



DIVERSITY

Revelation 7:9-17

If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Revelation 7, last book in the Bible. What is corporate worship in heaven? What does it look like? And how is our corporate worship today a reflection of what we will do for all of eternity? It's the question I want us to dive into this morning.

Let me encourage you as you're pulling out your Bibles, if you don't have one to find somebody around you who does. We're going to be all over Scripture this morning, turning a lot so just kind of get your fingers ready. We're going to be all over the place. This chapter we're looking at in the book of Revelation is foundational. I'm convinced it's one of the most important passages in the Book of Revelation. Maybe even one of most difficult as far as interpretation goes, but all of the Bible is all over this thing, especially in the Old Testament. So you're going to need your Bible.

We are coming to the last week of this series on corporate worship – this study we've been doing. We started off, looked at Nehemiah 12, the picture of community and corporate worship. We're not just a gathering of individual worshippers. We are a community of faith. The next week we looked at Revelation 19, "Humility." Worship is extremely God-centered. Then we looked at John 4, "Honesty" – how we need to come before God authentically, not only with God, but also with each other, honest with Him about our sin, about our struggles. Then last week we looked at Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 and looked at "Clarity" and the need for both revelation and response to be a part of our worship.

The Biblical Truth ...

Now we're looking at "Diversity" and here is the biblical truth. It's going to be the foundation for our time together today. Corporate worship, worship reflects two elements, the unity and diversity of heaven. Worship is a reflection of the unity and diversity of heaven. What I want us to do is see that unfold in this passage in Revelation 7.

I mentioned this is a difficult passage when it comes to interpretation. You read different things about this passage and you'll find all kind of different opinions, views, and perspectives on different parts of this text. My goal is for us to look at what we do know. I want us to see what this passage has to teach us about worship today. It is an incredible picture. Look at Revelation 7. We'll start in verse 9. This is where all of history is headed toward. Get the picture.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!' Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 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 spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Rev. 7:9-17).

What I want you to see in this passage is unity and diversity coming together. We have got diversity, a multitude that no one can count from every tribe, every people, every language, every nation. That is an extremely diverse picture. At the same time in the middle of the diversity they're singing one song. And they're all dressed in the same thing. There is unity in diversity.

Unity in Diversity ...

So what I want us to do is I want us to think about how these come together in Revelation 7. Then after we've seen that, seen what unites us, even across a diverse body of Christ what unites us. Then we're going to think about the implications of this text for our corporate worship.

We have all been purchased to praise Him.

So how do unity and diversity come together in Revelation 7? First picture I want you to see that unifies us is that we have all been purchased to praise Him, purchased to give Him praise. This is the unifying picture in Revelation 7. When you get to verse 9, it says after this which is a reference to what's happened in the first 8 verses of Revelation. In order to get a picture of what's happening in verses 9 through 17 we need to understand what's happened in verses 1 through 8.

So if you turn back, what you see is a picture of God talking about how He has sealed His people, Israel, the people of God throughout the Old Testament. I want you to look with me at verse 3, just to read it, get a context, get a picture of what's leading up to Revelation 7:9. It says in verse 3, *"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."* Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: *144,000 from all the tribes of Israel*" (Rev. 7:3-4). And what you see in verses 5 down through verse 8 is a list of the different tribes of Israel and each one of them is attributed its 12,000 people in this picture. So you've got 12 tribes, 12,000 people in each, a total of 144,000 people.

Now most people think this is not a literal reference to exactly 144,000 people. Instead it's a picture of perfection, of completeness, of God's people Israel. But, like I said, we're not going to spend our time this morning debating this or that. What I do want you to see though is that there is a connection between the people of Israel, God's chosen people that

we see throughout the Old Testament. There is a connection between the people of Israel and then when you get to verse 9 in Revelation 7 a multitude that no one can count from every people in every language and every nation, every tribe. So somehow, here in Revelation 7 these are connected together. The people of Israel flowing into a multitude that no one could count.

And what I want to show you is that this is not just an accidental connection that just happens to appear at Revelation 7. I'm convinced this has been the plan of God ever since the beginning of the Bible. I want to show it to you. Hold your place in Revelation 7. Let's go back to Genesis, first book in the Bible. I want you to turn back to Genesis 12.

I look at Revelation 7 – really all of the Book of Revelation in many ways – but especially this chapter... It's kind of a bookend in the Bible. It connects us to what happened in the very beginning. What we've got in Genesis is the introduction. What we've got in Revelation kind of the conclusion and it wraps things up. I want us to see these two passages as bookends. Go to Genesis 12.

Remember the chapter before this Genesis 11 is when they tried to build the tower of Babel. All the nations were scattered. All the nations were divided. When you get to Genesis 12:1 and hear what God says to Abram. This is when the people of Israel began to experience the promise and blessing of God. Listen to this, *"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'"* (Gen. 12:1-3).

Now what's happening here in the very beginning of the Bible is God is speaking to Abram who is the father of the people of Israel and He's giving him a promise. We need to see the promise God has made. It's a promise that God started way back here in Genesis 12 and here was the promise. He said, "Abram, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you into a great nation. I'm going to pour out my blessings on you." I want you to see what God promised to do through Abram.

He said, "As a result of my blessing on you, all of the peoples of the earth are going to be blessed. So I'm going to bless you as the leader of the people of Israel and those who come from you, but the result is going to be all of the people of the earth are going to be blessed through you." Abraham was going to be the conduit, so to speak of God's blessing. Receiving God's blessing and being the channel of God's blessing to all of the peoples of the world. That's what God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3.

I want you to look at the next chapter, Genesis 13. Look at verse 16. You might underline these verses. We started with Genesis 12:3. Look at Genesis 13:16. God says to Abraham again, He says, *"I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted"* (Gen. 13:16). Obviously no one could count the dust so the picture is a multitude that no one could count, which is exactly what we're seeing in Revelation 7:9.

Go two more chapters over to Genesis 15. Look at Genesis 15 verses 4 and 5. God says this again to Abraham. He says, *"Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir'"* (Gen. 15:4). You might underline verse 5 here, *"He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'"* (Gen. 15:5).

Now thousands of years later scientists tell us there is about 70 sextillion stars, which is basically 70 million, million, million stars. Those are the ones that we can see at this point. That's a lot of stars and so God says, "Abraham, let's go outside. I want you to look up here and I want you to see that there will be from your descendants a multitude that you cannot even begin to count." That's what He told Abraham in Genesis 15.

Go two more chapters over to chapter 17. To chapter 17:3. It says,

"Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you'" (Gen. 17:3-6). Are you seeing the connection here between Israel and a multitude that no one could count from every nation in Revelation 7?

Keep going to Genesis 22. Genesis 22, remember when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son? Abraham was obedient, was going through with that until God provided a lamb. You get to Genesis 22:17 and God reiterates it again. It's almost like God is trying to make a point here. It says in verse 17 in Genesis 22, *"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me"* (Gen. 22:17-18).

Now, Abraham had a son. His name was Isaac. Go to Genesis 26. Look at Genesis 26. God had made this promise over and over again to Abraham. Was it just Abraham? I don't think it was. Look at Genesis 26:4. You might underline this verse. *"I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all"—the what? "All nations of the earth will be blessed"* (Gen. 26:4).

Now Isaac had a son named Jacob. You get two chapters over you get to Genesis 28:14. God is keeping this promise alive. God says to Jacob in Genesis 28:14. He is having a vision, a dream and it says, *"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring"* (Gen. 28:14).

Now that's a pretty stout promise considering Jacob was a single guy at that point. He didn't even have a wife. He's looking for a wife and he finds out he's going to have descendants that are going to be like the dust of the earth. That's good news for a single guy in Jacob's shoes. So the promise is now not just Abraham, not just Isaac, but Jacob through you all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed.

Go over to Genesis 35. God comes to Jacob again, says the same thing to him. Genesis 35:11. It says, *"And God said to him, 'I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body'"* (Gen. 35:11).

Let me show you one more in Genesis. Go to Chapter 49. Look at Chapter 49. I want you to look with me at verse 8. Genesis 49 is God's blessing through Jacob on the 12 tribes of Israel. It's God's blessing on these different tribes. When you get to verse 8 and you see God's blessing on the tribe of Judah. Here was the blessing. *"Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he*

crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the (Gen. 49:8-10) – what? – “*nations is his.*” So what does that mean? Well when you do get over to Revelation 5 you see Jesus described as the lion of the tribe of what? Of Judah.

This is a picture here in Genesis 49 of the promise that was to come in the Christ and says, “The obedience of the nations will belong to him.” It’s just a coincidence maybe that you get to Revelation 7 and when it’s listing the tribes of Israel, guess which tribe is listed first there. It’s the tribe of Judah. There is a connection here between God’s promises in the Book of Genesis over and over and over again that He was going to bless all the people and all the nations, a multitude that no one could count, through His people Israel. God – don’t miss it – God promised to bless His people so that His glory, His salvation, His blessing will remain known among all the nations of the earth.

Now is this just a Genesis thing? I don’t think it is. I think it’s all over Scripture. We could go to numerous places. Let me show you one picture in the Prophets. Go with me to Isaiah. Turn with me to Isaiah, the Book of Isaiah. It’s right before Jeremiah, long Book of the Prophets. I want you to look with me in Isaiah 49. This will be the only other place we look in the Old Testament. Here in the Book of Isaiah I want you to see two passages that give us a picture of Revelation 7.

Isaiah 49, look at verse 6. This is where God talked about His purposes among His people. And He says, “*It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept*” (Is. 49:6). So God says, “*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,*” which means the nations all that are not a part of the people of God of Israel. “*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth*” (Is. 49:6). And what happens in the rest of this chapter as we see God’s salvation and the picture of what that is.

You get over to verse 10 and it says, “*They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them*” (Is. 49:10). That’s a direct quote in Revelation 7. The sun will not beat upon them. There will be no hunger, no thirst among the people of God. Because all of the earth, all of the nations will know that He is good through what He does through His people of Israel.

Here is the other passage I want to show you in Isaiah. Go to the last chapter Isaiah 66. I told you we’d be turning a lot and we’re just getting started. It’s just all over how the Bible comes together in this grand picture. Look at Isaiah 66:18. Listen to what He says about His people and what He’s going to do through His people. He says, “*I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations*” (Is. 66:18-19).

That’s what God was doing among His people throughout the Old Testament. Over and over again saying I’m going to bless you so that all the nations might receive my blessing so that all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. He said it to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He sang it to His people over, and over and over again. What I want to submit to you this morning is that in light of the fact that Revelation 7 is still in the future, God is still saying the same thing to His people today. What I want to submit to you this morning is that God

is still in the business of blessing His people so that His glory and His blessing and His salvation will be made known in all nations.

We are the people of God, His church and God desires to bless His people for the same purpose that has driven history ever since the Book of Genesis started. And what you see, what's interesting is that over and over in the Old Testament, you see the Old Testament people of God missing this. Over and over again you see them getting the idea that the blessing of God was intended to center upon them and so you see the people of God trying to enjoy His blessing, even expecting His blessing while indulging themselves in what was frankly self-centered worship.

There was not showing the holiness and the greatness and the grace and the mercy of God to the nations. You see them over and over and again, disconnecting the blessing of God from the purpose of God. Do you think we face the same temptation today? To receive the blessing of God, enjoy, sit back in the blessing of God and think that somehow, somewhere God has designed His blessing to center on us when it's not the case. His design is for His blessing to spread through us to all the nations.

Here's the deal, we're not the end game in this picture. God's blessing nowhere in Scripture was intended to center on us and stop with us. It was intended to be spread through us to all nations, a multitude that no one could count from every tribe, people, language and nation. That was His purpose. It's why Christ came.

See the promise that God has made, but see the price that Christ has paid. Jesus came. Why? Luke 24:47-49, He came so that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in all nations.

In the very beginning of His ministry Luke 4 Jesus, Himself quotes from the Book of Isaiah and He talks about how the Spirit of the Sovereign orders upon Him to preach good news to the poor. Then you get to the end of that chapter that He quotes from and He talks about how all the nations will know the greatness of God. So what Jesus did is He preached the good news mainly to the people of Israel in the Gospels. Then after He dies on the cross, rises from the grave He says to His disciples, "Now repentance and forgiveness of sins will not just be preached to the Jewish people. It will be preached to all nations."

You get to Romans 15:7-9. Basically, the Bible says there that God sent Jesus to die as a sacrifice so that the Gentile nations might glorify God for His mercy. The whole reason Christ died is to bring worshipers from every tribe, every people, every language, every nation. When you get back to Revelation 5:9, it says exactly that. It says Christ was slain so that He could purchase – the word it uses is purchase – purchase men from every tribe, people, language and nation. The same four things that we see emphasized in Revelation 7. It's one of four different times in the Book of Revelation where nations, tribes, peoples and languages are all brought together.

The global purpose of God is clear here, in Revelation 7. Jesus died to redeem worshipers, to save worshipers from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language. Think about it. Jesus shed His blood for every race. He shed His blood for every race without exception.

I want to read you a quote. I'm not going to tell who wrote it. I want you to see if you can guess who wrote it. The only hint I'll give you is that this was written in Birmingham, years ago in Birmingham. Here is what the letter says.

I've traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all of the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings, I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking, "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?" These questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. Yes, I love the church. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ, but oh, how we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being non-conformists.

There was a time when the church was very powerful. And the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion. It was a thermostat that transformed the moirés of society. But the judgment of God is upon the church today as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the 20th Century.

You know who wrote that? Martin Luther King Jr. and what became known as "The Letter from Birmingham Jail."

I want to remind you that Jesus Christ died on a cross and shed His blood to ransom worshipers from every race, and that means racial harmony, racial unity is extremely important to the heart of Jesus Christ. It was extremely important that day when the church was missing it and its extremely important today when we face the same danger of missing it. In our city, among this faith family our racial harmony and unity is as important to us as it is to Christ. If not, we are missing the point of why Christ died on the cross. Jesus shed His blood for every race.

Not just every race. He shed His blood for every people. What does that mean, every people – peoples that we see? All the peoples praise you God. What does that mean, peoples? Well, ethnographers help us out some. They have basically tried to identify different people groups around the world that are united together by their cultural understanding and cultural acceptance. What unites them together, whether that could be language or different other elements of culture. Basically ethnographers have identified about close to 16,000 people groups in the world today. You've got about 6.5 billion people in the world. Ethnographers have identified about 15,972 people groups – close to 16,000.

Then based on those people groups, what they have done is they have looked at which ones are still unreached with the gospel and unreached would be defined as people groups that are at least less than two percent Christian. In addition to that, do not have an indigenous community of believers, of Christ followers in that people group that are making the gospel known.

So out of 15,972 people groups, how many do you think are still unreached with the gospel? The answer is approximately 6,500 – 6,500 people groups still unreached. They estimate between 2 and 3 billion people. Will you feel the weight of that with me this morning? Sixty-five hundred people groups that are predominantly unreached with the gospel.

There are the Dayong people of China. Nearly a million of them who live in the mountains of Hunan Province that are basically inaccessible to other people from the outside world. There is a reason they are unreached. They are engrossed in animism and ancestor worship. They have many health problems because of the mountain climate where they find themselves in, but instead of having medical help for their health problems, they attribute all of their diseases to the fact they have not offered enough sacrifices to their ancestors and to the gods they worship.

They are the Komering people group of Indonesia. A violent people group that even many Indonesians say they do not want to travel through areas where they live – 99.9 percent folk Islam, also suffering from deep malnutrition because they bathe and wash their clothes and use the restroom in the same water that they drink and cook with.

Then there is the Tukulor people of West Africa, about a million of them living mostly in Senegal. The unemployment rate there has led to girls as young as 13 being sold into prostitution in order to buy goods for their families. They pride themselves on being the first Black Muslims and worship with a combination of Islam and animism strung together.

There is the Mon people of Myanmar, formerly Burma. The Mon people practice Buddhism and animism combined together. Ten years old the boys are put in Buddhist monasteries, at ten years old. Yet within a few years many of these boys are finding themselves addicted to heroin which is increasing the HIV/AIDS picture in the Mon people group of Myanmar.

Then you have the Drukpa of Bhutan. A small country, 600,000 people nestled between China and India – two large countries, this small country of 600,000 people. There are less than five believers in the Drukpa people of Bhutan. They are an animistic people who have their houses littered – scattered all over the doors – you see pictures of demons or idols that have been set up or prayer flags that have been set up to ward away all the evil spirits. Everything is aimed toward warding away all the evil spirits.

All of those people groups unreached with the gospel and the list could on and on and on, 6,500 of them. Jesus shed His blood for the Komering people of Indonesia and He shed His blood for the Dayong of China and He shed His blood for the Drukpa of Bhutan and the Mons of Myanmar and the Tukulor of West Africa. He shed His blood for all of them.

He shed His blood for every race, every people and every language. Linguists tell us that there are close to 7,000 languages in the world. Do you know how many languages still have no copy of God's word? Two thousand, two hundred and eighty-six of them – 2,286 languages that still have no copy of God's Word. We do realize how shameful it is to debate about which hymns or choruses we are going to sing in our churches when over 2,000 languages still have no written expression of the gospel.

I pray that Revelation 7 will be a reminder to us that Almighty God does not mean for His worship to be confined to multi-million dollar buildings filled with predominantly white, rich Americans. God means for His worship to unite all races and all peoples and all languages in one chorus of diverse, beautiful praise. He promises to bless the church that believes that. He promises to bless the church that believes that.

We are His people. When we abandon ourselves to live for the global praise of God, then we realize the very purpose for which He purchased us and we are assured of His blessing. Let's be that people and let's live for Revelation 7:9 and 10. Let's let it drive us. Let's let it be the vision that wakes us up in the morning and directs our paths and our ambitions and our career choices and our lives and our families. We want to gather in a multitude that no one

can count from every tribe, every people, every language, every nation to sing salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and the Lamb. That is the purpose of worship. We have all been purchased to praise Him.

We have all been sanctified to serve Him.

Second, we have all been sanctified to serve Him. We have been sanctified to serve Him. Now this word sanctified is basically a two-dollar theological word that means cleansed, made clean. I want you to come with me back to Revelation 7, and I want you to see what happens there in verse 9, the second half after we see this multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

It says, "They were wearing" – look at what they were wearing. "*They were wearing white robes*" (Rev. 7:9). It's another thing that unifies us here, not just the fact that we're seeing about salvation, but white robes and we're holding palm branches in our hands. We'll get to the palm branches in a second. Let's think about this white robes picture.

They're wearing white robes. Well what's interesting is when you get down later, these people who were wearing white robes, who are they? It says in verse 14, "*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (Rev. 7:14). Isn't that a weird picture? When you want to wash something that's white, blood is not usually the first thing you put in the washing machine. How do you wash something in blood so that it comes out white? This picture is just striking. It's really kind of like a paradox here that we would be made white by blood, but here is what I want you to see. I want you to see in this paradox – this picture – two different things.

First of all, this is a picture of how we have the victory of Christ. We have His victory. "Salvation" – the song that we sing in verse 10 there. "*Salvation belongs to our God*" (Rev. 7:10). The word literally means "victory". You see it in Chapter 12:9 and 10. You see it in Chapter 19:1. Salvation in the Book of Revelation is really a picture of victory—conquering, overcoming.

So what you've got is a song of victory, but it says salvation belongs to who? "*Salvation belongs to God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb*" (Rev. 7:10). His is the victory. The victory belongs to God and His son, Christ. That's where the victory is centered. This picture of being a white robe is not even first and foremost about us. It's about Christ.

I want you to hold your place here. Go back with me Genesis 49. This is the passage we referenced just a second ago. We didn't read this part of the passage. We stopped at verse 10. I want you to see verse 11. I want you to see another bookend, so to speak in the Book of Revelation or in the Book of Revelation and Genesis. Look at Genesis 49:11. Remember, this is talking about Christ the line of the tribe of Judah.

It says in Genesis 49:11, it says, "*He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch*" (Gen. 49:11). Listen to this. "*He will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes*" (Gen. 49:11). So we see in this picture of Jesus and the line of the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49, this picture of having garments washed in wine, robes dipped in the blood of grapes. So we see the picture first here in Genesis 49.

Then you come to the very end. Go with me to Revelation 19. Look at the picture of Jesus at the very end of the Bible, Revelation 19. We'll start in verse 12 and when we get to verse 13 we're going to see Jesus. This is a picture of Jesus in Revelation 19 that says, "*His eyes*

are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself" (Rev. 19:12). Now look with me at Revelation 19:13. It says, *"He is dressed in a robe dipped in" – what? – "in blood. And His name is the Word of God"* (Rev. 19:13). Jesus is dressed in a robe dipped in blood.

So the picture in Genesis 49 and Revelation 19 is the fact that Jesus wears a robe that's been dipped in blood that's been washed in blood. What we've got here, in the Book of Revelation is a picture of Christ's victory over sin with His blood. We've got a picture of the Lamb who was slain, but if you come back to Revelation 5, even you get to verse 6 it says, *"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain"* (Rev. 5:6). But here is what it says. It says the Lamb was *"standing in the center of the throne"* (Rev. 5:6).

That's one of my favorite pictures in all of the Book of Revelation – Revelation 5:6. A lamb that looks like it's been slain. Looking mutilated, looking slaughtered, but the Lamb is standing. If a lamb has been slaughtered the lamb does not stand very well, but not this Lamb. He has paid the price for sin. He has gone to the cross. He has been crucified there, but He has conquered by way of crucifixion. Now He is standing in the middle of the throne. He is risen over sin. He has power over sin and death and the grave and He has been resurrected.

So here's the picture. Christ – salvation belongs to Christ. The victory is his. Then when it depicts us in Revelation 7 wearing white robes, it's uniting us with Christ. Our robes dipped in His blood – our robes – a picture of the fact that we too now have conquered sin. We too have victory over sin and we have His victory. May we constantly remind ourselves from God's Word that no matter what sins you are struggling with, no matter how many times you're giving in over and over and over again and no matter how many times the adversary tries to remind us that we do not have the victory, we do have the victory over sin. We've conquered sin by Christ. He has conquered it for us. There is coming a day when we will stand before Him in white robes symbolic of the picture that we have conquered sin completely and sin will be no more. The struggles with sin will be completely gone because we have His victory. We have been sanctified.

Now, we have been sanctified to serve Him. Why has God cleansed us like this? To serve Him. Not only do we have His victory, but we have a whole new vocation, a whole new job, a whole new responsibility and it involves service. What you see happen in verse 11 all the way down to verse 14, it reiterates us with this sevenfold praise being given to God. Amen praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power and strength be to God. Then you get down to verse 15. It says, *"Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple"* (Rev. 7:15). They serve Him day and night in His temple. Now, here is the picture that it goes all the way back to the Old Testament. For the sake of time we won't turn there. You might write some of these verses down. You go back to Exodus 19:6 and what God told His people is that He called them a kingdom of priests.

Now a priest was someone who was intimately associated with the glory of God daily in the presence of God. In fact, when you get later on in the Book of Exodus, you see God calling out in Exodus 28:1 a particular tribe, the tribe of the Levites. Aaron and his descendants and they were the priests who would literally serve in the temple. You get to chapter 29 and actually it shows them being sprinkled with blood from the altar that makes them clean.

So what you've got in the Old Testament is a picture of God's people serving Him, especially this group of priests from the Levites that were serving Him day and night in the temple. Then you get to 1 Peter in the New Testament and everything changes. What you've got is a picture of Peter saying, "Now you as the church, you are a royal priesthood. You don't have

to go through somebody else to be in the presence of God. You dwell in the presence of God day in and day out. Day and night it says in Revelation 7 and you serve Him. Now this is the job responsibility that we have in heaven. We will serve Him day and night.

Now, I'm guessing when some of us hear this our faith can sometimes fall into a shallowness that when we hear I'm going to for eternity going to serve Christ – serve God day and night, well what's the fun in that? What's to look forward to in that?

I'm guessing some of you go to Starbucks every once in a while. I do the same and I was at Starbucks the other day. I got one of those cups and it had on the side a quote like a lot of these cups do. I want you to hear the quote on the Starbucks cup. The quote said, "Heaven is totally overrated. It seems boring. Clouds, listening to people play the harp. It should be somewhere you can't wait to go, like a luxury hotel. Maybe blue skies and soft music were enough to keep people in line in the 17th Century, but heaven has to step it up a bit. They're basically getting by because they only have to be better than hell."

Now that's, I'm guessing from somebody who is not a follower of Christ. When I look in the church, we have a tendency to picture heaven the same way. A luxury hotel where we are going to sit by the pool all day long and all the good things we are going to have. We picture heaven as this place where we're going to have all the finest amenities this world has to offer. I want to remind you that heaven is not a place where we're going to have all the finest amenities this world has to offer. Heaven is a place where the finest amenities of this world cannot compare with the fact that we are dwelling with Jesus Christ.

When you have Jesus, you don't need things. For us to even begin to depict heaven as the things we will have shows that we don't know who Jesus is. We will be with Him. We will enjoy His life and life with Him for all of eternity and there is no more beautiful picture than there before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. This is where all of history is moving towards. We have a new vocation. Sign us up for this job. We have been sanctified. Why? To serve Him and that's what unites us together in this diversity.

We have all been led to love Him.

We have all been purchased to praise Him, sanctified to serve Him and finally we have all been led to love Him. When you down to verse 16 it says, "*Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat*" (Rev. 7:16). Now listen to who leads us. "*The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*" (Rev. 7:17).

I want you to see two pictures of God here, in the last part of Revelation 7. First of all I want you to see God as an ever-present protector. He is the ever-present protector. It says, really at the end of verse 15 it says, "*He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them*" (Rev. 7:15). Now this is another rich Old Testament picture. You might write this down. Go back to Leviticus 23 and look at the Feast of Tabernacles because the picture of the Feast for Tabernacles is all over Revelation 7 verses 9 through 17. This was a feast in the Old Testament that God told His people to celebrate and it was basically a celebration of two things.

First of all, it was a celebration of the fact that they had lived in tents while they wandered around in the wilderness, and God had tabernacled among them. God had made His presence known among them, that when they were wandering around through all the hardships of the wilderness that God never left them alone. He was always with them.

So at this feast, what they would do is they would come together and for a week – for seven days – they would live in booths or tents, basically. They would commemorate the time when God brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness and never forgot them, always protected them. That's the first thing it celebrates.

Second is the Feast of Tabernacles was basically a celebration of the harvest. After all the crops had been gathered in, then you would celebrate thanking God for all the crops He had brought – the harvest that had come in. So what you would do is every day you would go to the temple. You would carry coincidentally palm branches in your hands and you would go to the temple and you would celebrate the victory because God had brought in the harvest. So that was the picture in the Old Testament.

When you get to Revelation 7 you see God making a very clear picture to the Feast of Tabernacles saying, "I'm going to spread my tent over you. I'm going to show my presence among you, ever present to protect you." And what you see in Revelation 7, remember who this book was written to. It was written to Christians who are experiencing some deep suffering and persecution for their faith. God is reminding them with this picture that He has not left them. That He is still covering them with His presence and His protection.

He is reminding them that there is coming a day when they will gather together with their palm branches, not to celebrate a bunch of crops coming in. Instead they will gather together to celebrate the heavenly harvest of a multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people and language gathered around. They will finally have all been brought in. It is a celebration of that. He has protected us from this day until then.

Isn't that a great Old Testament imagery brought in here? Not only our protector, but He is our eternal provider. The Lamb is our shepherd. Does that seem a little weird? Shepherds are not usually lambs. They kind of take care of lambs, but the lamb, in Revelation 7 is our shepherd. The lamb who is identified with the needs of the sheep is our shepherd. It says, "*He will lead them to springs of living water*" (Rev. 7:17). Put a little note out on the side and put Revelation 22 verses 1 and 2 there because that's a picture of the river of life. It's in the middle of the picture of the New Jerusalem. The river of life brings healing and fruit to all of the nations. "He will lead them to springs of living water where you will be satisfied forever." Listen to this, "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*" (Rev. 7:17).

This last week, Heather and I took Caleb to the doctor for his one-year shots. Not a fun afternoon. We come in there and he had missed his nap anyway, so he was not in the best of moods, but the nurse comes in with this plateful of shots. I've told you before; I don't really do good at even the giving blood or shots. Altogether needles just don't do it for me. Not that they do it really for anybody, but I really get queasy and so I just kind of stepped back. The nurse says, "Well, I need one of you to lean over your son and then I'll hold his legs and I'll give him the shots."

So, I decided it was best for Caleb's mom to be a part of this process. So she leans over his chest and the lady is holding his feet. I'm just on the other side of the room, just kind of looking. All of the sudden she pulls out that first needle and Caleb was kind of smiling until that needle his leg and then it was all over. He just starts screaming and yelling. I'm like it's okay, it's okay. I can't watch what's happening. I look at Heather tears are coming out of her eyes. Like it's okay, it's okay.

Finally after she finished one, two, three, four, just keeps giving these shots. He's crying and she finally gets up off of him, leaves the room and we gather around him and we're hugging and then just watching the tears from her eyes and his eyes. And I want to remind

you that no matter how painful the struggles of this life get, no matter how deep the scar feels, no matter how many tears are shed wondering if it's ever going to end or if it's ever going to get better, I want to remind you that it is. There is coming a day when God almighty, Himself will literally wipe the tears from your eyes. He is our eternal provider. All glory be to His name.

We are purchased to give Him praise. Cleansed, made white, sanctified to serve Him day and night. We have been meant to love Him as the one who satisfies us completely. Now that's the picture of what unites us from every tribe, nation, people and language. So what does that mean for our corporate worship? I want you to think about a few implications with me. Then I want us to put it into practice.

The Bottom Line ...

We need to get in on a global perspective of worship.

First of all, I think it means that we need to get in on a global prospective of worship. We need to get in on a global prospective of worship. I want to remind us this morning that worship is so much bigger and the purpose, and the plan and the family of God than what happens inside this building Sunday morning for a few hours every week. We are part of a much bigger picture here and we have brothers and sisters – a part of our family who are worshiping all around this city this morning and who are worshiping all around the world today. There is a global picture here that we need to constantly be aware of.

We need to get over the different styles of worship that divide us in the church.

I think that will help us with this second implication. Not only do we need to get in on a global prospective of worship, we need to get over the different styles of worship that divide us in the church. Yes, the pastor just said, "Get over it." You realize what an arrogant statement it is to say that this style of worship is what it has to look like when our brothers and sisters in Africa worship in a completely different style in an underground house churches in Asia worship in a completely different style.

What we've done is we've been looking at biblical non-negotiables in corporate worship. We're camping out on those, but if we spend our time debating and dialoging about this style or that style of worship and even letting it divide us, you realize we run the danger of negating that which Christ died to bring us – diversity in worship.

Jesus died to redeem, to gather worshipers from every race, every tribe, every people, every language, every nation. Let's embrace that and see the beauty of that. The greatness of a leader is seen in the diversity of people who follow Him. That's the picture of every person, every people group across this planet being united and praised to Jesus Christ. He is supreme when our worship is diverse. So let's get over it, the different styles of worship that divide us in the church.

We need to get involved in the joy of continual, worldwide worship.

Third, we need to get involved in the joy of continual worldwide worship. One of my favorite phrases. There is a lot of great stuff in Revelation 7, but it says they "*serve him day and night in his temple*" (Rev. 7:15). It's a picture of perpetual continual service before God. It's a good reminder for us this morning to realize, to see that every moment of every day in all parts of the world God is gathering praise for His name. It is our highest privilege to be a part of that praise on a continual basis day in and day out, moment in and moment out.

Worship is a much bigger picture than what happens for a certain matter of time in one particular location one time a week.

We need to get lost in the love God has for each of us.

Fourth, we need to get lost in the love God has for each of us. This is one of the things that as I was studying the diversity in this picture, it just came alive. It was one of those moments where you just fall on your knees when you're the Word and it just all comes together. This diversity, every nation, every people, every language, every tribe gathered around the throne singing His praises for His salvation.

We know that even in this room, even though we're pretty much a part of the same people group and our lives look a lot like each other, even in this room there is a lot of diversity, personalities, different diversity in gifts, stages of life, areas of life, what we've gone through and what we're going through. There is a lot of diversity even in a room like this. Isn't it an amazing thought to think that the God of the universe knows how to love each and every one of us in this room? He knows your personality quirks and my personality quirks. He knows the things that you struggle with and that I struggle with. The God of the universe knows how to penetrate each of our hearts with a diverse love that unites us together and praise to Him. What an amazing picture across this room. Though I certainly do not understand what any one of you, much less all of you are going through, the God of the universe knows exactly who we are, where we are in our lives and knows how to penetrate our hearts with His love. So let's get lost in the love God has for each of us, even in diverse ways.

We need to get on with the global mission God has called us to.

And let that lead us finally to get on with the global mission God has called us to. Get on with the global mission God has called us to. Over the last 10, 20 years in the church we have spent so much time debating different facets of worship. God, make us a people that rise up and say, "We're not going to talk about how and why this, we're going to look at the biblical non-negotiables you've given us and we're going to talk about how and why we can reach to all the people groups of the world with the gospel you've entrusted to us." If our worship does not propel us to go to the nations with His grace and His mercy, then we have missed the whole point of worship.

So let's get on with the global mission God has called us to as His people. God called us to from the very beginning and God is still calling us to today, looking forward to the day when history will culminate and a multitude that no one could count singing, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."

We have been purchased to praise Him sanctified to serve Him. We have been led to love Him, so let's put it into practice.

What I'd like for us to do over the next few minutes is something that we do every once in a while that sometimes takes us a little out of our comfort zones, but based on what we've seen in our study of corporate worship participation is a non-negotiable part of corporate worship. We're a community of faith. So what I want to invite us to do over the next few minutes is to gather together in diverse groups. Groups of three, four, five just with the people around you and we're going to spend a few moments praying together in light of what we've seen in God's Word.

I hope you've seen in this text a lot of fuel for our prayers. We have a responsibility, even in the next few moments to pray for unreached people groups. That they would hear the

gospel, they would know the gospel. We have the responsibility to pray that we would be vessels in God's hand to be used to make the gospel known among them.

We've got brothers and sisters around the world that are worshiping in different ways today that we have the opportunity this morning to pray for. I hope that our spending this time in prayer will make us more aware of the fact that we can and we need to be praying for our Sudanese brothers and sisters.

I think we need to pray all across this room for Jefferies and those he leads, but also for our brothers and sisters in Eastern Europe, our brothers and sisters in underground house churches in Asia, our brothers and sisters in Australia, our brothers and sisters in Latin America that we'll be serving with all this summer.

Let's spend some time praying as a global family of God. Then let's pray toward the end that God would use us as His church to accomplish the global mission He has put in front of us.

So I want to invite you to get in groups of two, three, four, five or six around you and let's spend some time in prayer and then from that, we're going to erupt into praise to His name, just like we see here in Revelation 7. I invite you into a time of prayer now.

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