



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, January 28th, 2007

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

“And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 8:11

In this eleventh verse of the eighth chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, we find Jesus commenting on the faith of the Roman centurion. He speaks of the promise of heaven--many coming to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Concerning this promise of heaven, we should note that it is a covenant promise. These three men: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are what are known as patriarchs of Israel, men to whom the Lord revealed himself and gave the great promise of everlasting life, just as he does still to his people in our time. And that covenant promise was a promise of heaven. Heaven is promised to believers by the Covenant of God--the Covenant of Grace, and the great plan and scheme of mercy through Jesus Christ.

But while the promise of heaven involves a covenant, it also involves a company. There is a company clearly in view in this verse, the company who will one day enter into heaven and enjoy forever the eternal bliss that it affords and the rewards that the Lord prepares for those who know and love him.

And this company is immense. Notice that it says, "many shall come..." Heaven's company will be immense. Indeed, as we trace this through the Scriptures, we find that heaven's company will be innumerable. The Lord Jesus Christ we are told, "brings many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). The company of heaven will not be some paltry little number, it is going to be immense and innumerable.

At the coming of the Lord, we are told in Jude 14, "he will be surrounded with tens of thousands of the saints. The word for "thousands" literally means myriads. And this same word is translated "innumerable" in Hebrews 12:22. This word signifies a company that is innumerable. Is this not what Revelation 7:9 says where it speaks of the great multitude that no man can number?

So we find that the promise of heaven involving this company is immense; it is innumerable. The point being made here my friends, is that the fruit of the Lord's death is beyond our minds to imagine.

In the final analysis, there will be more in glory than there will be in perdition. There will be more in heaven than there will be in hell. It may not seem like that as we look at our world today, but remember that the Lord is able, as he has done in past times, to sweep even whole nations into the kingdom of God and gather to himself tremendous innumerable companies of precious souls. The Lord's death therefore is mighty in its power, scope and fruit. Because it is by and through his death that people enter into heaven.

What an encouragement that is for sinners to seek him! It means that there is room. There's an old gospel hymn that says, "there is room at the cross for you." And it goes on to say that "though many have come, there's still room for one; there is room at the cross for you." Because heaven will be populated by an innumerable company, there is all the encouragement for all kinds of sinners to seek Jesus Christ.

The Bible reveals to us so clearly and in many, many instances, the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ saves the very worst of sinners. Some people have the strange,

fallacious notion that heaven is only for good people. That could not be further from the truth. Heaven is for sinners saved by grace. Heaven is for those who come to trust in Christ's atoning blood. It doesn't matter who they are or what their background is. My friends I tell you, in heaven there will be men and women who on this earth were murderers, idolaters, adulterers, drunkards, thieves, homosexuals and on and on it goes. The very worst of men are going to be found one day gathered around the throne in that immense company, kept by the power of Christ right through to the end of the journey and presented before the Father's face with exceeding great joy.

And therefore, whatever your sin might be today, and you may think it is enormous and so great that it cannot be forgiven. My friends, the Lord Jesus Christ has in this company a place for the very vilest and worst of sinners among men. May you seek him therefore and find for yourself the cleansing that his blood imparts and the preparation that the Spirit makes to bring you one day to glory.

So, there is in the promise of heaven, a company, and it's an immense company, but it is also a broad company. Because the Lord says "many shall come from the east and west." When one looks at St. Luke's account of this teaching (Lk 13:29) one finds that all four points of the compass are mentioned from. So from the four corners of the earth, the Lord is going to gather his people. In Matthew 24:31, we read of the day of his coming when the trumpet shall sound and he shall send forth his angels to gather his elect from the four corners of this earth.

But while this company is immense and broad it is also an identified company. This is shown by the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are named. The Lord knows those who are his personally. He knows their identity, every one of them and thank God not one will be missing.

So the promise of heaven involves a company. It also involves a consummation. The Lord reveals that those who will be gathered from the four corners of the earth are going to "sit down" with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Consider the reference to their "sitting down." This thought is one that denotes the idea of rest. You sit down to rest. And one day, the Lord's people are going to rest from all their labor and all their trial. That is the final consummation of their salvation and their eternal glory.

The term "sit down" literally means to recline at a table. Furthermore the word signifies reclining at a table to partake of a meal or a banquet. It is right here

at this point that we see the actual consummation of all things in heaven in view. This is a reference to the gathering home of the saints to partake of the marriage supper of the lamb—what our Holy Communion here on earth previews.

In Revelation 19:7-9 we read of that marvelous day when the Lord will come and the Church, the Lamb's wife will be arrayed in her fine linen, clean and white and will go into the marriage supper of the Lamb and will sit down with Christ. The Lord's work in the lives of those who trust him will finally be seen to be successful and fruitful.

"Gathered home in perfection and glory!" This the Lord does for all who seek and trust him. May you seek and trust him today as your redeemer for his own eternal praise.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.