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Week 1: Reflection 1: Revelation 7.9

Segregated Sundays: A phrase, which identifies Christian worship practices whereby congregations are segregated (intentionally or not) based on skin colour, cultural background, and social class.

A little brown girl sat on a wooden pew in the rear of the church next to her sister, along with a group of other children. There were about 15 of them sitting alongside their Sunday School Teacher, listening to the minister talk to them about heaven. They had all been learning about heaven during Sunday School, and how wonderful it would be when everyone was there with Jesus. Jesus was the king of heaven, but the teacher had explained that he had also lived on earth to show people how to live.

As the little girl sat, listening to the preacher she thought about what she had just learned. That Jesus – a little brown baby boy – was born thousands and thousands of years ago, or so the Sunday School teacher had explained. He hadn't been born here, where she lived, but in a country far away where other brown and black, and all different coloured people lived together in one land.

Jesus was very special. In fact, the little girl thought, he had to be because when Jesus was born – poor shepherds came to worship him and they didn't even know him. Three kings travelled thousands of miles, riding on camels, just to see him. They even brought birthday gifts and worshipped him along with the shepherds and all the angels in heaven. The angels were there, the little girl had learned, because heaven was Jesus' real home, and everyone in heaven was celebrating his birth, too. In fact, the girl thought – Jesus was bringing heaven to earth – simply by being born.

As she listened to the minister explain how beautiful heaven was; how there was always day light – there was no night, so people (even children) didn't have to go to bed. No one was ever old in heaven, or hungry, or poor, or without friends. The weather was always warm and sunny – it didn't rain, and yet there was grass, trees, flowers, and beautiful rivers and lakes. Even the animals in heaven were friendly, and everyone loved each other because they all loved God. In fact, this was why Jesus came – to show everyone – that God loved them, including little brown girls. More importantly, God wanted everyone to live with him and the angels in heaven. So, Jesus came to teach them how to do it.

This made the little girl squirm and fidget as she remembered asking the Sunday School teacher, “Why can't we all go live with God now, so that everyone can be happy and love each other? Why do we have to wait?” Then the teacher explained that God wanted to fill heaven with as many people as possible. This meant that people all over the world had to learn about Jesus first, and why he came to earth. They had to prepare to live in heaven.

The little girl thought about this – because she had learned in school that people around the world spoke different languages, and dressed differently, and even looked differently. Their skin was coloured differently, too. Maybe that's why they didn't sit together or worshipped at different churches – some

churches where brown girls could not go. But, in heaven the Sunday School teacher explained, this didn't matter – everyone was welcome – God created them all and loved them all – everyone was the same, and precious in God's eyes.

What a wonderful place heaven must be. No wonder the minister was encouraging all of the people in church to tell everyone they knew about Jesus and what Jesus came to do – to prepare us for heaven. What must it be like to go to a place, where everyone is loved and worship God together? Where everyone is friendly, treat each other kindly, are helpful, make others who are different (like little brown girls) feel welcome, and sing songs with the angels. Yes, heaven must be an incredibly wonderful place.

The little girl noticed that the minister had stopped speaking, and the choir director was beckoning the children to come forward and sing a song. As they sang, the little girl raised her voice and sang as loud as she could. She imagined that the angels in heaven were singing too, that everyone in the whole world was singing – and they were all worshipping God together. They were praising the God who loved everyone the same.

After the service, as the family was riding home in the car, her father asked about Sunday School. “What did you all learn in Church today”, he asked. Her sister began telling him and their mother about heaven, and how wonderful it was because it was a place filled with the love of God and all of God's people who had been prepared by Jesus' teaching and example. The entire family began talking about the goodness of God, what the Bible said about heaven, the 'good news', mission and outreach that needed to draw more people to God and follow Jesus' example.

The little girl sat quietly looking out the car window – at the homes they drove by, the people walking by or waiting for the bus. Some looked sad or tired as they walked, while others seemed to be in a hurry going somewhere – with no time to talk. An old man sat on a street corner, in a dirty torn coat, drinking something from a small brown paper bag. He looked sad, as people drove or walked by – not paying attention. He looked like he needed to hear about heaven and God's love.

This made the little girl wonder, with all those who spent time talking about heaven, believing in heaven, sharing the 'good news' of heaven, and going to church to learn even more about heaven – when would they all begin acting like they were in heaven?

But, she thought – this may be simply too hard. After all, it would mean doing everything we knew and read about heaven. It would mean accepting everyone, being kind and generous to everyone, making sure everyone was healthy and had good food to eat. It would mean treating everyone fairly – people could go to school where they wanted, live where they wanted, and work where they wanted. And, not where they were made to live or work because they were different – they were brown. And, like God, it would mean loving everyone the same – even little brown girls (and boys).

It would mean doing what Jesus did when he was born – bring heaven to earth; so that people like poor shepherds, and rich kings from different parts of the world would sing and worship God together – right here on earth, (with the angels).
