

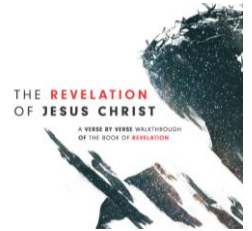
Title: Revelation, Part 15: We Serve an Awesome God

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 7:1-17

Big idea: John's vision in Revelation 7 encourages us with 8 powerful attributes of God.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 7: 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.



A few weeks ago, I shared a quote from well-known author-pastor, A. W. Tozer, who has been with the Lord for some time. Here is the quote I shared. Just read it to yourself.

[What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. \(A.W. Tozer\)](#)

What are the implications of that quote for your life?

Well, this quote captures the profound truth that our mental image of God and heart experience with him profoundly affects everything about us—our daily decisions, what we prioritize, our relationships, our use of money, how we care for our bodies...the list is endless.

Today as we continue our study in the book of Revelation, we're going to see some amazing qualities about the God of the Bible.

Here's our [big idea](#). [John's vision in Revelation 7 encourages us with 8 powerful attributes of God.](#)

If you want to read more from Tozer, this quote came from this great book.

A quick review. In this vision John has that he records in the book of Revelation, he describes these images as Jesus opened each seal of this scroll. Each image represents events that will happen as we approach the end times, including war between nations, civil war, famine, disease, and increased persecution of Christians.

We learned [5 insights can help us face the future with confidence](#):

- [Insight 1: Life can be unfair and difficult.](#)
- [Insight 2: We don't surprise God with our difficult questions.](#)
- [Insight 3: God will vindicate his followers who have suffered for their faith.](#)
- [Insight 4: Stay the course.](#)
- [Insight 5: We don't need to fear the future.](#)

John stopped before he described Jesus opening seal 7 and we come today to what we might call an interlude or pause between the opening of the first 6 seals and the opening of the seventh. In the next few chapters there are three such interludes. So, this is interlude 1. Next week in chapter 8 we'll see the final seal being broken.

This is one of the most difficult passages to understand and biblical scholars interpret it in various ways. I will give you my best understanding of it. There are:

1. [A warning that terrible tribulation will come.](#)
2. [An assurance that God will be with us.](#)
3. [A promise that all sorrow will one day end.](#)

Let's set up this passage with a short clip from the Bible Project <https://bibleproject.com/learn/revelation/> [7.13-8.08](#)

Ok, follow along now as I read it.

Rev. 7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³ “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” ⁴ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

He then list 12 tribes of Israel with each having 12,000.

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” ¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” ¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ 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 spread his tent over them.

¹⁶ Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat upon them,
nor any scorching heat.
¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;
he will lead them to springs of living water.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

You probably have some questions about some of these statements.

- What’s the seal?
- What’s the meaning of the 144,000?
- What’s the great tribulation?

Rev. 7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.

Jewish people believed that God had delegated his authority over various features of nature (including winds) to angels under his command. And in their ancient view winds had both a positive and negative effect. They knew about the hot winds that would blow off the desert in Palestine called sirocco winds. They would come from the Sahara and reach hurricane speeds in N. Africa and Southern Europe.

Wind was a frequent metaphor for divine punishment. Apparently these angels had the God delegated power for causing destruction in the judgment days and also the power to delay it.

Ancient people believed that the winds which came from due north, south, east and west were all favourable winds, but that those which blew diagonally across the earth were harmful. That is why the angels are described at the corners of the earth.

Another angel shows up with a seal and tells the other angels to not do anything until a seal is put on the foreheads of 144,000 people. What is that?



First, what is this seal? It's not this kind of seal but what this kind of *seal* implies.

A seal in antiquity was created when the person, often a person of wealth or prominence like a king, would melt wax on a document and press their signet ring or hand seal into the wax. This seal implied these things.

1. An official who wished to delegate his authority for a task to somebody else would allow that subordinate to use his signet ring.
2. Secondly, important documents were sealed to authenticate their contents and prevent tampering. Last week we looked at the seven seals on the scroll that Jesus is reading.
3. Third, this seal would spiritual protection during the last days from the judgements and woes that were to come.
4. Fourth, it meant ownership or possession. This reaches back into the OT.

In Exod. 28 the bible tells us that twelve stones were placed on the high priest's breastplate and the names of the 12 tribes would be inscribed on them. The 12 tribes were descendants of the Biblical patriarch Jacob, also known as Israel, and collectively they formed the Hebrew nation. But by the first century these 12 tribes no longer existed as separate entities.

On these stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes, and these stones were described in the OT like "the engravings of a seal" (28:21). The names of each of the twelve tribes showed who was a member of the Israelite covenant community¹

What is the meaning for us? This seal in Revelation is not some physical marking on a human forehead, but is spiritually symbolic of what a physical seal represents...authenticity, authority, ownership (protection) and the privileges that go with such a seal. The Scripture tells us that God spiritually seals his followers as his by giving us his Holy Spirit.

God's seal of the spirit authenticates us as a true follower, and it includes all the blessings and privileges of being a Christian. It is His promise of protection from spiritual harm, not physical harm.

2 Corinthians 1:22 [He has] set his seal of ownership on us and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

So the seal is the Holy Spirit given to us at our spiritual birth. In this verse the Holy Spirit is the way God affirms we are his and guarantees that we will one day fully experience eternal life with him.

This seal is something others can see on our bodies. It's not a physical marking so what's evidence of it.

Eph. 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

We grieve the Holy Spirit when we disobey the Lord, don't act like who we are. So, the evidence of being sealed by the spirit, being a true Christian, is seen through consistent character and conduct, a consistent attitude and action that reflects that we love Jesus and others.

And just as a letter courier taking a sealed letter from one person to the next would see this seal as representing authenticity, your character and conduct is what others see and that character and conduct reveals that we are the real deal, or not.

Can some people fake it? Sure, but not consistently.

¹ Beale, G. K., & Campbell, D. H. (2015). *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (p. 146). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

This sealing idea would reassure these early persecuted Christians that God had a special care and concern for them and that he would bring them into his presence forever.

So what about these 144,000 with the group divided into groups of 12,000 by tribes?

⁵ From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000...

Biblical scholars say this is either referring to actual Israel (these 144,000 are Jews who have come to Christ and are special missionaries) or it refers to Israel being identified as the entire Christian Church. I think that in John's mind he is equating the true Jews with followers of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile. And, keep in mind, that apparently in the end times a large number of Jewish people will come to faith in Jesus.

So, I believe this list refers to the complete church (12x12x1000 indicated completeness). I believe numbers are symbolic of the sealing of all true followers of Jesus rather than literal.

This chapter, this first interlude pictures the people of God at the beginning and at the end of their journey. The beginning is their conversion when they are sealed in 7:1–8, and the end is in heaven before the throne in verses 9–17.

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

So, 144,000 can't be the number of people in heaven as Jehovah's Witnesses claim. There will be so many people who have come to Christ over the ages that you can't count them. This is a great picture of all believers from diverse nations, and cultures, and languages being together one day in perfect peace and harmony. When we've had our combined language services and this place is packed, it gives us a taste of what that will be like.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

The white robes symbolize salvation that comes from the work of Christ through his shed blood, which cleanses us from sin.

Palm branches were emblems of victory and used in joyous times like Jesus' triumphal procession into Jerusalem a few days before the crowds turned against him. Branches of the palm-tree were carried by the victors in the athletic contests of Greece and Rome, and in triumphal processions. And various kinds of flowers were thrown in front of the victor during parades.

And then he describes a time of great worship as everybody in this vision gives God the highest kind of praise. And then an interesting interaction between John and

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In other words, sir, you are more informed than I am on this matter. I wait for your answer.

The bible describes three kinds of tribulation: ongoing by simply living out your faith in a hostile world, intense tribulation on the final generation of Christians, and a final time of tribulation upon unbelievers when God judges them.

This is probably the very last series of woes that immediately precede the end.

Matthew 24.21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

And he's probably referring to martyrs here. He writes about the future blessings in heaven.

15 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 spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

This tent is not like a camping tent. Rather, the Jews connected this word tent or dwell or tabernacle with what was called the Shechinah glory, the visible presence of God. In the OT the portable temple was called the tabernacle. God showed himself as a cloud over it by day and a fire over it by night. He reminded them of his presence and guidance as he spread over them, spread his tent over them, tabernacled with them.

In heaven there will be no more suffering from hunger and thirst and exposure to the elements, although we in the west usually don't deal with those issues as other places in the world.

For the OT believers who were slaves and faced starvation and thirst and the sun beating down on them as they labored, they looked for God's promised deliverance.

Isaiah 49:10 They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.

He closes with this.

17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

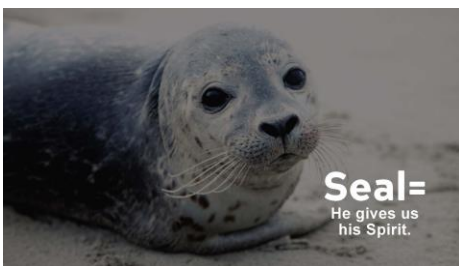
Jesus, the lamb of God has become the ultimate shepherd and will lead us to soul refreshment and remove all sorrow from us.

Psalms 23 is a beautiful description of our shepherd.

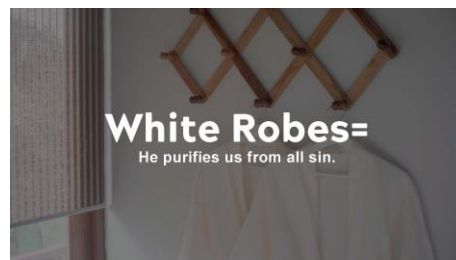
Just imagine that every single need in your life right now being met. Imagine everything you lack you now have. That is heaven, that is God's promise for every follower of Jesus.

So, let's go back to our big idea. [John's vision in Revelation 7 encourages us with 8 powerful attributes of God.](#)

I'm going to give you one image at a time that represents that attribute and then add the statement that explains the corresponding attribute the image illustrates for us. Then I'll combine these images into two slides with four on each and ask you to do some self-evaluation.



1. Seal - He gives us his Spirit.



2. White robes - He purifies us from all sin.



3. Palm branches - He fills us with joy.



5. Shepherd - He gently guides us.

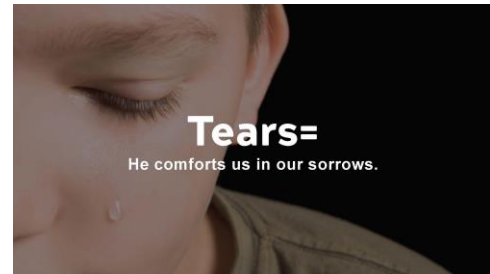


7. Water - He satisfies the thirst of our souls.

4. Lamb - He sacrificed his life for us.

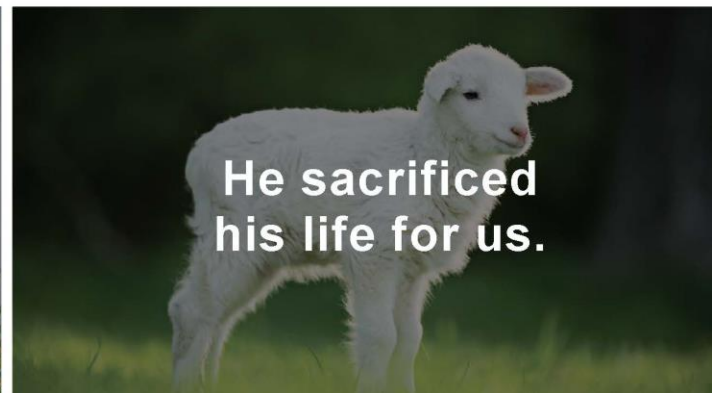
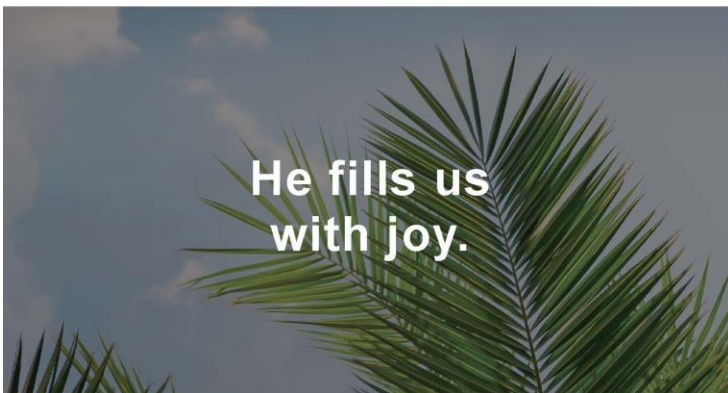
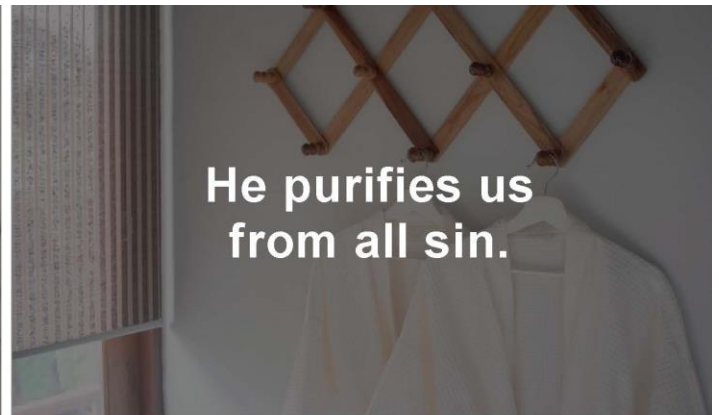
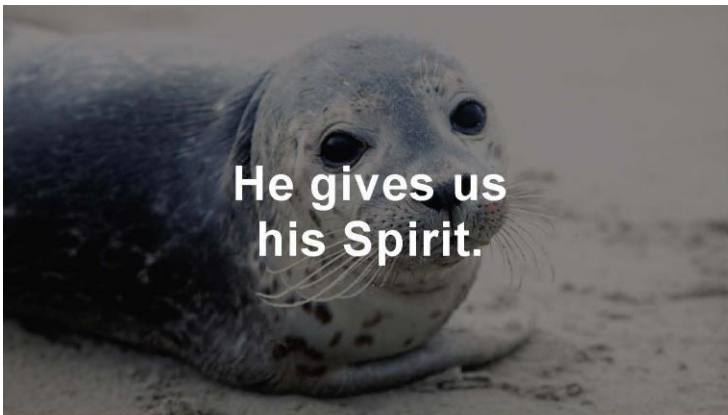


6. Tent - He is perpetually with us.

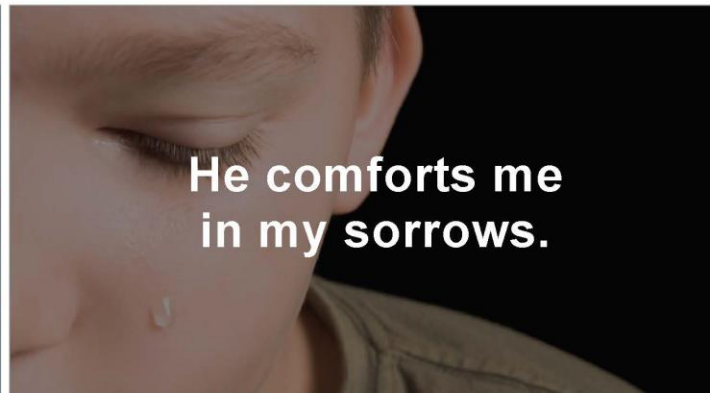
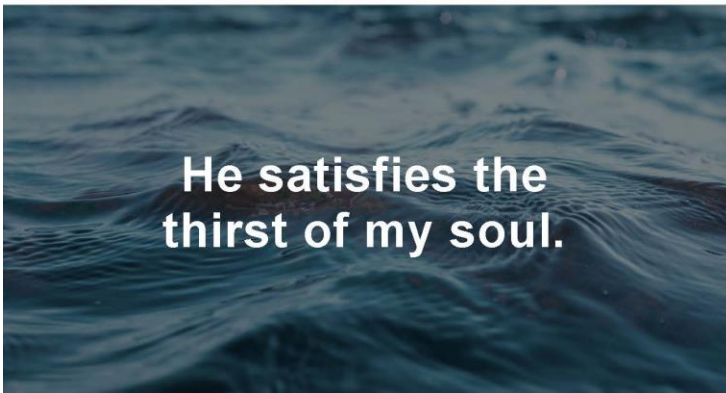
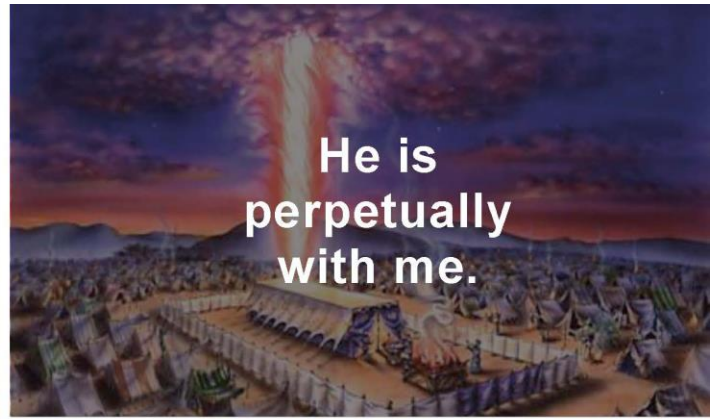


8. Tears - He comforts us in our sorrows.

I'm going to put these up four at a time and I'd like you to read them to yourself and ask yourself this question, "What is one attribute that I need to believe or experience more deeply?"



- He gives me his Spirit.
 - He purifies me from all sin.
 - He fills me with joy.
 - He sacrificed his life for me.



- He gently guides me.
 - He is perpetually with me.
 - He satisfies the thirst of my soul.
 - He comforts me in my sorrows.

Those two you picked, commit those to prayer this week and ask the Lord to drive deep into your soul that truth about Him.