



Revelation 7.9-17

- As a small boy I always wondered what was going on inside my Dad's workshop. Occasionally he'd let me in and show me the piece of furniture he was working on and a drawing of what it would be like when it was finished. Then I understood.
- Today's reading from Revelation is a bit like that. The Apostle is given a glimpse inside Heaven so he can better understand the masterpiece his heavenly Father is working on.
- John needs this so he can write to encourage the faith of the communities of Christians who are being persecuted by the Roman Emperor (Nero or Domitian).

What John sees

- He sees a great multitude of people, so many that they could not be counted, all standing before the Lamb of God, joyfully praising and worshipping Him.
- He sees that this vast crowd of people are all wearing white robes, indicating that they are pure, clean, whole and accepted by God.

What John learns

- In conversation with one of the elders, John learns who the people in white robes are and where they come from.
- He discovers that they have all come through a great tribulation or ordeal and that their robes have been made clean by the blood of the Lamb.
- He discovers that all those who have suffered will find their suffering reversed, in fulfillment of Jesus's promises in the Beattitudes (see Luke 6.20-22) and numerous OT prophecies (eg Isaiah 25.6-9).
- Verses 15-17 give a beautiful picture of the victory of God's justice, of wrongs put right, of perfect fellowship between human beings in which human values and God's values coincide.

Not just in heaven

- In case we think this salvation is just about life after death, as a kind of compensation for a lousy life on earth, Revelation goes on (chapters 21 and 22) to show that God's ultimate goal is not heaven but a new creation, from which death and evil have been banished.
- In the end the kingdom of heaven will be fully established ON EARTH, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. All who belong to Jesus will be part of that and their number will be greater than any number we can imagine...



Implications for us

We need to understand the reason John was given this vision and what it means for us. In his book *Surprised by Hope* (SPCK 2007) Tom Wright reminds us of the slogan of Christian Aid, 'We believe in life *before* death'. He points out the danger of believing salvation is only about life *after* death which might imply that there is no real point putting things right in the present world. Wright argues that:

For the first Christians, the ultimate 'salvation' was all about God's new world; and the point of what Jesus and the apostles were doing when they were healing people, or being rescued from shipwreck, or whatever, was that this was a proper anticipation of that ultimate 'salvation', that healing transformation of space, time and matter. (p.211)

I began by saying how exciting it was when my Dad let me peak inside his workshop and showed me what he was working on.

- Do you know what was even more exciting? It was the times when he would actually let me *join in* with his work – usually just by holding things and passing them to him
- but occasionally he'd hand me the screwdriver or the glue or the sandpaper and say 'now its your turn, son – have a go!'
- HOW EXCITING WAS THAT? It didn't matter if I couldn't do the task perfectly yet – my Dad was there to help and guide me and repair anything I did that went wrong.
- The thrill for me was to be joining in with him, doing *real* work, work that *mattered*...

WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT if we could bring that same thrill to our lives as Christians?

- When we are given a glimpse inside heaven (as in Rev 7.9ff), we see the masterpiece our Father is making, the work He and his Son and his Holy Spirit are engaged in...
- We see that our Father's work is about defeating evil, rescuing people from its grip, healing people, setting people free from poverty and despair, showing them tenderness and unselfish love. Its about God bringing more people than we could possibly count inside the safety of his tent (v15).
- It's also about bringing justice, not in the sense of punishment (retributive justice) but in the sense of making things RIGHT, making things the way they were always meant to be (restorative justice).
- It's a big thrill for me to see what my Father's work is all about.
- But how much *greater* the thrill if HIS work could be MY work... if I could join in with his work.



- And of course it *IS* my work and I *CAN* join in. Jesus said “it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14.10) and then he went on to say “all who have faith in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these” (John 14.12).
- Jesus goes on to say things like “I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends” (John 15.15) and “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last” (John 15.16).

One more quote from Tom Wright :

The work of salvation in its fullest sense is (1) about whole human beings, not merely souls; (2) about the present, not simply the future; and (3) about what God does through us, not merely what God does in and for us. If we can get this straight, we will rediscover the historic basis for the full-orbed mission of the church. (p.213)

- When I preach a message like this my heart starts beating faster, but how well are we doing about putting it into practice, at doing our Father’s work in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, here and now?
- Not too badly perhaps, but I think there’s a lot we can learn from other parts of God’s church who are more actively engaged in this work on a daily basis. That’s why I’ve invited Danilo along this morning.
- Let’s allow ourselves to be challenged by what he’s got to say and take this with us into our weekend away as Ann Morisy leads us in an exploration of how this church can be a place of hopeful possibility, in an age of uncertainty.