

Revelation 7:1-8:5 “The Seven Seals: God’s Sermon/Our Response”  
2 Chronicles 5:2-7:10  
Psalm 132

August 25, 2019

[comment as you read]

5:2 – assembles the elders ... and all the men of Israel

5:7 – the cherubim [four living creatures]

5:13-14 – glory of the LORD fills the house when the ark is brought in

6:1-11 – Solomon preaches his sermon – God has done what he promised

6:12-17 – Solomon prays that God will continue to do what he has promised

[this is the fundamental movement of preaching to prayer –

In the Word of God we hear what God has done;

In prayer we ask God to continue to do what he has promised]

In the petitions we hear a lot of the same language as the judgments of Rev...

7:1-3 – fire comes down from heaven in response to the prayer

7:4-7 – covenant meal – keeping the feast

Our song of response is Psalm 132 –

a song which asks God to remember his promises to David

(very much in keeping with Solomon’s prayer!)

Sing Psalm 132

Read Revelation 7:1-8:5

### **1. The Seven Seals as God’s Sermon (4:1-8:5)**

This is the conclusion of Jesus’s first sermon in the book of Revelation –  
the Sermon of the Seven Seals.

Jesus wants you to know that Judgment Day is coming –

that you are already beginning to see the first stages of that Day –

and so therefore you need to trust *him*.

In Revelation 4-5 we saw the Lord God sitting on his throne,  
holding a scroll – written on both sides, sealed with seven seals.

And we saw in chapter 6 that this scroll contains the purposes of God for history.

As the seals are opened, the scroll unveils the word of the Lord –

the plans and purposes of God for what must take place after this.

(At the end of the book of Daniel,  
Daniel was told to seal up the book until the end.  
Now the seals have opened – and we *hear* what is about to take place.)

But in chapter 5 there was a problem!  
Even in the heavenly liturgy there is a problem!  
Why is there a problem in heaven?  
Because there is *no one* who is worthy to open the scroll.

God is holding in his hand a document that contains his purposes for history.  
But in order for this document to be opened,  
*someone else* must open it.

But no one is found worthy.

In chapter 7, the story also comes to a screeching halt.  
We saw in the sixth seal that judgment day had come –  
but now we find that there is a whole chapter's worth of story  
before judgment day can *actually* come.

The heavenly worship came to a screeching halt because no one was worthy.  
Now earthly history comes to a screeching halt *also* because no one was worthy –  
and so God says that there will be a delay in the final judgment –  
so that salvation can come to all the earth.

Why is it taking so long for Jesus to return?  
Because the nations are not yet saved.

Revelation is a book about the end times – yes –  
but as we saw in Revelation 5,  
the end times began when Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father.  
The whole of the period between the first and second comings of Christ *are* the end times.

And now Jesus – the Lion of the tribe of Judah – has triumphed  
The Lion who has become the Lamb who was slain...

We often focus on how Jesus had to be a true man –  
a true second Adam (and he did!!) –  
but the focus here in Revelation is that he is the true Son of David.  
He is the Lion of Judah – the Lamb who was slain.

**a. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – What Happened When Jesus Sat at the Right Hand of God (6:1-8)**

Each of the sevens in the book of Revelation function as a proclamation of the Word of God.  
Seven seals – seven trumpets – seven bowls.  
And each of the sevens proclaim what will happen  
in between the ascension of Christ and the final judgment.  
In other words, in the heavenly liturgy, God’s sermon consists of all of history.  
Your life – your sufferings – even your death –  
is all a part of God’s purposes for history.

The first four seals showed us that King Jesus sits on the throne.  
And he sends out the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Where is God in the midst of catastrophe?  
God is sitting on the throne.  
Indeed, the command for such catastrophes comes from the scroll that Jesus opens.  
Our Lord Jesus is the one who brings catastrophes on the earth.

In short, “Rev. 6:1-8 describe the operation of the destructive forces  
that were unleashed immediately on the world  
as a result of Christ’s victorious suffering on the cross, his resurrection,  
and his ascent to a position of rule at his Father’s right hand.” (B, 371)

In the ascension of Jesus, there is now a Son of David – a Son of Man –  
sitting at the right hand of God.  
Therefore, the heavenly hosts now go into motion in bringing about  
the kingdom of Jesus!

The four horsemen are agents of God’s wrath  
who bring destruction on the earth.

Conquest, social disruption, economic disruption, and death  
are the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

(But as we saw last week – even Death and Hades obey the voice of Jesus,  
because *Jesus* triumphed over Death and Hades in his resurrection  
and ascension to the right hand of God.

**b. The Souls Under the Altar – Waiting Until Judgment Day (6:9-17)**

Then, in the fifth and sixth seals,  
we saw the centrality of martyrdom – those who have been slain “for the word of God  
and for the witness they had borne.”  
They are under the heavenly altar,  
because this is where Jesus presented his blood before the Father (Heb 9:12).

And so those who share in his sufferings – those who are faithful unto death,  
and die bearing witness to Jesus –  
these souls are now found where Jesus is.

The Christian life is characterized by the cross –  
Paul calls us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

The idea is that the souls under the altar want God to vindicate them –  
by judging the “earth-dwellers”  
(earth-dweller will be used throughout Revelation  
to speak of those who are hostile to God.  
After all, believers are those who are citizens of a heavenly kingdom –  
and so unbelievers are those who are ‘earth-dwellers’ –  
they are earthly-minded, earthly-oriented –  
they care not for heavenly things.)

But the souls under the altar are told to “wait”:  
They are given white robes and they are told to rest a little longer –  
just wait, “until their number is made complete.”

The point for *us* is to encourage us to be faithful unto death.  
God *will* be faithful to his promise to bring vengeance against those who do us harm –  
therefore we know that our patient perseverance in loving our enemies  
with the love of Christ  
will not be in vain!

And the sixth seal shows that the final judgment is Jesus’ answer the plea of the saints!

The Day of the LORD is upon us!  
The wrath of the Lamb!

The message of the scroll is that Judgment Day is coming.  
In the middle of history there will be lots of troubles and afflictions and suffering.  
In the middle of history we will face all sorts of financial hardships.  
In the middle of history there will be wars and famines and diseases.  
In the middle of history Death will continue to haunt humanity.

But King Jesus is on the throne.  
He rules over the heavens and the earth.  
All things – even Death and Hades – obey his command.

## **2. The Interlude – Judgment Day Postponed (7:1-17)**

### **a. I Heard the Number: 144,000 (v1-8)**

*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds*

*of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.*

Notice that the interlude addresses four angels who stand at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth.

What are the four winds of the earth?

You might say – the east wind, the west wind, the north wind, and the south wind. But that doesn't quite capture the image here.

Listen to what the prophet Zechariah says in Zechariah 6:5 – when Zechariah sees the four horsemen in Zechariah 6:1-4, he asks, “What are these, my lord?”

And the angel answered:

“These are going out to the four winds of heaven...”  
(indeed the Hebrew of Zechariah 6 would more naturally be rendered, “these are the four winds of heaven” – which is how the LXX translated it – and which is likely the translation that John would have known).

Either way, the four horsemen and the four winds are closely identified.

They are called the “four winds of the earth” here as a way to highlight their “earthly” destructive nature.

The four horsemen – the four winds of the earth – serve the purposes of our Lord Jesus – but they are not benevolent beings!

They come to wreak havoc on the earth!

So we should see the four winds as the four horsemen – but why are they not allowed to start their destructive work? Look at verses 2-3:

*<sup>2</sup> Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, <sup>3</sup> saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”*

Because Jesus protects his people!

As we saw, the four horsemen were sent out by the exalted Christ when he ascended to the right hand of God.

And yet now – after the sixth seal is opened (the final judgment!) – we start to hear *how* Christ will protect and vindicate his people.

As Christ opens the seven seals on the scroll, he also places his seal on his own people – “the servants of our God.”

In Ezekiel 9, God commands an angel  
to put his mark on the foreheads of all true believers,  
and then commands the ‘the others’ to pass through the city  
and strike down all those who do not have the mark of God.

If that reminds you of the Exodus – and the Passover – it should!  
At the Exodus, God commanded Israel to put his mark on their doorposts.  
Any house that had the mark would be passed over.  
Any house that did *not* have the mark – the firstborn son would die.

In Ezekiel 9, the story had come full circle.  
Israel had failed to live as God’s firstborn son.  
Israel had rebelled against the LORD –  
and so the judgment of Egypt came upon Jerusalem.

Now in Revelation 7, the same story is played out again – in a slightly different way.  
“Don’t bring judgment until the mark of God is placed on God’s people!”

So why are they sealed?  
Plainly they are being protected.  
But we have just heard that the souls under the altar must wait  
until the rest of their brethren have died!  
So they are not being protected from death.

As we keep going through Revelation we will hear more about what this seal does.  
In chapter 9, verse 4, for instance,  
we hear that those who have the seal of God on their foreheads  
are protected from the locust-scorpions.  
In other words, the seal protects God’s children from destruction.

After all, the follower of Jesus does not fear death!  
Our Savior endured the cross for us!  
And he calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.

So the thought of dying a martyr’s death is not a problem for the Christian!

Why do we need the seal of Christ?  
So that we can *endure* faithful to the end!  
We need the mark of Jesus!

Now, in Ezekiel 9, the passage that talked about the “mark” of God –  
the word for “mark” is the Hebrew word ‘taw’ –  
and back in Ezekiel’s day, the Hebrew letter ‘taw’ looked like a cross.

Have you ever wondered why some Christians ‘cross themselves’?

They are repeating the sign of the cross –  
the *mark* of the Christian.  
Now, the Bible never tells us that we have to do it –  
so I won't say that we have to do it! –  
but it *is* possible that the cross is the mark/seal that John is speaking of.  
(And that is why when I anoint with oil with the elders,  
I put the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one for whom we pray).

But then in verse 4, John *hears* the number of the sealed: 144,000.

<sup>4</sup> *And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:*

<sup>5</sup> *12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Gad,*

<sup>6</sup> *12,000 from the tribe of Asher,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,*

<sup>7</sup> *12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Levi,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,*

<sup>8</sup> *12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,*

*12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.*

There are 12,000 from each tribe of Israel

(although a careful reader will note that Dan is missing,  
and Joseph and his son Manasseh are both named!)

The numbers in the book of Revelation function in a symbolic way.

Why 144,000?

Because there were 12 tribes X 12 apostles X 1,000 –  
a 'thousand' refers to a very large cohort.

So 144,000 means a very large cohort that multiplies Israel by the apostles.  
(the apostles being the ones who took the message of Israel's redeemer to the nations!)

But also notice that John *hears* this number.

It does not say that he *sees* 144,000 Israelites! –  
indeed, in the very next verse it says:

**b. I Saw an Innumerable Multitude (v9-12)**

<sup>9</sup> *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,*

In chapter 5, John heard someone say, "Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah" –

and then John looked and saw *a Lamb*.

In the same way, here, John *hears* the number 144,000 Israelites –  
and then John looks and sees a great multitude  
from every nation, from all tribes, peoples, and languages.

Who is the Lion?

He is the Lamb who was slain!

Who are the 144,000 Israelites?

They are the multitude from every nation, from all tribes, peoples, and languages!

And – as you see them here in verse 9 –  
they resemble the souls under the altar –  
they are the fulfillment of the promise of chapter 6, verse 11 –  
that *the number of their fellow servants* would be made complete:

*standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,* <sup>10</sup> *and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

In other words, verse 9 is the answer to the question of chapter 6, verse 17:

“Who can stand” before the Lamb?

Who can stand before the throne of God in the day of judgment?

And the answer is:

“144,000 – otherwise known as a great multitude that no one could number...”  
namely, all those who trust in God and in the Lamb for their salvation!!

And when the great multitude cries out “Salvation belongs to our God  
who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” –

<sup>11</sup> *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,* <sup>12</sup> *saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

The heavenly assembly gives thanks and praise to God  
because God has fulfilled all his promises!

So, *who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?!*

We saw in chapter 6, that the martyrs were clothed in white robes and told to wait,  
until the *number* of their fellow servants and their brothers  
should be complete.



What is that number?

144,000 – otherwise known as a great multitude that no one could number!

But now one of the 24 elders asks John who they are.

And John replies simply: “Sir, you know.”

Please tell me!!

**c. Those Who Endure the Great Tribulation (v13-17)**

*<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” <sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

What is the “great tribulation”?

John has already told us (chapter 1, verse 9)

“I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.”

John made it clear in chapter 1, verse 9

that tribulation and kingdom are not two different periods of history.

Tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance all go together!

The great tribulation is the period of suffering in between the ascension of Christ and the return of Christ.

The great tribulation is this “in between” time –

where we are conformed to the likeness of Christ in his sufferings,  
so that we might also be conformed to his resurrection glory.

The seven seals proclaim a story –

the story of what happened when Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father –  
and how that connects to his coming again at the last day.

The first six seals showed us how Jesus is still in charge of all the mess and trouble of this age.

The interlude of chapter 7 reminds us of how Jesus still protects us

in the midst of all the mess and trouble of this age!

And so chapter 7 concludes with the elder’s commentary on who these people are:

*<sup>15</sup> “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.*

*<sup>16</sup> They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;  
the sun shall not strike them,  
nor any scorching heat.*

*<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and he will guide them to springs of living water,  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

By the way, *this* is why I said last week  
that the souls under the altar include all those who die in faith.  
Because this description of the “great multitude” plainly applies to all Christians who die in faith,  
and not just martyrs.

This is why we say that the souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness  
and do immediately pass into glory;  
and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

### **3. The Seventh Seal and the Response of God’s People (8:1-5)**

#### **a. The Silence of Heaven (v1)**

*When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

...

Silence for 30 seconds is difficult!!  
Now imagine silence for 30 minutes!  
A half hour where everyone is utterly silent!!

The Lord is in his holy temple,  
let all the earth keep silence before him!

When God *is speaking*, no one else should be talking!!  
And when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven...

Why?

Because there was nothing else to say!  
Judgment day has come.  
And when judgment day comes,  
there’s no point in talking.

Some people think that this is the end of the Seven Seals –  
and verse 2 begins the Seven Trumpets –  
but throughout John’s vision,  
there is a certain overlapping quality to the visions.  
No part of the vision fully ends before giving a sneak preview at ‘coming attractions.’

The reason why I am convinced that verses 1-5 is still part of the Seven Seals narrative

is because of what we saw in 2 Chronicles 5-7.

After the word is proclaimed, we hear the prayers and praises of God's people –  
and then, *fire comes from heaven* in response to the prayers of the saints.

And watch what happens here:

**b. The Prayers of the Saints (v2-4)**

<sup>2</sup> Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. <sup>3</sup> And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, <sup>4</sup> and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

Remember our picture:

there is an altar before the throne.

In the temple there were two altars:

a bronze altar for offerings and sacrifices;  
and a golden altar for incense.

In Revelation, these two altars are blended together in the altar before God's throne.

The incense symbolizes the prayers of the saints.

We've already heard from souls under the altar.

They are already here in the heavenlies –

so the “prayers of the saints” does not refer to them.

Rather, these are the prayers of those who are still on earth.

These are *your prayers* – these are *my prayers*.

John is giving us a glimpse of what the heavenly worship looks like –  
so that you can more clearly grasp what is happening *today* –  
as *you* are gathered *here*.

Our prayers ascend to the heavenly altar –

where all the prayers of the saints come before God.

And how does God respond?

**c. Fire from Heaven – Like Sinai/Like Solomon's Temple (v5)**

<sup>5</sup> Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, <sup>[a]</sup> flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Just as the glory of the LORD filled the temple in Solomon's day –  
so also the glory of the LORD is poured out today!

When we pray – our prayers ascend to God.  
Jesus himself presents our prayers before the Father.  
And then he sends fire from heaven in answer to our prayers!!

“Sure, pastor, it’s all nice to spout that pious nonsense!  
But I don’t see any heavenly fire!”

Ah – but remember, this is the tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance that are in Jesus!  
What is tribulation but being conformed to the cross of Christ?  
Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.  
If you are not denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus –  
then why do you expect to see fire from heaven?  
If you are not patiently enduring the afflictions of this age –  
then why do you expect to see the glory of the kingdom?!

It’s not enough to say “Oh, I’ve suffered!!”  
There is nothing magical about suffering!  
*Everyone* suffers.

That’s why John says “tribulation and kingdom and *patient endurance*”!!

Have you endured affliction with *patience* –  
showing kindness and mercy to others in the midst of your afflictions?

Grumbling and whining only make things worse.  
They add misery to misery.  
If you would see the heavenly fire,  
then you must learn to trust God’s promise –  
that he *will* make all things right in the end.

It may be a few hundred years from now!  
You may not live to see it –  
in fact, you probably won’t.  
But if you set your hope on God fixing everything now –  
then you won’t have that patient endurance in the midst of tribulation  
that is the hallmark of the glorious Kingdom of Jesus!