

# Sealing and Clothing God's People - Morning Service

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[ 0 : 00 ] You might like to take the Bible and open to Revelation chapter 7 on page 1031. That's where it starts. And as you do, I thought I'd mention the fact that this week, a number of St. John's members were delegates at the Anglican Network in Canada Synod that was hosted down at the Church of Good Shepherd, which is the one Anglican church in Vancouver that has managed to purchase a property.

And a number of St. John's members were volunteers. And it was a very happy time, full of unity, forward-lookingness. And the best part is catching up with old friends and new friends.

And I met there a couple from Nigeria. And I said to them, where are you working? And they said, we are working in Regina, in Saskatchewan.

And I said, that is very cold. They said, it is very cold. Very cold. I said, what are you doing? They said, we are working to pay our bills. I said, what about church? And they said, we are visiting people.

We go door-knocking to invite people to come to our church. And we have a small church meeting at the Multicultural Council Building. And I thought, good for you.

[ 1 : 18 ] Wow. That is exciting to hear. A small work beginning through a Nigerian couple in Regina. I also met up with Keith Ganza, who used to work on staff at St. John's.

He is now in Toronto. And they've moved their Sunday gatherings to a tea shop in the downtown, right in the downtown core. And they've already outgrown it, really.

But the tea shop has this one big table with a glass wall where everyone who walks down the main street of Toronto walks by and looks in.

And Keith said, I preach with my back to them. And people stand and peer looking in. And I think it would be very nice if they could go inside.

Well, it's a great privilege today for us to peer, not into one church through some glass, but into heaven itself. Into Revelation 7.

[ 2 : 19 ] And what we find are two pictures of salvation. Now, the key text in Revelation 7 is verse 10. If you just turn the page.

Which is, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. This is said by a great multitude in heaven that no one can number from every corner of the earth.

And it's not said politely. It's not said with liturgical correctness. They cry it out. It's a loud, rough word.

Salvation, they say, belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Salvation is part of the essential vocabulary of the Christian faith.

You cannot have Christianity without the idea of salvation. It's part of the irreducible core. Jim Packer says, salvation is a word picture. A picture word of wide application.

[ 3 : 25 ] Expressing the idea of rescue from jeopardy and misery into a state of safety. Saved from evil. From death. From disaster. From fear. From self.

From sin. Saved for good and for glory and for God. And what they sing is not, it's not just salvation belongs to God. The word belong isn't there.

Salvation is literally out of God. It's salvation is something within God that comes to those who are standing in his presence. Which is why the cry is so rough and joyful and amazing.

And why in verse 11, the angels, every angel in heaven joins the worship. Despite the fact that no angel has ever experienced salvation. They fall down on their faces and worship.

And they have watched as God has unfolded salvation in history with deep fascination. Serving as his ministers. And they have such joy in our salvation.

[ 4 : 28 ] The way God has rescued and redeemed us that they spontaneously fall down. And they praise God for seven things. Verse 12. They begin and end with our men. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever.

Now, I'm aware it's difficult to just drop into Revelation 7. Particularly if you haven't been with us so far. I was trying to think of an illustration of this.

It would be like a miracle. Imagine the Canucks won the Stanley Cup. Just imagine. And we do miracles here. And you turned up on the victory parade down in Vancouver and didn't know anything about ice hockey.

That's what it's like dropping into Revelation 7. Because in chapters 4 to 5, the author John had been taken up into heaven. And he had a vision of God on the throne above all things.

And you remember in God's hand there was a scroll. But it was closed. It had seven seals. And the scroll is the way God is going to work history to his purposes.

[ 5 : 37 ] He has the whole of history in his hand, of course. The seven seals. There's only one who is worthy to open the seals and carry out God's purpose. And then we get the picture of Jesus Christ who steps forward as the lion and the lamb.

The one who conquers by being conquered. The one who has victory through being the victim. And last week we looked at chapter 6. And we witnessed the lamb opening the first six of seven seals.

The first four seals, you remember in the early part of chapter 6, exactly matches our experience of history. First four seals, the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Devastation, war, famine, suffering. Seal 5 was about the people of God praying, when will you bring justice, O Lord? And then seal 6 ended chapter 6.

And it was an awesome picture of final judgment. An answer to the prayers of God's people. So when you pray to God, as we have already, your kingdom come. We are praying for judgment partially.

[ 6 : 47 ] And all creation is torn apart at the end of chapter 6. It's the second coming of Jesus. And all who are outside Christ, if you just look back at that in verse 16, And chapter 7 is a pause.

And then we have the seventh seal at the beginning of chapter 8. If you just look over. When the lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

I think there is such a sense of awe and motion and worship and depth that the only thing to do is to cover our mouths and to be silent before God for a while.

I think that's why that says it that way. But chapter 7 is very important. It's a pause in the action to show why God is doing what he's doing and how he does it.

And what it means for us, his people. I think chapter 7 is just a great gift to us. It stretches our imagination to show us how good salvation is.

[ 8 : 04 ] And the end product ought to be after looking at this, that our hearts are full of hope. So there are two sections in chapter 7, verses 1 to 8. And that's about what salvation means now in history.

And what it's really about is how God saves us by sealing us through his Holy Spirit. And then verses 9 to the end, what salvation means then.

And verses 9 to the end takes place after the second coming of Christ. And it shows how salvation God works through the cross of his son, Jesus Christ. So it's two pictures of salvation.

We get to peer into these two pictures of salvation for those who are saved, two pictures of the church, now in history, and then after history. Is that okay? So let's look at those two together.

Firstly, verses 1 to 8, what salvation means now. And if you look back at verses 1 and 2, you can see this is clearly taking place on earth. There are four angels at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth.

[ 9 : 15 ] They're the four horsemen that we met in chapter 6. In other words, someone has pushed the pause button. We've gone back to the beginning of verse 6. And we are before the four horsemen set out on disaster and devastation.

Because the obvious question is, what happens to God's people when there's devastation and disaster and famine and trouble? I mean, we know as Christians we're not cotton wool from suffering.

Christians die of famine. They drive earthquakes and wars. Are we just swept up and become victims of history like others? What difference does it make to trust God in these difficulties? If God is going to care for us and protect us, how does he do it? And the answer is, in this section, six times it comes, the way God does it is by sealing us, by sealing each of his people. So, in verse 2, before the winds blow, a great angel rises up and he says, wait, wait, wait, wait, hold on.

[10:22] There's something more important, that most important that has to happen first to all the servants of God. I have to seal them with the seal of the living God. Which means that all the disasters in history, including your own personal disasters, are in some sense serving the church of Jesus Christ.

It just shows the incredible importance of the church of Jesus Christ. Now, I'm very aware that when I talk about seals and sealing, I'm not talking about a roof or a little aquatic animal that you find in the waters of Vancouver.

This is a wax or a clay stamp that you put on a scroll to secure its contents. And the seal here, the seal of the living God, is placed permanently on the foreheads of his servants.

It's a picture, okay? But it's very important. A seal does two things. It protects the integrity of what's written in the scroll.

It secures what's inside the letter, inside the scroll, against meddling and change and interference. You can't break a clay seal, go in and scratch out a couple of paragraphs and change it around and glue it up again.

[11:44] You just can't do that. And the point of verse two is, we're not sealed with clay or wax, we're sealed with the seal of the living God.

In other words, there is no power in heaven and earth that can undo what God has done inside our lives. His seal on your life is stronger than you are.

Because once we trust in Jesus Christ, God begins to change us inwardly. He gives us a new heart and he seals us with his Holy Spirit. We belong to him and our lives are hid with God in Christ.

And there is no spiritual power that can steal that away. There's no spiritual power that can come along, break God's seal on you and fiddle around with the life of God inside you.

No suffering, no persecution, no anguish, no torment can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The seal of God protects us.

[12:42] He protects us during the difficulties. So firstly, the seal guards the integrity of what's inside. But the second thing is that the seal is a sign of outward ownership to those who look at it.

It's the personal imprint of the author. And if you have the seal of the living God on you, you are not your own. Life is not about finding your dream and believing in yourself.

If you are sealed with the seal of the living God, you don't define who you are. We belong to the lamb. This is our identity. It's not your seal.

It's the seal of the living God. It belongs to him, which he has put on each one of us. He knows his own. As God looks at us this morning, as he looks at all of those in history, he knows the genuineness of the true believer.

And that's the point of the number 144,000. It's a neat, symmetrical, mathematical, exact way of speaking of 12 times 12 times 12 times 3 times 10.

[13:51] It's a stylized way of saying God knows exactly the number of those who are his. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows us intimately. And he has sealed every single believer for himself.

And another reason we know it's a bit stylized here is because the list of the 12 tribes, which Deidre valiantly read from verses 5 to 8, it's not the usual list.

It's all mashed up. It's not an ethnic list of Israel. It's not just martyrs. It's the complete number of the servants of God. Line up in neat ranks of 12,000 as a sort of army of witnesses ready to give their lives for Christ.

So here is the point of the first seven verses. God seals all of those who are his precisely because there's difficulty coming and he protects us by making us transparently his and God has so designed it that when we experience evil or trials or suffering we are not left with our own resources but we are sealed by God. This is very difficult for us I think and we live life based on our own resources so often don't we when we begin to suffer we try and draw on our own inner strength and resources. Christian life Christian life is the gradual process of learning how to live out of the resources of God.

learning to lean into the ceiling of the holy spirit as it were because our endurance doesn't come by our grim determination and our gritted teeth real determination for the christian real sorry endurance for the christian comes by transferring our trust from our own inner resources to him this is true in difficulty it's true when things are terrific you know they say that you can only be generous when you're in a position of strength well this puts us in a position of strength the strength of the living god so that's the first picture of salvation now in our lives god places his own seal on his servants he saves us by sealing us in his holy spirit secondly then what does it mean after history how god how does god save us by the cross of his son and i want to just see if you're all with me now so let me tell you a little story that has nothing to do with the sermon some years ago i was reminded when dan was doing halloween they're asking the kids what they're going to go around as i was standing at the door and we had two buckets we had a bucket of carrots and healthy snacks which someone else in my house whom i have married suggested we have for the kids and chocolate and candy which i had and i opened the door and there were three kids one dressed as satan and two dressed as anglican priests i asked them to do a trick but they couldn't okay so what does salvation mean after history there's nothing to do with this um from verse 9 to the end of the chapter we move beyond history beyond the second coming you know so the great multitude in verse 9 praising god they're exactly the same group as the 144 000 they're just taken from a different point of view now in heaven after the second coming okay so in verse 4 god knows the exact number of those who are his in the midst of difficulty verse 9 none are missing but it's beyond any human to number and they are from every nation every cult every ethnic every cultural every linguistic group in the world which is worth a sermon in itself and at verse 13 god wants us to understand what salvation means in eternity and he wants us to see the centrality of the death of his son and he does it in verse 13 by one of the 24 elders stepping forward and pointing to the multitude and saying to john verse 13 who are these clothed in white robes where do they come from and john's learning john very wisely says you tell me and the elder answers his question and then he gives us one of the most remarkable pictures of the eternal enjoyment of salvation and i i want you to be aware of distraction in this next section this is very important the elder points out two things about the cross the first is the cross is for everyone who gets to stand before the throne of god and the lamb not just on that day of judgment but through all eternity can any of us hope to stand before before the lamb verse 14 he said 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 they've come out of the great tribulation all the suffering of history because god sealed them but how do we come to be sealed the answer is washing our robes and making them white in the blood of the lamb now that is the most graphic and explicit way of speaking about how the death of jesus must be made personal by each of us it's a paradoxical way of speaking about how god brings about a miracle of change in us through the death of his son that happened 2 000 years ago and at one level it's grotesque and i think it's completely confusing to those who are new to christianity if you wash something in blood it becomes bloody it becomes putrid and rancid and foul and if you look at the jesus dying on the cross it just looks completely pointless it looks like a waste of a good life it looks foolish but from god's point of view in the cross of jesus christ god completely overturns the overturns the wisdom of the world it's his blood it's his death alone that can cleanse us it's his death that makes us alive it's by his injuries and wounds that we're healed in the cross of jesus christ we see the wisdom of god and the power of god and if you've been a christian for a little while you're pretty used to this sort of language but i think you've got to sit with the with how jarring it is how much it says about us and it says about god i mean we are so easily convinced of our inward cleanness and our own innocence in things everything's unfair it takes the holy spirit to open our eyes to see that it's christ's death alone that can cleanse and purify and strengthen us and the elder is saying the stunning and miraculous power of change in the blood of comes through the blood of jesus it comes through him and his death that our robes are made white in other words we stand before jesus christ or this great crowd stands before jesus christ on that day and through all eternity not in their own whiteness but in the whiteness of jesus it's a total and complete the robe covers us entirely and if you wear the robe for long enough it becomes your identity and notice please it doesn't happen automatically jesus doesn't come and wash your robe for you we have to actively wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the lamb every single one who is standing before the throne who will stand there throughout eternity has taken this one action of washing themselves in the blood of jesus christ irrespective of their background it doesn't matter their nationality their language it doesn't qualify them their good deeds don't qualify them their bad deeds don't disqualify them

they have all simply come to christ and said to christ please wash me in your blood that's why we meet week by week this is the first thing the elder wants to get across the cross of jesus is for everyone it doesn't matter how bad you think you are or how good you think you [ 22 : 42 ] are how advantaged or disadvantaged how successful or unsuccessful the cross is for you and secondly the elder says the cross is not just for everyone it is forever and in this little last section in verses 15 to 17 i think we are we really move on to sacred ground we're dealing with a reality no human has ever seen this is this is straight revelation of the future from god and it begins with this big therefore in verse 15 for this reason because of the cross of christ the cross of christ necessarily entails this and what it entails forever well it begins in verse 15 with the close and tender personal presence of god to those who are with him just look at verse 15 therefore he says they are before the throne that's a word of physical closeness they are before the throne of god they serve him day and night in his temple temple is not the big open space it's the sanctuary the holy of holies the place god dwells his personal place and he who sits on the throne will shelter them in his presence he spreads his tent his glory tent over them says come in they shall hunger no more neither thirst anymore the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat because of the cross of jesus christ as one commentator says we will experience the sweetest fullest and most intimate fellowship in the presence of god remember the curse of sin ultimately is separation from god yes it pollutes us but that's not the big deal it separates us from god and now and now that separation is reversed into life and light and joy and we're given the unspeakable privilege of serving the one who served us as priests in his sanctuary caught up doing what's ultimately meaningful you know to see and to know the one who made us for himself with those it's plurals with those whom you love in the presence of god and the presence of the lamb who loved us and gave himself for us and it's so good you need negatives to describe it you know when you run out of comparisons you have to go negative no hunger no thirst no damage no danger no injury no injustice no shame no suffering no guilt no grief our desires are fulfilled because underneath all our desires is our desire for him as the psalmist said in the presence of god is fullness of joy and at his right hand our pleasures forevermore and if the chapter finished there it would be ravishing enough but the last verse is there because god wants us to enjoy this he wants us to see it and hope in it and notice in the last verse that the lamb and god the father there's no reticence in putting them together on the same level verse 17 for the lamb in the midst of the throne literally he's inside the throne he will be their shepherd he will guide them to springs of living water fountains and god will wipe away every tear from their eyes so jesus the lamb who was slain for us becomes the shepherd of the old testament and he directs our feet toward the fountains of living water the water that gives eternal life the inner experience of god

he died to save you and in eternity he will hold nothing nothing good back from you or from me and the picture here is not having one one big drink and then being satisfied forever you're done with drinking the bible picture is not the extinguishing of our desires the picture is that our desires grow stronger and wider and deeper and broader through access to living water in jesus christ able to take more in as we grow in our capacity and our love yes we will grow there sure we'll be without sin able to drink in the life that we share together more and more as one commentator says the saved will always thirst for god and that thirst will always be satisfied and the enjoyment of this fellowship is the enjoyment of his personal concern for us reversing all fear to joy personally wiping away our tears removing every cause and every sense of despair and torment and replacing them with his tender goodness and all of this comes to us through the cross of jesus christ so here are two pictures of salvation for us god sealing us with his holy spirit in this life god giving us white robes through the cross of his son and enjoying his presence forevermore you know people would fork out a lot of money to know the future but this is not a stock tip this is from the god who holds the future and i think of those people that walk by keith gans's church in toronto and peer in the windows and i you know i wonder what would happen if they started to walk in revelation 7 is not for peering at you need to open the door you need to go into it you and i we need to ask god to forgive our sin through the blood of jesus christ to wash us and to give us his whiteness we need to trust him and his resources for this week for our lives and you need to make sure you are numbered among those who are before the throne because salvation belongs to our god who sits on the throne and to the lamb and all blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to him forever and ever amen