

Date: February 2, 2020

Text: Revelation 7:1-10

Title: Signed, Sealed and Delivered

Theme: God's mercy

Proposition: God's mercy is seen even through the most difficult of times.

Sticky: Love nothing but God and hate nothing but sin!

Introduction: Let me ask you, as we begin this morning, if you have paused yet today to check in with Jesus Christ? The best way to do that is through your Bible, because Jesus Christ is revealed to us as the Word of God. He is the Word, and the Word reveals Him. So each time we open God's Word we can hear His voice. My prayer for each of us as we study this morning is that we hear God's message. He has preserved His Word over these many generations so that we still have it today. Oh, may we love reading it! It takes only 72 hours for the average reader to read through the entire Bible, so it is not as overwhelming as you might think. Well, let me invite you to open to the only book exclusively devoted to the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We come to somewhat of a significant milestone this morning as we study Revelation, chapter seven. The foundational six seals that begin the period known as the tribulation period is behind us. The six seals we have already studied really lay out for us the beginning of the judgment of God. Revelation 7 is right between the sixth and the seventh seal. But the seventh seal is not opened until chapter eight, where the narrative resumes. Instead, the progress of judgment is interrupted for a moment. God's mercy is seen here even through the most difficult of times.

When we ended two weeks ago, we were left with all the great men of the earth praying for the rocks to fall on them and crying out, **“For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (6:17)** In light of that question, chapter 7 provides us an answer with two different people groups that will be able to stand one day in the presence of Jesus Christ. One group which cannot survive, however, is the ungodly. I Thessalonians 5:3 tells us, **“For when they say, ‘Peace and**

safety!’ Then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.” And this is speaking of unbelievers who will feel the full fury of destruction from the hand of God. II Thessalonians 1:8-9 declares, **“In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”** There is nothing in those passages that give any hint of hope for and unbeliever to survive the wrath of God. And yet right in the midst of this great tribulation our minds are directed to the picture of mercy and grace, a scene of triumphant rejoicing. I think you may agree with me, after we study this chapter, that maybe, just maybe, more people will be saved in this Tribulation period than any other time in history. The Tribulation period will be a great time of spiritual harvesting. You might want to get a copy of this message and give it to your buddy and tell him that if he can’t find you one day, then he better listen to this message.

Follow along with me as I read the first ten verses of chapter seven.

“After these things (I hate to stop after three words but this is a very important phrase. We see it numerous times in Revelation. Wherever you see this, it introduces for us a new vision. We will see it again when we get to verse nine) **I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. (2) Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, (3) saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’ (4) And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: (5) Of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed (6) of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve**

thousand were sealed (7) Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; (8) Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed. (9) After these things I looked, and behold a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (10) And crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Prayer: Oh Lord we thank You for the magnificence of Your love. It is so comforting to see Your love as the Lamb who shepherds, sustains and meets every need of Your faithful servants. Thank You that before You unleash your judgments on the earth, that You put 144,000 Jewish evangelists into every corner of this planet to give the good news of the gospel. The good news is that You, dear Jesus, have paid our sin debt. May we be Your evangelists right now where You have placed us. Open our eyes to behold more wonderful truths about You, Lord Jesus, for it is in Your precious name that we pray. Amen.

There has been a whole lot of emphasis on certain numbers revealed in the book of Revelation. It has created some amazing debates, some of which actually takes place on our front porches, along with incredible superstition, intrigue, religious hatred, not to mention, great confusion. The number “666” would be at the top of the list. Debates are long and loud as to the meaning of this symbol. There are all kinds of strange teachings, and weird predictions related to this number, and websites abound in this area. Another number that has provoked as much debate, if not more, is the number “144,000.” An amazing display of religious teaching incorporate this number, obsess on it as if it were some kind of spiritual clue to unraveling the mystery of immortality.

A couple of popular groups in America are the Seventh-Day Adventists who believe the 144,000 are the true believers—made known by their observance of the Jewish Sabbath, or Saturday, as their day of worship. Unfortunately, they mix both Old and New Testament practices and, in

the process, confuse the meaning of both. Their website might tone down the 144,000 as just not Seventh-Day Adventists; however, if you dig deep enough, you will find out that only those who worship on Saturday will go to heaven. In fact, they believe Sunday worship is actually the mark of the beast. In other words, they're going to heaven and we are in league with the devil if we worship on Sunday.

The second group is even more popular, and connected to this number of 144,000 are the people we have most encountered on a Saturday morning on our front porch or driveway, the Jehovah Witnesses. They claim that the 144,000 in Revelation are not Jewish Christians. They believe they are the true, redeemed believers.

The problem with this belief became apparent when the number of Witnesses of Jehovah exceeded 144,000, like what are they going to do with the leftovers? So, they revised their doctrine and now teach that there is an earthly band of 144,000 and a heavenly band. The heavenly band of Witnesses was for the charter members—many of whom have already died.

According to recent data, Jehovah Witnesses believe there are more than 8 million of this number registered today. The problem of simple math reared its head again when the number of Witnesses exceeded 288,000 followers. So, they created in their doctrine a third band of 144,000 called the “servant band.”

Isn't it sad that there are so many who are entangled in this teaching? Interestingly, I listened to a podcast of Aaron Rogers with his live-in girlfriend Danica Patrick. She has her own program entitled *Danica Patrick and I'm pretty intense*. She conducted an interview with Aaron Rogers concerning his religious upbringing and what he believes now. He told her in High School he began to become a skeptic. He said and I quote, “Only 144,000 are going to heaven even though there are seven billion on the planet. How can you believe in a God that wants to condemn most of the planet to a fiery hell? What type of sensitive omnipresent, omnipotent Being wants to condemn most of His beautiful creation to a fiery hell at the end of all of this?” End of quote. Aaron, I'm sorry but our text in Revelation 7 lets us know there will be so many people in heaven that you won't be able to number them.

So, we want to answer this 144,000 dollar question this morning, but we also cannot miss Christ's merciful love in our text, which is demonstrated by His sending over four times as many missionaries into the world as are currently serving Him today. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were 35,000 missionaries of every persuasion (which I think 20 years later has diminished greatly) but during the Tribulation He will provide 144,000 evangelist. In the midst of judgment, we see God's mercy. What a beautiful chapter! But you talk about the mercy and love of Jesus for people. Here we have two groups of people, one group whom God graciously protects and preserves through the Tribulation, the other group whom God graciously removes from the Tribulation. In either case it is victory in a time of vengeance. Let me show you these two distinct groups that appear in two magnificent visions in chapter seven of Revelation:

The Jewish Evangelist Revelation 7:1-8	The Gentiles from all nations Revelation 7:9-17
Redeemed and evangelistic in the Tribulation	Redeemed during the Tribulation
Numbered - 144,000	Not numbered, nor could be numbered
Scaled on the earth	Standing in heaven before God

1. God's mercy to the sealed Jews - vv. 1-8
2. God's grace to the saved Gentiles - vv. 9-17

1. God's mercy to the sealed Jews - vv. 1-8 Friends, our God is a soul-saving God who has all of humanity on His heart. How evident is this?
 - God suspends the judgment - vv. 1-3 There are certain symbols here in this chapter as we have a new vision set before us. Look with me at verse one, **I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any**

tree.” The skeptics laugh at the “four corners” and say these early Christians believed the earth was square or flat and literally had four corners. The “**four corners of the earth,**” for instance, could stand for the four cardinal directions on the compass: North, South, East, and West. And this four places on the compass are the four points from which the wind originates. People today frequently use the expression “the four corners of the earth” as a figure of speech to indicate the far ends of the earth. So, it is accurate to describe it in that way. But don’t miss this point: The wind is not blowing. Quite an interesting phenomenon. For whatever period of time this little interlude takes place, the wind doesn’t blow.

Now these four powerful angels are seen holding back the four winds that are about to blow upon the earth. They are restraining elements of nature. In Revelation 16:5, there’s an angel involved with controlling the waters. But here they hold back the wind. Winds are a symbol of devastating and destroying power. The TV images we see of devastating hurricanes and tornadoes leave us in no doubt about the powerful forces of the wind. Wind in Scripture is often associated with destruction and judgment (see Job 1:19; Jeremiah 4:11-14; 18:17; Jonah 1:4). And now, right after the commencement of a judgment so great that the men of the earth have fled to caves and cried out to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them, the messengers of the Lord are suddenly seen holding back judgment for a moment. The reason for the temporary suspension of judgment is revealed in verse 2 as we meet a fifth angel, this one ascending from the east and holding the seal of the living God, “**Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea.**” This angel cries out to the four angels and tells them not to release those forces yet because he has a job to do first. He must mark the believers on earth. “**Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their**

foreheads.” God’s people will be sealed by a mark somehow. Believers today are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God in their hearts. Friends, listen to II Corinthians 1:21-22, **“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”** This guarantee is the security given a child of God who has been redeemed, bought out of the slave market of sin by the blood of Jesus. Jesus saves us and then seals (guarantees) us with His Holy Spirit.

- God permanently seals His servants - vv. 4-8. This fifth angel must apply a seal to the servants of God on their foreheads. The word here for **“servants”** is the Greek word *doulos* which means “slave.” If you’re a Bible genius — maybe not here in the first service but those in the second service, you may be thinking I have read somewhere about a mark in the forehead in the Old Testament. Revelation has 404 verses with 285 Old Testament citations and as many as 550 Old Testament allusions. Ezekiel 9 is one of the most fascinating descriptions of what God does. Too often when reading some of the Old Testament prophets we can sleep walk right through them. In Ezekiel 9 the basic background here is that King Nebuchadnezzar had his Babylonian army coming in to destroy Jerusalem in 586 B.C. And God is showing Ezekiel, a Levite, who was a faithful prophet of God, what was going to happen in the future. We read in Ezekiel 9:3, **“Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer’s inkhorn at his side; (4) And the Lord said to him, ‘Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it. (5) To the others He said in my hearing, ‘Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. (6) Utterly slay old and young men,**

maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.’ So they began with the elders who were before the temple.” So, in verse 3 God is starting to exit from the temple. Up until this time His glory, the Cloud, the Shekinah glory glowed over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. It was a sealed room with no windows but light radiated inside because of the presence of the glory of God. Verse 4 is a very powerful verse for it identifies who the truly saved are, **“the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.”** Paul stated in II Corinthians 5:17, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** The transformation that takes place by the new birth in Christ is not only an instantaneous miracle but also a lifelong process of sanctification. When I come to Christ everything changes; the old things have passed away. Old values, ideas, plans, loves, desires and beliefs vanish, replaced by the new things that the Holy Spirit desires. When we come to faith in Jesus, we get a new operating system. The Holy Spirit seals us, indwells us, and fills us. He also convicts us of sin. The evidence of that is that we are a new creature in Christ. We are in the world but not of the world. We do sigh and cry over all the abominations and idolatry in the culture of our world today. In the first century Christians even stopped going to the Roman athletic events because of all the nudity. Persecution began to hit because of the stand these believers were taking against the sins of the day. They were broken over the idolatry and sinful abominations in their culture. In essence, they were saying “I’m not going to consciously expose myself to what may cause lust.” They sighed and groaned over the sin in their culture, just as we should today. I will not do this or that for the glory of Jesus Christ. So what does God do? He sends an angel who has a pen and ink to mark the foreheads of these who sigh and groan. He is invisible and they don’t even know their forehead is being

marked. Just as those in Jerusalem were protected, so the 144,000 will not be destroyed by the Antichrist. These 144,000 evangelists, the Billy Graham's or Apostle Paul's of the world, will go untouched by the tribulation judgments. The seal of God is a protection. They have a job to do for God. **(4) And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:** Two facts are clearly presented to answer the 144,000 dollar question. And we can answer it without any special Bible code. As one writer said, "There is no need for textual gymnastics."

- Fact number one: These are Jews. These are Jews that have come to Christ. This is not the church. This is a clear reference to the historical sons of Israel (Jacob).
- Fact number two: There are 144,000 of them. This is not a figurative number. Lest anyone should think this is a mere symbol, John gives an itemized list of tribes. Now let me just give you a couple of notes of great interest with our tribes mentioned here. You see 12 tribes beginning with Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. Do the Jews know what tribe they're a part of? No, most do not and that's because the records have all been lost and destroyed in the destruction of Israel in 70 A.D. But God knows. In the Old Testament there are a number of different listings of these tribes, and they're different. Sometimes they are listed in birth order (Genesis 29,; 35); another time in the order of Jacob's blessing (Genesis 49). Sometimes in order of how they were encamped around the Tabernacle (Numbers 2). Sometimes in the order of the census before the invasion of Canaan (Numbers 26). Sometimes in the order of blessing and cursing (Deut. 27); sometimes in the order by the wives and the concubines (I Chron. 2-8). The order here is interesting because the tribe of Dan is left out. Dan is the

only tribe that failed to conquer its territory (Judges 1) and Dan completely turned away from God and to idols (Judges 18). Dan will not have protection during the Tribulation period because of idolatry, but you'll be happy to know that God will preserve a remnant from Dan and is listed in the millennial kingdom (Ezekiel 48).

2. God's grace to the saved Gentiles - vv. 9-17

Conclusion: Next week we will see the incredible results of their message of salvation to the world. The 144,000 are no different from us, in the sense of what they believe for salvation. They are not saved a different way from how we're saved. In fact, everyone is saved the same way. Don't get confused thinking the Old Testament saints were saved because they refused to eat pork and they sacrificed sheep; and tribulation and millennial people will be saved by this way or that. Everyone is saved in the same way, by faith. The cross is the center point of human history. On one side of the cross everyone in the Old Testament was looking forward to God sending His Christ, His anointed One, for salvation. Their faith in His coming was just as powerful and true as it is for us. We look back to the cross and what He did to save us from our sins. Everyone before the cross is saved looking and believing in the Messiah that was to come for sin, and all of us today are saved by looking back saying as Paul, **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh (here comes his testimony) I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** I am saved not because I grew up in a Christian home, or because I was baptized as a baby, or because I came forward in a church service, nor by raising my hand in a service. I am saved at this moment just like those during the Tribulation and the Millennium will be saved: By trusting in the One who gave Himself for Me, Jesus. He took my place. He died on the cross for my sins. He experienced the wrath of God for me. This is the love that Jesus shows to any who will humbly come recognizing their sinful condition and who will trust Jesus, and Jesus alone to be their Savior.

Dear Christians here this morning, do you and I bear the marks of God's witnesses in our culture today, or have we been enveloped and saturated by the culture? Would to God that we would join the Messiah's Marines that we read about today and take seriously the call of God in our own lives to testify of His grace and His glorious gospel. John Wesley basically said, "Give me a hundred believers who love nothing but God and hate nothing but sin, and I will shake the world for Christ."

Prayer: