

Revelations 7:13-14

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[0 : 00] There are at least two problems that get in the way of really benefiting from the book of Revelation and really benefiting from what the Bible has to say about what God has prepared for his people.

The first of these problems is just simply this, that we cannot, it is impossible for us, to comprehend the concepts of another dimension and another world.

We don't have the language, we don't have the understanding, we live in space-time history in the universe, in one particular dimension in which God has created, and we simply cannot possibly appreciate another dimension because we have no experience of another dimension.

Let me put it this way. I heard somebody giving this illustration the other day, and I suppose it kind of fits in with our whole theme this morning of birth.

If you were to, if it was possible to approach an unborn baby, I know it's impossible, let's say it was, that it was possible to approach, and if it was possible for that unborn baby to understand English, and you were to start explaining to the unborn baby what life was going to be like after birth, even if that baby could understand you, he couldn't understand you.

[1 : 29] For example, if you say, well, once you're born, you learn to walk. What does walking mean to an unborn baby? And once you're born, you learn to eat.

Well, what is eating to an unborn? And you're going to have a taste. Some things will be sweet, and some things will be sour. Some things will be both sweet and sour. However, how in the world can he possibly, or she possibly, understand the concept of eating and taste?

And then you say to that baby, well, you'll learn to read. And there are books about all kinds of things. There's a big world out there. There are countries. There's a sun that shines. There's sea. There's trees and mountains and volcanoes. There's other people, and you'll be able to see the whole of the world around you, be able to travel on an aeroplane. You might as well not bother starting, eh?

Completely impossible. Why? Not because the unborn baby can't understand language, because we've already decided that he can't, even though he can't. He can. But, if you understand me.

[2 : 36] But you know what I'm saying? The concept of the outside world after that, it would be completely impossible for him to understand.

Completely impossible. And therefore, we're dependent on just the little pieces of information that we have in the Bible to just try and confirm to us, number one, that heaven is a reality.

Just like a world after birth is reality. You know, it amazes me how people say, you know, you're one of those pie in the sky when you die.

Nonsense. It's impossible. The whole of life is about what you see or what you hear. Imagine you were to say, that's a baby. Well, it's not true, is it? Because the whole of life is not just the womb. It is for the moment. But then, there is after birth. There is life after the day you're born. And that is a whole different dimension. Well, God, the same God who has created the dimension that we know and we're so familiar with, is the same God who has created a completely different dimension with greater things and with things that we have never experienced and we cannot experience in this dimension.

[3 : 52] We simply cannot do it. That's the first problem. The second problem is this, that we're more concerned about what heaven is going to be like than who we are going to see in heaven.

Now, what the Bible says is this, that heaven, for the believer, is first and foremost about being with Jesus Christ. Well, how did he put it himself?

He said, I go and to prepare a place for you so that, this was his objective, so that you may be with me also. That's what Jesus wanted.

That's what he prayed for. That's what he longed for. That his people, the ones he had loved on this earth, and that includes you and I, if you trust in him, that they will be with him. That's what heaven is about.

It's to be with Christ. And that's what Paul said. He says, for to be with Jesus is better by far. So, whatever heaven is like by way of gold, or gates, or buildings, or whatever else we might experience in heaven.

[4 : 57] Trees, avenues, rivers, fruit, all these things are given to us symbolically in Revelation. We know that, first and foremost, heaven is about being with Jesus and gazing upon the glorious, glorified, risen Lord Jesus.

And that will take up so much of our attention and so much of our minds that really we won't, in some senses, nothing else will matter. I remember a couple of years ago we went to Paris for the first time as a family and we went to see the Mona Lisa in the Louvre in Paris.

And I'm sure many of you have been there and you know of course that the Louvre is a place of tremendous popularity even. Well of course nowadays but I was glad we went there in those days before the advent of the Da Vinci Code and so we went with thousands of other people and of course they were all heading in the one direction to the chamber to the gallery where at the end of the gallery there is the Mona Lisa.

Of course you get in the queue and your queue moves very slowly and you're looking over the shoulders of the other people and you're trying to see it for yourself all the way along. And of course eventually you get there you're not allowed to stay there for more than a few seconds you've got to keep moving you're not allowed to take any photographs you've got to keep moving but your eyes are upon this picture I suppose because the time is so short and because the focus of everyone is on this picture this painting all the time and you're looking at it.

Now what I'm trying to say is you know that in that room contains dozens of other beautiful paintings maybe some of them are just as beautiful as the Mona Lisa and yet nobody ever looks at them unless you're a real specialist the focus of attention was the Mona Lisa in that chamber and that's what it's going to be like in heaven I'm quite sure that the architecture of heaven will be absolutely magnificent and yet in a very real sense the focus of attention will not be on the architecture it will be on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ these are the two things that get in the way of really benefiting from and having a correct attitude towards heaven and of course sometimes we just give up and we say oh well it's far better to be as useful in this life as we possibly can and really what good does it do to think about heaven what good does it do after all it's a thing that I'll never be able to understand as long as I'm in this world so what practical use is it well that's a very very pure attitude to take because the Lord

[7 : 37] Jesus made it absolutely clear that heaven is his objective for his people for you and I who trust him love him so therefore our eyes and our attention ought to be given to heaven that's what I want to do this evening I want us to look at one of these passages we're not going to we're not going to spend a huge we're not going to ask any complicated questions we're going to try and make it as simple as possible we're going to just focus our attention a few verses in this passage here where John is able to see into that other dimension and this is what he sees he sees people verse 9 I saw a great multitude they are people they are not clones of one another they don't all look absolutely absolutely identical to one another they are all individuals each one of them in their own right and there are millions of them that's what he tells us that no one could count and they come from every nation they still bear the characteristics of their race they bear their identity they belong to different races and tribes and colors they belong to different cultures they are from every nation and tribe and people and language each of them in their own right and it's impossible to count them and if you were to go around if you were to start going around every single one of them would say tell you that they don't ever want to be anywhere else this is the only place they ever want to be and in a million years from now they'll still say the same thing

I don't want to go anywhere else except I want to be here where I am because I can't conceive of anything else being provided for me except this place understanding that's what he tells us he says that they're standing before the throne in front of the lamb now if you want a description of the throne and the lamb you have to go back to chapters 4 and 5 we don't have time to read it read it later on because this scene in front of them is so so incredibly glorious that they can't look away from it it's not as if they're hypnotized they have their minds they have their intellect they do this because they want to because they're fully satisfied all the hunger has been taken away all the

sense of loss that they suffered in this world has been taken away every kind of weakness has been taken away and they have fixed their eyes upon the throne now you might think well surely that's ok for a day or two but not for a million years or for two million years then that's that's a ridiculous concept you see what I mean see what I mean we don't understand do we because for them a million years is like a day because time has been taken away and God has replaced time with eternity and that in itself we cannot possibly understand we'll never be able to understand understand it and they're gazing they are gazing because they see something new every moment that they gaze and you know if you see the glorious things in this world

I don't know if you've ever visited some of the great places that tourists go to in this world you go to somewhere like the Grand Canyon I remember once going to the Grand Canyon many many years ago and it takes your breath away you stop the car in the car park you've travelled a long distance to get there you get out of the car you go to the edge of the car park and then all of a sudden you see this massive massive great crevasse in the middle of the desert and it takes your breath away you know you stand there and you think but then after a few moments it doesn't take only a few moments before you kind of got used to it I know you could go back there day after day you could see something else but eventually you would kind of get used to it but not in heaven the sense of wonder and awe in heaven is permanent and every day is as if it was the very first day that all these people stood there and gazed at the throne and they're surrounded by millions of people and yet they're not claustrophobic they know each other how can you get to know millions of people I have enough trouble getting to know the people that I think I know but I don't know in this world and yet in the next world there'll be no barriers to getting to know people there'll be no memory barriers we'll be able to remember one another and every one of us will delight every time you see another one of your brothers and sisters in Christ it'll be as if the first time you've seen them for ages there's no outstaying you're welcome there's no people getting fed up of one another because there'll be perfect love and perfect harmony between one another and they're singing they're worshipping they're worshipping endlessly can you imagine an endless worship even at the best of times even a service that we are enjoying you end up looking at your watch don't you because that's the kind of world we live in because we feel the time going past sometimes we don't as much as others but sometimes even the best will in the world after an hour or an hour and a quarter you're looking at your watch we've all done it and we've all said well that's got to be the end of it because that's the kind of world we live in but God

God will place it into the hearts of his glorified people that worship will be for them an endless ecstatic lovely experience that they would ever want to come to an aid they sing their singing is focused upon the lamb amen and praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever amen they don't need to learn the words they know the words they don't need to learn the tune they know the tune they don't need to have a presenter I don't think they do anyway I'm not quite sure when it comes to these things these details we have to leave it but I reckon they all know it they all know it all they have to do is to see the lamb on the throne and that's it that's enough to just burst them into song and they all know that there's no disharmony it's all perfect absolutely perfect because it is the place that God has created in his for his people they can all hear the words they all know the words the words have everything to them they're all wearing the same clothes clothes that speak to them to everyone else about the Lord who has saved them and has brought them to himself and they are all the same age agree with that they're all the same age

[15 : 07] I'm not sure what age that will be they're all the same age and although I said that they're all different in their own right yet there is also a resemblance to the lamb to the Jesus who saved them that's what the apostle Paul tells us he said that we shall bear the image of the man from heaven that's what he tells us in first Corinthians chapter 15 that we shall bear the image of the man who is the man from heaven the man who's just right here as this shepherd who moves amongst his people and he ministers to them and they love him to be amongst them and he loves to be amongst them and also if you look you'll see somebody and we're gazing into heaven at this time perhaps we on this side we don't know some of those who are going to be there but then we will know some because they'll still keep their characteristics that they had you'll be able to recognize christians that you knew on this side christians who have now died and gone to be with the lord you can recognize them but they don't want to be back with you they don't want to be back in this church they loved coming here they loved you as a family they loved you as a friend and they didn't want to go when they were here there was that natural reversion that every one of us has towards

death no one naturally wants to die of course not because death is an enemy death is an intrusion into the way that God has created the heavens and the earth and yet on the other side no one wants to come back it would be appalling to them to come back to be back in this world full of insecurity and darkness and sinfulness and temptation and they know that one day they will be joined by those who love them in this world if they belong to the

Lord Jesus Christ but as well as knowing some of the people that are there perhaps there are people that you might think will be there and might look for but they're not there because not everyone who has ever lived on this earth will be in heaven that's what the bible says Jesus makes that plain in John chapter 5 those who have believed in the Lord Jesus will rise to go to be with him forever those who have not believed they will be condemned condemned to a lost eternity to a place without God a place of punishment a place of righteous punishment and eternal punishment you know there are also others amongst that great multitude of people who nobody will recognize things why is that because nobody has ever seen them before in this world or if they have it's only as a tiny baby that they saw them in this world what happens to babies when they die you know a lot of people use that as an excuse they say ah there you go the bible talks about heaven and hell there you go what about infants what about babies when they die don't tell me that your God sends them off to hell they've never repented they've never had faith in

Jesus they couldn't possibly they're babies they've never had a chance to hear the gospel so if you're going to say that only those who have heard the gospel and have listened to Jesus will be saved then what about babies and people say they write the Lord off they write God off and they say if that's the kind of God you believe in I don't want anything to do with it excuse me hold on a moment where does the bible say that babies are sent to hell where if that's what you think the bible says and if that's the reason why you've written the gospel off then I'd ask you to think again because you're wrong there is every indication in the bible I know that we have to be very careful on this one but there is nothing in the bible to suggest that the Lord sends infants who haven't had any chance who haven't had any possibility of listening to the gospel there is nothing in the bible that tells me that such infants are sent to a lost eternity recently in Stornoway

I conducted two funerals in the same week that's actually not uncommon and it was brought home to me because the first funeral was a lady who had lived to the age of 105 to probably the oldest lady in Lewis and whilst there is always a sadness and there is always a sadness when somebody passes away that lady had lived to a good age and she had all her faculties up until very shortly before she died the other funeral was a baby a baby where the coffin was probably about a meter not even that and that really really gave me a thought because I've only done that twice I've only seen it twice you naturally you wonder all kinds of different thoughts go through your head when that comes home to you and it's only when you see it for yourself that you really begin to think you begin to think about the sadness of course in the first instance of parents who haven't even managed to get to know their child the child has only been born this little boy was two weeks old his name was Angus that's all we know about and the next thing they knew was that his parents got news that he wasn't going to live and eventually he did die at two weeks old and I was asked to conduct a little family service a little family funeral for him and we went down to the grave and we watched as that little coffin was placed into the grave that little boy will live for two weeks in this world and you ask all kinds of questions you know things go through your head like well in one sense that baby may have grown up and he could have suffered pain and tragedy he could have suffered a hard life maybe who knows what kind of life he could have lived and yet on the other hand you're thinking well you can't think like that because he could have been enormously useful to mankind he could have a gift and qualities who knows what kind you do you tend to you think about what kind of person would he have been what kind of person would he have grown up to be but as a

Christian you also ask where is he I have no question whatsoever I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever that that little boy is with the Lord he's with the Lord and that's not because I believe that you can be saved in some other way it's not because I believe that God has ordained two ways of being saved one way is by repenting and believing and the other way is another way it is because I believe in the Lord who is fair and who is right and compassionate and full of loving kindness and that baby genuinely genuinely along with the millions of others who have died genuinely never heard the gospel he could not possibly recognize the gospel there was no cognitive processes in his mind he's safe with the

[24 : 05] Lord but you have and I have heard the gospel and we have the responsibility of asking what do I do with the gospel we have a tremendous responsibility to respond to the Lord because we have had we've grown up and we've heard God's voice as we were thinking about what else do we find out about these people in this chapter we find out that they've got something in their hands and that's palm branches palm branches were used in the Old Testament in times of celebration and particularly when they wanted to remember celebration in connection with something the Lord had done for them and palm branches were used to express joy you remember of course that's what they did when Jesus entered into Jerusalem they lined up in front of him and they had palm branches in their hands and they cried out Hosanna in the house blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord and that's a little picture that day was a little picture of what heaven would be like a time of celebration of endless celebration when they were thanking God with understanding of what God had happened to them they are joyful there is a joy which is in them which you will not find in its fullness in this world and then you ask well what are they doing they're standing

John says he says that he sees them standing before the throne now that might mean nothing to you it might even be unattractive to you imagine spending the whole of eternity standing before the throne well I said before that the standing is a gazing and it is a continuous discovery in such a way that they don't want to be anywhere else but there's something else as well if you go back to the Old Testament you discover that for servants to stand before the throne was actually to do service to the king it was a way it was a form of expression which meant to do service and so the picture here is not just of people idly standing by but it is of people who are doing something for the king for the lamb they are serving him I don't know what they're doing but I know that they're serving him and they're serving him joyfully and they're serving him with gladness and they're not serving him because they get paid for it so that they can spend it on themselves they're putting every effort every ounce of energy is put into serving the king because they are driven driven by love for the lamb driven they are happy to do so and they don't want to do anything else where did they come from tells us again in the passage that would fight that's the question that one of the elders asked John these in white robes verse 13 who are they and where did they come from I answered sir you know and he said these are they who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb they come from this is how it's described the great tribulation now some people believe that before Jesus comes again there'll be a time of worldwide persecution and this is what they call the great tribulation but that may be so I don't know but if what John is seeing here is every Christian who's ever lived every person who has followed the Lord and they're now in heaven from every generation then it can't be those who have come through the final tribulation if there is going to be a final tribulation it's got to be people from every age all the new testament every century having been gathered and having been raised up and now appearing in glory gazing at the Lamb and serving him and worshipping him in other words what John is describing the world that you live in and I live in adds the great tribulation what kind of tribulation is he talking about well first of all tribulation in which Jesus promised that if the world hated me it will hate you also many Christians in the world are today hated and despised and they're cast out because they follow Jesus they hate them because they love Jesus that's the only crime that they have loved Jesus you don't have to go far back into history you don't have to go far abroad to find that people are put to death because of their love for Jesus that's all they've done they've loved Jesus but tribulation is a whole lot more than that tribulation can mean temptation it can mean the toughness of being a Christian and making your way from day to day as a Christian it can mean the toughness of maintaining a consistent obedient

Christian life and having to face up to your failures and to the knowledge that in many ways you've failed the Lord and you've let him down many of these people that you see there they thought they would never while they were on this side they thought they would never get there they went through days when they doubted that they were even Christians in the first place they went through days of temptation and backsliding they fell into temptation many of the times they allowed sin to creep in to such an extent where they lost sight of Jesus altogether and yet God has taken them through and now they're there they're there appearing before the throne because the Holy Spirit has completed that work of sanctification in their lives that he who has begun a good work has finished it to the end that's what we've got to look forward to and we've got to believe in it tonight and you might be conscious of all the weaknesses of this life in the various forms but believe this if God is for us who can be against us and he who begun a good work in us will complete it and will present us faultless

before the throne you'll do it for sure absolute certainty they came from the great tribulation there's one more question I need to ask you tonight and I so hope it's a question that you've asked as we've gone through this tonight and as I've tried to unfold this passage

[31 : 08] I so hope you've been asking one question above everything else what's the question the question is this it's got to be how did they get there how do I make sure I'm there let me ask you a question do you want to be there do you really really want to be there do you long to be there as you read these words is God let me repeat what I said this morning is God speaking to us and reminding us that this world is only for a certain number of years and there will come a time when it arrives in this world will come to an end now how do I make sure that once I leave this world that I will be amongst that multitude that cannot be numbered that I will be amongst them glorifying the lamb the Jesus who sits on the throne well it tells us even this passage tells us it doesn't leave us in darkness and ignorance it tells us they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb and that's a figurative way of saying first of all your robe is a symbol of who you are your robe told in

Jewish culture your robe was an indicator about who you wear it was a kind of uniform and so what these people have done is they have taken themselves and they have gone to the blood of the lamb now who's the lamb the lamb is Jesus Christ what does the blood of the lamb mean the blood of the lamb is clear the blood that was shed at Calvary when Jesus became a sacrifice for us they are not there because they worked hard for the Lord they are not there because they have been religious people and because they have crawled up the hill where they tried to find God through religion these people these men and women are there because God has saved them by his death on the cross that is the only way to make sure that we are there by coming to the place where Jesus promises that the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all sin they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb and white they are spotless not a single stain clean with no memory of the sins that they committed in this world and with

Jesus saying to them your sins and your iniquities I will remember no more are you going to be there that's the question do you want to be there then come you come and follow Jesus trust in him take that step of faith where you surrender your life to him and make him your lord and your king and your lamb let's fill the heads in prayer