

Horatius Bonar:

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number—of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues—stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. They cried with a loud voice, saying—Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!"—Revelation 7:9-10.

The vision of pent-up judgment begins this chapter—then the sealing and the ingathering. Our text is the result of the ingathering, as seen in heaven. The process of taking out this people, this election, from Jew and Gentile, may be almost invisible, attended also with labor, and grief, and persecution; but the result is glorious—visible in heaven! The sower has been doing his work in weeping, but the sheaves are plenteous, and the harvest one of everlasting joy. Let us look at this heavenly vision.

I. The NUMBERS. 'A great multitude which no man could number.' The 3,000 at Pentecost were a large number, but this is greater. The hundreds and thousands, both in Judea and throughout the Gentile world, at Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, Philippi, and other places, were specimens of the great ingathering—but here we have the aggregate, the summing up of all. Like Israel, they cannot be numbered for multitude. They are like the stars of heaven, or the sand which is by the sea-shore. The 'little flock' shall have multiplied into the innumerable company—and the few drops shall become the mighty ocean. What a difference between the then, and the now!

II. The NATIONALITIES. This is not the harvest of Israel, but of the world. The word has gone out from Jerusalem into all the earth. All nations hear the gospel, and some out of each of them obey it, and turn to the Lord. Every people furnishes its quota to this great assembly; every tribe has its representatives here; every region, every color, every language, every kingdom, every people, every age and century. It is the general assembly and Church of the First-born. How various the company in face, in speech, in manners, in dress, in habitation! Here all nationalities meet in one great heavenly nationality—without jealousy or distrust—all one in Him who redeemed them by His blood! Now it is seen that God has made of one blood all nations of the earth, and that under the shadow of the one great Sacrifice all these find shelter—sinners, yet pardoned—lost, but saved—vile, but washed white in the blood of the Lamb!

III. The POSTURE. 'Standing before the throne, and before the Lamb.' 'He who sits on the throne' and 'the Lamb' are distinguished the one from the other. This mighty multitude stands before both. They 'stand.' It is the posture of triumph and honor; 'having done all, they stand' (Ephesians 6:13). Not bowed down, nor kneeling, nor prostrate—the erect posture indicates the high position to which they have been brought; and especially is this honor apparent when we see them standing 'before the throne, and before the Lamb;' in the very presence of the eternal King! To stand before the throne is, next to sitting on it, the highest elevation. Both the sitting and the standing are connected with glory; and it would seem as if these 'redeemed' ones sometimes occupied the throne, and sometimes stood before it. Their shame and distance are at an end—glory and nearness are now their portion forever. They stand before the King, and not before base men.

IV. The CLOTHING. They are 'clothed with white robes.' Christ's transfiguration-clothing was white, shining as the sun—so is theirs! They are like Him in this, as in all else. Their old earthly garments are gone; they have received the glorious clothing which assimilates them outwardly (as they are already inwardly) to their Lord. 'My beloved is white and ruddy' (Song 5:10).

(1) It is the clothing of heaven. Not only is it Christ's robe, but it is that of angels. When they come down to earth, they appear in white, shining garments (Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:12); even the seven angels of vengeance are clothed in 'pure and white linen' (15:6). When Christ appears to John, His 'head and hair are white like wool, as white as snow' (Revelation 1:14). The 'stone' is white (ch. 2:17); the horses are white (19:14); the cloud is white (14:14); the throne is white (20:2). Whiteness, as the combination of all that is beautiful and perfect in color, is the hue of heaven, and with this the redeemed are invested—'clothed with white robes.'

(2) It is the clothing of purity and perfection. It is the fitting clothing of those who are 'blameless' (Philippians 2:15); 'faultless' (Jude 24); 'unblameable and unreprouvable' (Colossians 1:22); 'without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing' (Ephesians 5:27). No other hue could express the perfect purity of the redeemed. The false Church—the 'mother of harlots,' has her scarlet, and purple, and gold, and gems (ch. 17:4). But the true and pure Church has her 'fine linen, clean and white' (ch. 19:8, 14). 'There is no spot in you!' (Song 4:7).

(3) It is the clothing of triumph. It is given to him who overcomes (ch. 3:5). Purple might be the robe of the

Roman victor, but Christ's victorious warriors are arrayed in white (ch. 19:14)—as their Captain goes forth on the white horse, 'conquering and to conquer' (ch. 6:2).

(4) It is the bridal dress. 'White' is the invariable color used both by the bride and the bridesmaids. So we find it at the marriage of the Lamb. The clothing of the bride is white—at her marriage she wears the robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. Her dress is connected with the cross. She knows what it is to be 'justified by His blood' (Romans 5:9).

(5) It is the festal dress. At the marriage-supper this is the clothing provided—the bride sits down at the table in the King's pavilion 'arrayed in fine linen, clean and white' (ch. 19:8). How glad that marriage-day and marriage-feast! How glorious the Bridegroom and the bride!

V. The BADGE. They had 'palms in their hands.' The palm is the symbol of gladness and of victory. Here it is specially used in reference to the feast of tabernacles, the gladdest of all Israel's festivals (Leviticus 23:40). The true feast of the tabernacles, the memorial of our desert sojourn and earthly pilgrimage ended forever, the believers shall celebrate in the New Jerusalem. Their heavenly palms carried in their glorified hands shall have a meaning then and there unknown before. The days of their mourning shall be ended—their everlasting joy begun!

VI. The SHOUT. They 'cry with a loud voice—Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' It is not a song they sing; no measured melody. No harp, nor flute, nor dulcimer are here. It is the irresponsible shout rising and bursting forth from rescued men, from conquerors on a hard-fought field, that have as yet no time to throw their feelings into elaborate song or harmony. What a thrilling shout! 'Salvation!' We are saved at last! We are landed on the shore at last! We are in the New Jerusalem, and before the throne at last! Who would not desire to be there, to join in that 'cry' that 'loud voice,' that multitudinous shout, that shall fill both earth and heaven! In that day, shall we not be 'satisfied' (Psalm 17:15); no, more than satisfied?