

THE SECURITY OF SALVATION

Scripture Lesson: Revelation 7

Text: Revelation 7:1

Songs: R372 1,2; "Speak, O Lord;" "I Give You My Heart"

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

Every Christian is concerned about the security of his or her salvation. Young people take that security for granted. As we age bringing eternal life is closer, we often wonder just how secure our salvation is. One of the incongruities of the Christian life is that the longer one believes and the closer one comes to the heavenly city, the shakier the security of salvation becomes.

Every Christian scholar, every Christian pastor, has said, "If you sometimes doubt the Christian faith you never have to worry." The only people Bible scholars and Pastors worry about are people who never worry. Anyone who is a Christian Satan will seek to take away the sense of security in the salvation Christ has purchased for us. Today if you have any doubts chapter 7 of Revelation should dispel them and give you genuine confidence for the future. This chapter tells of the way God seals His own people and makes them part of His eternal family in heaven. This message is about the security of our salvation. So let's begin.

"V. 1." This verse continues what John sees after the opening of the sixth seal. Rather than move right to the seventh seal, there is this interlude that heightens the suspense. In Revelation 6:10 the saints prayed, "How long?" God is taking His time. That delay is pictured with this description between the sixth and seventh seal.

We have seen that God divides both the heavens and the earth into four. Now we have four angels on four corners. Wind is often the way God works. We remember Pentecost. God's wind parted the Red Sea so Israel could cross, "Exodus 14:21." The wind of God can also be destructive and terrible, the advent of His wrath. Hosea pictures God as a sirocco, a strong, scary desert wind, "Hosea 13:15." Hosea paints destruction. So does Daniel 7:2,3. "Daniel 7:2,3." It is this destructive side of God's wind which is now to be held in abeyance.

"V. 2." The angel comes from the east. The Bible often pictures God coming from the east, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel. This angel represents Christ, the Sunrise from on high who has visited us that Zechariah sang about in Luke 1:78, "Luke 1:78." Nor can we forget Malachi 4, the last chapter of the Old Testament which speaks of the day of the Lord, "Malachi 4:2."

This angel who represents God has "the seal of the living God." This is language we find throughout the Bible. After crossing the Jordan River and facing the unknown desert Joshua reminds the people that they have no fear for "the living God" is among them. You read it again in Joshua 3. In II Kings 19 Hezekiah calls upon God to deliver Israel from Sennacherib who had defied "the living God." This angel now calls to the other angels.

"V. 3." The seal of the Holy Spirit is applied to the righteous before the wrath of God is applied to the wicked. Ephesians writes about this seal of the Holy Spirit, "Ephesians 1:13,14; 4:30." Pentecost precedes Holocaust.

One of the premises with which we have been working as we study Revelation together is that this book is not like a tail on a dog. A dog can stand still and his tail wag happily. Bible students sometimes do that with the Bible. 65 books stand as a piece, the dog, and Revelation, the tail, wags all over the place. Using that method of Bible interpretation people are able to draw some very unusual interpretations. Our effort to root everything in Revelation in the rest of the Scripture makes us see the same things about Revelation as we see in the rest of the Bible. We see the Bible as one book, one piece, all 66 books.

For example, we see prophecy layered; that is, it comes to pass in a variety of ways and in a variety of times. When Isaiah writes there is immediate fulfillment in the events of his life and his contemporaries. The same prophecies are also fulfilled later in the coming of the Lord Jesus. From Revelation we learn that the same prophecy also holds for Christ's second coming in triumph. Now look at another layering of fulfillment. In Matthew 24:13 Jesus says, "Matthew 24:9-13." J. Marcellus Kik in writing about that last verse, "Matthew 24:13," writes, "One of the most remarkable things about the siege of Jerusalem was the miraculous escape of the Christians. It is estimated that over one million Jews lost their lives in the terrible siege, but not one of them was a Christian. This our Lord indicated in verse 13, ". . . but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." That is one of the fascinating historical notes about the end of the Jewish nation. Remember, not one Christian was killed. Remember, too, that God works so that His prophecies are like a cat with nine lives; they come true again and again. Jesus' words were true for the siege of Jerusalem and Jesus words are true for the end of time. God pauses in the vision between the sixth seal and the seventh seal to let his people know they are sure to survive to the end no matter how terrible the torture on earth. God will put His seal on them. That is the security of our salvation.

You and I are sealed. What super security there is our salvation! We know God will protect, govern and guide us. God is our Savior. He has all the angels at His command. He just stops the action until He gets all His people saved and preserved as He planned. God is always the victor—as are all of us who are on God's side.

What is the seal that gives us such security? Many Christians speculate it will be a visible sign. Some have said the sign is our Social Security number. Remember the dog and its tail! Their speculation is based on Ezekiel 9, "Ezekiel 9:3,4." Our pattern of Bible interpretation is that whatever of the Old Testament the New Testament does not supersede we keep, but if the New Testament puts a new twist on it or provides a deeper dimension, we go with that latest interpretation. We call that "God's progressive revelation." As history progresses, God increasingly clarifies His revelation. For example, the New Testament church worshipped on Sunday, not Saturday. We still read the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," but we apply it to Sunday because of Christ's resurrection, Pentecost, and the practice of the New Testament church. We might think the mark should still be visible as it was in Ezekiel 9, except that we have Jesus' High Priestly prayer in which he says, "John 17:11b." When we have the name of Christ, Christian, that is our protection. Listen to John 17:11 again, "John 17:11b." Paul casts this in a theological light in II Timothy 2:19, "II Timothy 2:19." The fact that we belong to God through Jesus is the seal of our ownership. When we confess that we are not our own but belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, that is a confession of the ownership seal that God has already given through His sovereign salvation in Christ. That is real security. The certainty of our salvation is not in us, but in what God has already done. Our great comfort is that the Lord Himself knows who we are. His knowledge is our sure and certain seal. That is the security of salvation.

"V. 4." This is obviously a symbolic number. The Jehovah's Witnesses say that just the 144,000 best people will make it to heaven. That is one reason why they work so hard to expand their religion: They all want to make into the elite circle of 144,000. At the judgment day they see God saying, "OK, my top 144,000 are to enter heaven." Think of the disappointment of a Jehovah's Witness who has worked feverishly for his whole life and is the 144,001st. He misses heaven by one lousy number.

We know it is not that way. We are saved not by what we do, getting to be the top 144,000. We are saved simply by the sovereign grace of God. That is the security of our salvation. The symbolic number either comes from multiplying the twelve tribes of Israel by twelve or by multiplying the twelve disciples with the twelve tribes. Either way it is easy to see how God arrived at this number in John's vision recorded here in Revelation.

“Vs. 5,6.” The tribes are listed. There is a reason for the order, but we are not going to go into that complicated issue. The order can be clearly diagrammed, but is more difficult to describe so we are going to pass on that.

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“V. 9.” Now we have not 144,000, but a multitude so great no one can number it. That is why we know the 1440,000 is a symbolic number which pictures the great multitude. That would have been even more plain if we had digressed into the complex study of the way in which the tribes are listed in the previous verses.

Notice two things about the multitude. They have white robes that picture the righteousness Christ has bought. They also have Palm branches that are a symbol of peace and restoration. That is what the crowd placed before Jesus, the Prince of Peace, on Palm Sunday when they thought He was going to restore the nation of Israel.

“V. 10.” What they say in a loud voice is just what we learned. “Salvation belongs to our God.” That is the security of our salvation summed up in a single sentence from the vast, uncountable multitude already in heaven.

“V. 11.” Now we see the four living creatures, the elders, and the angels. What is their message?

“V. 12.” They all echo the same anthem. The glory never goes to us who made a wise choice for Jesus. The glory goes to God who alone secures our salvation. “Amen” with an exclamation mark is both the first word and the last. Amen means “this is sure to be,” with an exclamation mark. That is the security of our salvation.

“V. 13.” One of the elders asks a question about these people.

“V. 14.” John answers wisely. He knows the elder has the answer. He just wanted to see if John knew the answer. Immediately the elder gives the answer, “Revelation 7:14b.” When and where is this “Great Tribulation?” Again there is a layered answer. For the first century Christians it was the persecution Christ Himself foretold in Matthew 24, “Matthew 24:21,34.” We know the persecutions through the centuries. We don’t know what persecution lies ahead for us, but we are ready because we have the security of our salvation.

“V. 15.” Only those who have the white robes of Christ’s righteousness are able to stand before God. The expression “Day and night” means the praises never stop. Actually we know that in heaven there is no night and that there is no light of the sun either because the Lord is the light of heaven. John does not know how better to express to his readers the unceasing character of their praise than using this expression, “Day and night.” The reference to God’s tent reminds us of the way God cared for His Old Testament people providing them with a tabernacle that traveled with them. God still covers His people with His tent of protecting care.

“V. 16.” This pictures the eternal blessing of God’s people. Again the heavenly blessings are put in terms of the things we know. We will never be hungry, never be thirsty, never too hot and never too cold. When you think about it, those are the basics of life. If you have enough to eat and drink, if you are always comfortable, what more is there to life? The saints have it all through Christ so they now sing of their blessed state.

V. 17.” The only reason we have this blessedness is because of Christ. He is pictured three ways. First He is the Lamb. We know that He is both the good Shepherd and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Second, the Lamb Who is really the shepherd brings them to springs of water. Here we have the heavenly echo of Psalm 23, “Psalm 23:2b.” Third, we have one of the great comforting statements of the Bible, “Revelation 7:17:c.” The tears are wiped away. No matter how you came into church today, no matter what your fears, no matter what your heartaches, no matter what your tears, God wipes them away. Praise God!

