

God cares and He is not distant

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's read Revelation chapter 7. We're going to read verses 9 to 17. After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.
- They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.
- All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne, and they worshipped God, saying, Amen.
- Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders asked me, These in the 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. They have washed the robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
- [1 : 1 5] Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple, and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger.
- Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
- Thank you, Anna Lauren. What we're going to do this morning is we are going to look together really at the last half of that passage we read.
- We're going to look at Revelation 7 verses 13 to 17. We live in an increasingly uncertain age.
- Two months ago, you probably had your summer planned out. You had your holiday plans. You had dinners prepared. Catch-ups, trips, work deadlines to meet.
- [2 : 1 9] Experiences to enjoy. Celebrations to enjoy. But now everything seems a great deal more uncertain. Many of us are fearful for our health.
- The health of our loved ones. We're fearful for our jobs. We're fearful for our jobs. Concerned as to what happens after school or after graduation. We might be struggling with loneliness and isolation.
- And so my question to you and to myself this morning is in the quiet moments of life, in those moments when it is just you and your thoughts, how does your mind process this increasingly uncertain age?
- Can we as Christians still hold on to the idea that we live in a fathered universe? A universe that has been designed and built by our loving God and which reflects his glory?
- Or are we prone to doubt? Toying with the idea that we have been fools for believing in such a hopeless fairy tale. As we continue through the book of Revelation, we see that John, the writer of the book, wrote this letter to Christians who are also struggling with uncertain futures.

- [3 : 46] They felt the prevailing Roman culture in which they lived as a pressure point on their faith. They were increasingly under pressure to renounce their faith, to abandon it.
- Because if they chose to remain as Christians, they would struggle with economic survival and for social acceptance. As these early Christians struggled with uncertainty and confusion in their own world, God in his mercy gave them an incredible picture.
- A picture to bring them comfort and to reassure him. He wanted to reassure the church then and he wants to reassure us as church now that God cared for them.
- That he had a certain and secure future prepared for them, even though their current plans were up in the air.
- We're all confused. Revelation 7 is like an amazing family portrait with everyone in focus. And it is full of glory and it's full of joy.
- [5 : 02] It's a picture of our final destination. It's a picture of home. Today we're going to dabble with some kind of art criticism and think through what's in this picture and then think a bit more deeply on what it means for this now.
- How this incredible piece of art should reshape our lives in the present. So let's look in the text itself.
- In verses 9 to 12, what do we have? We have written the words, We have this vast gathering of people from every possible corner of the earth.
- We're transported into a scene of utter joy and overwhelming majesty. Let's imagine this as a piece of art.
- As you step into this piece of art, you are being deafened by the sound of praise, by this multi-billion member choir gathered from every compass point.
- [6 : 28] And they're singing a song of praise. It's being sung in thousands of different languages and melodies and cultural styles. And it blends so beautifully together.
- And they sing with a super abundant lung capacity. And verse 15 tells us that all those in the picture, all those gathered in this choir, are God's children.
- It is a picture of the church singing praises to God. It's a picture of us. It's a picture of our friends.
- It's a picture of the saints of old. It's a picture of the complete and entire church singing praises. And as they sing praises, we notice that they are all facing into the centre.
- And we find that in the very centre of this masterpiece lies a great throne where God the Father sits and with him is the Lamb Jesus.
- [7 : 38] God is the focus for this heavenly choir. God is the object of their praise. Not one person in this choir is turned around praising someone or something else.
- God alone is the focus of their praise because he is to be prized above all other things. Why do they praise him?
- What has he done for them? Well, God has brought this vast gathering home. All his children have been brought home.
- And he has personally brought each and every one of them home. And they are enjoying the richest time of family fellowship.
- Their hearts are ablaze with joy and thankfulness. Now that they have reached their final destination, they have made it home. How does God do this?
- [8 : 49] How does God bring his children home? Well, he is able to bring his family home to be with him because he has dealt with the issue of sin in their lives.

That deep desire within each human heart to keep God at the fringes of life or to even push him out altogether. And sin was so deeply entrenched into every human life, it was beyond human means or effort to get rid of it.

Only God could free us from the destructive power of sin in our lives. And God does this through his son, Jesus, the lamb whose death on the cross removes the consequence of sin in our lives and who leads us to the springs of living water in the cross.

This is a picture of an irrepressible new life which no amount of suffering and hurt can quench.

And so because we are those who have been washed in the blood of the lamb, because we are those who have been given forgiveness by God because of our sin, that is why we can come home.

[10 : 14] God cared for us so much that he deals with the biggest issue in our life, the sin issue, so that we can come home. In Jesus' act of care towards us, his blood had to be shed, as it says in this passage.

He had to suffer. And as humans who also suffer and struggle, this must be a comforting reality because Jesus is a hugely sympathetic friend to us.

He felt anguish and pain. He understands us. If you're feeling a weight of worry about the immediate future, I would encourage you to go to him and speak with him and verbalise your feelings to him and allow Jesus to work in your heart.

But the picture, though it's comforting, it's an incredible comfort to us in that God is bringing us home, it's also a challenging picture because it asks us to think carefully about what we value in life.

It's asking us and encouraging us to have a soul audit. If you and I were to reflect on our key values now, would they be focused on God's glory and praise?

[11 : 44] Or would we reflect other values, other than God's praise? When others look in on our lives, do they see the picture of Revelation 7 lived out in our lives, a picture of praise towards God?

Or would they see something else? How much overlap would there be? To put it another way, how would you finish the sentence, if only I had?

I have a lot of things on that list, which I am certain my heavenly self would think, what? Why is that there? For some of us, we may have unearthed some habits or ways of thinking in our lives, which we thought were essential, but since lockdown, we have come to see them as not that important after all.

The need for going out to be entertained, the need to go and buy new stuff in the shops, that work was the be all and end all amongst a whole host of other things.

As Christians, as those whose father is God, we must be committed to reorientate our lives to the values that we see in this picture.

[13 : 03] And for this process of change to happen, we must have before us a view of our final destination. Christian values, what we value most, are not found in a moral code.

They're wrapped up in a person, the one who is at the centre of the throne. Our values are found in the person of Jesus, the Lamb.

His values of love, forgiveness, justice, care, sacrificial living, at our calling. And the good news for us is that with his shepherding and guidance, we can become more like him in this life.

We can reflect more of his values in our daily lives. Enjoying that life of fullness, of hope, freedom, which we all long for, which we all long for even in our uncertain age.

And the second thing we notice about the passage is found in verses 15 and following. In verse 15, we're promised that God himself will be our shelter, that we can find a resting place in him.

[14 : 40] His children are safe forever. No one will be afraid anymore. In our heavenly home, there will not even be a whisper of concern.

No concerns about where the next baselet comes. No concerns about our kids. No concerns about our health. All the fears that follow us as we go into social gatherings, gone.

forever fearless. As we enjoy this picture of protection and fearlessness, we also notice that under God's protective shelter, we are provided for, in verse 16, our current experiences of suffering and of final death in this life will end and in its place will be abundant provision and abundant comfort.

We will enjoy full bellies and satisfied thirsts. Heaven is not a place of just enough. It is not basic accommodation.

This is palatial. This is royal palace type provisions. Our great comfort is that in an uncertain immediate future, we have this security which no one can take from us.

[16 : 14] We, as God's children, are sealed into his family. And the family home that awaits us is unimaginably glorious.

It is an unimaginably happy and abundant place. It is a home where we will be our true selves and where we will see God in his glory.

No more seeing God in the shadows, but we're going to see God in all his radiant glory. For some of us, current personal struggles that we go through might reveal to us where we find refuge when things are hard.

Where do we go when the going gets tough? As we try and cope with life in flux and chaos for some of us, where are we turning to?

Are we turning in on ourselves, hoping that we can fix it? Are we finding refuge and turning to comfort and beginning a good binge to see us through?

[17 : 32] Letting our heads in the sand for a little bit? Or are we running to friends and family for help? These can be good options and they're often helpful for a while, but God reminds us in this picture that there's an eternal, there's an eternally helpful option.

and that option in times of trouble is to go to God for refuge and rest. God invites us to find rest in him and he alone can provide for us the deep longing for security and protection that our hearts ache for.

This week I would remind yourself every day of the words of Psalm 46, God is your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

The picture of our final destination must transform the places where our hearts may seek to take us in times of trouble.

God is to be given this glorious view of how God will shelter us and so we must be those who push ourselves under his canopy rather than fleeing elsewhere.

[19 : 02] As we shelter in God's care we notice this beautiful image of God wiping away our tears in verse 17. we live in a world of tears but in God's eternal shelter we will no longer experience the tears of sadness there and even the tears that we wept and weep here in this life will be wiped away forever there.

Do you know the deep security and hope that comes from knowing that your destination is secure? If not God offers you a glorious future through Jesus yes life here on earth is hard but through the struggle we can have hope because we have a glorious future to come that even though life is messy even though life is hard we are being taken home we are on a journey to home.

For those of us who are Christians be assured that our destination is secure and it's been secured by Jesus. In heaven we will be more happy but we are not more secure than what we are already here in the present.

our place in heaven with our father is sealed and cannot be taken from us. Let this picture challenge us.

Let us conduct a spiritual health check and make sure that even in difficult days our values are God's values and let us find refuge in times of trouble in God's shelter and not in the temporary and flimsy shelters which are an offer to us in our world.

[21 : 13] Amen.