

Revelation 7: 1-8; "The Seal of the Living God", Sermon # 62
in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness",
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 1st, 2007,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We are still continuing to look at the acts of mercy and judgment brought by our God and His Christ which fall under the sixth seal. The events under this seal, that we have looked at so far, refer the latter time period of the Pagan Roman Empire and Christ's bringing an end to the intense persecutions by the Roman Emperors. The wrath of the Lamb fell upon this whole wicked policy and the men who perpetrated it and the people that went along with it. They preferred the worship of false gods and the worship of mere men to the worship of the true and living God and His Son Jesus Christ. When Constantine became Emperor over the whole empire in 323 A.D. then a great change took place in the policy of the government of the Empire that lasted for the next three hundred and fifty years. It was; that Constantine and others after him made Christianity the religion of the Empire. There were attempts by some in power, after Constantine, to bring back persecution as a policy of state again, such as in the time of Emperor Julian, but they failed. Gilles gives 9 ways that Julian, who is called "the apostate", tried to go back to that policy. I will not list them here. But he utterly failed, in his reign of just less than 2 years. In fighting a war against the Persians, Gilles says, he "came within sight of the Persian army, and had a hopeful prospect of victory; when venturing too far, without his armor, he was on a sudden struck with a horseman's lance,, which grazing on his arm, passed in at his side." "The lance being two-edged, he cut his fingers while he strove to pull it out, and fainting with loss of blood and spirits, he sunk down on his horse's neck." "It is reported by Theodoret, that Julian, finding himself mortally wounded, took a handful of his blood, and throwing it up in the air, cried, "Thou hast overcome, O Galilean!" "Sozoman say, 'He threw up his blood into the air, as looking to Christ and accusing Him as the author of his death."

So, in thinking about the history of what happened in regard to this policy of Emperor's, we find that it was not be re-instated. Instead, Christianity was brought into great favor in the Empire and many people embraced it. John Gilles says, "In 324 A.D Constantine "immediately restored tranquility to the Christians, and directed orders to the governors of the provinces, whereby they recalled the banished, released those who had been confined, restored those who had been unjustly deprived of their offices and estates, set at liberty the imprisoned, and those who had been condemned to mines or other slavery, and bountifully rewarded many of them." "He also took strict care for the observation of the

Lord's day, ordering it to be set apart for prayer and holy exercises, that all persons as far as possible, might be induced to observe it; and that the commanders of his army might set them a good example, by attending the emperor in his devotions of that day." "He wrote a large epistle to the provincial governors of the East, wherein he earnestly exhorted all his subjects to embrace Christianity."

Truly it was a great change of events for the Christians. But along with the relief from persecution, and the peace that this brought to Christians in the Empire, came a great temptation in another direction. Now that the Empire was everywhere becoming favorable to Christians, there was a temptation to worldliness. There was the temptation to compromise with the truth of God's word, and the holiness that it commanded. This was the temptation that came to the Christians of that day. There was the real danger that the truth of the Word of God, which had been suffered for, for so many years; the testimony of Jesus, might be compromised. This is what we will begin to examine this afternoon and note the dangers to ourselves who are tempted by worldliness and who know little of physical persecution. The Lord Jesus Christ is strong and mighty. He is our strong Redeemer. Through Him alone can we overcome worldliness and error in doctrine. That is what characterizes this 2nd period of the Roman Empire and its influence upon the Church of Jesus Christ. What I want to do in this sermon this afternoon; is to first of all, show that this "angel" spoken of here in verse 2 is our Lord Jesus Christ. 2ndly- I want to open up Christ's command to the angels not to harm the earth, the sea and the trees. And 3rdly- I want to help you to understanding Christ's sealing the one hundred forty four thousand of the tribes of Israel. Our Lord Jesus is mighty to save and mighty to keep His people through all the many dangers, toils, and snares through which they will come before they reach heaven.

1st- Let me begin by telling you why I think that Christ is the Angel ascending from the East.

When Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem and the Wise Men came seeking Him, they said to Herod, "We have seen His star in the east and we have come to worship Him. Jesus Christ is the Sun of Righteousness who arises with healing in His wings, it says in the book of Malachi. The East is the direction from which the sun rises, and therefore it is a word used symbolically here of Christ's glory arising upon nations and peoples. Turn with me to Ezekiel 43 and we will find some very interesting words. Ezekiel is having a vision. And in verse 1 it says, "Afterwards he brought me to the gate, that gate that faces toward the East." "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the East." "His voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with His glory." Verse 4 continues the description, "And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the East." "The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the

inner court, and behold the glory of the Lord filled the temple." Ezekiel is here receiving a vision of the New Testament Church. Verse 6 says, "Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood behind me." "And he said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever.'" "No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on the high places." The reason that this was said, was because Ezekiel was given the privilege to prophetically see the design of the Lord for His New Testament Church, which was to take away all their iniquities and bring grace to each repentant heart.

If you turn over to the next chapter, chapter 44, and verse 1, you find these words. "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut." What is being prophetically indicated here, is that it is the Lord Jesus who is the only one who could accomplish the work of redemption. And any man's trying to go that same route to enter and become a part of this Church is shut. No man can do what Christ has done, or can claim that his works that he does, or the offerings that he brings, will find acceptance with God. Only Christ's Person coming into heaven itself, the greater Sanctuary, with His own blood, could accomplish redemption. We, by faith, do enter in this temple, but not from the East. His glory is not our glory. He alone is sinless. He alone is perfect in righteousness and holiness.

There is another reason that I believe that this angel is our Lord Jesus. It is because of the words, "having the seal of the Living God." It is very apparent that only the Lord Jesus could have this seal. James Durham says, "the keeper of the seal among men had his office next to the king, whereby he has absolute power to exempt from trials or not; which is upon the matter, equivalent to that of His having the keys of the house of David committed unto Him." John Gill says that the Lord Jesus has this seal because He has the impress of deity upon Him, being the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image or character of His person; having a testimony, an authentic proof and demonstration of His being the Son of God, of His being the true and living God; as also a commission from God, as Mediator, being sealed by him; and having all power and authority from Him, to seal and secure the people which were given unto him, and for that purpose he now came."

2ndly- I want to open up Christ's command to the angels not to harm the earth, the sea and the trees.

The Lord Jesus not only has the seal of the living God, but He has a higher place than the angels. He is the head over all principality and authority. The

angels here are pictured as "standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree." It may indeed be true that the angels have control assigned to them over the winds in a physical sense in this world. It says in Psalm 78: 49, when God came in judgments against Israel because of their sin, "He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them. And, in another Biblical episode, Job's children were killed by a wind that came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people." This was no doubt evil angels that did this foul deed. So when we come to the first verse of Chapter 7 of the book of Revelation, and it says that "After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree," we must try to understand what the wind means in this verse. The angels are holding the four winds of the earth. These are angels of judgment who are doing Christ's bidding.

As we look at the way the word wind is used in prophecy in the Scriptures we find that the wind is a picture word which can refer to God's judgments which he brings upon the ungodly and the nation that they live in. Isaiah 27: 7 and 8 show us this. "Has He struck Israel as He struck those who struck him?" "Or has He been slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?" "In measure, by sending it away, You contended with it." "He removes it by His rough wind in the day of the east wind." "Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be covered; and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin; when He makes all the stones of the altar like chalkstones that are beaten to dust." "Wooden images and incense altars shall not stand." These are the winds of the Lord's judgments upon a people who would not repent. I like what the King James says in 8. "He stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind." It means that in all of His judgments toward His Elect, God orders them and moderates the force of them that His people will be able to endure them and learn from them. With the wicked, He is not concerned with those things. Here, in Revelation 7, the angels are pictured as "standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds, that they should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree." The earth, we have seen represents the Roman Empire. The sea, I believe, would represent the many people who were professing Christianity during that time. And the trees are the professed Christians who lived at that time, whether they were true Christians or whether they were false professors. These were the ones who were going to be affected by the wind blowing upon them, which is what the Lord was having restrained at this point. The whole Roman Empire would be affected by these judgments that were coming, and the Church of Jesus Christ would be affected adversely as well, by these winds, but they would not be overcome. These winds

would, according to Christ's determination, be winds of judgment against Satan's strategies in the policies of the Roman Empire, but they would not destroy or overcome His purpose in terms of the salvation of His Elect, or ultimately defeat the progress of truth and the gospel among the nations. They would be, however, winds which affect adversely those who professed to be Christians and yet would were not, and who were tainted with errors in their doctrine. The new and revised strategy of Satan was to undermine the truth of the gospel, in regard to who Jesus Christ was Himself, and thus destroy the forward progress of the gospel. This was his grand strategy of this second time phase of the Roman Empire. It has been his grand strategy ever since. I believe that it related primarily to false doctrine and false teaching, as it states in Ephesians 4: 14, where it says, "We should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Those who bring these winds of doctrine are the heretics and false prophets who are led by Satan to try to put something else in the place of the true doctrine of the gospel and holding fast to Christ and His Word. Listen to how Jude describes them in his epistle. Verse 12 says, "These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves." "They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots, raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." This would be how Satan would oppose Christ's judgments during and after the reign of Constantine for the next 350 years. He would bring an inundation of heresies.

Now in closing, thirdly, I would like to help you to understand Christ's sealing of the 144,000 servants.

In regard to our text; the holding back of the winds of Christ's judgment upon the Empire, by His good angels, is opposed by Satan. But it is a relief for awhile to true Christians. The four angels of our text are good angels working in Christ's service. They have been "granted" the ability to "harm the earth, the sea, and the trees." All that is false will be ultimately be destroyed by the Lord's judgments. All that is true will ultimately be established. This does not mean that the Lord's servants would not suffer, but it does mean that Christ's true servants must first be sealed. They would be need to preserved through what was now to come upon them through the next strategy of Satan in regard to the Roman Empire. I like what Andrew Fuller says in his commentary on Revelation at this place. He says, "And true it is that during the life of the Emperor Constantine there was not only a season of peace, but considerable accessions to the Christian profession." "On this account, it seems, Mr. Lowman and others have been led to interpret this sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads of the numerous conversions made in those times to the Christian faith." "But sealing denotes, not conversion, but the preservation of those who are converted." "Those who were sealed did not by this

become the servants of God, but they are supposed to be such already." "Instead of signifying the enlargement of the Church, the object is to prevent it from being utterly swept away." I agree with this analysis, and I hope to open up the truth of it more in coming weeks. The one hundred and forty four thousand, sealed from all the tribes of the children of Israel, represents the total number of the Elect of Christ's Church during this second time period of the Roman Empire in New Testament times, a number which is represented by 12 times 12. The 12 tribes of Old Testament Israel multiplied by the 12 apostles of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. This is the true New Testament Church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, who shall be preserved through this time period and all time periods of this age. O Christian, you have every reason to praise God this afternoon that our Lord Jesus Christ not only saves from sin, but who also will "deliver you from every evil work and preserve you for His heavenly kingdom." He has the seal of the Living God. (2 Timothy 4: 18) Amen.