

St. Paul: On The Same page

10.27.13 Week #270

Day One: Rev.7:9-17

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Growing up in a small town in the 1950s and 60s the only foreign accent I ever heard was that of the German soldiers on Hogan's Heroes. Our children today hear Indian, Australian, Chinese and many other language tones from all over the world.

When you imagine the singing in heaven do you think mostly of people like yourself? Or do you remember that most of those who confess the Apostles' Creed, most of those who believe, most of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and who were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection are actually people who speak

*"For the Lamb
in the midst of the throne
will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to
springs of living water,
and God will wipe away
every tear from their eyes."*

Revelation 7:17

languages that are strange to you?

Next Sunday we celebrate the Festival of All Saints. You might say it is the ultimate diversity event, because we rejoice that with all the division in our world there is yet one thing more powerful that makes us all One. "For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." But all those who are in Christ Jesus have life eternal together!

There will be some Midwestern voices raised in song that day, but we will not be alone!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, let me begin already now to know my brothers and sister in Christ and to sing with them. Amen.

Day Two: 1 John 3:1-3

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

“The world does not know us...” What does John mean by that statement? Don't lots of people know you?

Not really. We love to be known by others. We might be a little uncertain about having actual fame and all the troubles that come with it, but we love it when others recognize us, when they remember our name. We like having lots of friends on Facebook, or receiving cards and letters at Christmas time.

But who really *knows* you? Those who know you best are the few people that you trust enough to be vulnerable with. You allow them to know your weakness or your fears. They sometimes tease you about your failures

and that's OK because you are confident of their love for you. But “the world” doesn't know you this way. For most people you wear a disguise that covers up your vulnerable parts.

John says that the world cannot really know who we are as believers in Jesus. It can only judge us according to worldly terms – whether we are strong or fast or talented or smart or rich or successful. The world decides if we are attractive or lovable.

But Jesus knows us as we truly are. He knows us as he has made us to be – forgiven, holy, pure, and lovely. Jesus knows us as his beloved Bride.

Look at the people who go to your church. Do they seem lovely to you? When you see them with worldly eyes you are aware of all their faults. One is clumsy. Another made a poor choice of clothes today. Several seem hoity toity to you. But the truth is, these are your sinful sisters and your broken brothers.

See them with Jesus' eyes today.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for calling me “beloved.” Help me to love my brothers and sisters with Jesus' love. Amen.

Day Three: Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

⁵ *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

⁶ *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

⁷ *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

⁸ *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

⁹ *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Who are these people that Jesus describes? The certainly don't sound like the Christians that I know!

Many Bible interpreters think that Jesus is ultimately

describing himself. He is the one with the longing spirit. He is the one who mourns for us, who is truly meek and merciful, et cetera.

Other interpreters say that these are attitudes toward which we must aspire. We should try harder to be meek and merciful and pure in heart. One writer even calls these verses “The Be-Happy Attitudes.” As if we could manage, if we try hard enough, to be perfect or happy.

No. These are promises in the present tense. They are already true! The first 8 blessings (verses 3-10) are framed by this truth, that those who are in Jesus already possess the kingdom of heaven (vs.3 and vs.10), so that even when you have troubles, even when you suffer in this life, you know that you have all the good gifts of God.

Maybe you don't seem very much like the people Jesus describes. But by his Holy Spirit these are the things God is working in you, and they lead to rejoicing!

Prayer: *Father in heaven, change me by your grace so that my heart longs for you. Even in trials let me rejoice in our new life. Amen.*

Day Four: All Saints Day

A good friend recently posted to Facebook that it was the 10 year anniversary of his wife's death. We all recalled together her generous nature and we looked forward to the day that we are reunited in heaven.

Remembering those who have gone to heaven before us, we often remember their kindnesses. We miss the nice things they used to do for us and with us. Meals we cooked together – hunting or fishing trips – games played and jokes told. We like to recall these fun family things. One friend commented, “What a wonderful pinochle game we will have in heaven one day.”

But this is not how the Bible describes the saints in heaven. It's not the nice things they did with us that John points to. It is the fact that “these are they who have come out of the great tribulation.”

Those whom we remember on All Saints Day when we read the names of all who passed away in the last year are not just fondly remembered for their kindness to us. They are celebrated as heroes of the faith!

They endured trial and temptation from Satan, their enemy. They suffered the effects of this sin-shattered world. They experienced illness and accident, sadness and regret. They sinned. They struggled. And they received cleansing and redemption. Their robes were washed in the blood of the Lamb, and they stand before God in blazing brilliance in the robes of Jesus' righteousness.

Do you want a good picture of the saints, the believers in Jesus as they battle through this life? I encourage you to visit prisoneralert.com to learn about brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer for their faith. There is even help there for you to write a letter of encouragement to them.

These are the ones we love who have “fought the good fight of faith” and now have the crown of life. We are the ones who still fight on, listening for the sound of the “distant triumph song.”

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, fill me with joy and eager anticipation as I await the song of victory in heaven. Help me to sing its refrain here as I wait for that great day. Amen.*