going to have to be checked for mold, you're never going to have to call an exterminator. All that stuff, imagine that, an existence that we can hardly fathom.

But then we turn to verse 17, "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters," it's this last statement and we'll close with it, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Don't get me wrong, I joke about getting frustrated going into libraries and hardware stores but can we all just be real transparent this morning? This life is tough. This life is difficult. If you don't believe me, just look at the last 15 months of your life whatever that has looked like. Imagine the tears being wiped away, the heartache being wiped away. Imagine the fact that all the difficulties, all the struggles, all the heartaches, all the disappointments, all the frustrations are gone.

You know, it's been said by one who is wiser than I that for those who reject Jesus Christ, for those who've said, "I don't want anything to do with him, you can have all that stuff, that's just not for me," that this earth is all the heaven they will ever know. But for those of us who understand we have a sin problem, for those of us who believe that the blood of Jesus Christ is the only answer to our sin problem, then this earth is all the hell we will ever know. I don't know about you but I don't want what I've got around me to be as good as it gets. It says here no more tears, no more heartache, no more remembrance. We have the opportunity to have an eternal existence that's not just in an environment that we would love to have but notice it says who's in the middle therein, the one who formed us and fashioned us and created us. He is in the midst thereof which is why we will declare

his honor, his glory, his might, his strength, his power. That is why no matter what it looks like we can't wait to do that which is asked of us. That can be your future. Remember all nations, all tongues, all kindreds. The only caveat is that you have to go through the blood of Jesus Christ.