

Sealed for God

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[0 : 00] Father, even as we stand or sit here this morning, you know the different desires that are rattling around within us. Father, you know that some of us have desires and longings which we're trying to push away, and we should try to push away.

Some of us, Father, have desires within that we should be pushing away, but in fact we're not at all. Some of us, Father, have desires that we're confused about.

Some of us, Father, have desires that we know are good and we puzzle over them. And Father, we could go on about our desires, but Father, we know as we stand or sit in your presence this morning that you know the desires of our hearts, that you look into each and every single one of us who is here and see, you see what is going on in terms of our desires and our longings and our yearnings, our imagination, our fears.

Father, we acknowledge before you that you are sovereign, that you are good, that you are kind, that you are filled with mercy, that you are mercy.

And we invite and give you permission, Father, for you to speak into our lives today, this morning, that your word would speak into our lives, that you, Father, that you would fan into our desires that we should have, that you would help us turn from desires that we should not have.

[1 : 24] And Father, we invite you to come into our lives and into our desires. And we ask that you would do that in a saving way and in a sovereign way. And so, Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as we hear your word.

Work in us. And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Oops. Oops.

I have sort of a bit of an apology. Not an apology. Sort of a bit of a clarification or qualification of something that I said last week. I made a slightly disparaging remark last Sunday.

Just slightly disparaging about radio preachers in the book of Revelation. And after the service, somebody pointed out to me that I'm a radio preacher. And the person who pointed it out to me, not only that they'd known this, it would have been even funnier, but if you listen to the last two times I spoke on the radio, I spoke on the book of Revelation.

And in fact, on Tuesday, I go in to take my next sessions, and I'm going to speak on the book of Revelation. So it's sort of a funny type of humbling thing for me to have made a disparaging comment about myself.

[2 : 45] But you can pray for me. On Tuesday morning, I tape some sessions. I share a spot on CFRA radio at 6.30 in the morning, Sunday mornings, with three other pastors.

And so approximately every fourth week, I'm on the radio at 6.30 in the morning on CFRA on Sundays. And so you can pray for me about that. When can we begin?

That's sort of a very, very common type of question. People might sort of wonder, when can we begin a family? When will life really begin?

There's an old joke, maybe you've heard it before. A rabbi, an Anglican minister, and a Catholic priest were walking along, and they were having an argument about when life began.

And the Anglican minister said, oh, you know, life begins when the baby comes out of the womb. And the Catholic priest said, no, no, no, that's a terrible thing to say.

[3 : 51] Life begins at conception. And then the rabbi smiled and said, you're both wrong. Life begins when the kids move out and the dog dies. Anyway, so we constantly ask the question, when will life begin?

When can we start doing things? When can we, you know, start working on a mortgage? When can we save money? When could we tithe? When can we be generous? When can we begin a relationship that could be permanent?

We as a church, on one level, are always sort of struggling a little bit with when we can begin. In particular, since we walked away from our building two and a half years ago and moved into rental facilities and stuff like that, it often seems as if certain types of ministries and all can't begin until certain other external things start to happen.

And the Bible text that we look at today, it doesn't answer all of the questions about when we begin, but it does have some actually very, very interesting and powerful things to say to churches and to Christians in terms of at least part of the Christian life and church life in terms of when certain things can and should begin.

So it would be a great help to me if you turn in your Bibles to Revelation 7. Revelation chapter 7. And let's hear what the Bible has to say about this.

[5 : 14] Some of you who might not know some things about our church, two and a half years ago we walked away from our building and separated away from the Anglican Church of Canada. And part of the reason we did that was to be connected to the global Anglican Futures movement of which we are a part.

And, you know, for somebody like myself, who spent all of his life up until two and a half years ago being in churches with buildings, it's a real learning curve, trying to have an imagination and a will which reflects not owning property.

And I know that there's a lot of people who get excited by that, but some sort of struggle with it. And this text, believe it or not, will sort of speak into it a little bit, at least in terms of how we should pray.

And here's how it begins. Revelation chapter 7, verse 1. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. Actually, you know what? Let's go up a few verses to what's just happened before this.

What's happened in the book of Revelation? In our church we preach through books of the Bible generally. That's how we, that's sort of what we do on Sundays. And so we're going through the book of Revelation. And, you know, in chapter 1 you sort of get an introduction to the book.

[6 : 30] Chapter 2 and 3 there's stories or words that Jesus has to seven different churches. In a sense that's seven different ways to enter into the book of Revelation. Sort of almost like an examination of conscience that challenges us as we go into the rest of the book of Revelation.

And then in chapter 4 there's a vision of God in heaven. Chapter 5 there's a vision of Jesus in heaven. And then last week we looked at chapter 6, which is that the same one who redeems us, which is Jesus, is the one who has control over the future.

From the moment of the crucifixion and resurrection until he comes back, that the same one who redeems us is the one who controls the future. And so last week we saw these judgments of God that were coming out.

And in chapter 6, that's what we're just going to do, it's like the sixth judgment is the sixth seal is opened. And just look maybe at verse 14. This is the sixth seal, the sixth sort of judgment, the sixth thing which is sort of happening on the earth.

And it says, the sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

[7 : 56] For the great day of the wrath has come and who can stand. And that's sort of where the action's taken us to right now. And it's a very, very gripping type of image. It's an image of, in some ways, all of the people on the earth who've turned their back on Jesus and the offer of redemption.

And they have, there's chaos going on all around them on a physical level. And they have this sense that they're somehow under the judgment of God. And at the same time that they have this sense that they're under the judgment of God, they also have a sense of his face.

That it's his face, that it's God responsible for this. And they actually even have a sense of his face. Not just his presence, but his face. And the mystery of the text is that even though they have this sense of the face of God looking at them in this time of chaos, they turn not to the face of God, but to a rock and say to the rock, hide us.

Who can stand? It's a very, very gripping image. That they turn their back on the face of God. They have this sense. How many people would love to have a sense or to see the face of God?

And the text implies that these people in some ways know the sense, the face of God, but turn from the face of God to speak to rocks. That they be delivered.

[9 : 26] And then it's right after that, verse 7, chapter 7, verse 1. And after this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth that no wind might blow on the earth or sea or against any tree.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun with the seal of the living God. And he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. You know, I watch lots of movies. Not all good movies as well. I don't know how many of you have seen the X-Men movies.

But if you've seen the X-Men movies, you have an insight to this biblical text that the rest of you don't have. And that is, for those of you who've seen the X-Men movies, what is it that Dr. X can do?

You know how one of the things that Dr. X can do is let's say, you know, we're all doing this and I'm up here and all of a sudden Dr. X, I don't know, Wolverine's going to come wandering in the room and I'm, all of a sudden, I freeze, we all freeze.

[10 : 34] It's as if for the whole room he has the power to suspend time and it's almost as if for those who he wants, they're outside of time for a moment and they can, you know, they can walk around the cafeteria, you know, juice or pop is being thrown and it all stops and they can have this conversation that goes on while there's chaos or other things going on that's all just stopped and that's the image of what's happening here.

Chaos is going on and all of a sudden it's as if chaos is going on and it just stops and in the midst of the chaos it's as if John has this vision of, outside of time of a conversation going on between angels and to John to tell him something and what he says is in verse 3 do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

So, here's the thing, the first point if you could put it up. Even while the earth is in chaos God is sovereign and seals ordinary people for himself.

Even while the earth is in chaos God is sovereign and seals ordinary people for himself. Sealing in this particular case in the ancient world that would be like you get something like wax doesn't have to just be wax but something which is melted and you put it on something and the king or the important person would have a ring or some other object that could be pushed into the wax or some other thing which is melted and it would leave an impression in that and that's sealing something.

And so in the ancient world there's three connections to being sealed. To seal something means to authenticate it or it means to signify possession or it means to signify protection.

[12 : 42] So what's so the three things that sealing means is that it either means that it's authenticating something it's signifying possession of something or it's signifying protection of something.

So here the image is that the lamb who is the redeemer is in control of the future as part of the future is there's these things that are going on in the planet the things that are going on in the planet the question within all of the things in the question of the planet is will suffering incline my heart towards God or away from Him?

Will suffering incline my heart towards God or away from Him? And in the midst of all of this chaos which is going on and all this stress which is going on that in the midst of all of this we have this image that in the midst of it that God is sealing ordinary people for Himself It means that when I put my faith and trust in Jesus, when an ordinary person like you puts your faith and trust in Jesus and what he's done for us on the cross, that God, as one of the things that he does to us as a response to us putting our faith and trust in the salvation which is offered to us through Jesus and what he wins for us on the cross, is that God seals me.

He seals you. It's as if he puts a tattoo on your forehead. Not a scary tattoo. But a good one. And he does that to signify that you're authentically his.

That you are authentic. That you really are his. That you really belong to him. And that he really will, in an ultimate sense, from the point of view of all eternity, that you will now be under his complete and full protection.

[14 : 20] And that is given to the ordinary person who puts their faith and trust in Jesus. Even while the earth is in chaos, God is sovereign and seeks ordinary people for himself.

Seven years ago or so, while I was still part of the Anglican Church of Canada, I went to a synod. Maybe it was the second to last synod that I ever attended. And there was a guest speaker.

And the guest speaker was the Archbishop of the Sudan, the head of the Anglican Church in Sudan. And as some of you know, it's been very, very hard. It was very, very hard for Christians in Sudan for a long time.

Many of them were captured. They'd be sold into slavery. They would be killed. Terrible, terrible things. And he came and spoke to our diocesan synod. And everybody was asking him all these questions about slavery and the poverty and et cetera, et cetera.

And so I got up and I went to the mic. And I said to him, Bishop, does evangelism still happen in Sudan, even though all these terrible things are happening?

[15 : 30] Or has it stopped you from doing evangelism? And it was so wonderful. I wish it was filmed. And he burst into a huge smile. And he said, oh, God has been very good to us in the midst of all these trials.

He said, our church has been growing. He said, I go into a village. And one of the things I will do is I will visit some of the individual Christians.

And then I go into the center of the square in the village. And I open my Bible. And in a loud voice, I tell people about Jesus and what he's done for us on the cross. See, here's the thing.

For a lot of us in the West, we wait until we have our own resources before we think that life can go on.

So for churches, we think if the economic indicators aren't going the right way for us, if the culture isn't drawing people to us but pushing people away from us, if the demographics are against us, if the building ownership is against us, and it's as if we constantly are waiting for the culture to turn, the economics to turn, the possession issues to turn, and we keep waiting, even though we don't have to deal with even remotely the type of chaos that they do, let's say, in Sudan, we keep waiting for external things to be ready and set so that we can begin.

[17 : 00] And this text is saying that what this archbishop in the Sudan, he understood Revelation 7. I mean, our prayer should be that we could be like the church in the Sudan.

Hopefully God grant us not to suffer that type of persecution and poverty and oppression. Father, may you spare us from that, and may you have mercy upon our brothers and sisters in Sudan and other places in the world that have to live under that.

But even in the midst of chaos, with earth and chaos, God, the sovereign God, is still sealing people, ordinary people for himself.

And the question for churches and the question for Christians isn't when will the culture allow us to do things again, or when will our owning of buildings allow us to do things again, or when will whatever allow us to do things again.

It's to say, Father, what divine assignments do you have for me? What divine assignments do you have for my church? Father, deliver me from thinking that everything depends upon my resources or the external things being completely and utterly correct before I can pray or act or seek to obey you and bring you glory.

[18 : 14] Deliver me from thinking that I... Deliver us from thinking it's all about our resources and all about external things. And help us to hear the voice of God and seek to be obedient in telling people about Jesus and ministry.

That even in the midst of chaos, God is sealing people for himself. Now, sometimes Christians fight amongst themselves about things.

We're all sort of familiar about... Maybe we're most familiar about the way that Christians maybe fight about whether you could speak in tongues or not. I didn't have a fight this past week, but I had sort of a sincere conversation a little bit with my trainer of the book of Revelation.

The fact the person who really knew the book of Revelation very, very well, and he knew that I'd just done chapter 6. He knew I was going to do chapter 7. And so he asked me, he said, George, okay, you know, the things in chapter 7, like when are they happening?

Like, are you like a preterist and think that it all happened like in the year 90? Do you think you're like an amillennialist and it's all sort of happening right now? Do you think it's like going to happen just before the Great Tribulation?

[19 : 23] Do you think it's going to happen in the middle of the Tribulation? Do you think it's going to happen after the Tribulation? George, what do you think? And I had a very simple answer for him. You can all write it down. Like, he asked me, which one of those things do you think it is?

And I had a very simple answer. The answer is yes. Yes, all of those things. Like, all of the above. Like, why do you have to choose one in particular?

But while we're sort of familiar with maybe Christian's fight, I mean, he was all ready for a fight with me about whether I was going to be a preterist, an amillennialist, a premillennial dispensationalist, historic premillennialist, pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib.

He was ready for a fight on this particular issue, and he didn't quite know what to say when I said yes to all of them. But a very, very more modern type of a disagreement amongst Christians is over politics.

And so it, you know, churches, there's some churches that their great dream would be, maybe more emergent churches, or maybe more what we would call liberal churches, their great dream would be to have somebody from the Green Party, or the NDP attend their church or speak on a Sunday morning.

[20 : 26] And there's other churches, and their great dream would be to have some great general from the United States military come and speak, or some football, college football coach. And the sort of the left-wing type Christians look down their noses at right-wing type Christians and say, look, look at that.

They've got all their identity and everything all confused. And the more right-wing Christians look down their noses at those left-wing Christians and say they've got their identity all confused. They're completely and utterly captivated by politics.

And the left-wing Christians look at the right-wing Christians and say, you've got all, like, completely captivated by politics. And both of us can sort of look at each other about that and have problems with the other.

But the text in Revelation says something very, very powerful about this. But let's continue reading. Revelation chapter 7, verse 4.

So remember, verse 3 was about having the servants of God sealed on their foreheads. In verse 4, I heard the number of the sealed. I heard the number of the sealed. 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.

[21 : 30] And then it goes through 12,000 of Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Some of those words, I don't know if I pronounced them correctly, but I said them confidently, so now you all think that's the right way to pronounce them.

But you go through this long list. And then verse 9, Now here's the very interesting thing about this text.

There's lots of very interesting things about this text. And I didn't catch this when I was reading it the first time. I've read it many, many times. It was only when I had to study the text that I noticed it.

Like, it begins in a very curious way in verse 4. I heard the number of the sealed. 144,000 is a symbolic number. It's a number of completion. 12 times 12 times 1,000.

It's a number of completion. From every tribe of the sons of Israel. But for a devout Jew listening to it, there's something, a variety of things, which are really odd about this text.

[22 : 46] As the angel starts to speak out loud, it's all Israel, so John's going to expect something, but the list is an odd list.

It's Israel, but not Israel. There's a tribe missing. Dan is missing. And there's something else odd about it. There's sort of two different primary ways in the Old Testament that the tribes are listed.

And this does neither of them. And it does something contradictory. You see, there's also a half-tribe mentioned. Usually in the Old Testament, when they're listing tribes, they say either neither of the half-tribes or both of the half-tribes, because Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and usually they mention just the two half-tribes, but it mentions Joseph, and one of his sons, but not the other's son, and Levi's included, and it's puzzling.

And ten and a half of these tribes in the 8th century B.C. were taken away to Assyria and disappeared. Nobody knows whatever happened to them. In fact, Mormons believe that North American aboriginals are the lost tribes of Israel, which is why Jesus, after he rose from the dead in Jerusalem, had to come here and preach to them.

There was a movement in the 19th century in England called British Israelism, believing that the English people were the lost tribe of Israel, and therefore all of the promises to Israel in the Bible were applied to them.

[24 : 27] But the tribe, ten and a half of the tribes disappeared. They got lost from history, and yet they're mentioned, and a half-tribe's missing, and Dan's missing. And then, it's a little bit like, those of you might remember, in Revelation chapter 5, there was a similar type of funny thing.

John hears that this mighty act is going to be done by the lion of the tribe of Judah, and then after he hears this, he gets an opportunity to see, and he's expecting to see a lion, and what he sees is a little tiny lamb.

Bah! Bah! Bah! He hears lion, sees bah! Bah! And here, he hears Israel, but then as he's hearing Israel, he's getting puzzled, and then what does he see?

He sees what's in verse, my page is flipped, he sees what's in verse 9, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes, and all peoples, and all languages standing before the throne.

he's surprised. It helps to show that the number is symbolic, and that somehow or another that God is making this new thing, this new Israel, that those who are healed aren't just, here's how I put it, and please take it with a grain of grace.

[25 : 53] Put it up on the screen, please. God does not want more Canadians or Africans, gays or straights, men or women.

He seeks more doulouses. I don't know how to spell it. It's D-O-U-L-O-S with an apostrophe at the end. God does not want more Canadians or Africans, gays or straights, men or women.

He seeks more doulous. If you go back up to verse 3, it says, do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the, then the word there translated as servant, some of your Bibles might say slaves, is the word doulous.

And some of you have heard me say this before, the problem with the word doulous in modern English is that neither servant or slave is a very, very good word. Many of us, when we hear the word servant, we think of TV series like The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.

Come on, we do. And, you know, often in American films, the servant is the smart, confident one in the family, right? The whole family is dysfunctional except the servant.

[27 : 01] Well, that's not what this text means, okay? And the other thing, we hear the word slave, we think of things like 12 years a slave. We think of the terrible, terrible, terrible things that happened on the slave plantations in the Caribbean and the United States.

And that's not what, that's not really what's meant either. That's why often I use the word doulous because it, it, I mean, it means both servant and slave, but it's something different in the ancient world.

But the primary idea behind it does, just like with sealing, has the idea of possession and under authority. Like, in some ways, the image of private would be better, but in terms of if you're in the army.

You know, if you just get, you get, I've never been in the military, but if you come in as a lowly private, the distance to general is really high. That's really high.

You don't, you don't get any, you don't, you don't get bossed anybody around if you're just a brand new private. You're, you're under authority. And, and that's in a sense what's just being communicated here.

[28 : 10] And, and you see, what's being communicated here is that God doesn't want Canadian Christians, African Christians, gay Christians, straight Christians, male Christians, female Christians. He's looking for doulous.

His doulous. His doulous. You see, what happens when we respond to Jesus and put our faith and trust in him that amongst other things is not only are we sealed, but we're also given a new identity and a new destiny.

We're given a new identity and a new destiny. And our primary identity now is that I am the doulous of the living God. I am the doulous of the lamb who was slain to redeem gays and straight Africans and Canadians and Asians and men and women for God.

And so, what that means is that, you know, part of what it means to grow as a Christian is the question before us is do I grow into my new identity or do I grow away from my new identity?

God wants me to grow into my identity that I understand that even though I am a Canadian and I live in Canada and all of that, that my primary identity is his doulous, that the dream of my heart should be to be his doulous, that even though I'm in Canada and I should be praying for the blessing of Canada and I should seek the good of Canada and there's nothing wrong with serving in the armed forces or serving on Parliament Hill or serving in industry or serving anything that, but that my primary identity that when it is for me to grow in to understand first and foremost where my citizenship and my identity comes from and it comes from being his doulous first and foremost and it not only gives me a new identity it gives me a new destiny and the question before me in growing as a Christian is will I grow into my destiny or away from my destiny?

[30 : 05] You know, growing away from my identity is to think that being a Canadian or being right wing or being whatever it is is more important than my identity as a Christian that that's the fundamental thing that determines my walk with Jesus and in terms of my destiny it's that we become insular that we lose this sense that every doulous of Jesus is called to be a world Christian that we have an obligation in our community to the arts community in the gay community in the entrepreneurial community in the bureaucrat community and the university community in the poverty community and the poverty workers community and that we have an obligation not just to the tribes and nations and languages in our city of those who speak Arabic and those who speak French and those who speak English but to the ends of the earth that we are to pray that as we grow in our walk with Jesus that we grow into an appreciation of our destiny to look not with fear and loathing from a right wing or a left wing view of the world but to see the world is ripe for harvest and that God has called us to tell tribes and nations and languages and people the good news that they can be sealed by the living God and can belong to him forever and can have the end of what they were made for which was to know and to be reconciled to the living God that that is possible for them now some of you might be troubled by some of what I said

I've now had six kids graduate from university and of course sons-in-laws and daughters-in-law and all like that and I ask some of them some of them take courses in this area and if they talk about missionaries in University at University of Ottawa I mean we all know how they're going to talk about missionaries at University of Ottawa they don't say woohoo missionaries rock they don't say that they say missionaries are bad they're terrible that it's imperialism colonialism triumphalism it's pride it's coercion and that's the way and so for me to talk about this type of identity is actually sort of it really goes against the grain of educated culture and popular culture in Canada and so some of us if we're honest are a little bit troubled by it but in fact if you listen to how it's described here it's the most profoundly unproud untriumphalistic uncoercive thing imaginable and it's profound good news listen to it again verses 9 and 10 after this

I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and all peoples and all languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice what do they cry?

this folks is dynamite against pride this folks is dynamite against presumption and arrogance and colonialism and triumphalism what is the cry?

salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb and in the original language it could be translated it should be it's more literally salvation belongs salvation is of our God and in Greek the word of our God here there's two different ways it can be translated into English the same one Greek word means both but we don't have an English word which is the same and of in this particular text in the original text can either mean possession or causality and so it's either saying and so the ESV some of your translations will translate a little bit different because translators have to make a choice so it's either saying that salvation belongs to God or salvation is caused by God and so our English we have to choose one or the other and translate it into English but the original language is saying both it belongs to him and it's caused by him here's the dynamite if you could put the next thing up here's the dynamite no person no family no philosophy no spirituality no institution owns salvation salvation only belongs to God and to the Lamb no race no color no educational attainment no socioeconomic status or wealth or bank account owns salvation

[35 : 03] I do not own salvation this church does not own salvation the Anglican Network in Canada does not own salvation the Roman Catholic Church does not own salvation Canada the United States the military industrial complex the Green Movement none of them own salvation only God owns it salvation only belongs to God and to the Lamb no person no family no philosophy no spirituality no institution owns salvation it is of God it belongs to Him what does this mean?

there are many people there are many spiritualities there are many philosophies there are many ideologies that teach in fact that some of us are doomed and that we cannot do anything about it and this says that is not true that is not true are you an untouchable in India?

are you a despised person in China? are you are you mentally handicapped? are you poor or broken or alcoholic or some type of broken and despised whatever it is the way that the left despise or the right despise because salvation is belonging to God and the God that is revealed here is a God that desires people from every nation every people every language every state of life to be with Him in Heaven it means that there is no one who is doomed by external or internal forces that what some Muslims teach that in the moment of your conception in the womb that God writes on you whether or not you will go to Heaven or whether you will not that that is not true that salvation belongs to God and that every person can say I cannot trust in myself I cannot achieve myself God salvation belongs to you may you grant that to me may you bring that to me may that come to me may I dwell in that it belongs to you and I desire what only you have and what I can never have by my own power or my own accomplishments

Father will you give me Lamb of God who is slain for me will you give me what belongs to you and God not weighing our merits but pardoning our offenses will so give it there is hope for the despised of the earth there is it undercuts pride and presumption it means that my grandchildren can't say I don't have to deal with these matters my papa's a pastor my kids can't say I don't have to deal with these matters my dad's a pastor we can't say I don't have to deal with these things I'm a Canadian Canadians get what they want it deals with all pride it undercuts all pride all presumption yet at the same time it gives us a very very secure thing friends there are times in our lives if some of you are young maybe it hasn't happened to you yet but you live long enough you deal with illness you deal with failure you deal with depression you deal with sadness you deal with things that just don't work out and if salvation is something that depends upon you you wonder if there is any hope as you hear the cry of heaven that salvation belongs to our God then my hope is secure and it's not pride it's not presumption nothing in my hands I bring not weighing my merits not weighing my accomplishments not looking at my race not looking at my sexuality not looking at any of these things because it belongs to

God and he gives it to those who call out to him with a broken heart to give me what only you have and what only you can cause and that is the message that we can take to the untouchables to the despised to the powerful to the rich to the educated a few years ago at our evening service I used to have an evening service and when we had interns at that time there was a brief period where our evening service had all these guys and gals with PhDs like if you only had a master's degree you were like uneducated in the crowd and I'd have these interns and they were terribly intimidated and I said to one of them listen I went over what he'd done as his sermon I said listen don't try to impress these PhDs with educate like listen you try to start talking about when things change in western civilization they'll just you know what I said every one of these guys and gals in that room they all struggle with pride they all struggle with envy they all struggle with sloth and with lust and with greed and with gluttony they all have problems with their kids and their wives and their boyfriends or their husbands like give them Jesus don't try to intellectually impress them tell them that salvation belongs to our God and not to the

[40 : 38] University of Ottawa or Carleton or Oxford or Cambridge but salvation belongs to our God just sort of in closing I don't have the time to really develop it here's the final thing when I came to this church quite a few years ago and I was trying to figure out what I should share with them with my vision and all of that type of thing and after a couple of years I came across this guy who asked a very very useful and helpful question and asking this question is a very very helpful question I think it was called it was a long article called 10 questions for the rest of your life and one of the questions was imagine that you're like 80 years old 85 years old 90 years old and you're looking back on your life what is it that you'll wish you hadn't achieved or tried to do that's a very very very helpful question and in fact I found it very very challenging and thought provoking and you see that's one of the functions of all of these visions of heaven you know palm branches might not do it for you but look again here at verse 9 and 10 and 11 and 12 after this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb and all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worship

God saying Amen the blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the might be to our God forever and ever Amen and the question is at the end of your life do you want to be there should that or can that be your supreme ambition put up the next slide growing a biblical longing for heaven will heal order and ground my dreams and yours I write my so that you write it down in your notes you're speaking about yourself growing a biblical longing for heaven will heal order and ground your dreams see the text doesn't say that we all become monks that we all become nuns it doesn't say that we all become pastors of churches it's all nations all peoples all people groups but it it sets before us this biblical notion of heaven and it's to clarify within us if my should that not be my supreme ambition that I not by my own merits but by the shed blood of

Christ and what he has won for me on the cross that I will one day stand with angels and archangels and the entire created order that I will stand before the living God unashamed clothed with a righteousness and a favor from God that is not my own but is given to me freely and utterly by Jesus and what he does from the cross and should that not be my supreme ambition that then can put into place some of my other ambitions let me just tell you very briefly how it worked in my life I know I'm a pastor but here's how it worked in my life I realized when I asked this question that to myself and I looked at this text that I did not care at the age of 90 if God lets me live so long at the age of 90 I will not care if I have ever been a bishop I I have actually become a canon but I said I wouldn't care if I've ever become a canon or a bishop a dean been in a famous church had any particular honors you know there's three types of things that at the end of the day that I would wish that at 90

I would look back and hope that I could do and one of them is that God this is something private and personal but some of you have heard it that God would use me and that I would be willing to take the risks that in a city like Ottawa God would build a church like All Souls Langham Place or St.

Ebbs or St. Aldate in Oxford and some of you don't know what those churches are but that if God there was no such church like that in Ottawa and if God would use me if I would be willing to take such risk only God could build it but that I would be willing to take such risk that such a church where God's word is preached where missionaries are sent out where people are equipped to live godly lives in their place of work whether it's the BBC or university or washing dishes that God would use me in such a way and I realized that at the end of the day what I would hope at 90 is that if God not only grants me such strength but my wife that I am still married to Louise and that we love each other and that if God grants me such strength at 90 that my kids when I die will be standing with me there in heaven and my grandkids and their husbands or wives and that forms my prayers and that's for me as a pastor for some of you you have this dream to be an entrepreneur or to be a great teacher or to write sonnets or to you know or just to be a great dad or great mom and there will be practical things in terms of your life that are all ordered towards this supreme ambition but as the gospel grips us and as we long for heaven then growing a biblical longing for heaven will heal order and ground my dreams in yours but stand never too late to be sealed by the living

[46 : 57] God and it's never too late to have a biblical longing for heaven order and ground your dreams you're never too old so the question is what is the Holy Spirit convicting you of this morning let's bow our heads in prayer father some of us are afraid of the Christian faith thinking that it will mean that we will no longer ever have any dreams that as we get closer to you we will have to become a monk or a nun or a missionary father some of us might become monks or nuns or missionaries but father we give you thanks and praise that just as salvation is a complete and utter gift that only you possess that you will give to us that you have not made us all to be completely and utterly alike but that you father desire to as you save us to heal us to point us in the right direction to help us to grow into our identity to grow into our destiny and by so doing to become free we ask father that your holy spirit would move mightily in our lives that your holy spirit would instill and inflame and inspire within us a biblical longing for heaven an appreciation of what your son did for us on the cross and how when we put our faith and trust in him you take ordinary imperfect people like ourselves and you seal us authenticate us as yours that you claim us as your own possession and that you will protect us father help us to go into our identity and destiny and grant us such a longing for heaven a biblical longing for heaven that our dreams will be will be ordered and our dreams will be clarified and purified renewed and revived and all of this we ask in the name of

Jesus your son and our savior amen