### “Our God” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 8, 2022

**Revelation 7:9–12**

9After 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. 10They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

11And 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 worshipped God, 12singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.”

**John 10:22–30**

22At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” 25Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; 26but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. 30The Father and I are one.”

The first thing to notice about the heavenly scene in Revelation is that believers from *all* nations, tribes, peoples, and languages are gathered before the throne. It is repeated to emphasize the point. And it should forever eliminate any notion that God favors one particular race or tribe. *All* groups are present in heaven.

Here we see risen believers worshipping together with angels. Who are the believers? Anyone who believes in Jesus; anyone who has the right intuition about Jesus. In the scene from the Gospel of John, Jesus tells some of his critics that they do not believe because they do not belong to his sheep. His sheep know his voice (John 10:26–27). You know how dogs recognize their master’s voice? Well sheep do, as well. The sheep know their master’s voice, and he protects them; no one can snatch them away. Do you feel that you know Jesus’ voice, that you belong to him, that he has you securely, and your destiny is in his hands?

Then Jesus speaks that sentence that is so important but has given rise to so many debates: “The Father and I are one” (10:30). Does that mean they are the same person, that Father and Son are just two different modes of the same being? That view, which came to be known as Modalism, was rejected by leaders of the early church. Instead, they favored an understanding that the Father and the Son have the same purpose and the same spiritual attitude, and they work together for the same end. That seems more likely to be what Jesus meant.

There are places in the gospels where Jesus says that the Father draws people to the Son. In John 6, Jesus says “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (6:45). I think it means the Father touches the person’s heart and keys that person to be receptive to the Son’s words. It really is a spiritual drawing power. If we recognize his voice, it is because he and his Father have been working deep within our souls, and we have consented to that working, therefore our spiritual ears, so to speak, are attuned to hear his voice. We have already been listening to that voice on levels that are deeper than our conscious minds. That is what I meant when I referred to having the right intuition about Jesus.

The idea of knowing the shepherd’s voice tells us how very personal our faith is. The insight of faith is a recognition that happens in one’s heart. There’s God’s side, but there’s the human side, too. Knowing the shepherd’s voice refers to one’s own personal relationship to the shepherd. Out of your experience, you have developed your own response to his voice, his words. I see this same highly personal aspect in one of the lines in Revelation. “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne” (7:10). It is not just God, but *our* God; the one who loves us individually and collectively. It is not just a statement about God’s power, but about how *caring* God is, that God and Jesus provided salvation for *us*. Also, the Revelation passage shows heaven as a place that is orderly and beautiful, not chaotic and often ugly as *this* world, at least *humanity* in this world, often is.

The last two verses in the Revelation passage are also important. They read: “All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders . . . and worshipped God, singing, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen’” (7:11–12). Notice the blessings that are uttered in verse 12. Some of them have to do with God’s power, namely “glory and power and might.” But some have to do with the goodness God has showered upon people: “blessing”—that means some people’s lives were changed and uplifted; “thanksgiving”—that’s the human reaction to receiving such a blessing; so these speak about the experiences that the worshippers have had: blessings leading to thanksgiving. Three of the qualities—wisdom, honor, and glory—speak about both God and humans. God has wisdom and shares it with us. God has honor and extends it to us, as when he says “well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23), and as when Jesus said to Zaccheus the tax collector, “he too is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9), thus honoring the guy and lifting his self-esteem. And God shares his glory with us. The saved people in heaven are thanking God for sharing wisdom and honor and glory with them.

Wisdom and glory are particularly important, because they will need to grow throughout our life and on into the afterlife. There will be a never-ending growth of wisdom and spiritual glory. This glory probably refers to a spiritual shining, an aura of beauty that surrounds the one who is receiving spiritual truth and goodness. It’s not a *physical* shining, but a *spiritual* shining that we will be able to see when we receive new senses in our new bodies in the heavenly realm. Paul says we are being transformed from one degree of glory into another, into the likeness of Jesus (2 Cor 3:18). Apparently, we will be able to actually *see* spiritual glory.

We take on spiritual glory even in this lifetime. Paul speaks of “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). Peter says “the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you” (1 Pet 4:14). Sometimes you can, at least in your imagination, see the glory that surrounds a particularly saintly person whom you know. In practical terms, I think of this glory as synonymous with spiritual progress. I don’t really think of myself as having glory, but I do think of myself as having made progress. As long as you don’t obsess about it, I think it’s healthy to contemplate the progress you have made. What progress have *you* made with your God?

God nurtures us and grows us. We are like his little plants that he waters and shines on. His spirit of glory rests on us.

And, finally, we cannot be snatched out of Jesus’ hand. He will encourage our growth in wisdom and glory forever. We will never stop growing spiritually. No wonder we will be rejoicing in our God, singing about God’s blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving. We will have many teachers and many fellow students, in the afterlife. We will grow in love as well as wisdom. This is what Jesus has prepared for us in the heavenly mansions.

Have you been listening to the voice within your heart? Have you been growing spiritually? Are you ready for a closer walk with Jesus? Let’s sing a song about our close and personal walk with him.