Revelation 7:1-14 “Sealed, Saved, Singing”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Imagine, kids, imagine that you are a part of the fellowship of the firstborn sons, in case you haven't heard of that. This is a group of Israelite friends living in Egypt the day before the first Passover. Y'all meet up to hang out every day after school, but today you've all been hearing some scary whispers around town. Stuff about the angel of death and tonight after dark and Yahweh's judgment coming on firstborn sons in Egypt. And as y'all start sharing what you've overheard, you realize that you're not the only one who's a bit afraid of what's going to happen, what's going to come tonight. You're a little nervous about going to sleep.
What do I do? How will I be safe? I think some of the first century churches receiving revelation must have had some of those types of feelings. They've already been told, most of them, that they've got some serious issues. Then they hear of four horsemen bringing God's judgment on the world, war and famine and martyrdom. And they've already experienced some of those very things. They've lost friends and loved ones. And it's supposed to get worse. The whole creation, they're told, now is going to fall apart. The lamb is coming in wrath to judge. And Revelation 6 closes with that haunting question we looked at last week. Who can stand? What do I do? How will I be safe? Maybe you felt a little bit of that fear last Sunday. Maybe even this week, maybe you've felt it before when you've had a bad day. Or you've let your mind wander to judgment day. And you realize that we fall short as individual Christians, as churches, as imperfect parents and children and people. And Yahweh's judgment is coming. Justice will be served. And remember, the world is entirely falling apart. Your money will not bail you out. Your social reputation as a respectable guy won't hide you. Your hard work and your connections won't offer you any safety. And so maybe you've wrestled with some of those same questions as the fellowship of the firstborn sons or the first century Christians.
[3:25] What do I do? How will I be safe? After all, who can stand? That's the question. That's actually the question that Revelation 7 answers. It's what it's all about. This is an interlude. It's another vision before the scroll's seventh seal is opened. But it's actually not chronologically between the sixth and seventh seals. It's a little confusing. This is a vision that John is given to answer that question, who can stand? And I think largely because God wants to reassure His struggling, fearful church in the midst of a lot of difficult life, right? In the midst of a lot of dark, apocalyptic imagery and revelation, He wants them to be comforted, to be reassured. Let's read all of chapter 7 together, and we're going to look at how God shows John who can stand the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of 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 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. 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,

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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 worshiped 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. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. 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. God, we ask, as we always do, that you would help us to see Jesus here. That seeing him truly would this morning be a great comfort to our souls.
[7:44] We ask it in his name. Amen. While this is John's next vision that he has, one of the ways that we know that it's not just chronologically after chapter 6 is that all of creation just fell apart at the end of chapter 6, remember?

And chapter 7 now opens with angels holding back winds so that they will not harm earth or sea or trees. These are winds of God's judgment.
Perhaps mirroring the four horsemen in the previous chapter. But they will come swiftly and surely. And we know that when they do, it will seem that no one can stand before God's just wrath.
Except that before God lets them come, there's this other angel, isn't there? That this other angel comes with the seal of the living God, His authority, and says, first, let me mark God's people with His seal for their protection in this coming judgment.
This is what's most important here. Before we talk 144,000, don't get distracted. God is sending His angels to say, destruction is coming.
[9:12] I want my people marked, sealed, protected, so that they can know that they will be safe when the world falls apart.

God's servants will be marked on their foreheads. Exactly like Ezekiel 9, if you want to read there, before God sends His judgment on those not marked as His.
Perhaps reminding them and you of the Passover in Egypt. later in Revelation 14, we'll understand the seal better because it's the name of God and the Lamb.
That's what's written on their foreheads. What's happening when God writes His name on their foreheads? God's people are being marked as His possession.
Right? The seal itself is figurative here. We don't go around looking for people who have a wax seal on their foreheads or seeing if somebody has the name God tattooed on their forehead.
[10:17] That's not it. That's not how we find out if someone's safe from the wrath to come. What John is seeing is that God marks His people and claims them as His own, protects them, right?

From eternal death. In fact, the best biblical understanding of this seal, many agree, is the promised Holy Spirit. Listen to Ephesians 1.
In Him, in Jesus, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Jesus, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.
See, God actually gives Himself to us, right? He sends His own Spirit to assure us that we are safely His, that Spirit who helps us cry, Abba, Father.
We are sealed, if you will, with a divine down payment, a guarantee that if God Himself is with you, then when God comes in wrath, you will not be destroyed.
[11:30] That makes sense, right? God's not going to destroy God. so He puts Himself in you and you know that if He Himself is with you now, then He Himself will be with you forever.

That song we just heard Ron sing speaks of our names being written on God's heart in marks of indelible grace. Isn't that beautiful?
That can't be erased like His name written on our heads. So I to the end shall endure as sure as the earnest is given.
You may have given an earnest payment before. Earnest money is a down payment, right? So that you can count on the rest coming. I'm not just messing around.

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I'm in earnest. This is something you can trust. And what's the result of that? Did you catch it in this song? The glorified spirits in heaven, the saints who have gone on before us are more happy, yes, in heaven, than we are in this painful world.
[12:37] But they're not more secure than we are. Right here, right now, with the Spirit sealing us, we are just as eternally secure right now as if we were already there in heaven.

That's God's seal on us. Now, I keep saying on us that we are sealed. Let me address a difficult issue of the 144,000 mentioned here.
People disagree, okay? It's revelation. Surprise! There are different viewpoints. It seems to me from careful study here in the rest of this chapter and later in Revelation that all of that points to the reality that this is the full church of Jesus Christ here on earth.
That's the 144,000. The church needing and receiving God's protection from His eternal destruction when His wrath comes on the earth.
You probably suspect 144,000 is almost certainly a symbolic number. 12 times 12 times 1,000. The full people of God.
[13:55] That's, by the way, always true when the servants of God is used in Revelation. It's talking about all of us. There are some who understandably say that these are 144,000 exact and literal ethnic Jews.

Some even speculate they're sealed after the church is raptured and they help evangelize the others in the rest of this chapter maybe. But you'll notice the tribes are actually kind of an unusual list.
I'm not going to speculate on details this morning but I do think that the tribes may indicate something special with the Jewish people. Something significant as part of God's church at the end.
These are 12 tribal names. Jacob's sons. They come from the Old Testament. Especially perhaps the faithful remnant of Jews.
Not the idolatrous ones perhaps represented by the tribe of Dan the center of Israelite idolatry being left off of this list entirely.
[15:05] Strange. Maybe something about a faithful remnant. What I think is clearer is the list of tribes as a symbolic census of fighting men.

If you've read the Old Testament you've seen lists like this as you're counting how many of us are there to go into battle. This is the church on earth needing God's protection in spiritual battle from the coming judgment.
So if that's the case what's the seal telling us? As God sends his angel to seal us saying we are held securely in God's hand.
Remember no one can snatch us out of his hand. Nothing can separate us from his love. Why? Because we are God's precious possession.
He claims us. He embraces us. He protects us. If you're a believer in Jesus, if you are one whose spirit calls out to God as your father and you pray to him that way, he wants you not to fear when you read all these things.
[16:20] He wants you to live in confident hope because he holds you. I talk often with a 91-year-old woman who has attended church her whole life, who prays every day, and yet she feels really unsure about where she's going to go when she dies.

when I talk about her going to heaven to be with Jesus, she says, I hope so. I like to think. But if you listen to her, you'll realize there's been so much sadness in her life, so much sin, so much suffering, that she can hardly let herself hope, certainly not with any confidence about what comes next.
But friends, we can, and we should. God wants you to have that confidence, even to be able to live like that now. Do you live like one who is God's, who has his name written on you?
Is your life today, for instance, marked by the joy of someone who knows that his best days are ahead, guaranteed? Is your life today marked by the peace of someone who knows that no election ever can unseat his king?
Is your life today marked by the security and the generosity of someone who knows that he has an inheritance of riches that can never be lost or taken away? Is that how you live?
[18:00] Just think, if you looked in the mirror every morning and saw God's name written on your forehead, maybe you should do this with the Bible, look in the mirror of God's word and see him claiming you, do you think you could remember whose you are?

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Do you think you could remember who is caring for you today? Who's in control? Who's got you? Do you think if you did that you would live with fresh freedom, that you would fight with fresh boldness, that you would stand firm with fresh confidence?
Who can stand? How could someone like you or me be safe when the just wrath of a holy God comes on this earth?
How? God marks us safe. God seals us secure. God brings us home. That's how. Now there's a second answer in this passage.
To who can stand on judgment day? The sealed and the saved. Same idea. Basically same group I'll argue.
[19:18] Do you remember when John heard about a lion just a couple chapters ago? He heard there was a lion and then he turned and he looked and saw what? A lamb.

That was talking about the same person figuratively, right? Both Jesus himself. I think that's similar here. I think John hears talk of 144,000 of this fullness of God's people and then he looks and behold a great multitude no one could number.
That's what he sees, right? It's possible that the numerical distinction is that 144,000 was a snapshot in time on this earth of God's people.
And that this great multitude now is all Christians from all places and all times now in heaven. And so there's a distinction but there is significant overlap in the full gathering of God's glorious bride. This now is what we call the church triumphant from earth's wide bounds to ocean's farthest coast through gates of pearl stream in what?
[20:33] The countless host. The multitude without number, right? This is what we're now looking at. This is what we're talking about. We're seeing into heaven in the throne room this multitude and what's the first thing we're told about them besides that you can't count them?

Well, maybe on earth what you've seen of God's people is there are ethnic gatherings of God's people. Maybe on earth there were people who never even saw anyone from another nation their whole lives.
Maybe on earth our perspective is so limited that we think our struggles are unique. No, no, no. He's saying lift your heads, broaden your horizons.
What do we know about them? Every nation, tribe, people, and language. In heaven, God's people is massive and multi-ethnic and myriad lingual, more languages than you know exist.
So please don't forget this. When you gather around the throne of heaven to worship the king, when you picture it and long for it now, when you're there declaring the lamb worthy, you will not be surrounded merely by first century Middle Eastern Jews.
[21:55] No, you know that. Which means equally, you will not be surrounded merely by 20th or 21st century white Americans. No, it will be so much more.

Somebody say praise Jesus, right? It's going to be glorious beyond what you can imagine and beyond what you've been able to experience here. it will be multicolored across millennia, rich and poor, men and women, people who've never held a smartphone, singing together of salvation from God and the lamb.
I'm so thankful that we get to have a small taste of that as we gather here for wonderful worship. For the record, I am pretty confident DJ is going to be leading the section that I'm singing in in heaven.
So you come be with us if you want to. But it is going to be glorious. That's what we should be getting a picture of. Can you imagine? Just try to let your imagination go for a minute to all of those voices singing at the same time in their own languages all at once.
Please don't be like the guy who said to me once, Pastor, the Bible says we're all speaking English. Look, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. It's in English.
[23:18] Friends, Revelation was translated into English for our sake because we don't speak Greek. Okay? All of our languages, even the ones you've never heard of, coming together for what purpose?

To exalt one Savior. Just one. What's the point of being told that there are all these people who don't look like you or talk like you or sing songs like you?
What's the point? The fact that we're all together doing the same thing highlights the glorious power, if you will, the centrifugal force. It's awesome of the one who's on the throne of heaven.

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Not one Savior for each culture or ethnic group. No, one Savior good enough, big enough, glorious enough for all ethnic groups through all of time and history.
Every nation, tribe, people, and language. So wrap your mind around the one who brings them all together, around him. Declare his glory among the nations.
[24:34] All heaven gets together to declare he is worthy of seven things, of course. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might.

So we saw the church on earth was sealed. Now John wants to highlight for us as he gives us this glorious vision of heaven. How's the church in heaven saved?
How do they get there? They were marked off but now how do they get to heaven? How is it that they stand before the throne? This is not the way you were born by the way.
In righteous white robes with Victor's palm branches in their hands. How does that happen? Well to focus our attention on that issue one of the elders there asks John about these people and John humbly responds if you get questions like this about revelation this is how you respond you tell me you tell me elder who they are and where they're from and how they got there.
He says these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation again there's disagreement here on a matter that in this passage at this point is peripheral to what's being said so we're going to talk more later in revelation those of you who are so eager I promise it comes and if Jesus lingers we'll get there next year but while this may be referring to an intensification of suffering tribulation toward the end don't read it to say only a subset of God's people are now here described this is all of us we all suffer in this world God's seal is not we know to keep us from all suffering rather it's to keep us to hold us in all suffering so what's the central point of his answer then they are in white robes because they have washed them in the blood of the lamb figurative yeah that washing in blood makes white of course course but it means pure righteous spotless what's being emphasized is it that some of them made it safely to heaven that way but others of them were okay already on their own or snuck in the back door found a different path no no no salvation belongs to God and the lamb they have all found refuge made their dirty clothes clean in the blood of the lamb remember last week
[27:35] I said in the midst of all the warnings and all the destruction that's coming the one refuge from the lamb's wrath was in the lamb's mercy right it has to be in the lamb that we find refuge that if his blood covers you you are safe and sealed and protected redeemed by the blood of the lamb right sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow what can wash away my sin I'm coming for your job this is this is good there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains just as

I am without one plea but that and that thou biddest me come come to thee oh lamb of god I come would you be free from the burden of sin would you be whiter much whiter than snow there is power power wonder working power in the of the lamb there is power power wonder working power in the precious blood of the lamb do you realize this is in almost every song we sing we're going to sing more later with better leadership but our song the song that comes they're singing in this passage over and over every time we get a glimpse of heaven they're singing our song for eternity is that we come in desperate need of cleansing and we are washed in Jesus' precious blood we are clothed in the white robes of Jesus' perfect righteousness salvation belongs to our
God and to the lamb amen as the sun sets one of the firstborn sons pipes up and says well I'm not worried about all this God says all we have to do is put the blood of the lamb on our door post and we're going to be fine I'm sleeping like a baby tonight some of the other guys seem to agree but you're too scared not to be honest I'm just not sure!
I skipped church last week and I was really mean to my sister last night plus I made fun of Moses behind his back for his singing I'm going to do the lamb's blood and all but I don't have a good feeling someone else was emboldened to be honest too I don't understand how all this works what's the angel of death anyway how does the lamb's blood work and how's that supposed to keep me safe what if we don't get the ceremony all right I mean I'll do the lamb's blood too but I'm telling you I'm not going to sleep all night due to events none of them could have foreseen the next gathering of the fellowship of the firstborn sons was outside of Egypt on the other side of the Red Sea and
God's miraculous provision of dry ground and Egyptian horsemen just drowned in the sea and salvation from Yahweh and their singing which of these firstborn sons was still there had the confident ones survived the night what about the black sheep church skippers how about the

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confused and uncertain who couldn't sleep there on the other side of the Red Sea all of them stood alive and well why because of the blood of the lamb and they knew it nothing else did they share in common except the blood of the lamb on their door post they weren't saved by the strength of their performance they weren't saved by the size of their faith they weren't saved by how well they slept they were saved by the blood of the lamb period the lamb like the lamb who was slain and now stands alive holding the scroll washing our robes so that we are sealed by his love and we are saved by his blood hallelujah what a savior now last week was 90% warning with a little comfort right this chapter is 90% comfort with a little warning friends the warning is important don't miss don't miss the need that every one of us has for the blood of the lamb if you don't personally place your trust in
[33:55] Jesus apply his blood to your heart these promises of sealing and salvation are not for you the angel of death really swept through Egypt and the wrath of the lamb really is coming on this world just just think back to the firstborn sons the only firstborn sons not safe that night would have been those who said they didn't need the blood or just never bothered to get around to thinking about it or doing anything with it maybe they would have said something like ah I'm from a religious family I mean no way am I missing out I don't need any blood covering me that's weird I'm already as safe as anyone can be friend don't let that be your song don't don't stand without the blood of the lamb on you

I want to ask each of us what's the theme song of your life what would you be happy to sing about forever and be known for eternally what what will you sing would it be about your kids making straight A's would it be about your house being in a magazine it be about your your golf game tour ready next year or would it be about the blood of the lamb what is it that makes you safe and secure what is it makes you joyful and purposeful it is only one of those things friends the others will never do it can you put yourself in the sandals of the firstborn sons on the far side of the Red Sea for just a minute can you imagine as the people of
Israel start singing you're listening to them can you imagine hearing their voices rise a bit louder perhaps than the rest of them I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously Yahweh is my strength and my song and has become and I will praise him their voices were singing loudly because they knew that they stood there only because of the blood I hope our voices can already start singing loudly salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb because we know that we stand one day someday and we stand here today only because of the blood that's our story that's our song so we're going to practice now no more singing we're going to rehearse for heaven that's what happens at this table this is rehearsal dinner for the wedding supper of the
Lamb come come if you're engaged to be his you're loving your savior if you are trusting his body broken and his blood shed for you then come and eat with him now because you will eat with him forever if that's not your hope your confidence today or if you haven't been baptized into his blood into his church yet don't come take these elements this morning but also as you see them before you notice the blood of Jesus shed for you consider what it would mean to have his perfect blood seal you and save you forever Jesus explained what was going on here to his disciples the night he was betrayed he took bread on that
Passover night he broke it and he gave it to his disciples says I ministering in his name give this bread to you he said take and eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me and in the same way!
[38:33] after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you from my blood which will cover you and forgive you and seal you forever let's pray and then we'll come in Jesus thank you for your blood given your body broken in our place as we take bread and wine juice today would you remind us that nothing can separate us from your love that if you gave your life for us once you will surely bring us home forever thank you for the privilege of celebrating that with you now speak clearly to our fearful sometimes uncertain hearts that we might know your love we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org by

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