

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 2nd May 2010

## 'Past Imperfect Future Tense' – 'The Church Secure in God'

### Revelation 7: 1 – 8: 1

#### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

**Chapter 7** is an interlude where what we see is the sealing of God's servants and that they have no need to dread the judgements of the last times. For John this context is important because the experience of first century Christianity was that they looked for the end and the imminent return of Jesus, and in fact what came about was the church. The chapter opens with 4 angels standing at the 4 corners of the earth. These are an alternative symbol of the 4 horsemen of ch 6. John is drawing on **Zech. Ch. 6** and his vision of 4 chariots. The destructive fury of the winds represents the whole manifestation of judgement symbolised by the seals. John's attention is focused on the sealing of God's servants; this corresponds to **Ezekiel 9:4** where God puts his seal on his people's foreheads. As Christians today we too are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit cf. **2 Corinthians 1:22**

Who are the 144,000 who are sealed? It has sometimes been thought that they represent Jewish Christians in contrast to the great multitude from every nation revealed in v.9 to17. Yet this cannot be the case, since John identifies this group with the same number in **Rev. 14:1-5**, which cannot be limited to Jewish Christians. Israel is therefore not meant in a literal sense as there were no literal 12 tribes of Israel in the first century and the list does not correspond to any of the numerous lists in the OT. The number 144,000 is meant as symbolic theology.

**The church is worldwide:** - *from every nation, tribe, people and language.* It is not limited to individual communities any longer. We are aware that barriers of class, colour and status don't exist as we see and hear of the power of Christ transforming men and women from every corner of the globe. The internet brings us immediate access to the suffering of Christians in many parts of our world within moments. We can and are sending Christians to support, aid and sustain our brothers and sisters in Christ in many parts of the world,

**The church loves Jesus the lamb:** Verses 9 & 10 take us deeper into the truth of the Church, We are able to stand before him in white robes not because of anything we have done, but because of what Christ has done; he has reconciled us by his death and resurrection. See **Col: 1:21,22**. Martin Luther said "Anyone who is to find Christ must first find the church. How could anyone know where Christ is and what faith is in him unless he knew where his believers are?" Here amongst the people of God seekers find those who are in love with the Lamb. At first they may not understand the love we have for our saviour, but they become more aware that it is the presence of Christ in you and me which draws them ever closer to the light.

**The church joins heaven worshipping God:** Read v11 & 12. Every time we gather to worship together we join with the hosts of heaven in worship, honouring the one who sits on the throne. The power of a worshipping people is immense. Read **Eph.3:10 -11**. The power of a worshipping church, joined with heaven in worshipping God is enormous. Read **2 Cor.10:3 & 4**. The power of a worshipping community comes about when God is preeminent in the lives of his people and it is here that we begin to see the removal of satanic strongholds; it is here at worship that those figurative boulders and rocks which lie in our path are removed one by one.

**The church will receive healing:** Read v16 & 17 We know and believe in our hearts what it will be like at the last, but what does a Church that is healed in this present age look like? For me it is summed up in this famous quote by Bill Hybels: "There is nothing like the local church when it is working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited... It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalised. ---The potential of the local church is almost more than I can grasp." In heaven before the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened, there is silence. I believe it's because of the awesome beauty and majesty of the Lamb and his bride the Church that there is silence. Let's seek to put our confidence in the one who when we first look is the Lion, but when we look more closely, is the Lamb who sits on the throne.



#### Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passages and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.

1. What do you think living in heaven will be like?
2. Imagine yourself in the great multitude. What would you be thinking, saying, hearing, doing and enjoying?
3. On what basis do believers stand in the presence of God?
4. Do you feel confident to ask your friends and neighbours to St Pauls? If not, why not?
5. In what ways are we like the church Bill Hybels describes? What areas of Church life could we change to make this more of a reality?
6. Where as a church do we lack power and how can we strengthen the confidence of each other in Christ?
7. How does it make you feel when as a church we venture into uncharted waters?