

WD August 15, 2022

“Family Photo”

Remember the days when if you wanted a family photo done you would have to go to a photo place and have them taken professionally? We used to take pictures of the boys at Sears on their birthdays, when they were seniors in high school, and when they got married and so on. It was almost always for a special occasion or to mark a special time in our lives. Such is the case with church directories as well. Often a church directory marks an anniversary or special time in the church’s life.

Not too many years ago if you wanted a picture, you had to make an appointment and wait for one of the studios to open up. The last time I can remember doing this was for dad’s 70th birthday. My sister and her family were in town. We all dressed up and carted ourselves to a store that took photographs.

The photographer had all of us stand together with white backdrop behind us. It took an hour to take all the pictures and then we had to come back to pick them up after they had been developed. Of course, there was also a time way back when we would have to wait for weeks for the pictures to be developed. Not anymore.

Now taking a picture is as quick as taking out your phone and snapping a shot. We still take a lot of shots of special things. We took hundreds of pictures when we were in Alaska last year. We captured as much as we could. But now a days, we take so many pictures we don’t really know what to do with them all. Many of us are running around with hundreds of pictures on our phone. We may even buy extra cloud space just so we can keep them. And often we upload them to the internet because we want everyone to see them. And isn’t that the whole point; to take a photo that we want everyone else to see. We want others to see our special day. We, ourselves want to remember all those special days.

Here’s the thing...all the pictures we take are of the past; something that has happened. Pictures show what used to be and freezes in time an important memory. No one takes a picture of the future. No one can.

Revelations 7:9-17 is exactly that.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 around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
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.

Revelation 7:9-17 is a family photo of what is yet to come. It’s not an anniversary. It’s not a senior picture or church directory photograph. The pictures and movies we take here on this side of eternity are all capture in time. This picture doesn’t have any time stamp on it. It’s an active picture. It’s a picture of God’s people in heaven and it comes in focus more and more as our hope grows in Jesus. We can see all those people. They come from many races and backgrounds and languages. (Won’t it be cool to be able to understand one another completely without barriers!). They are all dressed up in the robes of righteousness. They are happy and filled with joy. None are older than another nor does anyone have even the slightest evidence of any kind of brokenness. “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation...washed in the blood of the lamb.”

Nothing separates them from God or from one another. They are glad to be together. They are all together for a special occasion, namely the beginning of eternity. Everyone is present and accounted for. They are happy to be together and celebrating their homecoming. We can see them and we can hear them praising God in loud voices.

Look closely. It is a family picture of the future. It's a picture strictly limited to believers of Christ. No one who isn't family gets to photo bomb this picture. No one that I'm aware of takes family pictures of strangers and random people. The idea is to capture those who belong there. There is hope in this picture because strangers can become family. None of us actually deserve to be in this picture but grace we have been welcomed in. Imagine all the people we will get to meet there. We have been promised a place in the Lord's kingdom. By grace our baptisms mark us as children of God. By grace our faith unlocks the door.

This brings me to this last thought. If you were to look at the photos of our boys' wedding day pics or of dad's birthday pic I can see myself in them. Look at the picture of heaven and you will see yourself standing next to loved ones long gone...your great, great, many greats, grandparents. But look even closer. You may see your great, great, many great grandchildren as well. The picture is timeless and full of life. All who believe in Jesus are in this picture. The Lord shares this picture with us so that we may hope in the Lord. It is for us to understand that we have a destination and a place to belong. And at the center of it all is Jesus who is eager to welcome us into that great kingdom. In Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30