



Salvation Belongs to the Lord

Revelation 7

1. Who Can Stand? (verses 1-8)

2. Who Will Stand? (verses 9-17)

I invite you to open in your Bibles to Revelation, chapter 7. Last week, in our exposition of the book of Revelation, we looked at the backbone of Revelation: the seals, trumpets, and bowls. These are all symbols of the judgment that God pours out upon the earth. When a seal is opened, terrible things begin to happen upon the earth. When the trumpets are blown, similar catastrophes take place. When the bowls are poured out, God's wrath comes upon the earth. With each seal, and each trumpet, and bowl, comes increasing plagues upon the earth. As I told you last week, the seals are in chapter 6. The trumpets are in chapters 8-9. The bowls are in chapter 16. Also, there are 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls.

Now, there are various ways that people understand these seals, trumpets, and bowls. Some understand them to be chronological. In other words, the seals happen, and then the trumpets happen, and then the bowls happen. Others understand them to be concurrent. In other words, the seals are one cycle of judgments, and the trumpets are another cycle which cover the same time period. and the bowls are yet another cycle which covers the same time period.

The question that is before us this morning is this, where does Revelation 7 fit in? Does it fit in chronologically? That is, after the events of chapter 6 and before the events of chapter 8. Or, does it fit in concurrently? Taking place sometime during the seals, trumpets and bowls. Good, Bible-believing people believe Revelation 7 is chronological. Good, Bible-believing people believe Revelation 7 is concurrent with the other judgments. There are good arguments on either side. I'm not sure exactly which it is. But, it doesn't really matter, because the lesson is the same in either case. The lesson is this, "Salvation Belongs to the Lord." This is the title of my message this morning, "Salvation Belongs to the Lord." So, let's read our text, and then we will dive in.

Revelation 7:1-17

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, 2,000 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!" 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."

I trust that you noticed the source of the title of my message. It comes in verse 10. It is the multitude that cries out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And, as we shall see, this is the theme of the entire chapter. God is the one who protects and preserves his people (verse 3). God is the one who cleanses his people (verse 9). God is the one who provides for his people forever (verses 15-17). Now, chapter 7 naturally follows after the final question of chapter 6. Look back there at the opening of the sixth seal. "When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place" (Revelation 6:12-13). This sounds like the end of the world. with the stars falling from the sky, and the sky vanishing. This is why many think that this sixth seal is describing events toward the end of the world. After this, there seems to be little room for more to happen on the earth, as all is dark and the earth is being reformed.

Anyway, it's so bad that people want to die. Look at verse 15, "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 the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 6:16 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" (Revelation 6:15-17)? Rather than face the wrath of the Lord, people would rather die! But look at the question in verse 17, "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The question posed in verse 17 seems like a rhetorical question. God's wrath has come! Nobody can resist his will! All will perish under his mighty arm of judgment. "Who can stand?" Nobody! We might as well die. Well, that's not quite true (as we shall see in chapter 7). Chapter 7 begins by answering this question. This question is my first point:

1. Who Can Stand? (verses 1-8)

The answer is, "Those who are sealed." Let's see how this develops.

Revelation 7:1

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth,

Let's just stop here, because this is an important interpretive question. John isn't saying, "After the sixth seal is opened, this is what happens next." Rather, John is saying, "After I saw the sixth seal being opened, Then, I saw another vision." Now, it may be that chapter 7 follows chapter 6 in time. Or it may be that chapter 7 happens sometime before chapter 6. And I'm not going to speculate. Remember, Revelation is not a puzzle book to be figured out. It's a picture book to behold. So, let's behold chapter 7.

Revelation 7:1

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.

Now, some critics might argue here how ignorant the Biblical writers were. They thought that the earth was flat, and that it had four corners. To say so is to betray the apocalyptic genre. Rather, the four corners are emblematic of the four directions of the compass. Whether on the north, south, east, or west, these angels were stopping the wind, that it might not blow on the earth or sea or against any tree. The winds are probably representative of the coming judgment of God. The judgment was being restrained until God's people could be protected first.

I say this because this is the message that John hears in verses 2 and 3.

Revelation 7:2-3

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

This is why the angels are holding back the winds of judgment, so that in the calm, they might "seal the servants of God on their foreheads." Now, if you are familiar with the book of Revelation at all, you may have heard of "the mark of the beast." It comes up in chapter 13, when the beast that rises from the sea, marks people on their right hand and on their forehead (Revelation 13:16). This "mark of the beast" is a counterfeit to the seal of God. It was God's idea first to seal his servants on their foreheads. It was Satan's plan to imitate it with a mark. Curiously enough, the beast that rises out of the sea had a "mortal wound [that] was healed" (Revelation 13:12). Again, trying to copy what God had done first. The Lamb of God has a mortal wound that was healed. The Lamb appears in chapter 5, "standing as though it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6).

This is always Satan's plan, to mimic the work of God. And in this instance, God marks out his servants with a seal on their foreheads. Though this is what John saw, I do not think that there will be future believers walking around with a physical mark upon their foreheads. Again, this is apocalyptic literature working, God's servants are sealed. They are marked out by God for their protection and preservation.

God has always marked out his servants. Consider the following verses:

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God is the one who will guard his saints so that in the end, they might be saved (verse 5), and might receive their imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. God has always kept his servants.

Jude 24-25

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

God is the one who is able to keep us, that we might stand before him blameless before God!

John 10:27-29

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Jesus has such a death grip on his servants, that nobody is able to take them out of his hand. I believe that this is what the seal here in Revelation 7 signifies. It signifies the protecting, keeping, preserving power of God in the lives of his people. that they might be able to stand in the day of God's wrath. A fireman can enter a burning house, because of the fire-proof suit that he wears. The mountain climber can endure the harsh conditions at the top of Mount Everest because of the coat and the oxygen that comes through his mask. The astronaut can survive outside of the space station, because he has the suit capable of such survival. So likewise, God's servants will be able to stand in the day of his wrath, because they are sealed and protected and kept from his wrath.

Now, in verses 4-8, we see the servants identified.

Revelation 7:4-8

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.

Many have interpreted the identity of these people differently. The Jehovah's Witnesses "claim that 144,000 is a limit to the number of people who will reign with Christ in heaven and spend eternity with God." They are "the heavenly hope." Those who are not among the 144,000 will enjoy what they call the "earthly hope"—a paradise on earth ruled by Christ and the 144,000. Mormons take these 144,000 to be "high priests" who will spread the gospel.^[1]

Now, in mainline Christianity, there are basically two views. The first view holds that there are literally 144,000 people, 12,000 of which are from each of the particular tribes of Israel. making them 144,00 Jewish people. The second view holds that these round numbers are emblematic of a large number of Christians, Jew or Gentile. If you would have asked me before I began preaching through Revelation who these people are, I would not have hesitated to say, "I believe that the 144,000 are Jewish people, 12,000 from each of the tribes listed. That's what the text says. That's who I believe them to be." However, as I have been in the book of Revelation, and have seen and thought more about apocalyptic literature and how it all works, I'm not nearly as sure. I believe that it's legitimate to take this 144,000 as merely representative of a large number of people, whom God has sealed and protected for his saving purposes upon the earth.

Mostly this comes from how you see Revelation. If you see Revelation as a series of events that all occur sequentially, with the events of Revelation 7 happening after the events of Revelation 6, and before Revelation 8. then, most likely, you will interpret this 144,000 as ethnic Jews. But if you see Revelation, and the seals, trumpets and bowls all overlapping, retelling of the story from different perspectives, then, most likely, you will interpret this 144,000 as Christians, sealed for their protection. I do not know which interpretation is best. Faithful Bible believers have differing views. There are pros and cons for each way.

Taking the 144,000 as Jews, is the most simple, straightforward view. However, remember, not only is Revelation written as apocalyptic literature. It's also written to Christians in the first century, the majority of whom were not Jewish people, all of whom were facing difficult days of persecution. And I ask you, would the original readers be helped and encouraged in their persecution to hold fast their faith, knowing that way in the future, God was going to seal 144,000 Jews, so God's wrath would not come upon them? Or is the encouragement here of the picture. that God's wrath is coming upon a sinful creation! but God has his servants. God has sealed them, so that they will endure the wrath of God?

However you take these 144,000, let's not miss this main point! Who Can Stand? Those whom God has sealed and protected and kept for his redemption. Paul said it this way in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Salvation belongs to the Lord! It is God who destines us and protects us to obtain our salvation through Jesus. And when Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, he spoke about how they were sealed and protected for their future salvation. "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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

This is true of every believer in Christ Jesus. When we hear the truth of the gospel, and hope and trust in Christ, that "in him we have redemption through his blood" (Ephesians 1:7). When we believe this gospel, God seals us with the promised Holy Spirit. God guards us and protects us and guarantees for us our inheritance "until we acquire possession of it!" And perhaps, Revelation 7, spoken in the apocalyptic style, is merely rehearsing this truth of all believers. We are sealed and protected until the day of redemption! "Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). So, whether Revelation is speaking about us, or speaking about group of believers going through the most difficult of persecutions, or speaking about some future group of ethnic Jews, the point is the same. Who can stand in the day of God's wrath? Those who God has sealed and protected. We have no need to fear the future or coming tribulation, for God will protect his servants.

Let's move onto the next picture given in Revelation. It's the picture of the "great multitude" in verses 9-17. My question for these verses is simple:

2. Who Will Stand? (verses 9-17)

Look at verse 9,

Revelation 7:9

After this I looked, and behold

Again, I need to stop here. John is telling us that after he saw the vision of the 144,000, he sees this vision of the great multitude. That's not to say that these things will take place, one after another. They may. But they may be telling us of a different scene altogether. Or, as some

faithful interpreters say, that verses 9-17 are another picture of God's protection in providing salvation. I just mention that because this is how the apocalyptic works. It's giving us pictures of events, not concerned with precise accuracy, but wanting to make an impression upon our hearts and minds. And the impression here is of the vastness of those whom God will redeem.

Revelation 7:9-10

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!"

What a great scene! Here, we have a huge crowd! It's so huge that no one can number it! You fill a stadium, and there is often a good estimate of how many are there. When some large political event takes place and people come and descend upon the National Mall in Washington D. C., the crowd is huge, at times, up to a million people have come to that place. but we have estimates. This, is larger than that. We are talking about millions and millions of people! Perhaps 10's or hundreds of millions! And it's a diverse crowd, from every nation, from all tribes, from every people group, from every language, not just Jews. not just Romans, but all tribes. It's a heavenly crowd, as they are all standing before the throne and before the Lamb,

This takes us back to Revelation 4 and 5, where we saw God on his throne, where we saw the Lamb in heaven being worshiped. Revelation 5:13 "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" Likewise here in Revelation 7, it is a worshiping crowd, they have palm branches in their hands, brings us back to the days of Jesus, when he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem and mounted on a donkey, the donkey of a king! as if this is another "Triumphal Entry," not into Jerusalem! but into heaven itself. Not with the hundreds or thousands that gathered in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, but with untold millions at some point in the future! They are all crying out with a loud voice:

Revelation 7:10

Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!

This is the title of my message! This is the main point of Revelation 7! "Salvation belongs to our God!" Whether it's in sealing the 144,000, Or whether it's the worship of the great multitude, God has done it! God has brought about our salvation! "Salvation belongs to our God!" So is God to be praised for our salvation! And it's not just people who are praising God in this scene! In verse 11, we see the heavenly host praising God as well!

Revelation 7:11-12

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."

This brings up all of the categories of those worshiping God from Revelation 4 and 5: the angels, the elders, the four living creatures; All on their faces before the throne of God, worshiping him! Don't miss this little phrase at the beginning of verse, "all the angels." When John described these angels, he said that there "myriads of myriads" of them and "thousands of thousands" of them. It seems as if the size of the angelic crowd here competes with the size of people who are worshiping! Have you ever been in such an assembly of people worshiping? It's powerful! It's one of the things that we miss at Rock Valley Bible Church, being a small church. We miss the taste of heavenly worship! Yet, no church, no concert venue, will ever be able to duplicate the sheer size of this great multitude worshiping the Lord.

A curious note here, we read in Revelation 4:8 of how the four living creatures never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Yet, here we find them saying something different. They are saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (verse 12). There is only contradiction if you take Revelation literally at every point! It's not! It's a picture of what John saw! It's a picture of heavenly worship! It's a picture of all of those standing around the throne. It's to draw us in to the greatness of God, who has given us salvation! Then John has a conversation with one of these 24 elders:

Revelation 7:13

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

Those are the questions that we all have! Who are they? Where did such a large crowd come from? John didn't know. That's why he said in verse 14 "I said to him, 'Sir, you know.'" That's why the elder asked the question. He wanted to identify them for John.

Revelation 7:14

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."

The elder answered the questions in reverse order. He answered the "where" question first. Then the "who" question. "Where have they come from?" At this point, again, we have one of those debates, depending upon how you see the seals, trumpets and bowls, determines how you understand the "great tribulation." Again, if you see Revelation as a laying out of sequential events in the future. then you will see this "great tribulation" as happening between the seals and the trumpets. Some will view this as the rapture, the time in when the church is snatched out of the world, to appear in heaven! Other will view these saints as martyrs, millions and millions of people martyred during a time of intense persecution upon the world. But if you view the seals, trumpets and bowls as all describing the same course of events, this "Great tribulation" can mean anytime between the first and second coming of Christ, perhaps the entire church age!

Again, I'm not going to speculate on when this "great tribulation" might be. I'm going to focus upon the emphasis of the text. That brings us to the reality of the heavenly worship that John saw! of this huge, diverse, and heavenly multitude waving their palm branches in their hands,

and crying out with loud voices, "Salvation belongs to our God!" Then, the elder answers the "who" question in verse 14; "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

I love the apocalyptic imagery here! You dip a garment in blood, and you don't get a white garment. You get a stain that is so deep that you cannot wash it out. Yet here, this multitude have taken their robes, and have washed them in the blood of Jesus. Again, there is no way that the blood coming from the body of Jesus could wash such a multitude! Embrace the apocalyptic! The blood of Jesus cleanses us! "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!" Oh, not the literal blood. Oh, not just our garments! But his death upon the cross, where he was poured out his blood and died for our sins. But here, in Revelation 7, the Lamb is alive and well, and worshiped by this multitude (verse 10).

The obvious question here is this: Is your garment washed white in the blood of the Lamb? Will you be in this multitude someday? Is Jesus your hope? Have you trusted in him? Has he cleansed your soul with his blood? It's not physical, it's hoping and trusting in the crucified, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that cleanses our soul.

If God has cleansed you, you are protected! If not, you should fear the Lamb, as those at the end of Revelation 6 did. "Hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). Your only hope seal and protection is through the blood of Jesus. But if your garments are washed clean in the blood of Jesus, you can join in this multitude! You can worship your God, who has saved you from your sin! "Salvation belongs to our God!" Ok, we have one last section here in chapter 7, it's verses 15-17.

Revelation 7:15-17

"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."

This draws us to the end of the book of Revelation, which speaks of this wonderful time, when God himself comes to dwell with his people (Rev. 21:3), when he takes away all hunger and hunger and pain and sorrow (Rev. 21:4), when he gives them the water of life (Rev 21:8), and when he wipes every tear from their eyes (Rev. 21:4). Let me read from this passage!

Revelation 21:4-6

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment'

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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:3-4). This is what those in Revelation 7 are experiencing! It seems like they are experiencing the final state, sealed for eternity! in worship of the Lord. pain and sorrows are gone! These verses here are examples of what makes a consecutive reading of Revelation difficult. Because after this, next week, we will look at the terrible judgments that come with the trumpets. But it seems as if Revelation 7 finishes after the judgments are all over! And God is all and all! And his servants worship him forever and ever! "Salvation Belongs to the Lord."

Let me close with this: Following after Jesus is worth it! The original readers of this book, were going through a difficult time! They were facing tribulation, along with John. But such a vision of heavenly worship, gives a vision to press on! it's worth it. Follow the Lord "Salvation Belongs to the Lord."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 27, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] <https://www.gotquestions.org/144000.html>