

## Revelation 7:9-17

One of the reasons why we struggle so in this life is because we see things as they appear to be. The most difficult thing of all..yes, for it is impossible, is to walk, not by sight, but by faith. It is very easy, very natural for me to see, as I look out, sinners sitting in these pews, and for you to see a sinner standing in this pulpit. What is not so easy, in fact it is impossible for us, is to see each other as saints.

We do not appear as saints though we usually try to put our best foot forward. But we are sinners. And thus sin is part of everything we say and do. Not one of us has a pure motive...ever. And if we're around each other long enough we will see the ugly, sinful side because we all have it.

But St. John did not see it. In his Revelation vision he sees a multitude standing before the throne of God, and what his eyes behold are not sinners but saints. All the people in that multitude, with their mouths are singing praises to God and to the Lamb, and there is no sin in any part of their speech. Their thoughts, motives, words, and actions are pure. And thus John sees no bickering within that multitude. He sees no frowns on any of their faces; no anger or bitterness showing itself. No one in that multitude is acting selfishly. No one is lustful, greedy, or proud. All John sees with his eyes are saints: God's holy people.

And don't we wish that we were there and not here. Here there is bickering. Here sometimes there is anger that expresses itself; there is some bitterness. Here we see grumpy faces, and we see faces that are all smiles, but we know the heartache such smiles are attempting to cover.

This is not heaven as much as we try to make it that way. This multitude, of which we are a part, is lacking in everything compared to the multitude John sees.

And this does present us with challenges. In this multitude there are some who feel uncomfortable, as if they are not a part of our group. In this multitude we see a lack of commitment. In this multitude we hear half-hearted singing; we see God taking second place; we see a lack of love for Him, a lack of desire for His gifts. And in this multitude we always see those who are missing; missing from those who assemble before the throne and the Lamb to worship Him.

Is it any wonder that visitors sometimes make a beeline for the door and never return? Is it any wonder that members resist serving within the various offices in this multitude, for they know they will face criticism and judgment? Is it any wonder that paying the bills is always a struggle?

There are those who see this multitude today and say, "No thanks. I don't want any part of your multitude. I'll wait until I join that multitude in heaven." Of course they're wrong! No one can join that multitude unless they are part of the multitude that gathers now around the throne of God and the Lamb. Everyone in that multitude, John is informed, had to go through great tribulation to get there. There is no easy path to heaven. And the path that leads to that great multitude begins with this one.

Yet I can see their point...those who want no part of this multitude. For yes, there will be tribulation here. But is it my job to cause such tribulation for others? "*Blessed are the peacemakers* (not the troublemakers)..." says Jesus in our Matthew text.

It's all about walking by faith and not by sight. But how can we sinners do that? And this is a crucial question, for unless we do, we will slowly but surely walk our way out of this multitude and not return. We will avoid the tribulation that comes to those who gather today around the throne and the Lamb. And our place in that great multitude that John sees will be in jeopardy.

To walk by faith is a gift of God. May this gift be yours today and always. This gift comes as we look closely at our Revelation text with eyes focused upon the cross of our Lord. John sees a multitude and there are no sinners present, only saints. Now listen to this...the way John sees that multitude in heaven is the way God sees this multitude today. We see sinners when we look at each other. But God sees saints when He looks at you. He does not see future saints - the saints we will be in heaven; He sees saints now in the present.

What, is He blind? Does He not see our disobedience? Does He not hear our in-fighting? Is He like the tender-hearted grandpa who only sees little angels when he looks at his grandchildren?

You are no angel, nor am I. For Christ did not die for the angels; He died for sinners. That sin is no more in John's vision. Everyone in the multitude he sees is wearing a white robe. White, it says, for all their robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

When did that happen? For you it already did. Hear Paul's words in Ephesians: "*Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*"

This is you. This is who you are. Your baptism brought you into Jesus' church. And your baptism washed your robe and made it white in the blood of the Lamb. This is not in the future; it's today. God declares you to be holy today. He sees no spot, wrinkle, or blemish in you. He sees no disobedience, no sin. He sees you as His holy one. He declares to you in your baptism, which always stands, that you are His saint.

To believe this is to walk by faith. And to believe this is to see each other as saints. But with our eyes we see sins, don't we? Sin in ourself; sin in others. When was the last time you dropped to your knees in prayer asking God to help you to walk, not by sight, but by faith? To walk by faith is to believe that you are forgiven. To walk by faith is to forgive others when they sin against you. Is this where we're at? Or do we have doubt that God forgives us? Do we have trouble forgiving each other?

Not one of us walks by faith perfectly. Our eyes get in the way. We want to have John's eyes. He sees saints, not sinners. The key is Holy Baptism. For in that washing God declares you holy. It's time to start remembering our baptism daily. And it's time to remember that we rub shoulders with the baptized. We worship here with the baptized. We sit down in meetings with the baptized. We belong to the multitude of the baptized.

If God sees you as His forgiven saints...and He does, for so you are in Christ...then how can we see each other as sinners? You and everyone around you is wearing the white robe of Christ's holiness. You won't see it with your eyes, but it is truly there. And you will see it as you walk, not by sight, but by faith. Amen.