

All Saints Day
November 4th, 2018
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I Belong To God

Revelation 7:2-17 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!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, 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, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and 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 dwell among them. ¹⁶ "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Today is all saints day. So the first thing we probably want to ask is what is a saint? When we say that we are celebrating all the saints, who are we celebrating? Some will say the saints are those who are really a level above normal Christians. The saints are those who with great good works have set themselves apart. This is blatantly false as can be seen in many passages but even here in this sermon text it is evident how false this is, for "these are they that washed

their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." If any were able to attain heaven by their works they would not need to wash their robes, yet only those who washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb stand before God.

Again some might say the saints are those whom God has made holy. The confirmation students sometimes have to "mark the answer that is most correct." Sometimes there will be an answer that on its own sounds right but then there is another answer that is even better. That is what we have here. Because this first answer, although it recognizes that God is the one doing it, still focuses too heavily on our holiness. And from this many people get the idea that ok God has made me holy now I have to keep myself clean.

The better answer is this that a saint is one whom God has set apart as His own. Notice how our text really stresses this, that God has made me His own, that this is what it means to be a saint.

Verse 2- 8 He seals his people setting them apart from the world. In no other way are they different from the world other than God has put His seal on them.

In verse 10 the saints proclaim that "salvation belongs to our God." Again salvation is a thing of God not of men, but He is our God, thus he has made us his people

And then in verse 14 he has washed in the blood of the lamb, nothing else makes them saints except the blood of the lamb .

144,000

In verse one we find four angels poised to bring judgment on the earth. God has had enough. The world is filled with sin, judgment is needed. But before they can pour out the judgment the Lord sends another angel who says wait first we have to seal the people of God so that they can be saved before the judgment is poured out. And the number is given to us 144,000. Am I one of those 144,000?

Of course there are those who say that this is a literal number. The JW will say that number is already full. There is no hope of us being numbered among that 144,000. Others will say that number is associated with the millennium. So maybe we will make it and be one of the 144,000 rulers during the millennium.

But the thing is I'd like to know is that I not only have a chance but that I am actually numbered among these 144,000? Who are these 144,000? We have three clear proofs that the 144,000 is not a literal number but the full number of the church, all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

1. The judgment is held back until they are sealed, since the judgment hasn't come yet they are not all sealed.

2. A great multitude which no one can number. Now someone might say the great multitude is different from the 144,000 but look back at verse 3 again “sealed ALL the servants of God”
3. What is the seal? Those of you who were paying attention when we studied the book of Ephesians will already know the answer.

Eph 1:13-14 NKJ ¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

The Holy Spirit who we received in baptism is the seal. So yes I am one of the 144,000, because I was sealed with the Holy Spirit in my baptism.

Notice what the angel says, “till WE have sealed the servants of God?” What is this WE? There is only one angel who has a seal. The four angels are not helping him they are standing about to pour out judgment. Who is this we? The WE is all those whom God has sent out to preach the word and baptize, and through the preaching of the Word and baptism we are doing the work of this angel, sealing the people of God.

This 144,000 is symbolic. The full number of the church. 12 sons of Israel times 12 apostles, that is old and new testament, times 1000 the fullness of God’s work. The judgment of the earth is held back until all those who God has predestined have been brought to faith and made His people. Among whom I and you stand since we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit in our baptism through the Word of God.

A great multitude which no one could number of every tribe, tongue, etc

This group that John sees isn't just those who have gone before John. Notice this is the complete gathering of all who were, who are, and who will be. Nor is it an indistinct kind of general impression but John is literally seeing each and every saints, every person who belongs to God, every nation (including America), every tribe or ethnicity (including German, Norwegian, Mexican), every tongue (including English). Thus if we could look through the eyes of John we would be able to find

1. our own parents who went before us (Irmgard Quade, My mom, all those who went before us, we would see them standing there)
2. even ourselves (we could see ourselves because this all the saints)
3. Our children (Kaylee, and Grace, and Preston)

John saw all of these and so many more that he could never count them. He could never count them but God can and has and does. He knows each and every one of them by name.

And they are all wearing white, which means no more temptation, no more sin. No more trying to do what is right but then the shame and depression as you fail. No more arguments with your family and spouse. No more anger, no more jealous. God has removed all these things and dressed us in the white robes of Christ.

And carrying palm branches, the symbol of the people of God. We are his people and his people alone.

Verses 10 – 12

All these people shout out, “Salvation belongs to our God.” Because we know that we don’t deserve to be in this number but God has given us this gift anyway. So we shout out. The Angels and the four living creatures respond, “Amen” that is yes you are right but not only salvation but also, “blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might.” These things also belong to our God.

And this is the best news because guess what that means, no more fighting about politics at the thanksgiving table. Wouldn’t that be a great thing?

This is great these things belong to God because when all these things are in the hands of men they just ruin it. When we try to earn salvation our way, we have to go hide in the desert and spend months in meditation, and give all our money to the pope. But since Salvation belongs to God He freely gives it to us all. And when men have power they use it to lord it over others and oppress others. But God uses his power to come as a man and die in service to us. And when we have glory we are puffed up in our own pride. But thankfully all these things belong to God forever and ever.

And he is our God and we are His people. So he continues

Verses 13 – 17

Here we have the most specific definition of who these people are?

They came out of the tribulation. Here we think back to our gospel reading. And what is the meaning of the beatitudes? “Blessed are those who mourn” does that mean we need to go out and find reason to mourn, so that then we can receive comfort? No. The point is that when we mourn God will be there to comfort us. Or again “blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” Does this mean that we are saved if we are meek enough? No. We are saved by faith. But in that faith we are persecuted by the world, we are beaten down, we are poor in spirit. But God says in that tribulation do not lose heart because I will bring you out.

Here we see that. We are brought out of the tribulation. And by this also we know that we are the people of God. When we read the beatitudes we don’t read them and think well let me see

do I have a meek enough spirit? Instead when we are kicked around, when we are persecuted, we look at the beatitudes and think, ok the world is treating me like this, but that is ok that is how it treats the people of God and in the end God will bring me out.

This is very opposite the way we think by nature. Normally we think if I am God's, than I will be successful and God will bless me and then when there is trouble we think God must be angry. But here in Revelation and in the beatitudes we learn to think, this trouble this persecution this is what God said the world will be like for believers. So then rather than being afraid we look forward to coming home and receiving in heaven the wonderful blessings of heaven. Which we receive because God has washed us in the blood of the lamb.

There we will be with God forever more and He will protect us and there will be no more sorrow. Amen