

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'Heavenly Bliss? Or a garbage dump?'
Mark 9:42-78; Revelation 7:9-17
February 8, 2026
By Keith Marcy

This morning, I want to show you two pictures – word pictures. One describes Hell. The second picture describes Heaven. In the Scripture reading from Mark chapter 9, Jesus uses the word *'hell'* three times. It is translated from a Greek word *'Gehenna'* which comes from the phrase, *'Valley of Hinnom.'* This valley lay to the south of Jerusalem. From ancient times detestable things went on in this valley. Idol worship which involved unimaginable cruelty to children as a sacrifice to an idol. By Jesus' day, it had become the city garbage dump. Everything from household waste to animal carcasses and offal left over from the temple sacrifices were dumped here and burned. The fires never went out. They just smoldered and emitted a putrid, nostril irritating smoke.

I have vivid memories of the Beverly Township dump on the 6th Concession.

Yes, there were constant fires, pungent odors and rats everywhere.

Jesus compared Hell to Gehenna, a huge garbage dump.

Who will be there?

Those who do evil things, those who lead children astray and those who reject Jesus and the salvation He purchased on Calvary's cross!

Second picture.

A picture the apostle John saw when he was an old man. It is like God opened the door of Heaven just a crack to let him see inside. Revelation 7:9 and following describes what he saw.

'John saw a great multitude that no one could count' – a vast number of people – 'from every nation, tribe, people and language.' There were blacks, and browns, whites and those with a ruddy complexion, speaking every language and dialect under the sun. *'They were standing before the throne of God. They were wearing white robes' – a symbol of purity – 'and they were waving palm branches' – an act to honor the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.*

They were all different in looks! Was there a common denominator?

Yes! They cried out – they chanted like the fans of a winning team, but their words were heartfelt words, dead serious words: *"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

No one was saying, *“I’m here because I deserve to be here. Would you like to hear my credentials? How about the list of my good deeds? Let me tell you about the time....”*

No! People who blow their own horn are already breathing pungent smoke in Gehenna.

These people in Heaven are giving glory to whom glory is due. *“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.”* Who is the ‘Lamb? Here, it is Jesus.

Then John saw another group – a host of angels – the good angels who did not turn away with Satan and become demons on the earth. These good angels are also praising their Master.

Why would they exhibit such joy?

Have they not always been in Heaven?

The Bible tells us that when one sinner on earth repents and turns back to their Maker, the angels in Heaven rejoice! Now, among them there is a great multitude who have all repented. All of them saved by grace and mercy through Jesus Christ because of the working of God the Holy Spirit according to the will of God the Father. Motivated by joy, these angels fall prostrate before the throne of God. John hears their song, *“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!”* (verse 12)

While John is almost overwhelmed, one of the 24 elders comes to him and whispers, *“These you see in white robes – who are they and where did they come from?”*

John humbly makes the question rhetorical, *“Sir, you know.”*

The elder turns to survey the multitude and he makes a sweeping gesture with his right arm, *“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.”*

Now that is an odd observation. Blood is red. If they washed their robes in blood, they would come out red! On a physical plane. But the elder is not on the physical plane. He is speaking about an amazing spiritual truth. Our robes – every human being’s robes, signifying their inner lives – are stained with sin. God hates sin. He sees the stains. It tells Him that we are not His children. In fact, biblically speaking, we are His enemies. But, if we believe Jesus shed His blood when He died in our place, symbolically we are cleansed on the inside –

the crud – the filth – our sin – has been washed away – and the elder explains that occurrence by saying, they [believers] have made their robes white by believing in Jesus – symbolically they have been washed in His blood.

Elisha Hoffman was educated in Pennsylvania but worked as an evangelist in Ohio. He wrote over 2,000 hymns. In one of them he captured this truth from Revelation. The choir will help us sing it. It is printed on the back of your bulletin. We will sing one verse and the chorus.

*‘Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?’*

The vast multitude have all washed their souls clean by believing Jesus died for them.

Therefore, the elder tells John – *‘Therefore, because they are cleansed,’* fully pardoned, *‘they are here before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His temple.’* His heavenly temple. *‘And He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.’* A picture. He will care for them, protect them, live with them, so that *‘never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst, the burning rays of 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.’*

This is similar to the description in Psalm 23.

There we have it! A picture of Heaven!! Live with God forever and ever.

There are two places where men and women will spend eternity – this one – a place of everlasting joy –

Or

The garbage dump where the fires never die!

Where do I want to live forever and ever?

The thought of the garbage dump is repulsive and frightening.

Therefore, I trust in Jesus to wash me clean, and I try to conduct my life so that others may see a faint reflection of Christ.

The joy?

Or the smoke?

What about you?

The choice is yours!