

3. Do music and hymn-singing lift you up out of yourself and into God's love? If so, why and when?

### Closing Prayer

*Thank you, God, for the gift of music. Lead us to praise you together, offering our voices and whole selves. Lift us up so our hearts are fixed on you and your grace. In praise and music may we find the goodness, purpose, and peace you so graciously give to all who gather in your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

### Further Study

Psalm 96; Ephesians 5:15-20

### Daily Readings

M. Psalm 147:1-7

F. Colossians 3:12-17

T. 1 Samuel 16:14-23

S. Psalm 149

W. Acts 16:23-26

S. Psalm 150

T. Psalm 148

### Memorization

**Psalm 150:6a**

Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!

## All People Praise God

### Revelation 7:9-17

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

<sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

<sup>12</sup> singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” <sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple,

and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

- <sup>16</sup> They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;
- <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

## Theme Statement

The great multitude of those who have suffered and died in the faith gathers around God’s throne and the Lamb, praising and exulting in God’s ultimate victory. Their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, they celebrate God eternally.

## Exploring the Word

Welcome to the final four sessions of our study on “Celebrating God”! Before turning to God’s barrier-breaking mission in Acts (session 13), we turn to Revelation in sessions 10–12. These focus on the Revelation to John and the vision of God’s ultimate victory in establishing God’s kingdom. Notice that Revelation, which means revealing something hidden, is singular. It is not Revelations. This tells us that a single revelation is at the center of this entire letter to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day western Turkey). The revelation is God’s saving victory given through Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lamb of God.

The dramatic visions experienced by John communicate God’s power and ultimate victory over sin and evil, strengthening suffering Christians who wondered if God was on their side. They also challenge complacent Christians made lethargic by affluence and pressure to compromise with Roman religion.

## Revelation 7:9-12 A vision of the church triumphant

Martin Luther wrote that Revelation was a book of comfort and warning. Verses 9-12 give comfort: God saves God’s people through the blood of Christ. The number of those saved is enormous and diverse. God’s salvation is not about a select few individuals. Their robes symbolize purity and victory through Christ. The palm branches signal victory and celebration. “Salvation *belongs* to our God” (v. 10) proclaims that only God and the Lamb are the source of salvation. This multitude owes their new life to God. Unified, all worship around God’s throne. This church triumphant *worships* together, just as they suffered together.

All in heaven sing. The proclamation is unanimous: God’s ultimate purpose of salvation is accomplished. Praise God! Verse 12 is a seven-fold doxology, or song of praise. God is who God promised to be, the faithful and everlasting source of life and goodness. This doxology begins and ends with “Amen,” signaling that all of this is most certainly real and true.

## Revelation 7:13-17 Who are these saved by the blood of the Lamb?

Who are these people? Like us, they are suffering, struggling, and imperfect people. Christians in John’s day were treated as second-class citizens. Being ostracized from community events and trade guilds hurt them socially and economically. Community groups and events often included the worship of Roman gods and eating meat sacrificed to idols. Christians were torn between remaining faithful to Christ and going along with the dominant culture just to succeed in life. At the worst, Christians were persecuted, jailed, and killed for their faith. John’s vision of the white-robed multitude makes it clear that Christians’ steadfast endurance will not be in vain. Remaining

faithful in worship, conduct, and allegiance to Christ mattered. Refusing to water down Christianity in order to fit in and succeed was crucial. Such faithfulness and endurance, in spite of suffering, would end in vindication and eternal life. Christ would bring them through their ordeal and into the very presence of God. It is the blood of Christ, his suffering and death, that purifies and saves them.

But how can robes be made white by crimson blood? This seeming contradiction is a warning. To be faithful to Christ means to be willing to suffer, bleed, or even die as he did for the world. It is by his blood that believers are made pure and victorious. Salvation and victory are tied to suffering and defeat. Comfortably complacent Christians would find this unsettling. They were coasting, not suffering. Their lukewarm Christianity was so distasteful that the Spirit would spit them out (3:15-19). They needed to repent.

Why repent? Revelation 7:15-17 tells us. Only God will shelter them, literally “tenting over them,” so that they will suffer no more. Only the Lamb is the true shepherd who gives his life for the sheep and can guide them to living water. Only God comes down from the throne, like a loving parent, to wipe away all their tears. To whom would we go but to such a God as this?

## The Word Today

Reflect on the Lord’s Prayer and its meaning for our daily Christian life. It is prayed around the world, glorifying God. Think especially of the opening and closing: “Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.” The closing doxology, perhaps added as early as the mid-1500s in England, is confident and exultant: “For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and

forever.” The Lord’s Prayer begins and ends with praise. In 1529 Martin Luther wrote about the first three petitions in his Large Catechism:

There is nothing that God would rather hear than to have God’s glory and praise exalted above everything else and God’s word taught in its purity, cherished and treasured. (Stjerna, *The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther 1529*, p. 374)

Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are carrying out the vision and advice we have in John’s letter to the seven churches. The focus is on God, who is worthy of blessing, honor, and glory.

Christ taught us this prayer, and we should be careful not to overlook the great gift it is to the church. Luther emphasized that we pray this prayer not to *make* God’s name holy—it is holy in itself—but that *we* may keep it holy in our daily lives. Focusing on the glory and holiness of God keeps us fixed on the true God, who comes to rescue and save us. Likewise, Luther pointed out that to pray for God’s kingdom is to pray that it flourish and prevail in our lives and our world. Finally, the third petition is prayed so that God’s will be done among us. This is a battle cry against sin and evil, but it is not a call to violence. It is a call for *God’s* kingdom. Luther understood that so much in our world opposes God’s will and good purposes. We are vulnerable to our own fears and selfishness, and to evil itself just like the Christians addressed in Revelation were.

Luther’s advice above echoes that given by John to both struggling and complacent Christians. Joining in praise and worship is absolutely essential in the life of God’s people if we are to keep Christ at the center of our faith and life.

# Questions for Discussion

## Beginnings

1. Is there a song or hymn that you find strength in singing with others? Examples are “We Shall Overcome,” “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Why is it a favorite?

## Exploring the Word

1. What is the significance of the title *Revelation*?
2. Why is the statement “Salvation *belongs to our God*” powerful (Revelation 7:10, emphasis added)?
3. What does the doxology in Revelation 7:11-12 tell us about God?
4. What were the challenges and temptations facing the churches John was addressing?
5. How does Revelation 7:15-17 answer the question “Why repent?”

## The Word Today

1. Which words or phrases help describe the Lord’s Prayer for you? (Check all that apply.)

- Unifying
- Expression of faith
- Plea for help
- Cry for God’s will to be done
- Overused
- Challenging
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. The churches in John’s time struggled with discrimination, persecution, and complacency. What same challenges do you see in the church today?
3. Complete this sentence: One new insight or understanding that has been revealed to me in this study of Revelation 7:9-17 is \_\_\_\_\_.

## Closing Prayer

*Gather us, O Lord, to glorify your name. Unite our voices in worship, prayer, and praise. May the vision of your heavenly victory stir us from complacency and renew our faith. Amen.*

## Further Study

Revelation 1-3; 21:1-7

## Daily Readings

- |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| M. Psalm 67          | F. Psalm 86:1-11     |
| T. Isaiah 2:1-5      | S. Revelation 7:1-8  |
| W. Matthew 28:16-20  | S. Revelation 7:9-17 |
| T. Zechariah 8:18-23 |                      |

## Memorization

### Revelation 7:14

These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.