

The Sealing of the Saints

Revelation 7:1-8

INTRODUCTION

- A. There's nothing like protection in the midst of turmoil.
 - 1. How many people have found refuge from a tornado in a storm cellar?
 - 2. How many people have found refuge from war by fleeing to another country?
- B. Tonight's lesson presents something very similar in regard to the people of God.
 - 1. As we've seen, Revelation depicts God's judgment upon the world for the persecution of his people.
 - 2. But, although God sends this judgment upon the world, he protects his people.

GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE, vv. 1-3

- A. After the great cosmic disturbances in 6:12-17, John 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.
 - 1. In antiquity, the four winds represented the four points on the compass - thus, these winds were coming from the north, south, east, and west.
 - 2. Winds are pictured in Scripture as a destroying and powerful force.
 - a. Some texts:
 - 1) "Against Elam I will bring the four winds From the four quarters of heaven, And scatter them toward all those winds" (Jer. 49:36).
 - 2) "Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, Against those who dwell in Leb Kamai, A destroying wind" (Jer. 51:1).
 - b. These angels, therefore, are bringing judgment upon the earth.
- B. John saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God, v. 2.
 - 1. Since the sun rises in the east, this angel is rising as the sun rises.
 - a. The sun's rising is pictured in Malachi 4:2 as a blessing — "But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings."
 - b. Thus, this angel is bringing a blessing.
 - 2. The means of that blessing is the seal of the living God this angel possesses.
 - a. This seal is probably a signet ring or a cylinder seal which leaves its impression on things.
 - b. Notice that this is the seal of the "living God" — this contrasts with all the pagan gods in the first century.
- C. This angel cried out to the four other angels, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads," vv. 2-3.
 - 1. The purpose of this sealing is obvious protection, for these angels cannot unleash God's fury upon the world until God's servants had been sealed.
 - 2. A protective seal was well understood by John's readers:
 - a. God placed a protective seal upon Cain (Gen. 4:15).
 - b. Ezekiel saw a vision where the righteous were sealed and the wicked killed (Ezekiel 9).
 - 3. Sealing was a common practice in the Roman Empire.
 - a. Slaves were sealed to show ownership to a particular master.
 - b. The adherents of cults were branded to show to what cult they belonged - The members of the cult of Heiropolis were marked, some on their wrists and some on their necks.
- D. This ought to provide a great deal of comfort to us Christians.
 - 1. God knows who we are and protects us.

2. He is not going to protect us from all evil.
 - a. We may face catastrophe — we will become ill, we will die, our loved ones will become ill, our loved ones will die.
 - b. Those to whom John wrote faced death for their faith.
3. Then, from what will God protect us?
 - a. God will protect us from his wrath — that’s the context of this passage; God’s saints are being kept from the wrath about to be poured on the earth.
 - b. God will keep us from his wrath.
 - 1) God’s keeping his people from wrath is obvious in 2 Thess. 1:6-7 - “It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven.”
 - 2) We also see this divine protection in 1 Jn. 4:17-18 - We can have boldness at the Day of Judgment, because we know God will protect his own.

GOD SEALS HIS PEOPLE, vv. 4-8

- A. John heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 of all the tribes of Israel, v. 4.
 1. We cannot say with certainty why 144,000 are sealed.
 2. This best explanation is that 144,000 is arrived at by multiplying 12 x 12 x 1000.
 - a. 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles.
 - b. 1000 would stand for completeness.
 3. This, then, would show that all of God’s servants are sealed, protected.
 4. Jehovah Witnesses use this text to tell us that there will only be 144,000 in heaven, but these 144,000 are on earth, not in heaven!!
- B. Twelve thousand were sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel, vv. 5-8.
 1. This listing of the twelve tribes is different than we can find anywhere else in Scripture.
 2. Judah, through whom the Messiah came, is mentioned first.
 3. Dan is not mentioned but has been replaced by Manasseh.
 - a. Calf worship originated in Dan.
 - 1) idolatry was a serious problem when John wrote Revelation.
 - 2) Dan’s exclusion from this lists is probably meant to show God’s displeasure with idolatry.
 - b. The early church actually thought the antichrist would come through Dan.
- C. We are to understand these twelve tribes as the church.
 1. These cannot be the literal tribes, for 10 of the tribes never returned from Assyrian captivity. We don’t even know historically what happened to those tribes; they’re lost.
 2. Throughout the New Testament is the idea that Christians are the new Israel.
 - a. “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.
 - b. “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).
 3. Here we find God sealing his saints to protect them from his judgment about to come upon the world.
 - a. If we are correct in what we said about the 144,000, then we have a picture here of the sealing of the complete number of God’s redeemed - no Christian is left unsealed.
 - b. Every Christian is protected against God’s wrath.
- D. Isn’t that a blessed thought?
 1. We don’t have to worry about Jesus’ return — this world and all therein will be burned up, but we will be saved from God’s wrath.
 2. There is not a reason in this world that we should not anticipate Jesus’ Second Coming — we ought to look forward to Jesus’ Second Coming as we would to seeing a loved one we haven’t

seen in years.

- a. Illustration about woman's being upset for the preacher's praying, "Come. Lord Jesus!"
Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations, # 14727.
- b. Are you looking forward to Jesus' return?
- c. Have you been sealed? Do you have the protection God offers his children