

Sealed for Your Protection

Text: Revelation 7.1–8

Theme: God will protect those who are His so they will stand before Him

Introduction — I remember the Tylenol Scare of 1982; do you?

- the “Tylenol Terrorists”, as he was called, tampered with bottles of Tylenol
- the over-the-counter pain-reliever was poisoned and seven people died
- thus began the sealing of medicines
- it may often seem quite a bother, trying to open certain medications or other products
- but they are sealed for your protection

Wouldn't you like to be invincible? Invulnerable to any attack?

- but what if I told you that you already are invincible
- we, as Christians, need to understand the power of Almighty God & what it means for us
- we are free to live, free to love, and free to die, all for the gospel
- all this because the power of God is stronger than the power of death
- the power of God is mightier than the power of hell and Satan

We need this earnestness to live lives for the glory of the Gospel

- to proclaim the gospel
- to be willing to suffer persecution
- to have the ability to resist temptation
- all this comes from the power of God

And what we see here before us, in Revelation 7.1–8, is that...

- God will protect those who are His so they will stand before Him always and forever
- as I did in 6.12–17, I'll be asking several questions of Rev 7
- I'll divide it into three parts: today, next week, and then, July 16, following our church picnic
- this morning, I want to ask three questions of verses 1–8

The first question to ask of ch 7 is this:

I. WHEN IS THIS TAKING PLACE?

- does chapter 7 follow chronologically from chapter 6?
- simple answer is: no, it does not; and in reality, it cannot

1. Like a flashback

- first, look at the wording of v. 1: **“After this I saw...”**
- this is simply a sequence of what John saw, not a timeline of events
- “I saw one thing; then, I saw another thing”
- this is like a flashback moment in a movie
- you're in the present, then a scene showing something that has already taken place comes in

2. Remember, not a literal timeline here

- John's connection here in 7.1 is a literary connection, not a chronological one
- look at v. 17 of ch. 6: final question — “Who can stand?”
- ch. 7 answers this with “Here's who can stand—144,000
- ch. 7 takes us back to events of ch. 6
- however, cannot follow chronologically from ch. 6, vv. 12–17
- there we saw the cataclysmic upheaval of the earth in God's final judgment on unbelievers

- but in ch. 7, we have earth, sea, and trees still existing
- four angels in ch. 7 told by one angel in v. 4: “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees”
- in other words, before 6.12–17 occurs, something else has to happen first

3. What has to happen first?

- the text itself tells us: four angels at four corners ready
- prepared to bring God’s judgments upon the earth
- angels holding back until God does something more
- what is it that God has to do first?
- He needs to seal His saints, He has to protect them, show them how they can stand
- this is what ch. 7 is all about: shows us who can stand, endure
- before 6.12–17 & wrath of Lamb arrive, how can you and I make it through this? How can we persevere thru great trials

That question is answered as we ask the next question:

II. WHO ARE THESE 144,000?

- G.K. Chesterton quipped: Nothing John saw in the Revelation was as frightening to him a commentary on his book
- this text might just be one of those moments for John, were he alive today
- there have been some who take this number—144,000—literally
- within that group, some say these are literal Christians; others say, literally ethnic Israel
- others yet have said the church gets raptured prior to great tribulation
- those would then say this 144,000 are Jews who get converted during that tribulation
- which begs the question: how do they get converted if the church is gone?
- those who hold this view also believe the Holy Spirit is the Restrainer in 2 Thessalonians
- and this restrainer is removed before the great tribulation
- which again, begs the question: how does anyone get converted without the Holy Spirit?
- this, as I stated, is the view of some...it is not my understanding of the text’s plain meaning
- who are these 144,000?

1. 144,000 are not ethnic Jews

- I believe text shows us this is a symbolic number representing entire community of redeemed
- there are very clear reasons I believe this and the text points it out for us

2. Reason #1: The sealing

- in Rev 13, Satan seals all his followers with a mark
- this is a spiritual mark, it does not have to be some tattoo or such
- God’s followers also get sealed, not just Jews, but ALL of God’s people

3. Image of this sealing comes from ...the Old Testament, of course

- **“And the Lord said to him, “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.””**

(Ezekiel 9:4 ESV)

- context here: many of Israel are chasing after idols
- God instructed those who would carry out judgment to mark the faithful ones
- if there is no seal, God will strike you dead, simple as that
- Ezekiel 9 very clear; two groups—idolators and non-idolators
- ethnic Jews are a part of both groups, but not a separate entity

4. Reason #2: 144,000 called servants of our God, v. 3

- there is no reason to make this more narrow than what it says so don't interpret it that way
- phrase "servants of God" always refers to totality of God's people in Revelation
- never refers to just ethnic Jewish remnant at any time
- Rev 1.1: **"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place."**
- Rev. 2.20: **"But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who... is teaching and seducing my servants ..."**
- Rev. 19.2, 5: **"for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."**

And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."

- Rev. 22.3: **"No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."**
- all these references are of God's redeemed of all time, not some small group subset

5. Reason #3: 144,000 in Revelation 14

- there, we have another picture of this same "group"
- **Revelation 14.1-5**
- these are the redeemed purchased from among all men
- v. 3: redeemed from the earth: generic description of all God's people, not an ethnic subset
- v. 4: "these" did not defile themselves...this tells us of their purity, their holiness
- if this is literally a number of ethnic Jews, then they are all men; celibate men, no women included, not likely at all
- but Rev. 14 is speaking of men AND women of ALL God's redeemed who remain pure

6. Reason #4: 144,000 is a community of the redeemed

- look at the tribe listing in Rev. 7.5-8
- this is not the usual list given in the OT, but not unusual there
- there is a way John writes this which tells us not literal, but symbolic
- numbers are often, more often, symbolic in Revelation than they are literal
- not to say there aren't literal numbers; there were, after all, literally seven churches mentioned
- but we also saw that this is also symbolic of the fullness of all churches of all time
- vv. 5-8 is symbolic for a reason
- consider: $12 \times 12 \times 1000 = 144,000$, which is a great number
- 12 is number of patriarchs of OT; 12 apostles of NT, Rev 4=representing all God's people
- now look at the names of the twelve: which tribes are different than usual listings in OT?
- don't have time to track them all, but here we have Judah leading off, not Reuben
- Judah was the tribe from which Jesus would come, so sets this list off right away
- then note: Dan is missing, but Levi added, which is very odd
- Levi, tribe of priests, seldom listed because no inheritance of the land
- Dan left off because when kingdom divided, north & south, Dan home to Israel's gross idolatry
- Jeroboam constructed two golden calves & called them God who delivered you from Egypt
- put one in city of Dan; other in Bethel in Ephraim
- therefore Ephraim, one of Joseph's sons excluded here
- Manasseh, one of Joseph's sons mentioned

- Manasseh standing in for Ephraim, even as Joseph is listed, not left for two sons
- why these differences? I believe it is connected to Ezekiel 9 again
- non-idol worshipers versus idol worshipers; pure vs impure; holy vs unholy
- this list is telling us: these are all God's redeemed who have faithfully remained pure & holy

While that question is interesting, it is not the main one, for now we must ask:

III. WHAT IS THIS SEAL & WHAT DOES IT DO?

- a seal in the ancient world meant something quite important
- we've seen that involving the scroll Jesus is holding

1. Seal does three things

- it authenticates; says, "This is the King's"
- it secures: like a brand on cattle, keeps rustlers from just taking anyone's cattle
- it declares ownership: like my book embosser
 - you borrow a book from my shelves you'll know it's mine by the seal in it
- so when God's servants are sealed, this is a picture of a spiritual reality
- says: we are authentic followers of Christ who belong to God are safe from His wrath
- remember what we saw earlier in Ezekiel 9: idolators vs unstained people of God
- the seal there was your spiritual identity; it kept you from God's judgment

2. Rev. 14.1

- to be sealed in ch 7 is to be labeled with God's name in Rev 14
- seal is God's name, spiritually marking you as God's
- what we'll see in Revelation is that before the end comes everyone gets a mark
- either mark of God or mark of the beast
- these do not have to be literal markings or like tattoos
- it is simply God's way of saying: "I know who are mine and who are not"
- Satan will know who are his and who are not
- the seal expresses ownership

3. Spiritual not literal: Ephesians 1.13

- main reason I believe this seal or mark is not literal but spiritual
- **"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,"**

(Ephesians 1:13 ESV)

- context of Ephesians 1: Jews & Gentiles alike being addressed: all God's redeemed
- having believed, you were sealed, marked with the Holy Spirit
- so, when you were converted, you received the Spirit like earnest money, a down payment
- Holy Spirit is a guarantee of the inheritance to come
- you were saved (moment of conversion)
- you are being saved (present sanctification)
- you will be saved (final glorification)
- but how do I now I'll ultimately make it?
- because you have a down payment, the seal of the Holy Spirit upon you
- and it is a spiritual mark; you cannot show anyone a literal seal or mark
- Holy Spirit's work declares that you belong to God, He owns you now
- so not only a declaration, but mark of assurance: He will bring you through it all
- when you become a Christian, God decrees & makes good on that decree: this one is Mine!
- He gives you His very Spirit: says you are righteous and protected from judgment

- this is the objective truth: Scripture states it, so no matter how you “feel”, it is true

4. But what if I don't feel it?

- God wants you to know experientially that this is true also
- first, He tells you: “You are Mine”
- then, He says: “Live like it!”
- **“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”**
(Romans 8:16 ESV)
- **“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,”**
(Ephesians 1:18 ESV)
- God does NOT want you going thru life wondering if He really loves you
- you, you may have doubts at times, but that is not the end goal
- God WANTS you to KNOW He LOVES you

All this, in these eight verses so far, is so you will know that God protects those who are His so they will stand firm until the very end.

Conclusion – The great Greek warrior, Achilles, was invincible

- well, nearly, so goes the ancient myth
- his mother, a sea nymph named Thetis, had a son by a human father, Peleus
- to attempt to ensure Achilles' invincibility, she dipped him in the river Styx
- all of his body, covered by the water, was invulnerable to attack
- except that one small part where her hand held him upside down in the river
- that's right: his heel...in that one small place, he was vulnerable
- and that is where Paris, Troy's own hero, shot him with an arrow, thus killing Achilles
- right in Achilles' heel, hence the name we ascribe to people's weaknesses

God actively protects His people

- God keeps His own because He loves His own
- not a one of His own will be lost
- this does not mean that you will not suffer; just that you will always be His in eternity
- so when God seals you, marks you with His Holy Spirit, you are His
- because you are His, He will preserve you to the end
- He continually proves He is trustworthy, so we will believe and remain faithful to the end

So, remember Achilles

- my brothers & sisters, he was not invincible; only appeared to be so
- but if you are in Christ, then you belong to God; He has marked you as His
- this invincibility says that no matter what happens to you, God will save you
- you are sealed, kept in the faith
- no matter what trial you are going thru, He will save you and see you thru
- rest in His greatness; cling to His Word; always look to the victory on the cross