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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD”
Revelation 7:9-17

Is discipleship worth the cost?

{Lk 9:57-62} As Jesus and his disciples are walking along a man approaches and says, **“I will follow you no matter where you go.”**

Jesus replies, **“Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of my own, not even a place to lay my head.”**

Jesus invites another to follow. He agrees but adds, **“First let me return home and bury my father.”**

Clearly, the man’s father is not yet dead. If he were, the adult son would be busy making funeral preparations. **“Jesus [says], ‘Let those who are spiritually dead bury their own dead. Your duty is to go and preach the coming of the Kingdom of God.’”**

“Still another [says], ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.’”

“But Jesus [tells] him, ‘Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.’”

Jesus warns that **“Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”** (Luke 14:27). Is it worth the cost?

Let’s ask the multitude in Revelation 7.

☼ Who are they? Verse 9 describes them as:

① **“A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language”;**

② **“Standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”**

God the Father warned Moses, {Ex 33:20} **“no one may see me and live”**; yet through the ministry of God the Son, we are invited to **“approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”** (Hebrews 4:16).

③ **“They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”**

➤ The palm branch is a symbol of elation.

→ Sukkot is the most joyous of Jewish festivals. It honors God for taking care of Israel in the wilderness. In Leviticus 23:41 God instructs Israel to rejoice before him with palm branches during Sukkot. They wave them to the east, south, west, north, up and down as they offer jubilant praises to God.

➤ The palm branch is also a symbol of victory. In 164 B.C. the Jews drove out the armies of the Seleucid Empire, which had occupied Israel for two centuries. In celebration the people waved palm branches and sang hymns of victory as they entered Jerusalem.

➤ And of course the palm branch is a symbol of the Triumphal Entry, when crowds greeted Jesus with shouts of {Jn 12:13} **“Hosanna!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!”**

The great multitude is holding palm branches

■ Jumping ahead to Revelation 7:13-14 we read,

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.”

The great tribulation is a period of intense hostility toward God’s people. As a particular event it is prophesied to occur shortly before Jesus returns. As an archetype, it signifies anti-Christian persecution at any time.

The multitude has ④ **“come out of”** the great tribulation. This does not indicate escape *from*, but courageous passage *through* tribulation. Some have been martyred for their witness, others have not, but they all have remained loyal to God in their suffering.

Back to verse 14, ⑤ **“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Elsewhere in Revelation...

- {3:4, 5} Those who wear white clothes are the **“worthy”** and the **“victorious.”**
- {3:18} Christ counsels the **“wretched, pitiful... and naked... to buy from [him]... white clothes... so [they] can cover [their] shameful nakedness.”**
- {22:14, 15} The Lord declares, **“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the”** New Jerusalem.

This multitude has washed their robes **“in the blood of the Lamb.”** In the OT system of worship, the

blood of animals was used to purify sacred vessels, instruments and even people. Yet that blood provided only a temporary and eternal cleansing: it had no power to change the human heart. **“Just think how much more the blood of Christ [purifies] our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God”** (Hebrews 9:14)!

In summary, the great multitude consists of all who have been made holy through Christ’s death. They share in the victory of his resurrection, and are exceedingly joyful because of what God has done.

The kingdom of the world has persecuted them, yet {Rev 12:11} **“They [have] triumphed... by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they [have] not [loved] their lives so much as to shrink from death.”**

They testify that true discipleship carries a high price, but is well worth the cost.

Will we be part of the great multitude?

- ✪ Let’s listen to their song of salvation.
 - Verse 10 ~ **“And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”**
 - 📖 Salvation is forgiveness, reconciliation with God, deliverance from bondage, transformation of the soul, participation in God’s kingdom, abundant life now, and resurrection life upon Christ’s return.
- “Salvation belongs to our God.”** The Father, Son, and H.S. planned it, put it into effect, and will bring it to completion. Hence, {Eph 2:8-9} **“it is by**

grace [we] have been saved, through faith – and this [faith] is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God--” {NLT} “Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done.”

■ Verses 15-17 sketch out the amazing blessings of God’s saving work for his disciples, the great multitude.

❶ Verse 15 ~ “**They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple.**”

We talked about priesthood last Sunday. Revelation 5:9-10 exalts the Lamb, saying: “**You have made**” “**members of every tribe... language... people and nation**” “**to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.**” The world judges discipleship to be of little value; yet the multitude is privileged to serve “**in [the] temple**” “**before [God’s] throne**” because they are kings and priests.

❷ “**And he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.**”

Remember Sukkot? It is also called the Feast of Tabernacles, because for seven days observant Jews live in makeshift shelters. This commemorates the 40 years in the desert when Israel lived in tents, and looks forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise in Leviticus 26:11-12 ~ “**I will put my dwelling place among you, and...I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people.**”

In Revelation 7, the historic and prophetic implications of Sukkot are fully realized. Out in the world, Christ Followers were {1 Pe 2:11} “**foreigners and exiles**”; but here the multitude is directly sheltered by God.

❸ Verses 16-17 ~ “**Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center before the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.**”

In John 6:35 Jesus declares: “**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.**” We experience this filling to a degree even now; but in Revelation 7 the Lord satisfies his followers to the limit of their need, and beyond.

❹ Continuing in verse 17 ~ “**And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**”

→ Later, {Rev 21:3, 4} John hears “**a loud voice**” saying, “**God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**”

“**The old order of things**” is the kingdom of the world. Until is completely displaced we will shed our share of tears. We mourn the degradation, dehumanization, destruction and death inflicted by individual sins, and we mourn our collusion with sinful systems (though we {1 Th 4:13} “**do not grieve like the rest, who have no hope**”).

But make no mistake: “**the old order of things**” is passing away. Its doom is assured.

The multitude of disciples cries no more tears for sin. Their sins are forgiven, and the power of sin to corrupt individuals and systems is broken.

The multitude cries no more tears for suffering. Suffering is a thing of the past.

The multitude cries no more tears for death. They who were {Rom 6:5} **“united with [Jesus] in [his] death”** are now **“united with him in [his] resurrection.”** They are vibrantly, intensely, profoundly alive and will not die again. Death is dead!

→ If this great multitude cries any tears at all, they are sweet tears of joy, for {Rev 11:15} **“the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”**

Is discipleship worth the cost?

At a time when many fair-weather followers were turning away from him Jesus asked the Twelve, {Jn 6:67-69} **“You do not want to leave too, do you?”** Peter answered, **“Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life.”**

Discipleship is worth the cost. Salvation belongs to our God!