

Growing up there was always one thing I could say about a church service – I was glad when it was over. In our little church we had a clock on the side wall near the front – I always knew that the sermon should start by 10:50 and be over by 11:10 – any longer meant that we would be late getting finished which seemed terribly unfair. Those weeks when the sermon was over by 11:05 – well, those weeks I thought I was in heaven. I had books to read and TV shows to watch and games to play. I wanted my weekly church obligation to be over so I could get on with life.

You can imagine my disappointment when I first heard that verse we heard in the second lesson: “For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple.” Heaven is being described – these were the ones who had received salvation – and what did they do? Sit in church endlessly - worship day and night.

A person would really have to be in love with God for that to sound like heaven.

But in the vision given to John that we know as Revelation John looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, for all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white with palm branches in their hands. They cried with a loud voice, saying” Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb.” These are the ones who have come out of the great ordeal and who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb.

The great ordeal: Scholars say that this vision was given to John toward the end of the rule of the Roman emperor Domitian – around 95 A.D. Domitian demanded that his subjects address him as Lord and God and worship his image. Christians refused. Many Christians lost their lives.

These martyrs were the ones that John heard singing, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.” For them suffering was not sitting through an hour of worship – no, suffering was being tortured and killed for refusing to bow down to anyone but Jesus. Do you think they would soon tire of singing the song of God’s victory after that?

In our world today some Christians live where it is costly to follow Jesus. Following him makes their lives very hard. They must love Jesus.

In our world today there are people who turn the other cheek and go the second mile and take the shirt off their back to give it to someone who has none. They do these things not so that they will have more enjoyment for themselves but because they love Jesus.

In all of our lives are people who serve Christ in the church, who give far more than their fair share. They must love Jesus.

This vision given to John is an assurance that those who go through the great ordeal – every ordeal of living by faith and not by having our own way, serving in ways that are more costly than rewarding, giving for those who are ungrateful, - this vision given to John is the assurance that God sees and will not forget.

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. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more, the sun will not strike them nor any scorching heat, 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.”

For those who love Jesus so much that it costs them singing, the praises of Jesus will not soon grow old. Singing the praises of God and the Lamb will seem like heaven.

And for those who have lots of better things to do than worship God it might seem like hell.

But scriptures promise that God is what heaven is all about. The saved will be with Jesus who loved them so much that he gave himself on the cross for them.

Pray that you and I are privileged to thank him forever. Amen.

