

I want you to picture something with me. Imagine you are standing in front of an ocean, but this ocean is not made up of water, it is made up of people. There are people from every corner of the globe: Different looks, different features, different skin colors. They are not divided or fighting. They are intimately united. They cry out with a voice like thunder, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

This is the scene from Revelation chapter 7—a glimpse of genuine worship at the end of all things. We human beings were made for worship. It is something that separates us from other creatures. Animals can’t worship and adore. We can, and we do—constantly.

Let me give you some examples of things we might worship and adore. We might worship bodies—the female or the male—tracing every line and detail. We might worship our accomplishments, savoring each milestone. We might worship our family. We might worship our country. But our worship and adoration need not be limited to these higher, noble things. We might worship bowls of ice cream or glasses of brandy.

With whatever it is that we worship and adore, it’s clear that nobody has to force us. We love to worship the things that have captured our hearts and minds. Worship gives us pleasure, meaning, and peace. So the question is not *whether* we worship, but rather *what* or *whom*?

Here’s where Revelation 7 can be hard to appreciate. It depicts a great multitude whose hearts and minds have been set aflame with worship and adoration of God and the Lamb. To be frank, not everyone wants to worship and adore God. This shows us that heaven is not for everyone. Some people don’t want to be there; they won’t be there.

But even for those who want to be there—and I include myself in that number—I know that I am very far from worshiping and adoring God the way that I should. I don’t fear God the way that I should. I don’t love God the way that I should. I don’t trust God the way that I should. Therefore, I also do not pray, praise, and give thanks the way that I should. Accordingly, I don’t relate to the vision of heaven in Revelation 7 the way that I should. Maybe you feel the same way.

So today I’d like to sketch out what might be going on here. We’ll talk a bit more about the problem we have, then we’ll talk about where there’s hope.

Our problem, our lack of desire for God and our inordinate desire for other things, is mysterious. We can’t quite master it. If we could, then we could fix ourselves. All we’d need to hear is “Love God, and we would. Or: “Stop it!” and we would stop. But desires don’t work that way. Anyone who knows what it’s like to be addicted, knows that it isn’t that simple. Worship and adoration gives us pleasure and peace, whether that be of alcohol or porn on the one hand or brilliant achievements or good clean living on the other. We look to these things because they are effective. Simply being told to “stop it” is never effective.

Perhaps you’ve wondered in the past why the Israelites in the Old Testament would worship and adore idols and false gods. I remember thinking to myself in Sunday School, “Don’t these people know the first

commandment? Why don't they just stop it!?" It's always the case that other people's idols appear nonsensical. Somebody who doesn't like alcohol might think it very strange that anybody should be addicted to the stuff, but those who are see it very differently. The hold these things have is too powerful simply to say, "Stop it."

The alternative to seeking what we crave in created things is to lift our hearts and minds to the Creator to have them satisfied in him. This is what the people are doing in Revelation chapter 7. They are perfectly keeping the first commandment. They are loving God with all their hearts, souls, and minds, and nobody has to force them to do it. In fact, they've never had so much fun, nor have they ever been filled with such seriousness. God is their all in all.

It might feel like there is a huge chasm between the way you are and the way these people in heaven are. In fact, I hope you feel that way. The first step towards recovery is recognizing that you have a problem. You are powerless over the false thing that you can't help but worship and adore. In fact, that thing has power over you instead of you having power over it. This is not merely psychology; its roots are in the Bible. It's being humbled. Countless times and in endless ways the Bible says over and over again: **"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."**

So, with what we've been talking about today, we might confess: "I haven't loved you God. I haven't longed to be with you. I haven't adored you. My heart and mind has been wrapped up with many other things, but not with you." This can seem like a foolish thing to do, because you are basically saying to God that you haven't wanted to be with him, but here's the thing: He already knows. He knows our hearts and minds better than we know ourselves.

And here's the other thing: He has loved us nevertheless. This is where we may speak of hope. God's strange love and mercy is our hope. God did not decide to save only those people who already loved him, worshiped and adored him. There were no such people. He sent his Son, his dearest treasure, to redeem and save the worst of the worst—people who have ignored him, despised him, and chased after other gods instead.

Every single one of that multitude which no one can number was converted so as to put their trust in God and the Lamb. You hear it in their thundering song: **"Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb!"** They do not sing, "Salvation belongs to us, because we have been so good."

A bit later they are identified as the ones who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb so as to be pure and clean. This shows that they did not fix themselves. What happened to them is that the Gospel came to them. The Gospel announced that they have been forgiven and accepted for Jesus's sake regardless of any idolatry or sins. It's all because of Jesus.

This is the voice of the Good Shepherd: "Come here, my sheep, and be loved. **Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" The people who make up that multitude heard this voice of Jesus and followed him. By the Holy Spirit who was given to them, they began to see what an adventure lay in store for them with God. They had thought it was good to worship created things; they began to imagine what it would be like to see God.

But we haven't seen God yet, nor have we been resurrected with our purified bodies. This is why, as Paul says, "**Now we see in a mirror dimly.**" We do not yet worship and adore God as we will. To use the language in our reading, we are still in the great tribulation. The tribulation might have many aspects, but surely our weakness and coldness cannot be counted as least among its difficulties.

So where does this leave us? We stand between two realities: We know how we are now, and we are presented with something almost unimaginable in our reading. It can seem as though there is a chasm fixed between our coldness and their whole hearted love. But that chasm has been closed by the blood of the Lamb. Those who were far off have been brought near.

Those saints in Revelation weren't always radiant, pure-hearted worshippers. They were once like us—chasing comfort in bottles, screens, and achievements, just as the people of old used to worship the statues that their hands had made. What changed them wasn't their willpower, but the Lamb's sacrifice. The same voice that called them calls you now: not "Fix yourself first," but "Come as you are."

This is why we gather week after week – not to perform, but to be transformed. Every hymn we sing, every prayer we whisper, every "Amen" we utter is training for eternity. We're like toddlers taking first steps with our worship—wobbly, inconsistent, but held by the Father who delights in our trying.

One day, the struggle will end. The fog will lift. We'll join that ocean of praise not because we finally achieved perfect worship, but because the Lamb perfected us. Until then, we walk through our tribulation with this hope: the same grace that saved that multitude is shaping us right now.

So come, all you who are wearied by your weak worship. The Lamb who turned idolaters into worshippers does the same for you. And on that day, when your alleluias join that ocean's roar, you'll wonder why you ever settled for anything less than God being all in all.

