

## Come, Let Us Worship - Worship through life's struggles

[Revelation 7:15-17](#)

[Key verse: Revelation 7:17b ...And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes](#)

### Introduction

Good morning everyone!

For the last three weeks we have been listening to a 4 Part sermon series titled "Come, Let Us Worship"

1. Part 1 was "Worshipping In The Spirit and in Truth" specifically encouraging us to know that worship is no longer connected to a specific place or time, but can happen anytime and everywhere.
2. Part 2 was "Worship as Ascribing Ultimate Value" Encouraging us to make God the object of our 'ultimate value' and not tradition or human efforts.
3. And Part 3 was "Building a Worshipful Life" Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it in the name of Jesus.

Today in Part 4, the last of this sermon series, we are going to look at worship during life's struggles. Worship is often associated with expressions of joy and delight so it may feel a little anticlimactic to focus on struggles as the final topic. But if we desire to worship God in Spirit and truth then we need to acknowledge that sometimes it is hard to worship with happy and glad hearts.

Though it is easy to sing praises to God when things are going our way, often there are times when our lives or the lives of others are not going well (Mark 12:31). There are broken or strained relationships, exhaustion, poverty, depression, sickness and even death in our families and communities.

Do we force ourselves to put on a brave face when we worship God, pretending all is fine? *If we do this, are we honoring God with our lips but our hearts are far from Him as we learn in **Isaiah 29:13***. Or do we acknowledge our pain and the pain of our neighbor by laying it at the Lord's feet in an act of worship?

This is why we are looking at some passages in Revelation today, to give us hope and reason to worship God whether we are filled with joy or sorrow. They reveal an incredible God, majestic, worthy of our utmost attention and praise, a God who tabernacles with us, whose Lamb shares His throne and shepherds us. A God who promises to wipe away every tear.

## Let us pray

Triune God, teach us to worship you in Spirit and truth. Guide us to faithfulness and fill us with the Joy of your presence. May we listen to your Word, so that we offer heartfelt worship during both the good and trying times of life. Transform us ever more into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

## Biblical examples of brokenness

It is not hard to find situations of such despair in the Bible that worship seems difficult if not impossible. I would like to highlight a few:

- In the Book of Exodus, God sends Moses to Pharaoh to bring His people out of Egypt (**Exodus 3:10**) to worship (**Exodus 7:16**) Him. Despite God's promise to the Israelites that He would free them (**Exodus 6:6**), when *Moses told this to the Israelites;... they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery* (**Exodus 6:9 NRSV**). **How do you worship when your spirit is broken?**
- Around 589 BC, the Babylonians plundered Jerusalem and destroyed the Israelites most treasured physical possession, the Temple. They then dragged a select elite in chains back to Babylon. **Psalms 137** captures the trauma of these times in the words: "1 *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.* 2 *There on the poplars we hung our harps,* 3 *for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"* 4 *How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?"* **When your world has collapsed, when you are being mocked and tormented can you sing praises to the Lord?**

Our Revelation text today, is found in a book that was not born out of a restful relaxing time for God's people, in fact the opposite, it was a time of great persecution. When the free and open worship, that we are enjoying here this morning, would probably result in terrible punishment if not death. Its first hearers were struggling under Roman rule, so the book gives strong assurances to those who suffered. In our Bibles today, we know that God blessed them, and through them so many generations over the millenium, with a revelation that contains some of the most powerful visions of heaven, worship and hope in the Bible.

Even if we are not directly suffering, in Christ we are called to have compassion on the downtrodden (e.g. **John 11:33-35**). Helping others can be so uplifting but as we share their hurts we also need worship to provide Christ-centered and Spirit-powered motivation and energy to do so in a way that brings glory to God. Hopefully, these passages can help us to be worshipful whether we are in pain or sharing our neighbors' pain.

## Revelation context

To provide a brief context for the Book of Revelation. It is the last book of the Bible and is widely considered in church history to be written by the Apostle John, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, when he was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos (**Revelation 1:9**). In addition to **Revelation**, the Apostle John is credited with writing the **Gospel of John** along with the **Letters of John**. **Revelation** uses visionary and a-po-calyptic language, language describing the end of times, that is often hard to understand. The first **three chapters** cover a powerful vision of the Risen Christ and His messages to the 7 churches. At the start of **chapter 4**, a door to heaven opened and John witnessed scenes covering Heavenly Worship, the Lamb and Scroll, and the Seven Seals which brings us to our verses in **Revelation 7** which are found in the section titled "*The Multitude from Every Nation*."

## Revelation 7 verses 15 to 17

**[Slide 1]** **Revelation 7:15a** Therefore, "they are before the throne of God

The 'they' in this verse provides an amazing heavenly scene as described in **Revelation 7:9** *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 before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.* [This is one artist's impression though we can all sympathise it is impossible to capture the glory of this scene in a picture].

Here I would like to emphasise a few points before moving on to the message verses that start from **verse 15**. Worship here is corporate (a great multitude), inclusive (from every nation, people and language), Christ centred (standing before the Lamb) and it is only possible to come before the throne of God through the atoning death of Jesus. **Verse 14** tells us that their robes were white, symbolising purity, "*in the blood of the Lamb*".

It is also important to note that in the context of this passage the 'they' who are before the throne of God have come out of the great tribulation (**verse 14**). In Greek, 'tribulation' gives the image of being forced into a difficult situation, between a rock and a hard place. The people in our text today have experienced great suffering and yet they now stand before God's throne.

**This re-assures us, that even in our hardest moments the throne of God is open to us through Christ who will shepherd us through our tribulations.**

**Revelation 7:15b** and serve him day and night in his temple;

[Slide 2]: **Revelation 7:15a, b** (NIV) “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple;

When you read this verse can you spot the word 'worship'? This is the NIV version.

If we look at the NRSV translation it is more obvious.

[Slide 3] **Revelation 7:15a, b** (NRSV) For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple,

It is interesting they translate this word differently, afterall in English “worship” and “serve” can carry very different meanings. For example, we worship God here on Sunday mornings then go out into our daily lives to serve Him. But in Old Testament Hebrew and in the New Testament Greek word “*la-tre-uó*” the two meanings can be interchangeable.

For example, going back to the story of Exodus, God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh, ‘*The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness (Exodus 7:16)*. Looking up the meaning of the underlying Hebrew word translated “Worship” here in the NIV it is defined as “work, serve” [abad].

What if we were to swap the common use of the English words “Worship” and “Serve”? Instead of saying I serve Christ in a homeless ministry, we say “I worship Christ in a homeless ministry.” Or instead of saying, “I serve in a prayer ministry,” we say “I worship Christ in a prayer ministry.” I think this broadens our sense of worship to not only include serving but also healing. Serving others often brings healing and joy even if we are suffering.

In fact, it is often because we have suffered in similar ways we are able to minister at a much deeper level of understanding and compassion. Worship that involves quality time with others also opens our eyes to hurts that may not be obvious on the surface. So the words “worship” and “serve” can merge as **God calls us into His presence to worship Him in order to receive healing and to heal others in Christ’s love.**

[Slide 4] - blank placeholder slide

**Revelation 7:15c and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.**

A more literal translation of the Greek reads, “*the One who is seated on the throne will tabernacle over*” His people. God will set His tent over us to shelter us as we worship and that tabernacling will be perfect when God dwells with His own as recorded in **Revelation 21:3** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*

The same Greek [root] word for ‘dwell’ is used in **John 1:14** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*. In the future we will see God face-to-face, but right now we can worship knowing God is tabernacled over us in this very place, right now. Wherever God dwells is a place of love and overwhelming grace.

**If we hold onto this truth, that God tents over us, then every moment of our lives can be lived with a heart of worship whether we are living through moments of joy or sorrow.**

[Revelation 7:16](#) *‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.*

There are echoes here of **Isaiah 49:10** *They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water*. In Exodus, as the Israelites traveled through the wilderness, the themes of God’s provision of food (manna), water (from wells/rocks) and shelter (cloud - **Psalms 105:39**) are strong. We too today are totally dependent on God for His gracious provision and protection.

Sometimes in this life our afflictions are never fully lifted. A debilitating disease, a loved one who died and we miss terribly, a traumatizing event that still darkens our thoughts or a sinful habit that continues to consume our lives. **But this passage gives us hope in God’s promises that there will come a time when these afflictions will NEVER torment us again. Praise the Lord!**

[Revelation 7:17a](#) *For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’*

In this verse, we find Christ at the center of the throne identified as both the “Lamb” and “shepherd”. As Lamb, we are reminded that Jesus knows what it is like to be vulnerable, to suffer and is able to relate and minister to our own suffering. His suffering led to salvation for all who believe as written in **John 1:29**... “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!...*” and in **Revelation 7:10** “*They*

*called out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb!"*

The role as shepherd is beautifully expanded on in **Psalm 23**, a passage that is full of reassurance and comfort especially for the afflicted.

**Psalm 23:1-6** *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

The final verse provides the incredible reassurance that God's goodness and love follow us all the days of our lives, right here and now, and we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. **All these attributes of Jesus, as both Lamb and Shepherd who will guide us through life's tribulations, fill us with thankfulness towards Christ, alert us to His daily presence and provision and draw us with thankful hearts into worship.**

[Revelation 7:17b](#) 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

This may remind us of **Isaiah 25:8** or the second last chapter of **Revelation, chapter 21**, in the section commonly labeled "A new Heaven and a new Earth." In **Revelation 21:4** it reads 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' What an incredible promise, that the old order of things, the pain and suffering will pass away never to be experienced again.

### **Slide 5: Baby crying**

As shown in the picture here, wiping away a tear involves physically touching one's face. In the picture, the baby is wiping away its own tears but you can easily imagine a parent or sibling doing so with their own hand. This is an intimate act of compassion which often involves the sharing of pain. What parent sees their child crying and feels nothing.

So too God feels our pain and will wipe away, not one or two tears, but EVERY tear from our eyes. God is not distant and remote [transcendent and immanent]. **He is**

**tented over you and His Lamb has experienced hurt, betrayal, abuse and rejection so that we may one day have every tear wiped from our eyes. Is He not worthy of our devotion and praise?**

**Slide 6: smiling baby**

Conclusion

**Slide 7: Conclusions**

Today we have looked at maintaining a worshipful heart in times of joy and during life's struggles. The book of Revelation is a strong reminder that it is often when we are at our lowest that God gifts us with the most powerful revelations of His goodness and grace that is found in Christ. It is from these pits of despair, whether experienced directly or shared in Christ's love, that the most profound heartfelt worship can flow.

Specifically **Revelation 7:15 to 17** teaches us that:

1. **Verse 15a** - even in our hardest moments the throne of God is open to us through Christ
2. **Verse 15b** - to worship is to receive healing and to heal others in Christ's love
3. **Verse 15c** - God shelters us with His presence as we worship
4. **Verse 16** - God promises there will come a time when afflictions will never torment us again
5. **Verse 17a** - Christ is our shepherd who will guide us through life's tribulations
6. **Verse 17b** - God promises that He will wipe away every tear from our eyes