

Title: "Behind the Seal."

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Revelation 7:2-4

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Lesson: *We have been sealed by God in our baptism. We have died to sin and have been reborn to new life in Jesus Christ. We remember those who have gone before us but we also look forward to the day when we will join them in the presence of God.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Our message this morning comes from Revelation 7, starting in verse 2:

²Then 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, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

What images do the following words invoke: Eight track players. Rotary telephones. Fax machines. Carbon Paper. Phone book. AOL? If you are at least my age, you have not only used these items but understand the impact that they once had on everyday life. And, for those that are a bit younger, you have probably heard of these but the image that they paint for you is very superficial, academic even. You know what they were, how they were used, and you *maybe* could imagine the importance, but can't truly appreciate these items like we can. To level the playing field here is a list of items that none of us should have experience with: pony express, chariot, sundial, quilted armor. None of us can truly understand the depth of meaning behind these items. We know what they are, we can probably picture them in our minds and understand their uses, and we probably even know their importance, but we just can't personally *relate* to them; we can't *really* understand how life was impacted by them.

I bring this up because there is a term that is used in our reading today that I believe has lost its depth of meaning. It is **seal** and it occurs many, many times throughout the bible - both in the old and new testaments. Here is just one simple example from Esther (8:8):

⁸But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked."

Based just on this passage alone we can understand the force behind the king's seal and can imagine what it must have meant to the population in those days, but we simply cannot fully appreciate the reality of it.

One of the more famous examples occurs in the New Testament. After Jesus was crucified and buried, the chief priests and Pharisees complained to Pilate that someone might steal the body. He replies with an order to take Roman soldiers and make the tomb as secure as possible. "So, they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard (Matthew 27:66)."

You see, that little piece of wax did a whole bunch of things. It guaranteed that the body in the grave was that of Jesus, and that body would not be removed. It had been placed there in death and would remain there forever. And the world knew that it would not be removed because breaking the seal would release the full power and force of the entire Roman empire. It also announced to the world that what lay behind it was the property of Rome. Rome owned what it laid claim to. And it laid claim to the lifeless body of Christ.

That seal was a statement of complete ownership, protection, and authority by a power greater than any other in the world. That seal meant something to Rome, and it meant something to the early Christian church. It meant that whatever the seal was attached to was untouchable.

So how powerful an image it must have been for the early Christ followers to hear that they, too bore a seal - but not one from Rome! One from God! In their baptism they had received it and so now they were owned by God, protected by God, and backed by his full power and strength.

After Easter, when they saw Christ alive, they knew that Rome's seal wasn't strong enough to keep Jesus *in* the tomb. They knew that Rome's seal wasn't powerful enough to keep their sins *out* of the tomb. Rome's seal had lost all power and all significance now that Jesus was alive. He had broken through the enemy's seal. He had made it powerless. He had removed from Rome all claim and ownership of his people and instead adopted them into his family as brothers and sisters. And with that adoption came the full protection from heaven.

Nothing can stop the power and will of God. He will break every seal to find his lost people and lead them back to a life under the cross. And we can take refuge in his strength and protection. We can be assured that we, too receive the same seal of the Holy Spirit in our own baptism and that it too carries the full force and weight and protection of God, almighty. **We are sealed. We are his.**

Because of his seal we are absolutely certain of our salvation and faith because it rests on that work of Christ. Just as the broken seal on the tomb was a forward-looking sign that announced the resurrection of our Lord, the seal of God upon our foreheads is a forward-looking sign announcing the resurrection we will experience when Christ returns.

And we know, therefore, because of the broken seal on the tomb, because of the seal upon our foreheads, because of the promise of salvation, we can stand firm in our assurance that we belong to God. *We are* what lies behind his seal. *We are* what he protects. We are his. And we carry that with us, in faith all the days of our lives.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day and it is a time where we take a moment and reflect backwards on the lives of those who once lived in the *promise* of Christ's salvation but now live in the *reality* of it. We mourn for those that we have lost and even wish that they would still be here with us here, today. But we also know that they have received the seal of God in their baptism, the same seal that we received in

ours, and that they now rejoice in presence of him. And so today we rejoice with them, knowing that we will one day join them.

So, this morning, I would like to end with prayer and then offer a moment of stillness, a moment where you can reflect back on the lives of those you loved who have gone before you. But where you can also take a moment to remember your baptism, the moment when God placed his seal upon your forehead and called you his own.

Let us pray

Lord, today we remember our loved ones, those who have died and gone before us. We rejoice with them and look forward to the day when we, too can live in your presence. Lord, today we reflect on our own baptism, our own death and new life. You have called us your own and have placed your seal upon us. Help us live each day in recognition of your blessing and continually return to the waters of our baptism as a reminder of your forgiveness and our salvation. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

<MOMENT OF SILENCE>