

Sealing and Clothing God's People - Evening Service

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name, Amen.

Good evening. Hello. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron. I'm the minister that looks after this service. If you're new, I want to especially welcome you. It's fantastic to have you here.

I just want to alert you to the fact that my daughter painted my nails. Shortly before the service, in a pretty classy purple and pink glitter, which I was unsuccessful at removing.

Now, the only thing that could be worse was if I was sort of bedazzled like this last week when I was preaching about the judgment of God. That would have felt like, well, that would have been inappropriate, I think.

You remember last week, right? So we're in Revelation. Last week we preached. We were working through Revelation. Last week was chapter 6. It's a really tough passage. You remember what Revelation says about this, right?

[1 : 11] So there's this picture of God, and he has a scroll. And the scroll represents his plan for the world. And on the scroll it has these seven seals, you know, like wax seals that a king would put on something.

And chapter 6 of Revelation, last week's passage, was all about six of those seals being cracked open. And with every sort of opening of a seal, there was a vision, and it was tough stuff, difficult stuff.

I'll read a couple of verses to remind you, just to jog your memory. So this is Revelation 7 here. So this is a picture of our world under judgment now from God.

And then verse 15 at the end there. 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 caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us.

Hide us from the face of him who was seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of wrath has come. And who can stand? And this is, it's this amazing vision.

[2 : 45] This very sobering vision of powerful people scrambling to escape the rightful ruler of the universe who has come to bring judgment. So yeah, heavy sermon last week.

Because it was about the anger of God. As it's experienced now in our world, and as it will be experienced in its finality in the future.

And one of the big takeaways was this, is that God sees this stuff. God sees the injustice in the world. He sees it and he cares. And he is indignant that his world is being harmed.

And God will act and is acting. And he will call evil to account. And evil will finally be dealt with one day. So you remember, that's the passage last week talked about that.

And then it ended with this question. Given the anger of God at evil, who can stand? That was the question right at the end of chapter 6. Who can stand before God on the day of judgment?

[3 : 45] Who of us can stand before God and say, I'm okay, aren't I? Like, I'm fine, aren't I? Like, I didn't do anything, did I? Did I? I'm probably fine.

Who can say that before God? So that's the question chapter 6 ends with. And that's our context. So, chapter 6. Six seals were broken.

Now, you'd expect chapter 7 to be about the breaking of the seventh seal. But it's not. What we have is, let's call it an intermission or an interlude.

See, chapter 7 is this pause. It's a pause between the breaking of the sixth and the seventh seal. And Revelation does this a couple of times.

It pauses, has these interludes, and what they do is they answer some big question that has been raised. And in this case, the question is, what I've just said, who can stand in front of an angry God who will dish out justice to anyone who has done something wrong?

[4 : 47] It's a great question. It's a scary question. So we have our text tonight, this intermission. And it's a wonderfully comforting text.

It's one of the most comforting texts in Scripture, I think. And we need it after last week. And it simply says this. The one who can stand before God on this day are the ones who have been sealed by God.

So let's get into the passage. Some of you I know like a big picture first, so very quickly big picture. Chapter 7 roughly breaks into two halves if you kind of slide your eyes over the passage.

If you have it in front of you, that's super helpful. 1 to 8, 9 to 17 there. 1 to 8 is about our status of being sealed on earth now.

And 9 to 17 is about our hope in heaven. And it's a great hope. I hope it should change the way we live now. Right. So let's look at it.

[5 : 47] Verses 1 to 8. The passage begins there. So have a look at it. We see this very fascinating picture here. It starts with a vision of angels. Right.

And these angels are holding back destructive winds. Four destructive winds. And it's trying to get this idea that a whole lot of hardship is coming down the line.

Now, it's actually speaking about the four horsemen. So this is going to be slightly confusing. But chronologically, chapter 7 is describing something that is happening before chapter 7.

It's describing something that's happening in chapter 6. Okay. Right. So it says there's this great tribulation coming, coming down the line. And the great tribulation, that's the phrase that the Bible, that this chapter uses a couple of times.

The Greek is megaphypsis, which is a wonderful word here. Megaphypsis. Great tribulation. And what it means is it means pressure. It's like two things slamming into each other and you're caught right in the middle.

[6 : 51] Some people say it's like tectonic plates coming together. And it's a perfect picture in the case of Revelation of the two kingdoms coming together.

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the enemy slamming into each other. And the Christians are right there, are right in the middle, are caught between the two.

So the angels are holding off, are holding off this great tribulation, this crashing of kingdoms, until, verse 3 it says, until God says, I have put my seal on the foreheads of the servants of God.

Now what does that mean? Now these aren't seals like the seals on the scroll. That's confusing, I know. It's different kind of seals. So the seals that God is putting on the foreheads of the Christians who are facing this great tribulation, what does that mean?

It means a couple of things. First, it's the seal is like a way of saying, I own this. This is mine. So God does something to people through his Holy Spirit, by his Holy Spirit, by putting his Holy Spirit in us and says, these people, they're my people.

[8 : 11] Our daughter, Bea, is a runaway. She's a flight risk. So she takes off. And she's getting better, but she likes to take off. And one time she took off when she was on an outing with Amy, and it was terrible.

Amy called me at work. This is, I don't know, like five months ago. Amy called me at work, and she said, she says, Aaron, pray I've lost Bea.

So normally that would be scary. This was like, this was mega scary. This was off the Richter scary, because the whole sentence was this. Babe, she likes to call me babe.

Babe, what do you do? Babe. She goes, I've lost Bea.

I'm at Lynn Canyon. I know. I know. Where could be a worse place to lose a special little child, right, at Lynn Canyon?

[9 : 12] And then she hangs up. And so I'm freaking out. I'm just walking around the neighborhood, praying my brains out. And then there was a full search and rescue thing, and they found her. But half an hour later, she was totally happy.

And he just wandered off a path somewhere. And anyway, apparently this is fairly common for little kids like Bea. And there's lots of threads online about tracking devices you can sort of attach to these children somehow.

But I saw a really sort of effective sort of low-tech solution one day. I was at, I think it was at the P&E; this summer. And this kid runs past me.

Kid runs past me. It's kind of like Bea. And she had on her arm written in permanent marker, if I look lost, in big letters, if I look lost, phone this number.

And I thought, that's such a great idea. That's such a brilliant idea. This mom has just like marked their child out. This is my child. Look after her.

[10:10] So this is what God does in our passage. He marks us out. This is my child. Don't harm them. So the seal, though, it doesn't mean we don't suffer.

And we know that because verse 14 lets us know that the Christians in heaven have gone through the pain of life. The sealing of God isn't a removal from pain.

It isn't a rescue from the troubles of the world. Because some of these guys were, some of these folks, men and women, were martyred for the faith. So what, you know, what exactly does the seal do for us?

You might ask a good question. Well, if you think of those wax seals on envelopes, what do they do? They protect the integrity of the thing that's contained in it, right?

Don't they? They stop something from being opened up and tampered with. And that's what God's seals does. It protects us from losing what? Our spiritual life. It protects us from losing our spiritual life, not our physical life.

[11:11] You could say it like this. As we relate to last week's passage, God's seal protects us from God. We're protected from his anger against evil.

And the way he does that is instead of judging us for what we have done, because we're a compliance in all the evil of this world, God judges us on what Christ has done.

So God wraps us in his goodness and protects us from his wrath. That's what the white robes are about in Revelation. So what's the implication for you?

God has marked you as his. You cannot be snatched away from him. So you might be here and your faith might feel a bit shaky.

You might be here and life is very difficult, and the Jesus sort of thing for you is just like it's just really hard. And you may think of, you think this is too hard.

[12:13] You know, you might feel like you're on the edge of giving it all away. Or you just don't know if you have enough faith to keep going. Or you compare yourself to others and you go, those guys over there, they are so, they seem so full on for Jesus, and I just don't have what they have.

I wish I kind of, well, I'm so passionate like they have. I just don't have that. And you wonder, maybe you wonder, if you're actually okay with Jesus at all. Well, you are okay with Jesus.

Let me explain that using an Old Testament story. So you remember the Passover in the Old Testament. God's people, the Hebrew people, were being held captive in Egypt.

And God kept bringing these judgments on the Pharaoh, you know, and on the land, saying, look, you've got to let these people go, and it'd bring pestilence and, like, creepy crawlies and disease and goiters and stuff and Pharaoh.

No, no, no, I'm not letting them go. Eventually, the last thing he brought was death. The firstborn of all the males in that place died.

[13:19] But the Hebrew people were protected from the angel of death. How? Because they sacrificed a lamb, and they put blood over their door. So the angel of death passed over. So that's the Passover.

That's the Passover story. It's a wonderful story. Now, I want you to imagine a couple of little kids, a couple of little Hebrew kids in that city. And one of them, their parents explain what's happening, and that kid sleeps soundly all through the night.

But there's another kid, and he's terrified. And he doesn't sleep a wink that night. And when he does sleep, his dreams are filled with nightmares.

And he's just terribly afraid, and he's shaking all through the night. What happens to those kids the next morning? They're both alive. They've both been protected because they are both gods.

God made a promise to both of them. God had them. God was holding on to them. So if you were here tonight, and you're a Christian, God has you. He has you.

[14:23] Even if your faith is a bit shaky, he has you. That's part of what it means to be sealed by God. He's got you. Secondly, very quickly, what else does it mean to be sealed?

Do you see the mark? It's on our forehead. So why is it on our forehead? It was symbolically, it's trying to get across society, kind of communicate the idea that the seal should be obvious to others. People should see us, and they'll see our brokenness and all that stuff, but they should also see the Lamb of God. They should also see Christ through us. I bought something off Craigslist the other day on the North Shore, started chatting to this guy.

We were just talking about his family, his home, his job, and from within about one minute of meeting him, I thought, this man's a Christian. He mentioned nothing about faith, nothing. I thought, this guy's a Christian. And eventually, right at the end, he said, so what do you do to me? And I said, I'm a minister. He goes, oh, I go to Coastal Church. I thought, oh, I totally knew it. I recognized, somehow I recognized this man was a Christian.

[15:28] All right, let's keep going. So where are we? Those who can stand before the anger of God are those who God has sealed through his Holy Spirit and through that he says, you are mine.

I have got a hold of you. I'm not letting you go. He also says, no one can snatch you away and people will know that I have you. But there's this curious number here, 144,000.

And if you read the passage, just sort of quickly, sort of lightly, you'll sort of go, it sounds like God is saying that he only chooses 144,000 and they're all Jews. So that's a problem for us, you might think.

What do we do with this number, 144,000? Well, it has been a slightly divisive number throughout history. I mean, literally, denominations are formed around this idea that it's a literal 144,000, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example.

But remember, from the very first sermon, numbers in Revelation are very symbolic. And this is such a tidy number, isn't it?

[16:33] 144,000, that's such a tidy number. It's conspicuously tidy. It sort of makes you go, huh. Well, it breaks down very nicely to 12 times 12 times 10 times 10 times 10.

12 times 12 times 10 times 10 times 10. And so you know 12 refers to the people of God in Revelation, and 10 refers to completeness in apocalyptic writing.

So you have 144,000, 12 times 12 times 10 times 10 times 10. It's saying it's the people of God.

Now, seriously, it's the people of God, the complete people of God.

No, honestly, really the complete people. No, seriously, the totally complete people of God. It's the church. It's the church. 144,000 symbolically represents the whole worldwide church.

And God knows who you are. And it's wonderful, I think. I mean, if you take these numbers literally, you kind of miss out on something quite beautiful that the passage is saying.

[17:37] But then there's these tribes, though, and they can, you know, why list the tribes there? Well, genealogies. I know when you read your Bible, you skip over the tribes.

Some of you, right? You're just going to skip past them. But they're usually communicating something quite important. And in this case, this list of 12 tribes, it's my second language.

Come on, people. It's, it's, it's, it's, this list of tribes here, it's not like any other list in the Bible.

There's a couple missing, and there's one extra, like, it's, it's, it's different.

For example, the Reuben's tribe, which is usually first, is not first. Now it's the tribe of Judah that's first. Dan's tribe is missing. It's replaced by Manasseh. Who are these?

Who's Manasseh? Who's here to these guys? Nobody, right? So what's the reasoning here? Well, best guess is that Judah's at the top because that's where Jesus is from. Dan, is anyone called Dan here?

[18:35] Dan, Dan's tribes were habitual idolaters. I'm afraid. Sorry about that, Dan. Manasseh, they were this quite sort of out there, outcast-y sort of tribe.

The one commentator says this. The reason the tribes are there and the reason the order's mixed up and it's different to anywhere else in the Bible, this commentator says this. The order of the tribes in Revelation symbolizes the reign of Jesus, why Judah first, the incorporation of the outcasts, that's why it's Manasseh's there, the exclusion of idolaters, that's why Dan's gone, from the covenant community that God hides from his terrible wrath.

So there you have it. Now let's move fairly quickly just to the second half of this passage here. So that's 1 to 8, 9 to 17, and a few minutes here.

So here we have this amazing vision of heaven, of the future. So we move from our current hope, God has us, he won't let us go, to our future hope.

So there's this great multitude, symbolically called 144,000, but it's obviously a lot more. Every tribe in the world is there.

[19 : 47] You can see the passage says, every language is there, which is lovely to think, that I'll be there going, hello, how are you? I'll be speaking New Zealand to you. And you'll be there going, hey guy, it's great to be here, because that's exactly how you sound to me.

So there's all these lovely accents there. Culture, like culture's still in heaven. Culture's still there. It's wonderful. Christians from all over the world, they're praising God.

Canadians, Americans, Chinese, Pacific Islands, they're all there. I read recently that Somalia is a country of 8 million people. There is less than 1,000 Christians in that country.

There used to be a lot more, but incredible persecution exists there. Those 1,000 Christians will be there in heaven with us, praising God. People from all tribes and countries we've never heard of. All together, dressed in white, praising God. It's so wonderful. And to underline what it will look like up there, or there, wherever that is, there are these three images at the end.

[20 : 49] And remember, John is trying to convey something indescribable. He does his best job, right? And so it's beautiful imagery, and there's three sort of images there. Verse 15, it says that we will serve God.

We'll be there serving God. So that's wonderful. There's something to do, which is a much more compelling picture of heaven than sitting on clouds, isn't it? The second image, verse 16, all the evil in the world will be undone.

No more war, inequality, and hunger. And lastly, verse 17, this beautiful, beautiful passage. 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. Isn't that amazing? God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And it's such a tender picture of God wiping away our tears, like I wipe away the tears of my children.

God himself coming down from the throne, doing that, and comforting us. And it speaks volumes of what heaven will be like. Whatever it looks like, we know this, it will be about intimacy with God.

[21 : 56] It will be about intimacy with God, and God healing our hurts and our pain. And this is perhaps such one of the most unbelievable parts of heaven, perhaps for you.

One of the hardest parts of heaven to believe, because some of our hurts are very deep, and some of our pain is so inexplicable.

Now, I don't know what makes you cry, what brings you to tears, if you still do. Loss, loneliness, physical pain, fear, anxiety.

Perhaps you cry over a life that is not the life that you planned. Maybe this is not the life that you planned, but it's the life that you have. Perhaps that brings you to tears frequently.

Well, in heaven, God will come down from his throne, and he will wipe away those tears, and there will be healing. And it is a wonderful hope, isn't it? A wonderful hope.

[23 : 01] A hope that should change the way we live now. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.