

SEQUOYAH HILLS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Seals: The End in Mind”**

**Rev. Rachel Hamburger**

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*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,*

*“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

*And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,*

*“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

*Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.*

*They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

*When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.*

*Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.*

*Revelation 7:9-8:4*

Have you ever been reading a book, and you just have to peek at the final pages just to see how things will end? Is it a sad ending, a happy ending, will the good side win? Will it be resolved in the end? The Book of Revelation calls us to keep **the end in mind**. As we end today this 3-

chapter series, we summarize a bit. We've looked at the opening of the seals on God's scroll, the judgments and calamities that were, and would happen on a rebellious earth, yet an earth that God loves.

And we saw in the first verses of chapter 7 a pause in the unfolding events, so that very seal of the Living God (the seal we know as the Holy Spirit) would be put on believers, marking them as belonging to God! As we may remember, the number of people marked was precise - 144,000, carefully counted!

We pick up at Chapter 7, verse 9. [read scripture]

From what was happening on earth with the 144,000 marked/sealed, the vision turns to eternity. Apostle John sees (in this vision) an uncountable number standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, waving palm branches, waving them in victory. He's told that these standing before the throne are those who've come out of the great ordeal, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. *What does this mean?* It appears that these are the martyrs, those who lived out their faith, and died for their faith in a very hostile world; they are likely the very ones, the 144,000, who were marked/sealed on earth, who've come through, who've overcome, who are now standing before the throne, in eternity. The book of Revelation, we find, goes back and forth between earth and eternity.

"In some ways," writes William Pender, former pastor at First Presbyterian Knoxville, "the book of Revelation is like the action of a student pilot practicing touching down on a landing strip: the plane touches down, bounces back up into the sky, circles the landing area, touches down again, and the cycle is repeated. In other words, instead of a linear development from one point to the next, *the book develops as a spiral around the reality of the victorious Lamb upon the throne.*"

And there is every sense, that along with the martyrs, this multitude before the throne is filled with anyone and everyone who has believed in Jesus, those who have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, who've truly received the gift, who are and will be saved not by their death or our death, but by His, all who have lived life in the Lord, through sufferings, perplexities, injustices, heartaches, and joys with Jesus as our Savior, and hope. They and we will be there. Maybe we will be amazed at all who are there.

One physician writes, "Early in my career as a doctor, I went to see a patient who was just coming out of anesthesia. Far off church bells were sounding. The woman murmured, 'I must be in heaven.' Then she saw me. She said, 'I guess not.'"

John says this multitude standing before the throne and before Jesus were from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. I love this part! Tribes.

As a young person I was deeply moved by the book *Peace Child*. It is the story of Don and Carol Richardson and their young son who travelled to Papua New Guinea to share the Gospel with the Sawi tribe, a very warring, savage people, their villages battling continually. The Sawis had never heard anything about God before, no church, no missionaries, no VBS, not even a portion of Scripture, and no comprehension of a personal God, who loved them. All they knew was treachery and war. Don and Carol worked tirelessly to communicate. They prayed and

prayed, but couldn't get through. Until one day, they found an opening. There was a long tradition within that warring tribe. Peace (in their tradition) could only be made if one village, specifically one mother and father, would give their infant to their enemy village not to kill or harm, but simply to give that child over to them for life. That child was called "The Peace Child," and through that giving, anguishing as it was for the parents, peace was made.

Suddenly there was a connection for this tribe to what God had done in his Son, Jesus for the very people on earth who had rejected him. Suddenly John 3:16 made more sense to them. *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* And slowly, that Sawi tribe was changed, and made part of Jesus' one flock, on earth, and for eternity.

And the people (John sees) before the throne are celebrating with loud cries, "God Saves! Salvation belongs to our God, and to the Lamb!" Why are they worshipping, singing? Because their lives, our lives have been completely changed by the grace of our Lord! "Christians sing," author Eugene Peterson writes: "They sing in the desert, they sing in the night, they sing in prison, they sing in the storm .. and evil pales with that singing!"

I'll never forget how my dad, for as long as I can remember, sang that old hymn "For All the Saints." He sang it like there was no tomorrow. "For all the saints, who from their labors rest, who Thee by faith before the world confessed, Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed, Alleluia! O blessed communion, fellowship divine, we feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine, alleluia. From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast, through gates of pearl streams in the countless host, singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Alleluia."

"The song Christians sing has a different ring on earth from what it has in heaven," writes Dietrich Bonhoeffer. "On earth it is the song of those who believe, in heaven the song of those who see."

And John's vision continues to unfold in verse 15. "And the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd, and he will guide them to the springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." No passage is more comforting as the transition comes, as our earthly life ebbs away, and we step into the fullness of eternity.

Revelation 21 has similar words: "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See I am making all things new."

Although this all is still in the future for us, for the many who struggle on earth, it is the future that guides our life now. That future gave the pilgrims courage as they came to these shores, to practice their faith, and to build this nation at great cost. It gives us courage, even as a young man this past week stood outside that Surfside, Florida Condo, wondering if rescuers would find his 91-year-old Grandmother. As the reporter interviewed him, there was concern on his face, but also a clear Christian hope. He said, "Whatever happens, she's OK!"

The message of the book of Revelation, could it be that God holds this dark earth; He holds His people; He's working to bring all of life to Himself? In His hands, it's going to be more than OK.

Last evening, I was walking by the river down here in Sequoyah Park. Along the path there was a small group of people preparing for a small wedding. I kept walking and several minutes later ran into a young couple; they had a map in hand and looked concerned as to whether they were going to find the wedding, and if they were going in the right direction. I said, "if you are looking for the wedding, it's just about 4 minutes down the trail; keep going!"

It occurred to me that this is the message of the Book of Revelation. When we are in Jesus, *Keep Going, Keep Going ...* there is Life ahead!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.