
The People of Glory

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Introduction

9 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, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" (emphasis mine) 14 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. 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 shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 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."

...1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place[a] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,[b] and God himself will be with them as their God."¹

"Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" Who are these people of heaven? From every nation, tribe, and language? Who are these who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb? And who are these with whom God will dwell? And who are these who will be his people... a people of unmatched blessing? Certainly, as the angel points out to John, they are at least the saints coming out from the great tribulation and as we read the book of Revelation in its entirety, we realize that these are the redeemed, the people of God from all time and all places.

¹ Revelation 7:9-17, 21:1-3

The people of heaven... The Lord God himself has, for a very long time, as we count time, been busy about his work of gathering a people who, at the moment he wills, to the place he calls, will come together for the wedding of the ages. And this is why I love Sundays, for in *our* gathering is the scent of the coming feast wafting through the air, making our stomachs, our hearts, growl with hunger and anticipation for a celebration that we will never forget because it will never end... for we are the people of heaven. [Let's Pray].

Overview

Tonight we are going to continue our series on the place of glory and we will be focusing on the people who will be there. It is certainly not an overstatement to say that God's people will play a prominent role in heaven. At the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, an event in which we are the bride and Christ is the groom, described in Revelation 19, we read, [6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And again in Revelation 21, 9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.](#) Yes, the bride figures prominently into the scene and the activities of heaven. We will be a conscious, engaged, active people in that kingdom.

By "prominent" I don't mean "focal" - that is reserved for the Bridegroom and the bridegroom alone. The glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ is at the center of it all. But, God's people, many of you, will be there. If we are to rightly live in light of this reality, then we must understand how it comes to be, for it is in the *getting* of this people that the grandeur of God's holy love is displayed like so many... so many what? Oceans roaring? Mountains falling? Skys thundering? Lightning flashing? Quakes shaking? What language of earth could ever fully capture the magnitude and magnificence what he has accomplished and what he will accomplish? To simply say, "We will be a people in heaven" is like taking someone to bottom of the Grand Canyon blindfolded, standing them in the Colorado River with their head bowed down looking at the ground, and saying okay, open your eyes, but don't look up. You are in the Grand Canyon! It's just another river... Until, you look up and someone begins to explain how this came to be. It is in the seeing and understanding that your jaw begins to drop and your eyes pop... and it takes a lifetime of hearing and gazing to even partly appreciate how astounding it is that we can be among those numbered in the multitude who will surround his throne and praise him.

Part of seeing and understanding then is comprehending that **God has planned, through keeping promises, to purchase for himself a people fit for glory.** That is our simple thesis for tonight and will spend the rest of our time considering the plan, the promises and finally the people.

Plan

So let's consider this **plan** initially. We all plan - some more than others. If we are fast learners, it doesn't take us long to realize that even the very best laid plans with the best laid intentions rarely come to pass exactly as we intended. Even when great nations with unprecedented resources, and unlimited brain power at their disposal plan, it often does not work out. Social Security was established in 1935 and while it has served many - it does not appear that this great "plan" for the welfare of the Nation will actually prove to be viable, at least in its current form.

When we talk about the plans of the Lord, we have to shift our mindset. Hear the author of Psalm 33, [10 The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.](#) Amen? [11 The counsel of the Lord \[however\] stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.](#)[12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!](#) The Lord's planning, you see, is foolproof, guaranteed, sure to work, failsafe, it stands forever and the plans of his heart to all generations. You see, in God's heart is a plan, and we are part of that plan. Psalm 33 tells us that the result of God's planning is blessing for a people. It also assigns this relational status between God and "his people" in the context of his plan. The people of his plan are called his "heritage." To be God's heritage is to be *his*, his possession, to belong to him.

When Beth and I *planned* to start a family, to get for ourselves a people, we ran into a small problem. We were confronted with the immense blessing of infertility. No fertility meant no family and no family meant no heritage, no people. Our plans were not successful. So we would get our people another way. We would embrace the wildly wonderful process of adoption. Thus we purposed in our hearts to create our people by finding those who were not our own and making them our own. You know them as Reuben and Theo.

This is not too dissimilar to God's plan barring one major difference - he intended to adopt from before the beginning of time. Here is how the story of God's plan to adopt his children, and thus get a people for himself, is told in Ephesians 3. Listen carefully for the "purposing" "planning" "adoption" "heritage" "inheritance" language:

[3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,](#) [4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,](#) that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,](#) [6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.](#) [7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,](#) [8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight](#) [9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose,](#) which he set forth in Christ [10 as a plan for the fullness of time,](#) to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. [11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,](#)[12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.](#) [13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,](#)[14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.](#) [emphases mine]

After the sin of the garden, Adam and Eve could not be the heritage that God sought. Sin had rendered them, and therefore the human race, unacceptable as a holy people - the only kind of people that God could ever call his own. People of heaven they were not and therefore, apart from Christ, people of heaven we are not. God would have to adopt a new people - God would have to make a new people who he could call his own. And this he certainly did: [9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy².](#)

So here we see just a cursory glimpse of the glory of God's plan to get for himself a people, a plan that issued forth from his very heart. Those whose robes are white, those who have been washed in the blood of the lamb, those who are redeemed. The people of heaven are a people that God has planned for and his plans, never fail.

Promises

In order to enact this plan, God would needed a vehicle for carrying along his intention throughout history. He chose to use promises. In one sense, this should not surprise us at all. Which one of us when we need to assure ourselves or others that something *will* happen in the future don't use a promise as a vehicle to convey our commitment. At the same time it should surprise us, for just like man's *planning*, man's *promises* are frail and fragile, continually broken. At some point I think I probably promised my wife (or at least myself) that I would take her to Hawaii for our 15th wedding anniversary. This May will be our 16th wedding anniversary. I promised myself that I would run three times this week. As of yesterday I ran once. I often promise the boys I will play planes or cars with them as soon as I finish setting the table. As soon as I finish setting the table we are eating dinner and playing planes or cars is long forgotten.

God's promises - praise him - are not like this. [God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it³?](#) So when God set out to get for himself a people - his perfect plan yielded 100% trustworthy promises. The apostle Paul banks on these promises continually - the letter to the Roman church, the flagship defense and explanation of the gospel in the New Testament, begins with Paul's tying the whole matter of the gospel to the promise.... [Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son \(emphasis mine\)⁴...](#)

And that "promising beforehand through his prophets" was repeated in many ways and many times across all of redemptive history. Moses, similar to Paul, is founding the salvation of the Israelites as they head to the promised land on the promises that were made to Abraham centuries before: [6 "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who](#)

² 1 Peter 2:9-10

³ Numbers 23:19

⁴ Romans 1:1-3

are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and *is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers*, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, *the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations...*⁵

So let's walk together briefly through redemptive history and see how these promises have been used to carry along God's plan for getting himself a people fit for glory. We can begin with Genesis 3:15 when God, just following Adam and Eve's sin, embeds in his curse of Satan a seed of hope: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* This was a thinly veiled promise of God's that he would win - he would ultimately be victorious over the apparent victory that Satan had scored by successfully tempting Adam and Eve to sin.

Later in Genesis 12 as God's plan unfolds, he promises to Abraham: *1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...*

As God's promises continue to carry along his purposes, a similar promise is made to Moses but with explicit "if-then" requirements that could never be kept by God's people: *1 And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. 9 The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. 10 And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord*⁶... This promise did not negate the promise to Abraham but it further revealed how God would remain true to himself in redeeming a people he could call his own. Thus it became clear that God's plan, as it unfolded through promises, was to be both comprehensive and sufficient.

Despite the painfully obvious inability of Israel, or anyone for that matter, to keep their end of the promise with God, He perseveres in his purpose to get for himself a people who will be fit for glory. He will keep his promise. Even in the time of Hosea, when the nation of Israel is disintegrating He restates his intention to redeem a people, a people who would be with Him in a place and a time of blessing, a people of Heaven: *16 "And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 18 And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth*

⁵ Deuteronomy 7:6-9

⁶ Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 9-10

you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord⁷.

Can you hear the chords of heaven mixed into the prophetic line? God knows where he is taking his people. He knows how we will form this host of heaven. And God knew precisely when the climax of his plan would occur, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons... So you are no longer a slave, but a son and if a son, then an heir through God*⁸. Adoption as sons, an heir through God, his promises have been kept, are being kept, and will be kept. It is through the work of Christ that the Lord satisfies the demands of his own holy character in one epic act, unmatched in history past or future *For the grace of God has appeared... our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession*⁹... *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God*¹⁰. And hence, by the cross and at infinite cost, these people fit for glory are formed. The promise is kept.

People Fit for Glory

As we move toward closing tonight, I want you to note with me several things about these people fit for glory. First, there is a "not yet" sense to God's work - we are not yet free from the presence of sin, we are not yet in our resurrection bodies, we are not yet with Jesus and the holy host of heaven face to face - but there is also a formidable "already."

We are not yet free from the presence of sin - but - we are already free from the penalty and the power of sin and are being daily transformed into the image of the Son Jesus Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians *17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit¹¹. And Paul tells Titus *11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...* Allow this to temper how we see our trial and temptation, understanding that by it we are being matured, transformed¹², made ready to be a people fit for heaven,, ready for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are not yet in our resurrection bodies - but - we are already in the midst of shedding our old bodies and being renewed in preparation for heavenly bodies in a way that magnifies Jesus. Paul tells the Corinthians, *7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us... 10 always carrying in the body the death*

⁷ Hosea 2:16-20

⁸ Galatians 4:4-5, 7

⁹ Titus 2:11, 13-14

¹⁰ 1 Peter 3:18

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹² James 1:2-4

of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies...16b ...Though our outer self is wasting away our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison... 5:4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Our preparation has already begun... allow this to temper how we see our difficulty and suffering in this physical world. Even in our deterioration and decline, there is an unseen - yet perhaps not unfelt - preparing for the eternal weight of glory... beyond all comparison.

We are not yet with Jesus and the holy host of heaven face to face - but - we are already enjoying unprecedented intimacy and closeness to the person of Christ as we now constitute all but his head here on Earth, carrying out his will in his power. And though we see in a mirror dimly, we do see¹³! This is radically different than prior to the cross. Even a casual reading and comparison of the Old and New Testaments make this clear. Consider 1 Corinthians 12 and the long description given there of the body and its unity: 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Or Ephesians 4 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. You will find nothing like this in the Old Testament because it wasn't possible in the Old Testament. There was no Spirit, no cross, no church. Allow this to temper how we think of the church tho it be in an imperfect state constantly hounded by our sins and foolishness - it is also the most real representation of Christ himself that we have on Earth thus we should cherish and enjoy it, serve and bless it, humbly bear with it. If you've truly come to know "the church" as a people representing Christ, and not simply as a service-oriented organization standing up programs and ministries, you will love it! Because as you go with her through hell and highwater, blessing and bounty, you will marvel at the multifaceted beauty of a strong Christ sustaining his weak people decade after decade, year after year, day after day and at times, hour after hour in the midst of a world which cannot understand.

Secondly and lastly, our extended meditations on glory, whether they be on the people of heaven, the person of heaven, or the place of heaven, should have a certain kind of effect on us. If the seeds we are scattering as we preach are true to the Word, and if the heart-soil they are falling on is fertile and prepared, we will see that the contemplation of the future produces and an Abraham-like people - trodding about in the dust with the outlines of an eternal plan, the promises of a coming glory, and the hope of a righteous people in their hearts all the while experiencing many earthly obstacles challenging their belief... Paul describing Abraham's faith: 17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he

¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:8-12

should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised¹⁴.

For Abraham, a future hope did not become an escapism or an excuse - it became a grand motivation to keep looking ahead, to press on and never give up, to prepare for the coming fulfillment of God's promises to him. He believed in the God of the impossible with unwavering confidence. For Paul, the contemplation of the things to come, produced a similar effect. I'm not sure if you caught it at the end of Dale's sermon last Sunday morning, the last verse of 1 Corinthians 15 - verse 58 - we barely had time to notice it. After an extended teaching on death and resurrection and the bodies we will have that are fit for heaven Paul says, *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.* Paul, Abraham, men fit for glory, believers in what the world says is unbelievable, believing in a way that transforms their lives.

As we close, have you ever noticed how many of our songs here at the Chapel have a musical crescendo built into them? The volume, the intensity, begins to swell and then we break through the clouds, so to say, and burst out into chorus... One of these songs that my family has been delighting in recently is Forever - we sang it this morning. You here the crescendo begin to build musically as we go in to that verse - *The ground began to shake, the stone was rolled away, his perfect love could not be overcome, now death where is your sting, our resurrected king has rendered you defeated, Forever he is glorified, Forever he is lifted high, Forever his is risen, He is alive, He is alive! We sing hallelujah (x3) The Lamb has overcome, Forever....*

As with the Psalms, our songs reflect our lives. Beloved, in view of heaven, coming face to face with our Savior, the risen Lamb, our lives are to be lived with an ever-building crescendo. As we move toward the death of our physical bodies and as our time walking with him lengthens under the sun of his blessing, under the hand of his enablement in the storm, our faith grows. So when thinking on the the thrill of what is to come we run harder and faster than ever because our confidence in his plan, in his ability to keep his promises, and in the sureness of our place among his people, overwhelms us with an untethered sense of glory, of hope, of confidence... for the Lamb has overcome. We are not waiting for heaven, we are not waiting for this life to end. Rather, we are growing every day, in every trial, into a people fit for glory. Life, for the believer, is to be lived in a perpetual crescendo that will culminate when we break through the clouds and join in the wedding feast of the Lamb and be made, finally, all that we should be - the people of heaven.

¹⁴ Romans 4:17-21