

8-14 May 2022 Revelation 7:9-17

Perseverance

Read the passage from Revelation. It is written below.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Bible notes

Before coming to this passage, we need to understand the context. Following his vision of the worship of God and the Lamb (chapters 4 and 5), John sees the Lamb opening the first six of the seven seals on the scroll representing God's purposes (chapter 6). Past, present, and future interweave in these visions. The slaughtered Lamb raised to God's throne has already accomplished God's purposes; that is, Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and announced, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled', at the beginning of his earthly ministry (Luke 4.16-21). However, God's purposes are not yet fully accomplished, and there is 'an eternal gospel' to proclaim 'to every nation and tribe and language and people' (Revelation 14.6). The opening of the first six seals revealed the ways in which human beings will slaughter one another and how the souls of faithful cry out, 'how long will it be before you judge?' (Revelation 6.8-11).

Now, in chapter 7, there is another vision of the worship of God and the Lamb. In it those who have been faithful to death are no longer crying out 'How long?' but are before God's throne, worshipping night and day. This divine throne

room is eternal in heaven but yet to come on earth. It is more enduring than the throne of Rome, despite the hailing of Vespasian as 'benefactor', 'saviour', and the 'only worthy emperor' (Josephus, The Jewish War 7.71). John's images recall worship in the Jerusalem Temple, destroyed by Vespasian's son Titus: the Lamb and the palm branches (v.9) suggest the Passover festival. There are remarkable paradoxes here: The slaughtered Lamb is also the Lord, the shepherd who leads to life (v.17; and, of course, Psalm 23). As in the Book of Hebrews, Jesus is both the sacrifice and the high priest. And the white robes representing God's approval are washed in red blood, a symbolic nod to the testimony that both blood and water flowed from Jesus' pierced side (John 19.34; 1 John 5.6-8).

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

In folktales, animals are often assigned human characteristics. Foxes are seen as cunning and The compelling visions of Revelation set the everyday events of our lives within the great drama of the victory of the Lamb of God over 'the deceiver of the whole world' (Revelation 12.9). In this light – which is that of Jesus himself – we can see that every decision we make, as individuals and as church communities, is caught up in this struggle. We choose either to worship the Lamb, serving those who hunger and thirst, or to worship the deceiver, subtly serving our own self-interest and the idols, perhaps, of comfort and money, prestige and success, to which we are all too attached.

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



Questions

- What does the turtle in this photo symbolise for you?
- Have there been times in your life where you have had to just keep going?
- What aspects of your faith sustain you in difficult times?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you for washing us clean,
for putting purpose, light and colour into our dark empty lives.
Thank you for your perseverance with us,
your never-ending provision of wisdom and strength
that helps guide us through all life's circumstances.
To you be thanks and praise.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

God of all our coming in and our going out,
of our past, present and our future,
of all the ups and downs of life,
give us bright hope that all shall be well.
Help us to trust in your promises,
to find springs of the water of life,
and to share that with others,
that tears may be wiped from every eye.
Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honour and power and might
be to our God for ever and ever!

Amen.