

Visions of the Church Sealed and Standing Before God and the Lamb

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Date: 19 July 2026

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[0:00] Well, do go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 7. Before you stand, let me set the context, and then I'll have you stand for the reading.

Perhaps this is not a book that you're very familiar with, or maybe you've heard many different things about the book of Revelation, and it holds a lot of mysteries for you. But you need to remember, we all need to remember, that this is a book that was given by God himself to be an unveiling.

An uncovering. That's what the word apocalypse or revelation means. An unveiling. To make something that was previously unknown to be known to his servants.

So this is a book for you, dear Christian. It's a book for us. In fact, it's said this in Revelation 1.1. It's called the revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that soon must take place.

Specifically, we can say that this book is a revelation both from Jesus Christ and about Jesus Christ. And what is it ultimately about?

[1:13] Joel Beeky says it this way. It's the great theme of the victory of Christ and his church over the old serpent, over his helpers, and over the kingdoms of this world.

So you must remember that this is a book about Jesus Christ, the conquering king. At the same time, it's important for us to remember that this revelation, this unveiling comes to us in the mode of visions.

Visions that were given to the apostle John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. And he was in the spirit on the Lord's day.

In other words, he was worshiping Christ on the Lord's day. And Christ came and gave him these visions for the purpose of recording them for his church. As the last book of Holy Scripture.

The book is structured where it has seven cycles of seven visions. And we're going to be looking at what can be considered the second cycle this morning.

[2:17] The first being the vision of the Son of Man and then the seven letters. So we're going to be looking at the second cycle of seven. And as we come to this, then what you need to think about this is we're coming more to like an art museum than you are to a lecture hall.

You know, some books like an epistle, it's like someone's directly addressing you like you're in a lecture. But some books like the book of Revelation, because it's visions, it's like you've come to an art museum.

And sometimes in an art museum, what you find is that different paintings are grouped together in a room. And then you have another room with different paintings. So as I said, there's seven cycles of seven.

It's like we're coming to that second room with seven different paintings in it or a few more. And that's what you need to be thinking. John comes as our tour guide.

And he brings us to the portion or to the room where there's a collection of paintings about the seven seals. There's a scroll. And on it, think of seven wax seals.

[3:22] Okay. And that's what we're going to be considering. There's also, before you get to that, these exquisite paintings in Revelation 4 and 5. These visions of the heavenly throne room.

Where you have God on the throne. Then you have the Lamb as well. And then these six seals that are first opened. There's first the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

And then the fifth seal, which is the martyrs in heaven. And then the sixth, the great day of the coming wrath of God and the Lamb. But then we're not through.

There's more paintings in this room. Two more visions that serve as a sort of interlude between that opening of the sixth seal at the end of chapter six and the opening of the seventh seal at the beginning of chapter eight.

So what we're focused on is chapter seven. So please stand. And hear now the very word of God. Starting in Revelation chapter seven, verse one.

[4 : 25] And we'll read down to Revelation chapter eight, verse one. This is the infallible, inerrant word of the living God. 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 the 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.

And I heard the number of the sealed. 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel. 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed.

12,000 from the tribe of Reuben. 12,000 from the tribe of Gad. 12,000 from the tribe of Asher.

12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali. 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

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.

[6 : 21] 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 worshipped God, saying, Amen!

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen! Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?

I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. He and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.

The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[7 : 37] And when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Amen.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, as we have come once again into Your presence on another Lord's Day that You have set aside for us to rejoice and be glad in, we come pleading with You that You would please send Your Spirit in greater measure to us, send Your Spirit to enlighten all of our hearts, especially we pray for the hearts of Your children here today, that we would know what is the hope to which You have called us, what is the riches of our glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of Your power towards us who believe.

And Lord, if there are any in this room who do not yet believe, would today be the day of salvation for them, that they would come to believe not only that they are great sinners, but You are an even greater Savior, and that they would put all their trust in You alone.

Oh, Lord, speak to us through this Your holy word, we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen. Please be seated. Now, as I said, we're in this second series of visions, and in this series of visions, the Apostle John first takes us to heaven.

In chapter 4, just to remind you again of context, John sees God in His glory, seated on the throne, and He's surrounded by a rainbow. I have to say, one of the glorious things about our vacation was we were driving, and we actually saw not just one rainbow, but a double rainbow.

[9 : 22] And quite frankly, I couldn't help but think of Revelation chapter 4, and the throne of God, surrounded by the rainbow, showing that He is a covenant God who's faithful to all His covenant promises. And that's the vision that John sees, and around the throne there are 24 elders who fall down and worship Him, and four living creatures all praising Him as the creator of all things.

But then, it's as though the camera, which is showing this wonderful vision of God and all those worshipping Him in heaven, it zooms into the throne, and it zooms into the right hand of God. In chapter 5, we find the right hand of God is holding a scroll. G.K. Beale tells us, which I believe he's right, that the scroll is best understood as containing God's plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ's death and resurrection, but has yet to be completed. It is that plan from Christ's death, resurrection, to the ultimate consummation. For that to be completed, this scroll must be opened.

Everything that's to take place has already been written, but now it has to actually take place in space-time history. You remember chapter 5, there's this great dilemma.

[10:47] There is John, and he's there, and he hears an angel crying out, Who is worthy to take and open this scroll? And you remember, search is made in heaven above and earth beneath and even under the earth, and no one is found.

And you remember what John does. He weeps. Because he knows what this scroll represents. He knows the only way the consummation of our redemption is going to happen is if someone is found who is worthy to open the scroll.

And as he is weeping bitter tears, an angel comes and says, Weep no more. Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah.

And John then ceases his weeping. He's been looking down. Then all of a sudden, you remember what happens. He looks up to see the lion of the tribe of Judah.

But what does he see? A lamb standing as one who had been slain. And this is the one who is worthy.

[11:53] It is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who came as the great sacrifice for his people's sins. He is now worthy as he enters heaven after his resurrection, as one who's ascended.

He's worthy to take that scroll and open its seals. That's what chapter 5 is telling us. And you remember, immediately as he takes the scroll, there's an eruption of praise.

The 24 elders are singing, Worthy. The saints in heaven, they're singing, Worthy are you, who was slain, to take up the scroll and open its seals.

Because you were slain, and by your blood, you ransomed people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation. And this praise erupts out. And then in chapter 6, what happens is, now the Lamb begins to open those seals.

And as he does so, what it represents for us, remember, this is a vision. So you must not think of this in overly literalistic terms. It's a vision communicating heavenly truth.

[13:03] Jesus is now able to execute what God has decreed is to take place. These seals, as they're opened, it's an execution of the decrees of God from the time of Christ's ascension, we could say, until his return.

The first four seals, as I mentioned before, are the four horsemen sent by the Lamb to execute God's judgment on the earth, even before the final judgment.

That in the period from this time, from Christ's ascension to his return, God's wrath is being revealed on the earth. That's what Romans 1 tells us.

There is a great day of his final wrath, but his wrath is being revealed today. You know how his wrath is being revealed? Some of it is by giving up people to their sinful desires.

Part of what Romans 1 talks about is unnatural desires for men to be inflamed with lust for men, women for women, Do we see that in our world today? And do you realize that that is the wrath of God being revealed in the world now?

[14:11] That's part of the four horsemen going out. That is Christ executing God's decree in judgment against those who refuse to repent. Of course, at the same time, there is the white horse that goes out.

There is Christ who goes out to do what? To bring in his elect. Throughout all the periods of the ages before his return, he is both executing judgment and redemption at the same time.

So you have these visions of what's happening. And then, of course, you have the fifth seal is opened. And this time, it's what's happening not on earth, but what's happening in heaven.

And there you have the martyrs under the altar of God crying out, how long, O Lord, before you will judge and avenge our blood? Right now, all the Christians who have been martyred from Stephen forward are under the throne of God, as it were, crying out, O Lord, bring ultimate justice.

They're looking forward to that great day of consummation. And what does God say? He says, not yet. Rest for a little while longer. That day will come. Then comes the sixth seal.

[15 : 26] And the sixth and the seventh seal are representative of that final great day. And in the sixth seal, you remember what's said is judgment is coming so much so that the people that are there being judged, they would prefer that the mountains fall on them.

And you have a good sense of what mountains look like here. I'm from the East Coast. We have, you know, what you might call hills. We call them the Appalachian Mountains. You have the Rocky Mountains. Could you imagine the largest of the Rocky Mountains?

You're like, please cover me so I don't have to see the blazing eyes of the Lamb of God and His wrath. That's what's going on as the sixth seal is opened.

And indeed, you notice the last couple of verses, notice chapter 6, verse 16, they're 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.

For the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand? That's the question. Who can stand before the holy, holy, holy God and live?

[16 : 39] it's actually an answer to this question that John has given the two visions that we find in Revelation chapter 7.

Two visions of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Two pictures that I want you to have before your mind all your days on the earth.

That's what Revelation is for. See, it's not so wrong for us to like images. Yes, we're a culture who loves movies and those kinds of things. But let me tell you this, don't let the images of the world captivate your heart and mind.

Let the images of Scripture so captivate you that you can't stop thinking about these things and what they mean. Two visions.

One, the vision of the church militant sealed and secure on the earth. That's verses 1 to 8. I'll say it again. A vision of the church militant sealed and secure on the earth.

[17 : 44] And then the second vision is a vision of the church triumphant standing and serving in heaven. So two pictures, one of the church on earth, the other of the church in heaven.

So let's unpack these visions and what they mean for us and to the glory of our king. first then, a vision of the church militant sealed and secure on the earth.

And I want to, with each of these visions, ask and answer three questions. Okay? The first question is, where and when is this vision taking place? Right in verse 1, we learn that John sees four angels standing on the four corners of the earth.

You can speak, it's okay. Earth, right? So this is a vision of the church on earth. Some visions that we find in the book of Revelation are what's taking place in heaven.

That's what we said with the throne room in Revelation 4 and 5. Others of what occurs on the earth. The first four seals, the four horsemen, that's on earth. Right?

[18 : 55] The sixth seal, that's on earth. So here is something that takes place on earth. You need to understand that. And what's occurring? Well, what we see is there are four angels at the four corners of the earth, if you're thinking of the earth kind of like a flat earth.

I'm not a flat earth conspiracist, but you know what I'm saying. That's the vision here. Okay? And these four angels are restraining, keeping back the four winds from doing what?

From bringing harm. That's what it says. Right? Keep them from bringing harm. Verse 2, right? He could have been given power to harm the earth and the sea.

Now what's going on here is you need to understand the book of Revelation is these wonderful paintings, you could say, these wonderful pictures, but the Lord is painting using the colors of the Old Testament.

Every verse of the book of Revelation is actually dipped in the paint of the Old Testament to paint these pictures. And what you have here is an echo from Zechariah chapter 6 in which it speaks about four horsemen that are closely related to four winds.

[20 : 09] And the horsemen and the winds are that which are bringing judgments on the earth. So we see these four winds are related to the four horsemen of the apocalypse. And so what this means is these four winds are to be seen as judgments that will come upon the earth throughout the time of Christ, between Christ's first coming and his second coming.

They're pictured here like winds of a hurricane bringing destruction and devastation upon the earth. And also then the final judgment in which the earth and the sea and even the trees, it says, will be shaken.

Even the trees. And so the four winds here represent God's judgment. I don't know if you've ever seen a tornado or you've ever experienced a hurricane.

It's almost like there's nothing that can stand in its way. And that's the power, the image you're to have in your mind. And there's these four angels that are restraining this powerful winds from coming and bringing this destruction.

But what happens to God's people when God's judgments are unleashed on the earth?

[21:28] And here's where we see another part of this vision. John sees another angel coming from the east who calls out that the judgments are not to go forth until what?

God's servants are sealed on their foreheads. That's what he says. You see it there. Verse 2. 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 the four angels.

He says, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

So before final judgment comes, before the ultimate end and consummation, all God's servants will be sealed.

That's what this is saying. So this is a vision then of something that takes place on earth throughout the church age in one sense before the final judgment of Christ and his return as a reminder that something must take place.

[22:38] God's elect people must be sealed. Let me just say something. This is a reminder to us as well that the order in which things and these visions take place is not necessarily chronological always.

These are visions teaching us truth about what's going to happen or is happening during this whole age. But what's the significance? Here's our second question. When and where we've said it's happening on earth during the period between Christ's first and second coming.

The second question is what is the significance of being sealed? What does that mean? What is the vision communicating to us? What's the truth here? And here you need to think about what happens in the ancient world.

Maybe you've watched a movie set in the Middle Ages or even Reformation time period and you have an important document from the king and he rolls it up and then you remember he's got a candle over here and he's got this wax and he melts the wax and presses it on there then takes his signet ring and presses it in it.

He has sealed it. Right? That's the image. A wax seal authenticated by say a signet ring. That's the kind of idea. It indicates both authenticity and security.

[23:55] That this document for example is truly from the king. It's authentic. This decree that goes forth is real. But also security that it's sealed and not opened except by the person that has the authority to open it.

So it represents both authenticity and security. Now how does that relate to us you and me as Christians the idea of having our foreheads stamped with this seal?

Well first being sealed on the foreheads as God's servants means you have the seal of authenticity. God is saying by this seal this one is truly mine.

She has been adopted into my family. She is certified to be part of the people of God and the Lamb. that you are authentically one who belongs in the family of God.

You are genuinely a child of the King. This understanding of the meaning of the seal on the forehead is confirmed by Revelation chapter 14 verse 1.

[25:07] You can turn there if you like or just listen. This is what it says. Then I looked and behold on Mount Zion stood the Lamb and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads.

Same idea. The name. Where is it written? The same place as the seal. On the forehead. You think about this. Having a seal or your name written on something is a sign of ownership.

This belongs to you. My wife not too long ago well long ago she gave me one and then it broke and so she gave me another one. But it's one of those seals that you stamp your books with right?

It says from the library of John Alexander Miller right? And particularly my sons they like to stamp my books for me right? And so when that book is stamped it's a seal saying it belongs to me. When God writes His name on your forehead or puts the seal on your forehead He's saying this one belongs to me God says. You are authentically a child of the King.

[26 : 17] You are owned by Him. You belong to Him. As Christians you are those who bear the name of Jesus Christ. You have the family name.

Just like a wife in our at least tradition in the U.S. when she marries she takes her husband's name. She now bears that name. The children bear the family name.

That's what is being communicated here. And this connection between the seal and God's name is also seen in places like 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 19 where it says this but God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal the Lord knows those who are His.

The seal is what? The Lord knows those who are His. You belong to the Lord. The next verse in parallel says this let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. To bear the seal is parallel with bearing the name.

To having the name of Christ upon you. Thus to be sealed means you are authenticated as one who genuinely belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 25] So that's the first part authenticity but the second part is this security security security. This seal secures God's people from the harm of God's judgments.

Before the winds are let go every one of God's elect people must be sealed secured. This is reminiscent of what we read earlier in one sense but that's part of Ezekiel 9 through 11.

Ezekiel is also a book of visions. The first vision is sometimes one of the most confusing visions in Ezekiel chapter 1. It talks about wheels within wheels and going forward and backward and all this. What's Ezekiel 1 about? Let me just give you a simple explanation. It is God on his war chariot, his throne chariot and he's coming to judge his people. That's what Ezekiel 1's vision is about.

But there's another vision that's given to Ezekiel while Ezekiel is in Babylon. It's a vision of what's happening in Jerusalem and that's Ezekiel 8 to 11.

[28 : 37] And in that vision what he sees is all the idolatry that's taking place. Here are God's people. They're to worship the one true and living God and instead they're worshiping idols. They're worshiping the sun.

They're worshiping all these false gods even within the temple. The height of breaking the commandments of God. What's the first commandment? Thou shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself any graven images.

So on and so forth. They break on all the commandments and God said when you break my covenant I'm going to bring the covenant curses on you and part of those covenant curses are going to be I am going to destroy that temple and I'm going to remove my presence from you. And the vision is the vision of God coming to bring his judgment and also not only him bringing his judgment but the glory of the Lord ascending from the temple and leaving from Jerusalem and actually going to be a sanctuary for his true remnant in Babylon which is part of what we read in Ezekiel 11.

In Ezekiel 9 though there's this vision of one who's to go throughout the city of Jerusalem before the judgment comes before the temple is destroyed and this is what it says it says pass through the city through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it and so after this angel goes through and marks on the forehead those who are grieved over the idolatry because they still love and worship the Lord after them in the vision what does Ezekiel see the executioners are to come and what are they to do it says kill old men outright young men maidens little children and women but touch no one on whom is the mark do you see the

[30 : 40] Lord is painting with the paint from Ezekiel 9 here in Revelation 7 and he's saying those who have been sealed who have the mark on the forehead when God's judgment comes they're the ones who are saved from the harm of the judgments of God doesn't that remind you of the greatest act of redemption in the Old Testament the Passover where there the blood of the Passover lamb is taken in that bowl and the hyssop and you dip it in and you paint it on the lintels and the doorposts so that when the angel of death comes passes over because they've been marked out as the place of safety a place of security from the coming wrath and judgment of God so now this seal here in Revelation 7 it is talking about the security of God's people but let me be clear it is being secure from the harm of

God's judgments not from the experience of them it does not mean that God's people will not experience trials sufferings and even great tribulation John himself says that he is one who's going through tribulation and he was he was exiled he was away from the church he's alone on an island he's suffering he experiences it but he's secure from the harm of it see when judgments are unleashed on the earth Christians are not immune from wars from famines from sickness from death itself we do and we will experience all these things tribulation but as those who are sealed God's people are spiritually protected we are secured from the harm of these things secure in Christ and in fact you're secured! so that you're enabled to go through these tribulations and able to still have faith in Christ so that you can overcome that's what it's saying not that you will never go through pressures dangers difficulties but in the midst of the pressures the influences dangers snares of the sinister world you will not be overcome by them you will not be destroyed by them but you will continue to cling to Christ and be forever with him ultimately that's what the picture of being sealed is about!

you will persevere you're secure in Christ isn't that a comfort to your Christian that you if you're a Christian here today you have been sealed and no one not even the devil himself can take that seal from off of your forehead so often if you're like me you look at your own heart and you realize that I'm a weak man I have fear and I even sometimes fear that I'll make a shipwreck of my faith and be swept away but God is the one who comes to assure us God is the one who assures you and he says to you I have sealed you and made you secure you are being guarded and kept by my power not your own through faith yes but where does faith come from it's a gift for salvation yes a salvation that's ready to be revealed at the last time

Christ seals those who belong to him God has sealed you and he will preserve you to the end beloved as a Christian you've been sealed and no matter what trial no matter what tribulation your faith as genuine faith will not ultimately fail but here's a third question for this first vision but are all Christians sealed I mean after all in the vision it's only 144 thousand right 144 thousand are sealed! [35:04] so are you part of that or not? Now some take this number very literally right you know certain cults for example the Jehovah's Witnesses they limit the number to those who are believers who will spend eternity in heaven and according to Jehovah's Witnesses that number 144,000 was reached in 1935 so sorry if you're Jehovah's Witness you're out of luck dispensational Christians are those who would say that this is the number of ethnic Jews who convert to Christ after the church has been raptured out of the world I'm just going to tell you I don't believe that that's not what's going on in this passage you have to understand these are visions and visions in the book of Revelation when there's numbers these are meant symbolically they communicate truth but in a symbolic theological book of Revelation John takes Old Testament language and imagery about Israel and he applies it to what the church of the

Lord Jesus Christ made up of who believing Jews and believing Gentiles who are those who are saved all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are saved from Adam and Eve to the last person who saved Moses David all of them they were looking for who the coming Messiah!

everyone Jew or Gentile is saved by faith in Jesus Christ and that's what this represents what's going on here is this is a language to represent true Israelites those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and this understanding is confirmed when you recognize as you read through this list of the 12 tribes it's unlike any list you find in the Old Testament do you notice some tribes are missing did you notice it's not in the usual order so take a few moments and notice how it is who's listed first Judah who's the firstborn of Jacob though Reuben Reuben should be first he is in every other list but here it's Judah why because this is not just talking about physical ethnic Israel this is about those who come from and belong to Jesus Christ Jew and

Gentile who believe in him that's why Judah is first he's the lion of the tribe of Judah so Judah is first and then you'll notice the sons of Jacob's concubines are listed before the sons of Jacob's wives that's not the usual order so you have Gad Asher and Naphtali before you would have Simeon Levi and so forth why some of this is to symbolize the incorporation of the outcasts the incorporation shall we say of the Gentiles into the very people of God that's why they're next and then you'll notice not only this the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted they're not there at all why would Dan and Ephraim be omitted from this list what do you know about the city of Dan and the city of Bethel shall we say those are the two cities where Jeroboam placed the golden calves to lead Israel to what idolatry and the point is even if you're a Jew ethnically but you don't actually worship the true God and his Messiah you're not part of Dan and Ephraim are omitted idolatrous Jews are not

part of the people of God idolatrous Jews today are not the people of God only those who believe in the Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ are truly the people of God and they are the ones who are sealed authentic Christians so what we have here is the 144 thousand is used to represent the whole number of God's elect people 12 12 tribes of Israel 12 12 apostles 12 times 12 is 144 times a thousand the fullness of all

[39 : 35] God's covenant people again from Adam and Eve to the last person that saved that's what this is saying it's a reminder that not one of God's elect people will be lost but all will be saved all will be sealed for the day of salvation and here's my question for you this morning what about you just because you're in this room and even just because you profess with your mouth that you're a Christian that doesn't necessarily mean you are have you been sealed that is do you actually believe that you are a sinner worthy of eternal damnation because you've sinned against your maker the one who has loved you with an everlasting love just by creating you you deserve damnation but he's offered salvation have you run to Jesus Christ the only place of safety the only one who can save sinners from the coming wrath of

God and the Lamb or are you still trying to live on your own righteousness are you still living in your own pretended world or are you living according to the truth how is someone sealed it happens like this the spirit of God comes to you and opens your and you and you you run to him by faith and you are given the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit himself comes and lives inside of you and what is the spirit called in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13 in Christ you also when you heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation and believed in him you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the what the guarantee security of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory this is what it is the

Holy Spirit is the seal you are sealed when you are given the Holy Spirit and if you have been given the Spirit when you hear the word of truth you believe and the reality that you have believed is then publicly displayed when you come to the waters of baptism that's what baptism is baptism is baptism into the one name of Father Son and Holy Spirit baptism you could say is when God writes his name on your forehead and says mine you belong to me and you've already been given the Spirit you've already come to faith in Christ but baptism is that public kind of I call it the betrothal ceremony where you're betrothed to Christ publicly looking forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb have you joined the ranks of God's church on earth the church militant that fights not with physical weapons but with spiritual weapons by faith against the world the flesh the devil it is these and only these those who are true

Christians who are sealed that come even now and the great harm that will come as he will cast those who do not believe in him into the lake of fire with the devil and his demons have you been sealed and if so rejoice that you are secure you're authentic you're part of even those who are now the glorified spirits in heaven maybe you've heard of the hymn a debtor to mercy alone it's one of my favorite hymns there's a line at the end of that hymn where it says more happy but not more secure are the glorified spirits in heaven you see right now in heaven the Christians the saints who've died their bodies in the earth somewhere but their soul is glorified in heaven and yes they're happier than we are now we're pretty happy we know the Lord but we have lots of sorrows and difficulties and tribulation on the earth so it's right for us to grieve now they're happier than we are but if you're a

Christian they're not any more secure than you you're secure because you've been sealed with the seal of God on your forehead as we've thought about the spirits in heaven now we must turn to heaven in the second vision we've seen a vision of the church militant sealed and secure on earth now secondly it's a vision of the church triumphant standing and serving in heaven and so you see after this verse nine so this is now a second vision a different vision and we have to ask and answer some of the same questions where and when is this vision taking place and clearly we are no longer viewing what occurs on earth but what occurs where in heaven the imagery that we find throughout this vision is the same as what we saw in chapters four and they're singing they're singing to

[44 : 57] God on the throne and to the lamb and again in this vision you see the elders and the four living creatures they're all around the throne and what are they doing praising God and the lamb in verse 15 plainly it tells us right therefore they are where before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple this is a vision of the heavenly temple the true temple where God and Jesus the lamb and his glorified spirits they're all there this is a vision of that so this vision is taking place

in heaven but the question is when when is this vision taking place and what we see is there's this great multitude that that's wearing white robes and they have palm branches right palm branches and what we have to recognize from this vision is that this happens after

God's servants have completed their sojourn on the earth after all of that tribulation has happened this is what takes place at the end in that sense white robes were mentioned in the seven letters as one of the things that will be given to those who overcome so what we have here are a picture of those who have overcome they've been given the white robes they've come through so those who have been faithful to endure the trials and tribulations that they had to go through on the earth in fact that's part of what we have with the idea of the palm branches the palm branches again is paint we could say from the Old Testament and the palm branches reminds us of one of the great feasts and that is the feast of tabernacles every camper's delight right what they had to do is they had to come towards

Jerusalem and instead of sleeping in nice tents what did they do they had to make these shelters out of branches and sleep in them why it was a reminder of their pilgrimage through the wilderness that they at one time were brought through the wilderness into the promised land and so the feast of tabernacles is about God's protection of them and how he brought them safely into the promised land so now holding these palm branches and white robes it's saying the same thing it's a commemoration of how God protected them throughout their wilderness wandering on the earth and now they're safe in the ultimate promised land in heaven that's what's going on and in fact you have this question asked well so what we have here let me say it this way is a picture of not the church militant fighting against the world the flesh and the devil it's a picture of the church triumphant in heaven rejoicing and praising

God and the lamb for bringing them safely through now to be safe with God forever so that's the first question right the when and the where it's in heaven when it's after going through tribulation on earth the second question is who is this great multitude that no one could number right that's what it means after this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number I submit to you what it is is the very same group of people symbolized in the 144,000 but viewed from a different perspective see the 144,000 is viewed from the perspective of earth and isn't that how the church seems to us so often it seems small I mean 144,000 is a lot but come on I mean my city of Macon is over 144,000 it's 155 or something like that Denver is more than that right and here is a church of maybe 80 seems so small and so few right that's how it seems from earth's perspective but if you view the same thing from heaven's perspective which is the true perspective the church is a multitude that you could never number because it's made up of God's elect people through all time and all places gathered together now in one place that's the vision the elder comes and asks the question who are these right and of course

John has what I consider both the safe and the wise answer you know I don't know but you know why don't you tell me always a great answer and what does he say he says these are the ones coming out of the tribulation right the great tribulation now that phrase particularly great tribulation is a phrase from Daniel chapter 12 verse 1 and yes in one sense what it says in Daniel 12 is it's what will occur in the last days what will occur in what's called the end times and I have a news flash for you we've been in the last days ever since Christ's first coming we're in the last days in fact Peter in his Pentecost sermon you remember after the spirit has fallen they're speaking in other languages the glorious wonderful deeds of God some men who are hearing people speak languages they don't understand go those guys must be drunk and instead of them being drunk Peter stands up and says let me explain to you what's going on look it's 9 a.m.

[50 : 48] who gets drunk at 9 a.m. that's not what's going on what's going on is what God prophesied back in Joel chapter 2 that God would pour out his spirit and it's a sign ultimately Peter says that the Lord's Messiah that you crucified has been exalted into heaven and is now king of kings and lord of lords and he's poured out this gift of the spirit on his church but if you actually notice when he quotes from Joel chapter 2 there in Acts chapter 2 he changes some of the wording the wording in Joel 2 says after these things I will pour out my spirit on all flesh Peter when he preaches says in the last days I will pour out my spirit on all flesh what is Peter doing he's interpreting and he's saying Joel prophesied that after these things meaning after Israel's return to the land the Messiah has come and all that I'll pour out my spirit and Peter saying that's happened and now we're in the last days the last days signifies the fact that there is no other great act of redemption we're looking for to accept the consummation there's nothing else in between so the

last days began with

Jesus coming so we're in the last days tribulation is now the great tribulation began we could say and the reality is you see this throughout the church age there are those who are Christians who have been martyred killed!

and brothers and sisters it's happening today I already told you about how that's happening in Nigeria you know of those even northern Africa other places it's happening still because this is still the great tribulation until Christ returns but when it's over this is the picture a vision of those who have come out of it and it's not a minuscule number it's so many people we can't even count it you see something similar to what happened in Revelation chapter 5 you see John hears about something and then he sees something that's slightly different he hears the lion of the tribe of Judah he sees the lamb standing who was slain and here he hears notice what it says verse 4 and I heard the number 144,000 but when he looks right verse 9 after this

I looked he sees a multitude no one can number the lion and the lamb! we're referring to the same thing Jesus Christ the 144,000 and the multitude that no one can number are referring to the same thing all of God's saved people so you see the same thing here and here's the amazing thing how are they described notice this verse 9 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 you remember what the question was at the end of Revelation chapter 6 who can stand before God and the wrath of the lamb these who have been sealed these who belong to Christ can stand they can stand a great multitude sealed and secured by God but here's the last question that we must ask and answer how did they get there and how are they enabled to stand before the holy holy holy

God and live and this is where you notice again verse 14 I said to him sir you know and he said to me these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb that's hell you see they're not there primarily because they went through tribulation it's not the suffering that they experienced that qualified them to be there nor are they there because of their own blood right no they did not gain these white robes through washing them in their own sufferings and blood no they have gained these white robes because they're washed in the blood of the lamb!

[55:33] their hope is not in themselves not even in their good works their hope is in the savior and his good works on their behalf that he said I will come and represent my people I will come and do what they failed to do they have broken every one of my commandments but I will keep every one of God's commandments I will love God above all else my father in heaven the truth and love to those that are straying I will rebuke but I'll rebuke in love I'll comfort I'll give myself for my neighbor greater love has no man than this that he laid down his life for his friends and Jesus did that very thing and said I will take upon myself all the guilt all the wrath that the sins of my people deserve that they may be made clean and white and qualified to stand before

God and the Lamb that's what it is this is the only way to have a white robe this is the only way to be enabled to stand before God and the Lamb it's by coming to Jesus yes in all your sin yes in all your filthiness and crying out wash me Savior or I die his blood is the only fountain that can make you clean the good news is this if you're here today and you have never come to Christ and you're still in your sins the good news is that if you're living right now you still have an opportunity to come to him the fountain is still open and today can be the day of your salvation so that when the Lamb returns in all of his fury!

here's the reality you don't know how much longer you have to live don't think because you're 15 or 16 you have a long life ahead of you you don't know that 16 year olds die don't think that you can just put this off for several more months oh I want to do other things I want to sow my own wild oats blah blah blah you don't know if you have that but today you have been given the opportunity right now to come to Jesus Christ so come to him today cry out to him and pray to him and say!

Lord save me wash me seal me make me clean and indeed you know the reality is this one day that final seventh seal will be opened that's what chapter eight is about it talks about that seventh seal at the end of every one of these seven cycles the seventh of them is a picture of the consummation from a different angle and here the seventh seal is opened and what does it say happens right after it's opened in heaven there was silence for half an hour think about that right now there's continual praise and singing that's going on in heaven but when Jesus finally opens that seventh seal silence all singing all praising will stop every hand will be placed over the mouth because they know the

end is coming

God will bring about the completion of both his salvation and his judgment and that's where you have verse five of chapter eight where it says that an angel took a censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth and there were peals of thunder rumblings flashes of lightning and an earthquake which signifies the ultimate destruction of all those who refuse to repent and the ultimate salvation of all those who trust in Christ that day is coming until that day reformed heritage church until that day you must remember you must arise and be the church militant you must know that there is a great multitude that will believe even here in Denver as hard as that is to believe and your job is to pray and to preach and to trust the

[60:09] Lord and to labor as long as he gives you breath and life in this world so be the church militant you are sealed you are secure you can stand do not fear the enemy do not shrink back but take every opportunity the Lord gives you whether it's at school at work with your neighbor speak the gospel this is the means and pray for the Lord to be faithful to save his people because he will be yes when he opens that seventh seal there will be silence for half an hour but until then don't be silent but preach the gospel of your glorious savior the lamb of God slain that you may stand before him forever amen let's pray heavenly father we come to you once again amazed at your word and how rich it is how a vision that can seem strange to us or difficult to understand by your spirit you can make it clear and plain lord we thank you for these visions of your church visions of your work in us and through us and ultimately your work to bring honor and glory to yourself we do worship you and adore you we ask that you would help us to remember these things and to live according to them that your word would guide us and direct us you are the good shepherd and that you would lead us safely all the way home that all glory and honor!

go to you! I pray in