

Experiencing True Joy

Revelation 7:12

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-05-22

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Text - Revelation 7:12

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from all ethnic nations and tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palm branches in their hands. 10 And they shouted with a loud voice saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels stood around the Throne, and the elders and the four living beings, and they fell down before the Throne, on their faces, and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength to our God for ever and ever! Amen."¹

Introduction

I've decided to take one more Sunday on chapter 7 because I have not yet covered verse 12 (which is a beautiful doxology), and I haven't fully pulled out the implications of verses 9-12. And it is such a marvelous devotional passage that I am hoping this whole sermon can be an exercise in prayer and adoration that would increase our joy.

The praise in these verses poured forth for three reasons: they were thrilled with God's salvation, they were thrilled with God's blessings, and they were thrilled with God Himself. And if we could learn to daily count these blessings, it would be rare that we would not find the joy of the Lord springing up within our hearts.

I. Thrilled with God's salvation (vv. 9-11)

First, they were thrilled with God's salvation. And it wasn't just those who were saved that were thrilled - the angels were thrilled with God's salvation too, even though they didn't need to be saved. Luke 15:10 says that every time a sinner is saved, the angels in heaven have great joy. Why? Well, the more you study the doctrines of salvation, the more astonished you become at God's wisdom, love, mercy, justice, wrath, patience, and other attributes. 1 Peter 1:12 says that angels desire to investigate the doctrine of our salvation more. Now, the same passage implies that they have been studying this salvation since it was first proclaimed in Genesis 3. Yet it is a doctrine that

¹ Translation of the Majority Text by Wilbur M. Pickering - [The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken](#).

still brings them joy and admiration for what God has done. And I am going to give you a tiny introduction as to why angels glory in this doctrine when not a one of the angels was saved.

Last Sunday afternoon I was reading a chapter out of the book, [A Puritan Theology](#), and the chapter on the Beauty of Christ's Heart that summarized one of the books written by Thomas Goodwin moved me to tears and prayers of joy. Those of you have not learned to read theology books devotionally miss out on so many opportunities to have your heart flooded with the joy of the Lord and to have your admiration and praise for God increase. But these saints and angels in heaven stand in awe of God's salvation. It is so great that it makes every other version of salvation pale into insignificance. It makes them assert with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God..." And it makes the other half of the congregation respond "Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength belong to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

And when you think about it, it really is a miracle that God could save anyone. Let me give you an ounce out of the ocean that constitutes the doctrine of God's salvation. I believe even this small ounce sized drink ought to be enough to cause our hearts to be joyful in our God this morning.

Think of the justice diminution of salvation. God can't ever sweep sin under a carpet and forget about it. God is a just judge and Exodus 34:7 says that He can by no means clear the guilty. Numbers 14:18 says, "He by no means clears the guilty." He would cease to be a just judge if He condemned the innocent and pardoned the guilty. So how could He condemn Christ, the innocent one, and pardon us, so full of guilt? How could He do it and still be just? Yet somehow, God did just that - He pardoned the guilty and condemned the Just One, Jesus, without being an unjust judge.

Now, I'm not going to delve much into that incredible doctrine this morning, but let me spell out an implication. It's very popular nowadays for evangelicals and even some Reformed people to deny the doctrine of legal imputation, but it is the only answer to this dilemma. If you ditch the doctrine of the legal imputation of our sins to Christ and the legal imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, you slander God's justice. Without it He is no longer a just Judge. Without it Numbers 14:18 is turned upside down and it makes God clear the guilty when God asserted that He by no means clears the guilty. Many of the Auburn Avenue advocates have monkeyed around with the doctrine of imputation, and you can't do that without destroying this

part of God's story of salvation.

But without the Incarnation, there could be no salvation. No mere human could take our punishment because that human would have his own sins to answer for. *God* could not take our punishment because a *man* sinned and a *man* must be punished. But even a perfect man could not take the place of all sinners. The most he could do would be to take the place of one sinner. Nor could a mere man provide the infinite price required for insulting God's eternal and infinite Being.

But the incarnation provided the way for the miracle of salvation. Jesus was the God-Man, which made His substitutionary atonement perfect and infinite. He had to be One Person, not two, or salvation would be marred. He had to have His natures indivisibly united, but not confused, or our salvation would be marred. And as you study the doctrines articulated at the Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), you begin to realize that the simple Gospel was hardly simple for God. It took astonishing wisdom, providence, grace, and character for the Triune God to pull off our "simple salvation." And as I read creeds like the Athanasian creed, I sometimes shake my head in admiration and worship of the great God that we have. And those creeds have barely dipped into the mysteries that angels desire to more fully understand, and that we will be spending an eternity more fully understanding.

And the more you study the Incarnation, the Active Obedience of Jesus, and the Passive Obedience of Jesus, the more you realize what an amazing plan this was.

And of course, the plan started in eternity past. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit entered into a covenant with each other to save us. And so there is the huge doctrine of covenant theology that began in eternity past. Without that covenant, there could be no salvation. And thinking about the details of that eternal covenant almost brings you to tears because it makes you realize the incredible love that God had for us wretches. Jeremiah 31:3 says,

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.

Psalm 90 says,

Psa. 90:1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Psa. 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

His covenant salvation is incredible to meditate upon. It lifts the drooping spirits to have great joy.

But there were so many obstacles to getting saved that every part and piece of salvation is an astounding piece of the puzzle that should draw our hearts out in admiration for God's wisdom, thankfulness for God's sacrifices, and praise for His work.

Just consider the issue of God's wrath. It is a miracle that God's wrath could give way to infinite love. Christians have a tendency to take God's love for granted. You can't. And saints in heaven certainly do not. Scripture indicates that God's wrath must always abide on sinners. So why is God's wrath not abiding on us? John 3:16 is followed in verse 36 with the assurance that those who do not put their trust in Jesus shall never see life but the wrath of God continues to abide on them. And the question is, "How could God love us when we were sinners?" Psalm 5:5 says about God, "You hate all workers of iniquity" - all workers of iniquity. And there are many Scriptures like that - that affirm that God hates, despises, abhors, and abominates sinners. Not just the sin, but sinners. So how could He love us? Every one of us has done some iniquity. And the answer is that the only way He could love us was as He saw us united to Jesus. Romans 8 says that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. But if we were outside of Christ for even a moment, only God's wrath could abide on us. So there is a Christ-centered focus to our salvation in this chapter.

When I lie awake at night I will sometimes use the parts and pieces of my salvation as a reason to lift my heart up to God in admiration and praise. If you were condemned to death in a court of law and on appeal you were not only acquitted, but declared to be perfectly righteous and not guilty of what you were accused of, you would be thrilled. But if you really *were* guilty and the only reason you were declared not so was because your attorney died in your place and credited his good record to your name, you would be humbled and astounded. But when you realize that your attorney not only died in your place but paid an enormous ransom for the privilege of doing so, that too would make you wonder, "Why?" And then if you discovered that your attorney was motivated purely out of love for you and the glory of God the Father, it would make you feel forever grateful to him. But then you discover that your attorney caused you to inherit his fabulously wealthy inheritance. That's a bit what it is like to think about being saved. Can you see why martyrs are not bemoaning their martyrdom at all. They are rejoicing in their Savior.

Meditating on total depravity makes me realize that I could not even have faith to come to God if God did not first give me that faith. Meditating on unconditional election makes me thrilled with my Savior who paid for every condition and saw nothing in me that deserved salvation. Meditating on Limited Atonement is not only humbling, but gives security and hope because you know that Christ's atonement was not a general atonement for faceless masses but was a personal atonement that had each one of you in mind and loved each one of you enough to go to the cross. "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt." Meditating on Irresistible Grace makes me thankful to the Holy Spirit for what He puts up with. Meditating on the Perseverance of the Saints - what can I say? It is mind boggling that God would preserve us through all the ups and downs of our sinful life and preserve us for eternity. But His preservation is the only thing that can enable us to persevere. All the way through, it is grace, sheer grace. So Isaiah says,

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

Can you say with me, "I was condemned but now I am justified"? That is great reason for joyful praise. Can you say with me, "I was enslaved, but now I'm redeemed"? Redemption means to be purchased out of slavery or out of captivity by a ransom. We are free! Can you say, "I was under God's wrath, but now I am at peace with God?" Can you say, "My righteous deeds used to be all filthy rags, but now they are acceptable in Christ?" When all around you are sinners predestined to judgment, and God chose you from eternity past, not because you were any better, but simply to show forth His kindness and mercy, it is thrilling. It is thrilling. No wonder these martyrs are thrilled with God's salvation.

Some Christians might have been tempted to envy the power, wealth, and position of their persecutors - but those persecutors were headed to earthly judgment and eternal punishment in hell. There was nothing to envy. Instead, these martyrs were to be envied. They were accepted by God, which is symbolized by the fact that they can stand before the throne. Think of that! They are standing before the throne in verse 9. Certainly they fall on their faces too in verse 11, but not because of terror. They fall on their faces out of love and gratitude and astonishment at the awesome goodness of God.

Their white robes come from Christ. Their victory branches come from Christ. So they instinctively ascribe all salvation to God and to the Lamb. And men, angels, and all creatures respond with a hearty "Amen!"

II. They were thrilled with God's provision of blessings (vv. 13-17)

The second reason for their doxology is that they are thrilled with God's abundant provision of blessings. We saw that God provided fellowship where only alienation existed before. God provided joy, peace, love, and all the fruit of the Spirit. God provided holiness. God provided a kingdom, and heaven, and the privilege of a position to serve. Basically you could say that having given us the Son, God also, with Him, freely gave us all things.

If you lack the joy of the Lord, you might consider making a long list of blessings that God has strewn into your life. At our session meeting on Tuesday, Rodney quoted someone as saying, "Was it a bad day? Or was it a bad five minutes that you milked all day?" Isn't it amazing that we can have so many blessings in a day, and one bad experience that lasts five minutes ruins our day and makes us milk the bad and nurse on it as if we loved it; we can't let it go. That's a terrible way to live. I didn't ask Rodney where he got the quote, and my searches kept saying that the author is unknown, so I am going to start attributing that quote to Rodney. But it basically says, "Was it a bad day? Or was it a bad five minutes that you milked all day?" Think of those martyrs. They had a bad-hair day, didn't they? Yet they rejoice in all the good things that God has given.

We too easily allow small things to suck all the joy out of our lives. We too easily allow one person to suck the joy that five people have brought into our day. But focusing on the hundreds and hundreds of blessings that God has given can cure us of joylessness and make us realize that we are incredibly blessed. Sometimes I give that as a homework assignment to people who think that marrying their spouse was the worst thing they could have done - I ask them to write down 100 things about their spouse that they are thankful for. And almost always they can't think of one. I have to give some suggestions, and they reluctantly agree that those are things to be thankful for. I give a few more, and they get the point. And I have yet to see a person who really tries who can't come up with 100 things to praise God for about their spouse.

So if you lack joy, count your blessings. Take time off to do so. One of the purposes of God's festivals was to give enough time off that people could count their blessings and have joy. Deuteronomy 16:15 says,

Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.

He blesses you so that you can surely rejoice. But you can only find that joy as you count your blessings.

III. Thrilled with God Himself and praise Him (v. 12)

But the third reason why they had such great joy was that they were thrilled with God Himself and praised Him. And before we go word-by-word through this seven-fold doxology in verse 12, I should point out that almost the same praise was given to the Lamb in chapter 5 as was given to God here. The reason is obvious - both were divine.

A second thing that I want you to notice is how close the martyrs are to God in this paragraph. Both Barclay and Bass point out that the martyrs are closer to God's throne than the elders or angels are. Bass says,

Here we have a series of great concentric circles of the inhabitants of heaven. On the outer ring stand all the angels. Nearer the throne is the twenty-four elders; still nearer are the four living creatures; and before the throne are the whiterobed martyrs.²

God honors them, and they are secure in Him. They stand before Him that close.

A third thing that I want you to notice is that there is an "Amen" at the beginning and ending of verse 12. "Amen" is a liturgical expression of agreement. So this last chorus begins with an "Amen," the only time in Scripture that happens, and ends with an "Amen," that shows agreement with everything that God is being praised for. And in our Christian walk we want to get to the place where our hearts really enters into that "Amen" or that agreement. But that means disciplining our thinking and taking the focus off of worldly things that tend to obscure the great privileges that we have.

So let's go through these seven attributes of God. If you ever run out of things to praise God for, start listing His attributes. Verse 12 list seven things. Seven is the number of perfection, so even though not every attribute of God is mentioned, it symbolizes all that God is. And they praise God for these seven things above everyone else. Though people can have some of these things, they only have them as they are derived God. And so the word "the" is added to each blessing to emphasize the fact that God has each of these characteristics preeminently. As Trail's commentary says, "The article means in each case 'the... above all others.'" It shows God's pre-eminence.

G. K. Beale and others point out that these very words were used as

² Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future*, (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), pp. 208-209.

expressions of praise to earthly kings and the Caesars. But when you understand how infinitely small and insignificant even the greatest human potentate really is in comparison to God, such praise almost seems blasphemous.

A. *The Blessing*

The first word is "the blessing." The Greek word, εὐλογία, literally means "to speak well of someone." So, can we bless each other and speak well of each other? Yes. We should. We are commanded to.

But it should be even easier to speak well of the only God who is perfect in His attributes and from whom every blessing flows. Yet how often do we do so? I thought I was pretty good at blessing God when I was in my twenties, but I soon discovered that I was pitiful at doing this. The way I discovered it was my professor gave us an assignment to spend a whole hour that day in doing nothing but prayers of adoration. He told us not to interject even one sentence of petition or other kinds of prayer - just adoration. I remember when he gave the assignment that I thought it would be a piece of cake; no problem! So I got on my knees that night and began to adore the God who had saved me and done so much for me. And in many ways it was a great prayer of adoration. It was kind of short, but my heart really was thankful to God. I took a glance at my watch thinking that the hour must be nearing an end and was shocked to see that I had spent only a few minutes. I was really running out of things to say at the end of fifteen minutes. And soon I was having to turn to the Psalms and other Scriptures to use them as expressions of adoration. I was running dry. I didn't know how I was going to finish the hour. That exercise was an eye opener to me for what a shallow worshipper I really was. I could go for an hour asking God to give me things and to give other people things - but blessing God that long?

But over the years I have discovered that blessing and praising God should be the most natural flow of our heart because in Him we live and move and have our being; in Him is wisdom, healing, ministry, and everything else that we do. Psalm 103 says

Psa. 103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

And he goes on to give all kinds of things for which He blessed God. Do you

bless God that you have salt and pepper on the table, and clean water, and Air Conditioning?

Last Sunday we saw that heaven is the pattern for worship. It is also the pattern for what maturity and closeness to God looks like. And the closer we draw to God, the more natural blessing God will become. It is a sign of maturity in Christ. It is certainly one of the things that leads to joy inexpressible and full of glory. Try it sometime. If you run out of things to praise God for, the deficit is in you, not in God. As the Levites in Nehemiah 9:5 said,

‘Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

In other words, no matter how much we bless God, He is so much greater than anything we could say in blessing and praise. We will never exhaust the depths of God's perfections. We will never run out of new things for which to bless Him.

B. The Glory

The second word is "the glory." The glory belongs to God, not to man. But man is always seeking glory, praise, and honor for himself. Rather than seeking to esteem God above all others, we seek self-esteem. But in the process we lose it. Ironically it is as we seek God's glory that God's light shines more and more into our lives and transforms us from glory to glory. How do we get glory? How do we get esteem? By esteeming God and glorifying Him. Douglas Kelly said of this verse,

If you could get rid of everything that is secondary, what would be the primary purpose for which God caused you to be born? Above every secondary purpose, the primary one is that you might glorify Him...

This is profoundly different from the worldly way of thinking, which is that if you are to be a good humanist, what you need to think about is self. The chief concern is how can I make myself happy; how can I get out of life what I wish? How can I avoid any more pain than necessary? How can I have the maximal, physical or emotional pleasures? How can I use other people to give me that pleasure? In other words, the humanistic position is glorify self. But once you set as the goal of your life to make yourself happy, you are assured of misery! Self-seeking of my own pleasure and glory brings more psychological, relational misery than anything you can imagine. It is the lie of the devil... In human relationships it is the people who are the most caught up in the glory of God and seeking to honor him who [will be the most]... liberated personalities; free and open-hearted...³

And he points out that as you are consumed with a passion to glorify God,

³ Douglas Kelly, *Revelation*, (Cornwall, England: Mentor, 2012), p. 152.

God's glory invades your life and illumines you more and more with His light. As 2 Corinthians 3:18 words it,

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Do you want to have the joy of these martyrs in heaven? Then die to self and live for God's glory.

C. *The Wisdom*

The third thing they adore him for is "the wisdom." God is preeminently wise. The more you realize the incredible complexities involved in God's predestinating plan or in His providential rule, the more you will realize how amazing his wisdom is. The more you study biology, botony, or astronomy, the more you will be blown away with God's astounding wisdom. It was God reciting just a few of those scientific facts that humbled Job and made him realize that he knew next to nothing. Take discipline after discipline in the University, and it takes your breath away at the incredible wisdom of God. Don't speak of the invisible hand that makes the laws of economics work even when powerful bankers and governments try to break them. Speak of God's wisdom. Don't speak of the wisdom of nature when you study physics. Speak of the wisdom and power of God. After Paul discussed the wonders of salvation and the amazing eschatology of God for planet earth, he bursts into praise saying,

Rom. 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" Rom. 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

D. *The Thanksgiving*

The next word is "the thanksgiving." Should we be thankful to the people who are around us and who bless us? Obviously, yes. But who deserves the ultimate thanks? It would be God. That's why 1 Thessalonians tells us to give thanks in all circumstances and why Ephesians 5:20 tells us to thank God for all things. The saints in heaven realize to a much fuller degree than we do how everything works together for the good of believers and it makes them supremely thankful. The more we are convinced that this is true, the more we will be thankful in all circumstances and for all circumstances. It

will also make you realize why God's judgments so frequently fall upon people who complain and grumble. Such grumbling is an incredible insult to the God who loves you and only does good for you.

This is yet another test of your maturity - how close are you to the saints in heaven in giving thanks? Interestingly, thanksgiving transforms us and turns even the worst things that happen to us into a blessing. The Puritan, William Law, said,

Do you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is the person who has a thankful heart...

If any would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you. For it is certain that, whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing. Could you, therefore, work miracles, you could not do more for yourself than by this thankful spirit, for it heals with a word of speaking, and turns all that it touches into happiness.⁴

I can tell you from personal experience that what he says is true. See God as worthy of all thanksgiving in all things and for all things and you will start having the character and the joy of these saints in heaven.

E. The Honor

Yet another aspect that can judge the maturity of our worship is the praise that they ascribe to God above all others - "the honor." Natural man wants honor for himself. Perfected man in heaven ascribes all honor to God. Where are we on that continuum?

Who we bestow the most honor upon shows the relative importance of that person in comparison to us. But by that measure, most men see themselves as far more important than God and far more important than others since they constantly seek their own honor and rarely speak of God's honor or the honor of others. But the most holy and most joyful beings in the universe are these saints who speak of the preeminent honor going to God.

F. The Power

The next two characteristics are "the power" and "the strength." Both have the idea of power and might inherent in the words, but the first word, δύναμις, focuses on God's omnipotence already displayed and the second focuses on God's omnipotence giving Him the ability or capacity to

⁴ William Law, [A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life](#), (First Rate Publishers; Kindle Edition), np.

accomplish anything in the future.

The word *power*, or δύναμις, is used many times of Christ's miracles. In fact, it is translated with the word "miracle" several times in the New King James. Sometimes it is spoken of as the power that produced miracles. Luke 16:19 says that power went out from Jesus and healed them all. But it is also used of God's creative activity. Romans 1:20 says that creation shows forth God's great power. His victory over demonic hosts shows forth His power.

G. The Strength

The strength, however, focuses on what God's power has the capacity of doing in the future. So where power showcases what God has already done, strength showcases what God's power will achieve in the future.

And both are subjects that bring great joy. God told Job that when He spoke the world into existence, the angels of heaven broke out into singing and praise. It must have blown them away to see this massive planet suddenly brought into existence out of nowhere. They were no doubt astounded and startled them initially, but when they realized what God had done the text says that all the sons of God shouted for joy (Job. 38:7). When God's power parted the Red Sea and destroyed Pharaoh's armies, it caused God's people to break forth into singing. When the power of God produced the Incarnation, the angels of heaven sang for joy. So God's power has accomplished great and mighty things.

But God's ἰσχύς, the last word, which the dictionary defines as "exceptional capability, with the probable implication of personal potential,"⁵ is celebrating the incredible plan which will span thousands of years in the future - God's power committed and fully capable of carrying out His plans. Kelly comments on this last word:

We often enough fail to carry out our resolves to do good; we lack either the strength or the resolve.

God is different. He is able to carry through every aspect of every gracious promise he has made to his children. In due time, he will carry through everything he ever said he would do for us.⁶

Speaking about this word, Henry Rosscup says,

Heavenly worshipers in the Rev. passages are completely convinced of His capacity to work ...⁷

5 BDAG

6 Kelly, *Revelation*, p. 154.

7 James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our*

Now, when everything appeared to be falling apart on the earth, it took faith to do that. But all it took was a glimpse of God's throne, and any doubt was removed.

So in this passage we can praise God for what He has done, for what He is doing, and for what He will do. The past *testifies* to His omnipotence; in the present we *experience* His omnipotence; in the future we can *trust* His omnipotence to transform this world, just as He said He would.

And the double "Amen" shows that they are doubly convinced of these praiseworthy features in this amazing doxology. Here is a crowd that was not discouraged by the Great Tribulation. On the contrary, they see that the power of Satan and the Beast and his Prophet are no comparison to the God we serve. And if God is for us, who can be against us. Amen? Let's be a people committed to rejoicing in all circumstances and for all circumstances. Amen.

Communication with God (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2008), pp. 2761–2762.