

The 144,000: Who Can Stand?

Revelation 7

I'm glad to see you are all still here. No one has yet been raptured away. That's good...for me...and everyone else still here.

Last week we looked at the first 6 seal judgements. The 6th one was so bad that during it the entire world acknowledged that it was God's judgement. There were no more denials of God's existence.

The lost cried out in the last verse of:

Revelation 6:17, "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

Today we will answer that question.

Paul warns the Thessalonians about this in:

1 Thes. 5:1-3, "Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them

suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

He goes on in his next letter to the Thessalonians when he writes:

2 Thes. 1:6-10, "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."

So now in Chapter 7 we find the interlude between the 6th and 7th seal judgements.

In our outline we have come to letter:

g. An Interlude Revelation 7:1-17

First, we will look at:

(i) On Earth: The Sealing of the Servants of God 7:1-8

Revelation 7:1-8, "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 3 "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." 4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, 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 12,000."

After John wrote of the events of the 6 seal judgements we have this pause. Just as the angels

are holding back the winds, we find ourselves holding our breath waiting for what happens next.

Among all this death and destruction, we pause and see once again the love and mercy of God. This is the God that David wrote about in:

Psalm 34:17-19, "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;"

The lost called out at the end of chapter 6, "Who can stand?" The answer is found in verse 4 when we see the sealing of the 144,000.

Paul writes in:

Romans 11:25-26a, "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, 26 and in this way all Israel will be saved."

Zechariah also writes of this preservation of Israel in Zechariah chapters 12 & 13.

The 144,000 is a tool that God will use to help bring salvation back to Israel. This group of evangelists will be marked by God and protected through the tribulation. So, why do they need protection?

In the book "Revealing Revelation" the author writes this:

"Because they will stand apart from all others in their dedication to righteousness and purity. They will be living examples of the failure of the world's moral code. People will hate them because they will represent everything that is wrong with their own lives."

Jesus told us this would be the case in:

John 15:18-19, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

Does the world hate you? Do our lives reflect the world enough, so it doesn't hate us? Are we blending in?

If we talk about holy living will the world be offended?

Why are so many Christians' trying not to be offensive? We want to emphasize the love part of God while ignoring the holy part of God. Ignoring the truth part of God. Ignoring the judgement part of God.

(ii) In Heaven: The Singing of the Servants of God 7:9-17

Revelation 7:9-17, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

14 I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 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. 16 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

So, in the first half of the chapter we saw the sealing of the 144,000 on earth and now we turn again to what is happening in heaven.

Here in heaven John sees a great multitude too big to count. This group is made up of people from all over the world. They are before the throne and they

worship crying out, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Then once again we see the angels, the elders and the 4 living creatures. They all then fall on their faces and worship.

Are they wasting their time? Are they? All the time they are worshipping, are they wasting their time? How often should we worship?

1 Thes. 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Why do some Christians think of worshipping God for eternity as boring? Let's be honest, at some time we have all been there. How does that change for you? How does it change?

Get to know God. Get to know Jesus. Get to know the Holy Spirit. As you grow in faith and get to know the Trinity and fall in love with them you transition from thinking of worship as boring to becoming a passionate worshipper of God. Have you spent enough time with Him?

If worship is simply a box you are checking off once a week you are not spending enough time with God. Read the Psalms and listen to the longing for the presence of God in them. That is how we need to be, but it takes time with God, time in His word, time admiring Him and a thankful heart for all He has done for you.

Then in verse 13 we see one of the elders asking John who this great multitude is. I love John's response, "Sir, you know." John didn't know who they were so the elder then explains that they are the ones who came out of the great tribulation. They are the saints who have died during the tribulation.

This "great tribulation" that John mentions was described by Jesus in:

Matthew 24:21, "For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again."

We are just scratching the surface of this topic and especially the specifics we find in this section of Revelation. If our discussion is pricking your interest, you might consider joining Bible Study Fellowship this fall as they go into more detail on Revelation.

But let's try to get a little bit deeper here. We know the tribulation is a 7-year period. When John and Jesus describe the great tribulation, it refers to the second half of the 7 years as during the later half of the tribulation things get really bad.

Matthew 24 and Daniel 9 are great places to explore this deeper. One phrase you will hear in this topic is Daniel's 70 weeks. Each week refers to a 7-year period and Daniel's 70th week is the tribulation.

The great multitude that is standing before the throne are believers who came out of the great tribulation.

As I am studying Revelation again it continues to challenge my thinking and my theology. We should always be open to adjusting our **••estY**theology as we learn more. I have seen some great arguments for a post-trib rapture in my study. I have also seen some great arguments for a pre-trib rapture. But making it easy isn't the best way to adjust theology. There are simply some things we will never understand.

This group before the throne are separated from believers of other ages. It would be easy to jump on the post or pre trib raptures to accommodate this

separation. Making it easy for us to understand isn't God's goal here.

I have received some questions about how people come to Christ after the rapture so let me try to explain it here.

When the church is "caught up" to meet Jesus in the air, at that moment there is not a single believer on earth. Scripture warns us many times to be ready for the bridegroom coming for His bride. This is being ready for the rapture.

When the bride is removed that is it, there isn't a new bride being made. So, in the case of a rapture being at anytime other than a post-trib rapture coming to faith will be different in one important way, they will not be sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Let me illustrate it this way. How did saints come to faith in the Old Testament? By faith! The Spirit would come on a person but could also leave that person. We saw Saul receive the Spirit only to lose Him later.

Sampson had the Spirit, lost the Spirit and then got the Spirit back.

Peter, John, Matthew, James and the other disciples, if they had died before Pentecost and receiving of the Holy Spirit, where would they have spent eternity? We know they professed Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as Lord. They would have been in heaven with Him.

The Holy Spirit is given to seal us in our faith. To begin and continue a work in us until the Father makes us complete in glorification.

Matthew 24:4-13, "Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

This covered the first 4 seal judgements. Verse 9:

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11

and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

See that in verse 13? Now it's required to stand firm to the end. This makes sense if the Holy Spirit is no longer sealing believers. We will see later in Revelation that anyone taking the mark of the beast will never be able to be saved.

So, salvation in the tribulation period is the same as any other time in history. It is the turning from our way and following God in faith, trusting in the work of His Son on the cross.

Have you trusted Jesus?