

April 21, 2013

PARADOXES OF FAITH GIVES US GLIMPSES OF HEAVEN

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

Adapted from sermons: [Paradoxes of Faith/Revelation](#)

Revelation 7:9-17

God touched us this morning with a finger of love, and our eyes were opened and we gave praise for a brand new day. But did your beautiful mind begin to wander and say, “It’s pointless for me to get up so early, shower, eat and sit in CHURCH. It is pointless to and a waste of my precious and valuable time. Do you have any idea how comfortable my bed and pillows are? Do you know how much work I could be getting done right now? I could be checking off so many things on my to do list. It is starting to really heat up again – you know, this thing called life. There is so much yard work that I need to be doing; doing handiwork around my home. This last week I was soooooo very busy. It would be great to just sit back and relax this morning for a just a little while.” Oh, you can look at your pew neighbor and give them that slight nod and say, “yes I can agree - there are so many other things we could be doing.” But here I am. Here we are.

I’ve heard things like that so many times before, and I’ve felt them as well. I’ve knocked on people’s doors and been laughed at when trying to share church information. People have told me, “My life is just really busy right now, I don’t have time for church,” or “Sunday is my only day off.” Someone once even said, “I don’t like to leave my dog alone. I have to take care of him right now.” I’ve invited people to church or Sunday School, and I have heard, “Maybe I’ll give it a try,” but they don’t. I’ve been told, “I will be there this Sunday,” but they aren’t. Apparently, they have better things to be doing. Church is just pointless.

But hold up before we point fingers and become judgmental. All of us, yes, each one of us, have or have had that temptation lingering in the back of our beautiful minds, that voice of reason from Satan saying, “You have better things to be doing. You need to rest. You need to get caught up on work at home or get a head start to your busy workweek. You really need to take a week off.” Obviously, this is a serious temptation. It’s the reason why on Easter we have a 50% increase in worship attendance, and on every other Sunday we are blessed to find each one of you here. Satan wants us to believe that church is pointless. Satan wants us to believe that our faith is pointless.

And you know what? He's right. It is pointless—by worldly standards. As the world with its reason and philosophy and science looks at it, our faith is completely and utterly pointless. But spiritually speaking, that couldn't be farther from the truth. That's why we call our faith a paradox. It is something that seems senseless and pointless and wrong, but yet is completely true. In fact, our faith is founded on a series of paradoxes—truths and statements that sound illogical and contradictory yet are completely true. Today we will look at **Revelation 7** and **Paradoxes of Faith Gives Us Glimpses of Heaven**.

During the Easter season we talk a lot about sheep. Sheep are weak and defenseless and helpless animals. They can't do much to protect themselves. They aren't very smart. They aren't very crafty. Sheep need a shepherd. They need a shepherd to guide them, lead them, and protect them. Imagine if the shepherd relinquished his duties, stepped back and appointed one of the sheep to be the shepherd of the rest of the sheep. How could a sheep, or a lamb, at the same time be a shepherd? That's impossible.

Yet this paradox is true in our faith. During this season of Easter we joined the multitudes of heaven and we fell at the feet of the Lamb of God. Through prayer, worship, Scripture and meditation we have been blessed to see a beautiful glimpse of glory in heaven where the Lamb was seated on his throne. All believers and all angels were bowing before him to worship him. Picture in your minds what John the apostle saw in today's Scripture, *"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 in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"*

An impressive scene to say the least. A multitude that no one could count with people from every country and race joined together to cry out praises to the Lamb. Yet look at what we are told in **verse 17**: *"For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water."*

What? How can that be? How can a lamb also be a shepherd? You can't be both at the same time! That makes no sense.

Yet this paradox of faith is true. It's true because of what Jesus did. Jesus became the Lamb of God for us. In the Old Testament times the Israelites were required by God to make frequent sacrifices of sheep, rams, goats, oxen, and more. God was

sending the people a message that death and blood were necessary to pay for sin. You might also recall the story of the first Passover. The Israelites were in Egypt with Moses. God sent 10 plagues against Egypt. The 10th was the death of all firstborn males. But the Israelites sacrificed a firstborn male lamb and painted its blood on their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass-over their homes and spare them.

All these Old Testament sacrifices were foreshadows of what was to come—or rather, who was to come. Jesus came to be a sacrifice. He came to be the sacrifice for our sins and for all the wrongs we have done and will do. Just think of all the animals we would have to kill to pay for all the wrongs we have done! But Jesus came to shed his blood and become the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And as the Lamb has covered us with his blood, God now will pass-over us with his anger and punishment. This is why the multitude in heaven cries out, *“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”*

God has accomplished our salvation. He did so through the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Because Jesus has accomplished our salvation, because he has defeated Satan and death, because he has won—now he sits victorious on his throne in heaven. And because the Lamb sits victorious on his throne in heaven, he can now claim a different title—Shepherd. The very same Son of God who became the humble Lamb of God and sacrifice for all is no longer humble. Now he is exalted. Now he is glorious. Now he is both ruling and reigning. That makes him also our Shepherd who watches over us and protects us. It’s a true Paradox of Faith. It sounds impossible, but it’s not! Jesus is both Lamb and Shepherd.

I remember Nicolas playing in a very rainy football game when he was a sophomore in high school. The team played the entire game in the pouring rain. By the end of the game there was no grass left on the field at all. They were completely covered in mud. Of course when he was all done, he brought me that mud-caked uniform and said, “Here mom. Have fun with that, and don’t worry, Mom, it’s not really dirty. It’s actually clean.” Funny Nic, how could something be both clean and dirty at the same time? Impossible!

Yet this paradox is true in our faith. Join John again as he observes the glory of heaven, and listen to a conversation that took place starting in **verse 13**: *“Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes—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; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”*

Again, an incredible paradox presents itself. We stand caked in the muck and mire and mud of our own sins. Here is a glob of greed, here a lump of lies, here a big old splotch of bad language, here a stain from slander and gossip, here is dirt from my doubt and gossip. I'm filthy. You're filthy. But thanks be to God, we can stand before God completely unclean and absolutely unworthy of any of his love and kindness. But we are washed—not with Oxiclean or ERA or Tide. We have been washed with the most potent and powerful detergent of all—blood. This same apostle John writes in his first letter, *“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* Isaiah the prophet said, *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”* The holy, precious blood that Jesus shed during his innocent suffering and death was poured out for us to make us clean. It has washed all our sins away.

This is why John looked and saw in verse nine, all of these believers wearing white robes in heaven. They have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. So have we. Though we might be covered with the filth of our sins, we are at the same time washed completely clean in Jesus' blood. It sounds impossible, but it's not! It is another Paradox of Faith. We are washed white and clean with blood.

We have all made mistakes, some privately and some very publicly. Instead of admission of sorrow for that mistake, often we try to write it off as being no big deal by saying, “Well, nobody's perfect.”

We may want to have that person take ownership of their behavior, but as Christians we can celebrate that it is correct - no one is perfect. We aren't even close. We all fall far short of the glory and perfection of God. To think of perfection would be an impossible dream for us. Yet this paradox is also true in our faith. Listen to the description of believers in heaven beginning in **verse 15**: *“They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

In the book of Revelation the number 10 is often used as a picture of perfection. If you count all the blessings of heaven listed here, there are actually 10. This is the perfect list of the perfection of heaven. What joy and what bliss! We will get to gather around God's throne and serve him day and night. God will spread his tent

over us, giving shelter and protection to us forever. No more hunger. No more thirst. No more blazing sun or scorching heat. The Lamb will be our loving Shepherd forever. He will refresh us with his living water. And we will never shed a tear again. Absolute perfection. Sound impossible? It's not! It's waiting for you and for me in heaven. It is a wonderful Paradox of Faith. We certainly are not perfect, but we will be perfect, and we will enjoy perfection forever in heaven.

Is our faith pointless, as the world would have you believe? They shout - it's pointless for you to be here and give up your Sunday mornings for an hour of worship and an hour of Sunday School. But Church of a Living God - it's priceless to put our faith in a Lamb that was slain. It's priceless to think we have even a shot at heaven. It's priceless to be showered with God's wisdom. And God's wisdom is the basis for our faith. Our faith is based on paradoxes. We have a Lamb that is our Shepherd. That makes no sense. We are washed white and clean with blood. That makes no sense. We sinners will one day be perfect. That makes no sense. But all this is true, and was made true, by the Lamb Jesus Christ. Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb. Thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's foolishness to the world, but it is wisdom and joy to us as we are encouraged, empowered and exalted by our **Paradoxes of Faith that gives us Glimpses of Heaven**.

AMEN