

PSALM 34 – “Psalms Now”

I feel as if I could never cease praising God. Come and rejoice with me over His goodness.

I reached for Him out of my inner conflicts, and He was there to give me strength and courage. I wept in utter frustration over my troubles, and He was near to heal and support me.

What He has done for me He can do for you. Turn to Him: He will not turn away from you. His loving presence encompasses those who yield to Him. He is with them in the midst of their troubles and conflicts. He meets their emptiness with abundance and shores up their weakness through His divine power.

Listen to me: I know whereof I speak. I have learned through experience that this is the way of happiness. God is ever alert to the cries of His children; He feels and bears with them their pains and problems. He is near to those who suffer and reaches out to help those who are battered down by despair.

Even the children of God experience affliction, but they have a loving Father who will keep them and watch over them.

The godless suffer in loneliness, without hope; the servants of God find meaning and purpose even in the midst of suffering and conflict.

REVELATION 7 verses 9 – 17

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. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’

¹¹ All the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹² saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?’

¹⁴ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’

And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ 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 shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,” nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre 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.”’

“THEY SHALL COME FROM THE EAST”

[Mission Praise 946]

They shall come from the east,
they shall come from the west,
And sit down in the Kingdom of God;
Both the rich and the poor,
the despised, the distressed,
They'll sit down in the Kingdom of God.
And none will ask what they have been
Provided that their robes are clean;
They shall come from the east,
they shall come from the west,
And sit down in the Kingdom of God.

They shall come from the east,
they shall come from the west,
And sit down in the Kingdom of God;
To be met by their Father and welcomed and blessed,
And sit down in the Kingdom of God.
The black, the white, the dark, the fair,
Your color will not matter there;
They shall come from the east,
they shall come from the west,
And sit down in the Kingdom of God.

They shall come from the east,
they shall come from the west,
And sit down in the Kingdom of God;
Out of great tribulation to triumph and rest
They'll sit down in the Kingdom of God.
From every tribe and every race,
All men as brothers shall embrace;
They shall come from the east,
they shall come from the west.
And sit down in the Kingdom of God.

A song from the desk of Gowans & Larson included in the musical “The Blood of the Lamb” and reflects on the poem “General Booth enters Heaven” accompanied by those who had received salvation – from every country, every social status – a wonderful depiction of the global need for a global Saviour.

“CHRIST FOR THE WORLD – OUR GLOBAL SAVIOUR”

READING: *Revelation 7 verses 9-17*

I always have a sense of wonder when I look at photographs taken of the earth from space. Even the aerial photographs taken of our coastlines get a “wow” response. With the increased use of drones, more and more people are taking photographs from a height that not so many years ago would be deemed impossible without the use of a balloon, or even aircraft. Photographs taken by the International Space Station of Cuba, Florida and the Bahamas provided stunning images - a view of the Earth that we could never have from our perspective with feet on the ground.

Our text today is a view of the Kingdom of God from a perspective we cannot see on our own and presents a scene that causes sensory overload - amazing, spectacular, celestial vision of the glory of God and the risen King. The focus is on Jesus as a Saviour of and for the whole world – a global Saviour.

In **verses 9-12** we see a global Saviour worshipped by all people. There is much excitement, except for this year, of large international sports gatherings whether it is World Cup events for various, the Commonwealth Games or the spectacle of the Olympics. I suppose, for those who love it, even the Eurovision Song Contest, creates a similar spectacle of peoples and nations coming together. Even though they are there to support their own particular nations, there is a sense of a celebration of humanity.

The sight described in our reading is one of total unity, a global gathering, without number, without borders and without divisions or loyalties. Bible commentator, Warren Wiersbe wrote: “You cannot read the book of Revelation without developing a global outlook, for the emphasis is on what God does for people in the whole world... “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” was our Lord’s mandate.”

This huge crowd were standing before the Throne with palm branches, a large scale version of that triumphant entry made by Jesus when He entered Jerusalem at the start of His final journey to the cross. This multitude of people were praising together. No fear of different languages, or preferences of worship music style, these people were united in their worship and even, as **verses 11 and 12** tell us, the angels joined in on this.

The text here explodes with images of the global nature of the work of the Saviour. God is not a British God. God is not a Western God. God is not a white God. Our Christian faith is global, it is multi-racial, it has no colour and has no national or international boundaries. We have brothers and sisters throughout the world who are gathering to worship our Risen King. We may be confined to our homes at present, but when we approach the Throne of God is praise and worship, we are part of a world wide worship service and even when we “sign off” for lunch or some other activity, that worship continues. The hymn “The Day Thou Gavest” reminds us in verse 4 of the hymn:

*The sun, that bids us rest, is waking
Our brethren neath the western sky;
And hour by hour fresh lips are making
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.*

In a world that seems to be gradually being stripped of all hope, **verses 13-15**, remind us that He is our global hope. In a country where people have, more or less, the freedom to attend a place worship and join with fellow worshippers, we are now being reminded of those for whom the expression of their faith has cost them the ultimate. But when we think of martyrs of the faith, those “saints” being venerated on this All Saints’ Day, we need to remind ourselves of those who suffer for their faith today. Despite the actions of the Chinese Government, the underground Church in China is thriving. Despite the work of militant Islamists around the world, trying to gain their place in paradise by eliminating the infidels, there are many Muslims turning to Jesus Christ.

Dana Ferguson in “Feasting on the Word” writes “We Christians are wont to imagine that God’s job is to keep us and our loved ones safe from all harm. This mis-guided belief causes more lives of faith to crumble than any other that I have known...”

Jesus, on that last night together with His disciples and aware of what lay ahead of them shared his heart with them. In **John chapter 16 verse 33** we read, “***I have told you these things, so that in me you might have peace. In this world you will have trouble...***” Not exactly the words of comfort they had expected or wanted. But Jesus continued, “***..take heart ! I have overcome the world.***” Of all of the disciples, only John died of old age – the others faced horrific deaths.

Jesus brought hope to the persecuted, those whose time of tribulation left them beaten and bloody, but washing in the blood of Lamb made them white as snow – symbolic of purification. Christians have been persecuted for their faith find themselves pronounced righteous before the throne. It is estimated that every five minutes a Christian is martyred for their faith, more than 200 million followers around the world currently face persecution. Our reading provides the hope that those who suffered in the great tribulation, were not destroyed, but they had entered their great reward – life eternal. Jesus, in his “Sermon on the Mount” as recorded in **Matthew chapters 5 – 7**, states “***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you***” (**Matthew 5 verses 10-12**)

The final few verses **15-17**, we have a reminder of Jesus as the global healer. He will shelter them with his presence; He will give them food and water and covering; He will shepherd them. He will lead them to springs living water. **Psalm 23 verses 1-4** remind us “***The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. 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.***” The reminder “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes” have been called by some as “the tenderest little sentence in the whole Bible.” God shall wipe away every tear of sorrow, every tear of loss, every tear of disappointment, every tear of pain. For a world that is aching and hurting, this is not just a future hope, but can also be a present experience. It is said, apparently, that the poet Robert Burns could not read the closing verses of this chapter without shedding a tear.

Conclusion

This global Saviour can be and is our Saviour. This global hope can be and is our hope. This global healer can be and is our healer.

As we look at pictures from the International Space Station we may not see many small details of the Earth, more of a big picture. Do you think God is only seeing a 'big picture' view of the lives of those who serve Him? No way! God knows what we are each going through, even what we try to hide from others. He's aware of every tear. He sees every injustice. In His own way and in His own time He will set all things aright. But are you letting Him lead you to that living water today? The healing which Christ, our Saviour offers is not only for another time and place when we go to heaven... it is for today. Rev John James used to say “not just pie in the sky when you die, but steak on the plate while you wait” (with apologies to non meat eaters) As His saints today, we can experience comfort and the assurance that nothing we do for God, and in His name, goes unnoticed.