

St. John was shown a vision of heaven. He saw a great multitude, which no one could number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne of God and the Lamb of God, wearing white robes, holding palm branches, and praising God for his salvation. The angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim fell on their faces to worship God, attributing to him praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength.

This is the vision of heaven seen by John. If you want a picture of heaven, then listen to what the Apostle here describes. He doesn't depict a master race of people who finally win out and conquer the day. Instead, he describes a massive crowd of people from every nation, tribe, and language. He doesn't speak of some earthly military victory. No, he speaks of the salvation and victory and strength and power of God.

Heaven is where God is. It's where God's Son is. But how does John see him? He sees him as the Lamb. The Lord Jesus Christ stands on his throne, not as some far off deity, but as the Lamb who was slain for sinners. This is heaven. Heaven is always seeing Christ the Lord who saved us from sin, death, and hell by the shedding of his own blood. The Son of God became flesh, suffered and died for our sins, was raised again and ascended into heaven. But when he ascended into heaven, he didn't leave behind his human nature. No, he sits at the right hand of God still clothed in our flesh and blood, still interceding for us, still our Mediator, our Redeemer, and our Savior.

This is heaven. The elder who was with John asked him about the people dressed in white robes. The elder is an angel who represents the people of Israel. Why is he asking John who these people are? As John says, he already knew. The elder then tells John who these people are.

That angelic elder knew who they were. But why did he ask John? It seems like something an angel would do. You see, the Bible tells us that the angels long to touch and catch a glimpse of the salvation God has given to men (1 Pet 1:12). They are ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who are being saved by God (Heb 1:14). They are fascinated and at awe with all God does for us and for our salvation.

So the elder asks John, "Who are these? And where did they come from?" But of course, he knows. He tells John who they are and where they came from. They are those who have come out of great suffering. They have escaped the valley of sorrow in this earthly life. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.

This is how God describes heaven. It is where the crucified and risen Christ is enthroned with the Father. It's where people from every nation stand before him, washed of all their sins in the blood of Christ. This is the marvel, which causes all the angels of heaven to bow down and worship God for his great glory and salvation.

This morning, we gather to receive what the angels long to look at. All of heaven rejoices while Bennett is brought into God's kingdom through baptism. There he was washed with the blood of Christ, baptized into his death, clothed with the white robe of Christ's righteousness.

2 All Saints – Revelation 7

This morning, the angels long to peer into the salvation God bestows on us all. As we confess our sins and receive from the crucified and risen Christ his sure word of absolution, all the fiery angels bow down to worship God for his great glory. As we hear the Scriptures, confess the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, receive instruction and encouragement from his Word, God's glory fills this place with his salvation. When we eat the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins, we are given a taste of this marriage feast of the Lamb in his heavenly kingdom.

This is what heaven is like. It's what we look forward to. But it's also what we have right now. God has set us apart to be his children. He calls us his saints, his holy ones, not because of any worthiness in us but only because of his mercy and salvation in Christ. We enjoy heaven even now in his Spirit and Word, in his body and blood.

If you truly believe this, then you will make every effort to be present here with God's saints to receive his Word and sacrament regularly. But I'm not talking about being a church mouse. God knows that you have daily duties in this life. And as far as most of these duties go, they don't make you look much different than the rest of the world. Like those who belong to the world, you also have to eat and drink, work a job, love your spouse, and raise your kids.

But when you know what heaven is, then you know the true sadness of this world. You know Christ has saved you from sin, the same sin that still dwells in your flesh. You know he has saved you from the devil, the same devil whose lies run rampant in this world. You know the dangers of losing your faith. You know the attacks and threats against your Christian confession. When you know the heaven God has given you in Christ, then you know that you live in a valley of tears in this life. In other words, you know what God has brought you out of. He has taken you from darkness into his light, delivering you from sin into his righteousness, from death into life. He gives you joy in the midst of tears.

God therefore teaches you to carry his Word with you into this world of darkness. Teach it to your children. Confess it to your neighbors. Stand on the salvation Christ has won for you. Trust in God whose throne is in heaven yet comes to dwell with you by his Word and Spirit. This is what sets you apart. It's where you find your rest. The Lamb, who was slain for you, remains and will remain your shelter, your food and drink, and your Shepherd. He will wipe away every tear from your eye.

What will this look like? We only have a glimpse of it from John's Revelation. But when our Lord returns, we will be like him in every way, because we will see him as he is. In the meantime, we are God's children in this world. Though we see in part, we will see him face to face. Though we know in part, we will fully know even as we are now fully known by Christ, the God of our Salvation. To him be praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength forever and ever. Amen.