**The People of God**

Revelation 7:1-17

Ok, the word SEAL has become important in the book of Revelation so let’s zoom out in the New Testament to see what it means to be “sealed by God.”

“He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.” Romans 4:11

***Circumcision was a physical mark on the body*** of male Jews to demonstrate identification with the God of Israel. When foreigners converted to Judaism, they had to circumcise their men and boys as a sign of genuine commitment and faith. It worked in ways similar to baptism today: a physical sign of spiritual faith. A SEAL of that faith, like a wax imprint from the King showing this letter is from HIM. The reason Paul brings this up in Romans is to show it’s still the same now, after Jesus: ***righteousness is counted to all who believe, it is a gift of grace received by faith, not by works.***

“And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

The Holy Spirit is the sign and seal God places on a new believer.

“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

***The Holy Spirit comes into your heart*** as soon as you commit your life to Jesus in faith. It is like God takes His own signet ring and presses it into the wax of your heart to show, “This one is mine. You belong to me.” One more:

“But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’”

2 Timothy 2:19

The Lord knows who are His and ***those who belong to the Lord know it too because the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts***, giving us the blessed assurance that we are His and He is our Father.

So this brings us to **Revelation 7**.

“‘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…” Revelation 7:3-4

Four angels from the four winds, covering the whole planet are told to WAIT on the judgment they are about to unleash until **those who belong to God** have been marked with His seal. This proves significant just two chapters later when the fifth trumpet is sounded.

“Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Revelation 9:3-4

Later the ***beast and the antichrist*** will force everyone on earth to get THEIR seal, as an intentional mockery of God’s seal. So everyone on earth will be visibly marked either as belonging to GOD or to the devil. No one can stay neutral. No one can serve both.

So this chapter and this theme of the SEAL of God raises the question for everyone: **to whom do you belong**? Whose mark, whose seal do you bear? Has God pressed the seal of His signet ring into your heart and mind so you bear His impression? Or has your allegiance shifted to this world and the king of this world, the devil?

In Revelation 7 we will see four promises for ***those who belong to the Lord***, who are marked with His seal. First:

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Access** to the glorious presence of God

“Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” Revelation 7:3

The vision opens with four angels at the four corners of the world, holding back the winds of judgment. **Wind is an interesting word in the Bible** because in both Hebrew and Greek it can mean either wind or SPIRIT, referring to the Spirit of God. In this case the wind, or breath or Spirit of God is about to blow violently across the earth bringing judgment and destruction. But before God begins to unleash His breath on the earth, there is a pause to seal those who belong to the Lord: HIS SERVANTS.

Then it goes through the tribes of Israel who are marked; 12,000 from each tribe.

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Access** to the glorious presence of God

“After this I looked, and behold a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation… standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” Revelation 7:9

This chapter gives us a beautiful picture of **the UNITY of God’s people**, showing the full number of JEWISH believers in the 144,000 sealed, and then immediately a great multitude of people from every nation and tribe and people and language. Remember last week when the fifth seal was opened we saw under the throne of God the souls of those who had already been slain for the word of God and their testimony. Like this great assembly in chapter seven, the martyrs of chapter six were clothed in white robes and praising the Sovereign Lord, crying out for justice.

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Access** to the glorious presence of God

“And were told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants… should be complete…” Revelation 6:11

***FULL NUMBER.*** 144,000 shows a number of total completion when it comes to ISRAEL. Now we see from the nations a huge number around the throne, clothed in white, worshiping God, but still waiting for the full number to come in.

That reference takes us back to **Romans 11** where Paul talks about the hardening of Israel and their rejection of Jesus so “the full number of the GENTILES” could come in, being grafted into the vine of God’s blessing to Israel in Christ.

The whole people of God, all who belong to God by faith in the Lord Jesus, ***will have access to His glorious throne room***; will rest in His love; will be protected by His sovereign grace.

People love to debate and discuss the identity of the 144,000 and what that number means. But let’s not overthink it. 12 x 12 x 1,000 is a nice round number that builds on the 12 tribes of Israel and assigns an equal number to each tribe (which never happened in history btw) using the round number of 12,000 to signify completion. 144,000 is a relatively small number compared to the OT census numbers that put Israel at well over a million or two all told. So while the number conveys completion and fullness it also communicates the consistent OT theme of **a REMNANT** - a holy portion, protected by the Lord, that remained faithful to Him when most of Israel rejected God to worship other idols.

So the Romans 11 promise that “all Israel will be saved,” seems to be fulfilled in the 144,000 being sealed from every tribe (except Dan for some reason). And the remnant theme fits the book of Revelation very nicely in the call to ***patiently endure in order to prove yourself a part of that faithful remnant*** that overcomes and is not led astray by the deceptions and enticements of Babylon and the devil.

***For those who OVERCOME***, the letters from Jesus were filled with promises of blessing and protection, of access and affirmation. And we see the initial fulfillment of those promises in the throne room scene and here in chapter seven with the saints of God

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Access** to the glorious presence of God

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.” Revelation 7:15

Again, we see the throne of God in the context of His heavenly temple, but not with just a few priests ministering, but with all of God’s people around His throne singing praise to His Name and to the Lamb.

That is the ***first promise and the primary promise of the whole Bible: access. Relationship. Peace with God.*** Love. We are not promised a pain-free, easy life. Quite the opposite. Following Jesus means we expect to be treated as HE was treated, with fierce opposition, persecution and eventually execution. “The servant is not greater than his master. If they treated Jesus this way, why would we expect anything different?”

How is this access made possible? That’s the second promise.

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Righteous** standing before God

“Standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes…”

Revelation 7:9

The great multitude from all nations, around the glorious throne of God, joining the four living creatures and the 24 elders, joining the hosts of heaven and all of creation to sing the praises of God on the Throne and Jesus the Lamb.

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Righteous** standing before God

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14

It is clear in chapter six that ***God has GIVEN them these white robes.*** But here it says THEY have washed their own robes. So does God choose people for salvation or do people choose God? Yes. In the mystery of God’s eternal purposes and sovereign election, God definitely chooses those who will belong to Him. But at the same time, we see that people must choose to repent and believe; they must choose to forsake the world and choose the King and His kingdom. They must take up their cross and follow Jesus.

Or in this metaphor, they must take their own sinful, selfish, personal robes and wash them in the blood of the Lamb. I don’t know much about laundry, but I do know that BLOOD is not the best detergent. It actually is one of the harder stains to remove from clothing. But the blood of Jesus, meaning His sacrifice, ***His death on the cross, is the most powerful detergent in the universe when it comes to washing away SIN.***

And so we see the people of God marked with the seal of God and standing before God’s holy, previously unapproachable throne in His shekinah glory filled temple, worshiping the Lord. They have access to the Lord because they stand before Him not in their own righteousness but in the perfection of King Jesus.

What about you?

***Have you washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb?*** Have you taken all of your selfishness and all of your sins and bowed down before King Jesus, crying out for His mercy and grace?

***If you HAVE asked Jesus to forgive your sins*** and take over your life, then this should fill you with great comfort and joy. God does not see your sinful garments any more, He only sees Jesus when He looks at you.

If you HAVE NOT yet committed your life to King Jesus then you still stand before God totally on your own merits. And books will be opened that detail everything you have ever done and said and thought. And you will answer for them all. Your robes have not been washed in the blood. They are still covered in the stains of your selfishness and pride, your greed and immorality, your bitterness and anger.

But you can change that today if you just call on the name of Jesus. In the **Passover** event the Jews had to take a one-year-old lamb, slit its throat and apply the blood to the doorposts of their house. Those who did place the blood of the lamb on their homes were saved from the judgment of God when the angel of death flew over.

***What can wash away my sin?*** NOTHING but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood… If you belong to Jesus by faith you have access to God’s glorious presence, you have been declared righteous in Christ. Third, you have:

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Protection** from the wrath of God

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation… He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” Revelation 7:14-15

It seems that the first four seals being opened, unleashing the four horsemen of the apocalypse, represent **the wrath of MAN**. I think those coincide with the birth pains Jesus described in Matthew 24, and what you expect with birth pains is that they will increase in frequency and intensity until the arrival of the baby.

As believers proclaim the gospel, in fulfillment of the promise in Matthew 24:14 that “this gospel will be proclaimed in all nations as a testimony to them, and THEN the end will come,” that ***advance of the gospel will be met with increasing resistance*** in the form of deception and persecution.

***The world itself will groan in the pains of childbirth***, with famines and earthquakes, plagues and disasters. The nations and kings of the world will rage against the glory of God and the announcement of King Jesus, shaking their fist at Him as described in Psalm 2, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?”

But after birth pains, after labor, comes a new birth, a new beginning. God will bring life from death, as He always does. ***Resurrection follows crucifixion.*** Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. If we have died with him (Rom. 6) we believe we will also be raised with him.

***And one of the things that will “come out” from the great tribulation is MARTYRS***. Believers who overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony; who conquer by not loving their own lives even unto death; who stand firm to the very end, no matter what they are threatened with or tempted with.

When you see martyrs in the book of Revelation. When you hear of martyrs and those persecuted for their faith now, ***how do you feel about them?*** Do you pity them or almost ENVY them a little? What a tremendous privilege to pay the ultimate price! To prove your true devotion to Jesus over all things; ***to fully surrender your life.*** To say with Paul in Philippians 3, “I want to KNOW CHRIST and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,” and in Acts 20:24, “I consider my life worth NOTHING to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

Notice the promise here of protection: God on His throne will SHELTER us. ***This is where the martyrs go: UNDER the throne of God.*** What could possibly touch us there? What more powerful shelter is there?

“The LORD is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble… He is our rock and our fortress, our shield and our deliverer, our light and our salvation, whom shall I fear?”

***Have YOU taken refuge in the Lord Jesus?*** His Name is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe. The Name of Jesus is “the only Name under heaven, given among men, by which we can be saved.” It is the Name above all Names. His Name is the one every tongue will confess as Lord; before whom every knee will bow in humble submission.

One more promise for those who do belong to the Lord.

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Blessing** and joy in the Lord forever

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.” Revelation 7:16

This recognizes that ***“in this world we will have trouble.”*** We will face tribulation. But not forever. The day will come when all of our hungers and longings will be fully satisfied in Christ; when all of our spiritual thirst and dehydration will be filled up in Jesus; when all the oppression of heat, all the burdens of this world will be replaced by the comforts of eternal joy in the Lord.

John must have visited Florida to know about scorching heat. He must have coached soccer in August in Florida. That is some serious scorching heat. That is some intense thirst. When we first got here, we signed Micah, our youngest son, up for soccer at the YMCA. Practices were at 6 pm in August and September which we thought, oh so naively, would mean the weather would be cooler. Oh no. Full heat intensity all the way through September. I kept waiting for it to let up. Nope.

***Remember Jonah under his little plant?*** He was so happy about that shade. When you are exposed to the blazing sun, there is nothing like finding a place in the shade and a cold drink.

That is the picture here **for those who persevere** through the heat and suffering, the hunger and thirst, the danger and fear, the sadness and loss of this world and the many attacks of the devil: blessing and reward are coming. Just hold on a little longer!

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Blessing** and joy in the Lord forever

“For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water.” Revelation 7:17

What a picture of **Psalm 23** - King Jesus as our shepherd, forever. Making us lie down in green pastures and leading us to quiet waters; refreshing our souls in His love for all of eternity. The Lamb of God will be our SHEPHERD.

In fact, He already is our shepherd, protecting us, guiding us, healing and sustaining us. He has already filled us with ***living water through His holy Spirit*** who dwells in our hearts. As we experience the love of Jesus, we are filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

The springs of living water are not something other than God, they are symbolic of the presence of God, the love of God, the grace and mercy and power and peace and joy of God. And that is where we will live forever and ever: with the Lord. The River of the water of life flows from His throne. This is a preview of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 and 22. Which is how the chapter closes.

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Blessing** and joy in the Lord forever

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Revelation 7:17

Yes, we will have tears. We will weep now. We will grieve many losses and endure many hardships. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!” Jesus says, “I have overcome the world.” One day we will look back and see that it was all worth it. Every sacrifice, every sadness, will be more than made up for when we see Jesus face to face and He personally wipes the tears from our eyes.

***Because Jesus is coming soon to make all things new.*** In the new creation there will be no more sadness or pain or sin or evil or death or darkness ever, ever again.

So here is our summary for today:

**Promises for those who belong to the Lord:**

1. **Access** to the glorious presence of God
2. **Righteous** standing before God
3. **Protection** from the wrath of God
4. **Blessing** and joy in the Lord forever

God marks those who belong to Him with a seal of ownership, a seal of identity. This one is mine, He speaks over you, if you have pledged yourself to Jesus in faith. These children of God receive wonderful promises from the Lord.

First, we are promised access to the glorious presence of God, direct, immediate and personal relationship with the God of heaven and earth. For generations people could not set foot into the temple of God. For 2,000 years now the temple has not even existed on earth in a physical form. Right now, we see through a glass dimly, but when Jesus comes back, we will see Him face to face and be with Him forever.

The reason this is possible for sinners like you and me to be in the holy presence of God is that our standing before Him has been completely changed. Instead of being exposed as selfish, proud, idolatrous rebels, we have been covered by the righteousness of Jesus. We have washed our robes CLEAN in the blood of the Lamb, so we stand before God not in our own sin but in His perfection.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are protected from the wrath of God through the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus and His victorious resurrection. So God is no longer against us but is now for us, and God Himself will shelter us under His own glorious throne.

Finally, our Good Shepherd promises to wipe away all of our tears and to satisfy all of our desires in Himself: we will hunger no more, thirst no more, struggle no more, worry no more. We will experience the ultimate blessing of being with Jesus, from the moment He comes back for us, and we celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Anyone ready for that last trumpet?

For now, we have these great and precious promises to encourage us and sustain us to hold on a little longer. I know many of you are feeling the scorching heat of this world right now. Many of you are walking through times of great sadness and loss. Many of you are facing great physical pain and daily struggle. For most ofus here these are the general struggles of life, not direct persecution for our faith in Jesus.

But let’s remember that there are believers right now, in record number, facing exactly that kind of suffering and pain. They are in prison, separated from loved ones. They are facing death and the murder of their loved ones before their eyes. They have lost houses and jobs, church buildings and property. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ have lost everything for the sake of the gospel.

Yet they persevere. They hold on. They keep praying. They keep trusting. And our Good Shepherd meets them in the midst of their sadness and helps them hold on for one more day.

STORY FROM THE INSANITY OF GOD or the persecuted church.

Let’s pray.