



KIAMA
ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

A Great Multitude ... and a Promise-Keeping God

Sermon – Steve Stanis

Revelation 7:1-17

31 Oct 2021 (Psalm 23:1-6)

Introduction: The Magnitude of the Vision

Revelation 7 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. It we have a promise keeping God. God keeps his promise of our present forgiveness and our future hope with him.

For all who hold onto this promise, John sees an innumerable throng of people before the throne of God, loudly proclaiming in chorus:

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10).

I am struck by this verse as this weekend we hear about Denise, Daphne, Glad, Rod, Barry and Rhoda (and others). They are confident of their promise keeping God and their salvation in him. I am moved by their confidence in Jesus and their heavenly perspective.

Let me pray...

“God, our Merciful and Almighty Father, Jesus, our Redeemer and Shepherd, and Holy Spirit, our Guide and Refiner, please open our minds to this Vision from Revelation? Help us to have a heavenly perspective, to stretch our preconceived ideas and embrace Your plan for this world. Encourage us to hold on to your promises even when it is tough going.

We thank you for Denise, Daphne, Glad, Barry, Rod and Rhoda and all who we know who are unwell. Grant them

your peace and assurance that you are a promise keeping God. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus, Amen!"

Thinking about a throng of people singing...COVID has blessed us with many virtual choirs all over the world. A couple of weeks ago we watched our own virtual choir. How delightful it was to hear and see our own people singing, "How great is our God".

Can you enlarge the screen in your mind, as big as you can? Bring in more people of different nationalities, different languages, different outlooks. Hear them singing together, 'How Great is our God'?

This is like a grain of sand to what John is visioning here. In Revelation chapter 7 John invites each of us to see our world from the perspective of heaven. There God is pictured as seated on his throne. The redeemed sing their praises, (7:10)

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb".

To this, the angels echo back, "Amen" (V12).

This expands our perspective about how we understand our history and world history. Long ago, God promised Abraham, "I will be your God and you will be my people".

From (Genesis 22:17-18):

"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, as the sands on the seashore.... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Abraham trusted God's promise, as did all the faithful prophets of the Old Testament. God's plans have been in

place since the beginning of time. He is a promise keeping God. He is faithful to his covenant.

As we know, his covenant is fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament. God's covenant faithfulness and God's crucified love centre us on salvation, rescue, redemption and acceptance. God's covenant calls his people together. God has promised to be Saviour and Redeemer for all eternity. What the Father planned, the Son achieved.

The Spirit now applies this commitment to redemption that will re-fashion us as God's own people. All who trust in Jesus are included in this people, not one is lost.

Multitude of People (V 4- 14)

Who are these clothed in white?

Where did they come from? asks one of the elders in V13.

To trust Christ is to be part of the Great Multitude, a multitude that no one could count. *Verse 4* symbolically describes this as numbering 144 000. This is not offered literally; this is not a counting exercise. Based on Israel's 12 tribal groups, this represents the complete people of God, twelve times multiplied by twelve times and then by a thousand – a multitude numbered by fullness and perfection.

Today the current world population is approaching 8 billion. If 144,000 was literal today, then only approximately 0.005% of the earth right now is part of the throng! No, this is a huge throng which nobody could ever count.

This rich symbolism marks out those named and called by the Messiah, who now belong to God's renewed and rescued people, whatever their ancestry...

“...wearing white robes and [were] holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Clothed in white, for victory and purity. Clothed, symbolising their belonging to Jesus. Clothed as they stand before the searching gaze of a holy God. Clothed in **his** righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

The great multitude of people express their gratitude to their God and Saviour, Jesus Christ the Lamb. They cry out praises to the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. He bought us back to God despite our ignorance, rebelliousness, and brokenness.

When John is asked who they are, his reply is, ‘*Sir, you are the one who knows*’. It is the Holy Spirit who gathers the family of God, and no one fully knows another person’s relationship with the Almighty God. In fact, it is quite inappropriate to make any judgement.

The Mercy of God (V 1-4)

The Angels’ Protection V 1-4

Verses 1-4 underscore that the created order still needs to be purified. John pictures this as a violent wind which will scorch the earth, stir up the sea, and uproot trees. Images from the natural world are John’s way of illustrating that God’s judgement might be thought of as a great shaking that will pass through our world of human affairs.

John senses that this is about to happen, so God’s people need to be reassured that they will come safely through. They will be marked on their foreheads with the special

seal that declares they belong to God and will not be harmed.

Ephesians 1:13-14 affirms:

“And you were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession - to the praise of his glory”.

The Shepherd’s Care (V 15-17)

And, in a wonderful role reversal, the lamb will turn into a shepherd, assuming the role of the ‘good shepherd’ promised in John. This is the divine role of (*Psalm 23*), where God is the shepherd who leads his people to springs of living water.

We hear this again in the final anticipation of the New Jerusalem in (*Revelation 21:4*). God himself ‘*will wipe away every tear from their eyes*’. The **intimacy** of that promise speaks loudly for the **whole vision** of a **merciful God**.

The gracious words from (*Psalm 23*), referenced here in *verse 17*, promises that the saints will experience joy and happiness through their every moment in the Lord’s presence. There will be no separation but everlasting peace.

“Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives as we dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6)

Amen!

The Motivation for Today

God's plan is a heavenly perspective for us now on earth. God promised Abraham that he would build a spiritual family of those 'who believed in him'.

God continues to call each of us into his family through the patriarchs, prophets and now through Jesus. This is true today. God's purpose is to rescue us from our despair and abandonments.

John urges us to live in the present. Remember, this vision is not about a future heaven; it is a mandate for the church on earth now. How we live now makes a difference. We trust 'the promise keeping God' whose Spirit does the work of gathering the family together, but we are entrusted to be part of this process.

This passage speaks into our personal mission, wherever we are, as we see ourselves amongst the vast crowd praising Jesus around the throne.

We are gathered as brothers and sisters all generations in Christ, regardless of our global backgrounds or religious experiences. Right here and now we are gathered around the King in his throne room, seeking to live in our community.

We are bound under his Lordship, belonging to his Kingdom, making a difference in our interactions with others.

We are called to shine as a light in 2021 is to make a difference where God places you. I would say that this means forming connections to allow another person to feel understood. We need to ask questions. We need to allow the other person to feel safe and understood. We need to earn trust. We must be like Jesus to those around us. We

have to be ready to give an answer to the hope that is in each of us.

As part of our Vision for KAC, I want us to be a community of believers who seek to let others explore, ask questions, feel safe to join with us, which is, to belong with us. This is when true conversations happen and Christ will be made known.

It is interesting as we think about growing an intergenerational church. Are we engaging in the conversations the rest of the world is having?

Has the tragedy of Afghanistan impacted you?

Have you kept up to date about Climate Change and the talks this week in Glasgow?

Have you grappled with Voluntary Assisted deaths, as our Archbishop is encouraging us to do?

I could name any number of conversations that impact our world. Nowadays, the non-church goer often doesn't know what a Christian believes, unlike previous times when many more of us had some understanding of the Christian faith. Today many don't care what a Christian believes. Maybe, as is often portrayed in the media, they believe Christian values are oppressive and outdated.

Are we? In fact, some publicly see **us** as the problem. We have our challenges to be open to conversation if we seek to engage with our community and build God's church.

Here at Kiama Anglican Churches I desire to build:

- an intergenerational church (welcoming all ages)
- an internationally minded church (starting in our local community) (interested in the world) (desiring connection through concern for the world)

- an inclusive church (welcoming all those the Spirit is calling and transforming)
- and an inspirational church (where people are affected by our praise and worship - both in attitude and practice as we are moved through prayer).

We can take our model from Revelation 7 and join the GREAT MULTITUDE in praise of God, living and singing “How Great is our God – so that all will see How great is OUR God!”

Whenever we engage in any large expansive project, every step is an act of faith...every part builds into the project, but what motivates each step? A vision of the finished project!

Today we have seen an image of the family of God, the countless multitude of God’s people – gathered in praise of God. May this be a reminder that God will keep his promise – “I will be their God and they will be my people!”

And a motivator for our journey of faith. Let us seek to live until that day as our Mission...

“To glorify God, making Jesus known as we love and serve together”. Amen