

Salvation in Tribulation

Revelation 7

(preached Pine Grove 2/12/17; Sunday AM)

Introduction

I think most of you know that I had a go cart wreck when I was 6 years old...

And the effects of the wreck on my body weren't really obvious...

I walked away from the crash, but I never felt quite right..

After a couple weeks passed and multiple doctor visits, it was determined that I needed surgery to find out what was going on inside my body...

Turns out, I had bleeding internally and simply needed rest to get better...

But I will never forget what my doctor told me when he was telling my parents that he was going to operate...

Though I was 6 at the time and really didn't understand what surgery was, he turned to me and said...

There's a silver lining in all of this for you..

You get to home from school for a month...

I may not have known what exploratory surgery was, but I knew what staying home from school was and so I was all for the surgery..

Little did I know how painful the recovery would be...

But as we left the doctors office that day, I remember asking my parents what a silver lining was...

And they told me that every cloud has a silver lining, which simply means that there are good things even in the midst of bad things...

We all understand this idea.

WE even have phrases that describe it...

Every cloud has a silver lining...

There is light at the end of tunnel...

It is always darkest before the dawn...

Well, the Bible even talks about this principle...

In the OT, a prophet named Habakkuk lived during the time of God's judgment upon Israel...

The nation had sank into idolatry...

The nation worshipped false gods..

They weren't fair in their business dealings..

Injustice was everywhere, and God was about to judge the nation by allowing a foreign nation to come and defeat Israel and carry them into exile...

And as Habakkuk warned of coming judgment, he wrote this in Habakkuk 3:2...

***2 Lord, I have heard [b]the report about You and [c]I fear.
O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years,
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember [d]mercy.***

Habakkuk was essentially saying, in the cloud of your judgment, let us find a silver lining of mercy from you..

And this is the nature of God to do just that...

Even in the midst of trouble, God delivers...

13 men in a boat and a storm all around them on the sea of Galilee...

Yet they are perfectly safe because Jesus calms the storm...

At the cross, God's wrath is being poured out on His Son, yet we see the mercy of God to save sinners through judgment....

In the worst of times, we see the best of God...

Well, in the book of Revelation, we are seeing the worst of times as we closed out Revelation 6 last week...

The world is coming apart at the seams...

There is a global earthquake..

Mountains and islands are being relocated.

Stars are falling from heaven...

The sun is black and the moon is red...

And all of that is on top of a time of war and famine and worldwide disease and death...

As chapter 6 closes, the dark cloud of God's judgment is hanging over the world...

But in chapter 7, we see the silver lining...

In the midst of wrath, God remembers mercy...

Because in chapter 7, we are going to see the millions of people who will get saved during the tribulation...

Though the world is in chaos, millions will make peace with God through faith in Christ...

As God judges the world for their unbelief, he grants the gift of faith to many others who will serve to be his gospel army upon the earth...

The joy for us is that we get to see this group of people even before they come to know the Lord in the midst of that 7 year period of tribulation...

And as we meet this large group of people this morning we are going to be reminded of three of God's greatest characteristics in Rev 7...

Let's begin in verses 1-3 with a reminder that...

I. Our God Is Sovereign (1-3)

Verse 1..

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out 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 or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

What we see here is a suspending of the seal judgments for a moment in time...

God sends 4 angels into the world to hold back the four winds of the earth, which I simply see as a reference to the north wind, the south wind, the east wind, and the west wind...

And all goes still on the earth for a while...

This is the calm in the middle of the storm of God's wrath...

This the eye of the tribulation hurricane as everything on earths stops for a moment, and the purpose of this calm is made clear in verses 2-3..

Where a 5th angel comes from the rising sun, which would suggest that he comes from the east...

And he comes to announce that all harm to the earth must cease for a moment until God's servants upon the earth get seals on their foreheads..

Now, what is this talking about?

Well as we take the Bible literally, there will be a day during the great tribulation where God will mark his people on the forehead...

In this passage as we are about to see, God will mark the foreheads of 144,000 Israelites that he is going to save during this time of tribulation...

And they will get a seal on their foreheads, similar to the branding of cattle...

Why the forehead?

Because it is the most noticeable part of a person and the most prominent.

Why the mark?

It seems best to see it as a source of protection from the next two sets of coming judgments when the 7th seal is opened and 7 trumpet judgments come followed by 7 bowl judgments with the 7th trumpet..

God is simply going to preserve 144,000 Israelites who come to faith in Christ, and they will become gospel preachers in the tribulation period..

You see, the church will be in heaven...

The people who spent their lives proclaiming the gospel will have been taken to heaven in the rapture...

Yet God will still need preachers to take his message of salvation to the nations in such horrible conditions...

And these 144,000 Israelites will serve that role..

As they finally come to see Jesus as their Messiah, they will tell the other Jews and the rest of the nations that He is the way, the truth and the life even during the tribulation period...

And how does God ensure that his message will be preached amid such horrible conditions on the earth, like famine and war and diseases and death?

Well, he calls an angel to put a mark on their foreheads to protect their lives from all these disasters, so that they can survive to preach the gospel...

Now listen, this is very important....

What was Israel's role in the OT?

Why did God call Abraham and bless him and make Israel into a large nation?

Was it because He loved Israelites more than any other nation?

No, HE called them and blessed them and set them apart so that they would be a light to the nations around them...

They would eat different foods, they would behave different by obeying the laws He gave them, they would worship one God only...

And the point of all of that was for Israel to be a people that called other nations to their God since He was the only true God...

Yet, what did Israel do?

Well, they ruined that opportunity.

They couldn't obey the laws...

They couldn't resist worshipping other gods..

They couldn't be different, and therefore they failed to be God preachers in the OT...

But in the tribulation, that will all change...

God will open the blind eyes of Israel...

He will give them hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone..

He will unclog their ears to hear the truth about Jesus as their Messiah....

And many will get saved...

In fact, I think more than 144,000 Israelites will get saved...

It is just these 144,000 that will be set apart to proclaim the gospel to the world..

And this seal on their forehead will be their assurance of survival among the worst of conditions upon the earth...

Just like Satan will seal his people with the mark of the beast in the tribulation, God will seal some of His people with the mark of gospel ministry...

And the point of these opening verses is that God stops the show for a moment to make sure His gospel teachers are protected...

He is God who can still the winds on the sea of Galilee waters but he also has the power to still all the winds of earth to serve his purposes...

And that is what he does in verses 1-3...

Now, let's move to a second important truth about God in chapter 7...

Which to me is the most important lesson of the entire chapter...

II. Our God Saves (4-15)

As we move to verse 4, we meet these 144,000 gospel witnesses...

4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

Couple quick thoughts on this salvation of Israelites from these verses in Revelation 7...

#1 - God is not done with Israel.

There are many people who hold to the view that God is done with Israel...

They claim that Israel gave up their role as God's people when they rejected Christ and called for his execution...

They say that the church then replaced Israel as the apple of God's eye...

Yet, nothing could be further from the truth...

Paul asked the question in the book of Romans...

"Has Israel fallen beyond recovery?"

And as quick as he asked the question, he answered it...

May it never be.

God was not done with Israel then and he is not done with Israel today...

No, they haven't trusted Christ and if they die without Christ today, they will go to hell...

But as the tribulation begins, God will begin to open their hearts to the gospel and all Israel will be saved in that period...

Yet, these 144,000 will be given a special ministry of going into the world and preaching the gospel...

And that 144,000 number comes as God sets 12,000 aside from 12 tribes of Israel..

Another note here...

No Jewish person today knows their tribe.

All of those genealogies were lost in 70 AD, but I assure God knows which tribe every Jew belongs to, and when the tribulation breaks out...

Israel will come to faith....

Some will die in the judgments, but 144,000 will be set apart with a special seal to preach the gospel to the nations for the remainder of the tribulation period....

And we those 144,000 right here...

And let me just add, there are about a 144,000 explanations of who these 144,000 are....

But I hope you that the paling meaning of the text is the best meaning....

These 144,000 aren't the church...

The church is already in heaven...

The 144,000 aren't the only people to be saved in the tribulation...

We are about to see more...

These 144,000 aren't the total number of people who will ever get to heaven, which is what the false teachers of Jehovah Witnesses teach...

The best meaning is the literal meaning, and that is to see these 144,000 as a set of Israelites that will be sealed to preach the gospel to the world...

And this will make more sense when we see them again in chapter 14...

One final thing to say here...

God keeps his promises....

God told Abraham way back in Genesis 12 that he would bless him and his descendants forever...

And though Israel did everything to forfeit God's blessings, it is impossible for God to break a promise...

The salvation of Israel had to happen because God never lies and he never forsakes His word...

Though it takes until the end of time for God to bring Israel to salvation, HE will do it because HE is a God that can be fully trusted...

Now, that group of 144,000 Jews and others will be saved in the tribulation, but God doesn't stop there...

Verse 9....

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I [a]said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In verse 9, we leave earth and the four angels holding back the four winds so that 144,000 Israelites can be marked for gospel ministry, and we go back to heaven...

Where John looks and sees a great crowd of people from every nation, tribe, and tongue....

They are standing before the throne and before the Lamb..

They have on white robes and hold palm branches...

And they are crying out to God, praising him for the salvation found in the Lamb..

And then the heavenly angels, the elders, the four creatures around the throne all join with this large crowd in worship of God...

Now, who is John seeing here?

Well, these are the Gentiles who will come to faith during the tribulation period and then die from the natural disasters, diseases, famine or natural causes...

How do we identify these people as tribulation saints...

Well, a couple reasons...

Well, as John looked into heaven before the seals were opened, he made no mention of this group....

IT seems best to see them now in heaven as a result of the first 6 seals being opened...

They don't appear to be martyrs who were killed for their faith...

They simply seem to be believers who were killed due to the global wars, famines, earthquakes, plagues or meter showers...

In a sense, these are blessed people that God would remove them from the horrible conditions on earth and rescue them from the worst that is yet to come...

Though the first six judgments are bad, it is about to get much worse with the opening of the seventh seal and the beginning of the trumpet judgments...

Remember, living in these conditions will be worse than death...

Last week, the rulers of the earth were begging for the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of God.

So, death to the believers in the tribulation will be an act of mercy...

Now some of this group probably came to faith right after the rapture...

Some may have come to faith once the judgments started coming...

Some may have come to faith by the teaching of the 144,000 sealed Israelites that we just met...

All we know is this, and it is a very important truth...

God will save people during the worst conditions the world has ever seen...

For some, it will be the best of times and the worst of times...

Yet, this God in his wrath, remembering mercy...

And this is the nature of our God...

He is a saving God...

He doesn't wish for any to perish but for all to come to saving faith...

And in the midst of pouring out his judgment on an unbelieving world which fully deserves it, what do we see God doing?

He is saving people...

He is saving all of Israel and a great multitude of the nations....

God can't help Himself...

He loves to save people.

IT is his nature...

Do you remember the parable of the prodigal son?

A son rejected his father...

Asked for his inheritance early and went and wasted it all away on wild living...

He got so low that he was eating with the pigs...

And then he remembered his father and the comfort of his home...

And as he swallowed his pride and decided to head home, do you remember what the father did?

Let me read it to you in Luke 15....

17 But when he came to [g]his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I

have sinned against heaven, and [h]in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”’ 20 So he got up and came to [i]his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and [j]embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Who does the father represent in this story?

Well, he represents the Lord, and he demonstrates a trait of God that is so important to remember...

God is a saving God by nature..

He runs to save people.

He has compassion on people who need to be saved.

He embraces those who desire to repent and be saved...

And he celebrates when salvation occurs...

In Luke 15, God is shown to be a saving God, and in Revelation 7, we see that truth play out...

Israel is saved.

A crowd of people too numerous to count is saved and brought to heaven when they die due to horrible conditions on earth in the tribulation...

If you are sitting here this morning thinking that God is mad at you for not getting saved...

And that coming to him will result in Him giving you a stern lecture on how your life should have been better...

I will just tell you...

If you repent and come to the Lord this morning, HE will run to embrace you and every other believer in here will celebrate with you...

And you know why God won't lecture you on why it didn't happen sooner?

Because God loves to save people...

IT is his nature and his people are grateful that HE does...

Amen church?

Amen.

God will save in the tribulation, but dont take the chance of getting saved then...

Get saved today...

A final truth about God that we must see before we leave
Revelation 7 is found in verses 15-17...

III. Our God Supplies (15-17)

15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His [b]temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun [c]beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the [d]water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

John gives a description of what this great multitude is doing upon their arrival to heaven after their deaths in the tribulation...

The first thing we see is that they are in the presence of God before his throne...

The Bible says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord...

And once these tribulation believers die, they go to see God on his throne...

Not only are they with God, they are serving God continually...

Day and night they serve the Lord, which is further evidence that heaven is not a place of laying on a soft cloud and playing a harp...

We serve our God but without the fatigue and trouble that accompany our work on earth...

Then we see what God does for His people at the end of verse 15....

He will spread his tabernacle over them...

This gives us the impression of protection, which these saints will long for since they have been living without any protection in a world that was falling apart around them...

You ever left the comfort of a warm house and went outside...

You never really appreciated the warmth of the house until you were surrounded by cold...

And then when you go back in, you really enjoy the first blast of warm air...

God will rescue these believers in the tribulation where trouble was all around and they will come under the protection of his presence as he spreads his tabernacle over them...

Then we see that these people will no longer hunger or thirst, which takes us back to seal number 3 which brought famine to the earth...

They will also be protected for the sun and the heat, which will be the consequences of other judgments to come upon the earth in the tribulation...

And then the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their Shepherd...

Since the beginning of time, people have acted as shepherds for lambs...

But in heaven, the lamb will shepherd the people, and he will lead them to quiet waters...

And then God will wipe every tear from their eyes...

So many people see this verse as teaching there will be tears in heaven due to grief from regrets on earth or people left behind...

This verse doesn't say that at all...

IT teaches that tears will go away in heaven...

The thought is that the people in this crowd brought the tears into heaven due to their sorrow on earth, which makes sense due to all the trouble on earth...

Yet, God has no place for tears in heaven, so he wipes them away forever and replaces sorrow with joy....

And the clear lesson of these closing verses is that God provides for His people...

He provides while we are on earth, and He provides in heaven...

His provisions for his people never run low and they never cease...

Our God cares for His people now, and he will care for them in eternity....

God is sovereign...

God saves....

And God supplies...

Those are the lessons of Revelation 7...

Though the cloud of judgment is growing blacker, God's work of salvation in tribulation is the silver lining that gives us light in a dark tunnel of coming judgment...

Conclusion

As we wrap this chapter up, let your eyes go back to verse 15 for a moment...

As the list of what God does for His people starts, notice the first 3 words..

“For this reason....”

And the question is ...

For what reason is God so good to provide for these people in heaven...

So, we simply have to go to verse 14...

Where John is told who this huge group of people in heaven are....

“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb..”

I spilled coffee on a white pullover this week...

A lot of coffee...

So I took it took the sink and ran a lot of water on it, and I took some liquid Dawn and poured it all over the stain...

While I was doing it, I was thinking this is crazy....

I am pouring bright blue dishwashing soap on a white pice of clothing in hopes that is will pull out a brown stain....

Kinda crazy but it worked...

I used something blue to make something white...

The blood of Christ is red, but it washed our souls white as snow before God...

We use red to erase the blackness of sin and turn our souls white before God...

What a miracle that red + black equals white...

Yet that is the case, and if you turn from the blackness of your sin and trust in the redness of Christ's blood today, you will made spotless before God...

That is the miracle of salvation...

That is the power of the blood of Christ...

His red blood mixed with the blackness of our sin results
in us being spotless before God...

Trust in Christ today...

He will and clean you completely....

Let us pray....