

The Sealing of the 144,000 (I)

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The question which is frequently raised in our day is, how shall the church ever survive in the midst of the corruption and devilish assaults which seem to grow in frequency and intensity. So urgent the question becomes, that we are inclined to frame it within the context of survival and almost overlook the fact that the church must do much more than survive, she must be busy in her calling! We ask, how is it possible that in our day of moral decay, great apostasy in the nominal christian church, persecution of the faithful Christian, social upheaval, wars, natural disturbances, and an increase of God's judgments upon men, that the church of Jesus Christ continues to preach the true Word of God, enjoy the sacraments as Christ has instituted them, and be protected by the discipline which Christ instructed His church to exercise? Why are not the people of God deceived by false doctrine and led away to pursue a life of sensuous pleasure?

The answer we find in the portion of Scripture we would like to consider in this chapter. The people of God are sealed by God Himself and that makes all the difference.

We read of this in Rev. 7:1-8, "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And 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 given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel." Then we have listed the following twelve tribes each having sealed 12,000: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Nephthalim, Manasses, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zabulon, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Chapter seven of Revelation forms an interlude between chapters six and eight. In the preceding chapters, John's attention has been drawn to the vision of the seals. Christ was revealed to John as the One Who was able and willing to take the sealed scroll from the Sovereign God Who sat upon the throne, and to open it and reveal and realize its contents. This brought forth the four Horsemen who in their totality constitute the first four seals. The fifth seal revealed that under the altar were the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God. With a loud voice they cried saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true does thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell in the earth?" They are victoriously delivered from the troubles that mark this present time, they are clothes in white robes of victory. The sixth seal unfolded a terrible array of destruction in nature. Listen, "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together . . . For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" Rev. 6:12-17. The 6 seals taken in their totality reveal that as long as earth continues the purpose of God shall be victorious. The white horse shall ride on and with it shall come wars, bloodshed, troubles in society, and persecution of the saints. In the midst of this world, God continues to speak to the wicked that the great day of His wrath is come when He will call all mankind to account. These same signs assure the church that the end draweth nigh when they shall be delivered. This testimony will be most terrible just prior to the return of Christ when all the forces of nature shall be shaken with judgment.

In the vision recorded in Rev. 7, it is about the time for the opening of the seventh seal. This seventh seal in turn comprises seven trumpets. These are mentioned in Rev. 8:7 through 9:21 (The seventh trumpet becoming in turn seven vials). These seven trumpets are a further revelation of God's terrible judgments upon the world.

In order to understand the sealing of the 144,000 we have to be acquainted somewhat with these trumpets. The first trumpet (Rev.8:7) presents a terrible hail storm with flaming fire which destroys a third part of the vegetation. The second (Rev. 8:8) presents destruction of life in and on the sea brought about by a flaming mountain. The third trumpet brings destruction in the rivers and inland waters (Rev. 8:10, 11). The fourth trumpet is sounded and a third part of the sun, moon, and stars are made dark which in turn affects man's life (Rev. 8:12). The

angel shouts in heaven. “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels which are yet to sound” Rev. 8:13. The fifth trumpet brings forth terrible demons and evil spirits that corrupt the minds of men, (locusts out of the bottomless pit, Rev. (:1-11). The sixth trumpet brings upon mankind great pestilences, terrible wars, famines, etc. which really constitute an increase of the destruction wrought by the horsemen. One third part is destroyed by the trumpets which shows an increase over the one fourth of the seals. With the blowing of the trumpets, things are brought closer to the end and the hand of God is working in a greater measure of judgment upon the unrepentant wicked as they hover on the brink of hell.

In the midst of the vision of seals and trumpets God reveals to John quite a different scene. We can just imagine how terrible this vision must have been. It is frightening to read, but try to imagine one that actually saw all this dramatized in a revelatory dream before his very eyes! John heard the kings of the earth, the great men, and the rich men, and chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man scream from their hiding places, “Mountains and rocks, fall on us! Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”

The four angels which John saw in the beginning of chapter seven were the harbingers of those who would blow the seven trumpets. The wind that was about to sweep over the earth that was restrained by the four angels (indicating that the whole earth is involved, north, south, east, and west), must not be separated from the following seven trumpets, rather the wind will occasion the trumpets to blow. As soon as the four angels will release the wind, the seven angels with trumpets in their hands will blow and the results will follow.

John must have been excited to hear the angel who ascended from the east (the sun rising), shout, “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” At this point in the vision, attention is drawn to the church of Jesus Christ that is on earth. What will happen to them? The opening of the six seals have brought forth terrible judgments of God upon the earth and these will increase as the end comes. The trumpets are about to be blown revealing a still greater judgment and horrible spectre of depravity and death. God knows that the interest of John (who is a servant of God and who has to write these things down in order that he may tell it unto the churches) is centered in the welfare of the church. These words are for us.

The church is sealed by God. This guarantees their safety in the midst of the world that is being plagued and shaken by the righteous God.

We must ask, what does this mean that certain ones are sealed, and that too on their forehead? Scripture repeatedly speaks of the children of God as being sealed. Some examples: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,” Eph. 1:13. “Now he which established us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God: Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts,” II Cor. 1:21, 22. “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption,” Eph.4:30. From these texts we conclude the following: first, that the living God seals them. The angel is His messenger to fulfill His will. He is the source of salvation and apart from Him there is only death and destruction. Secondly, this seal is a proof of ownership. When God through the Holy Spirit seals a person, He designates that the person belongs to Him. This means that the seal that is placed upon the child of God has its source in the sovereignly free counsel of divine election. Eternally, God sealed unto Himself His people, through the decree of election. Still more, these elect are sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Their mark is really the blood of atonement. This was typically manifest in the Old Testament when Israel stroked the blood-mark upon the doorpost, (Ex. 12:21-23). God sealed His own with blood. This is also signified in the sacrament of Holy Baptism in the New Testament church. The mark of the sealing is essentially the verification of being purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thirdly, the seal distinguishes a person, it separated the one sealed from those who are not sealed. For this reason the mark is placed upon the forehead. This represents the fact that the sealing of the child of God by the Holy Spirit is not only internal, it also becomes manifest in the world. Surely, according to the passages quoted, the Holy Spirit is the One Who seals the people of God within their hearts by the preaching of the gospel. He gives a new heart of flesh which replaces an old heart of stone. He gives us revelation so that we know God. He fills us with divine love so that we respond to God. By the working of the Holy Spirit we are sealed in an unbreakable and unchangeable eternal covenant of friendship with God. This sealing becomes manifest in our life. In the vision, the seal is on the forehead thereby representing the visibility of

the seal. You can tell who is sealed! You can see who are the children of God by their walk of faith in the midst of an evil generation.

Finally, it is a seal of safety. This follows from what we have just said. Notice, the fact that the 144,000 are sealed does not mean that they will not suffer the plagues, the judgments common to all mankind. The church in the last days will not escape the judgments of God like Israel did in Egypt. Scripture is replete with warning concerning the Great Tribulation which the church will suffer: Matt. 24:19-24, II Thess. 2:2, II Peter 3:18, Rev. 3: 11, 12. The sealing by the Holy Spirit indicates that the salvation of the church is God's work which He performs by the Holy Spirit and no power or evil force shall ever destroy the work of God. He is faithful and whatever He begins He finishes for the glory of His name.