



# MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 9, 2023  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor James Enderle

First Lesson: [Joshua 4:1-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 34 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 7:1-8](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 16:13-20](#)

## The Church Will Stand Forever

1. We are \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_
2. We are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
3. We \_\_\_\_\_ as if \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
4. We are \_\_\_\_\_ among the \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

If I were to ask you where you feel safe, what might you answer? Having a guess, many of you like living in the country, in the Morrison area, because it's a fairly safe place. We don't really feel like we have to lock the doors. You know your neighbors. We don't have high crime rates like some of the big cities or other places might have. You could think about other places that you enjoy going to; maybe when you are out camping, you feel safe.

When my wife and I lived in China, it was actually a very safe place. The crime rates were low. Even in a large city of 9 million-20 million people, a woman could walk down the street in the middle of the night and be safe. Think about places where you feel safe. Maybe think about in your life, times or people that made you feel safe. Think of when kids are having nightmare and they wake up and what do they need? They need to climb into the arms of mom and dad to feel safe. Or even still today, when things are hard or things are difficult and you have to make a difficult decision, or things have just been rough, maybe you call a parent or a close friend, and they lift you up and help you feel a little safe. You know of places where you feel safe and you'd probably say here at church, overall you would say you feel very safe.

Are there reasons for us to not feel safe? Not really, right? Until we open up the Book of Revelation and then see what God says about what is here or what is coming and

what we should be prepared for. We know that He promises **the Church will stand forever**. We know that He has to encourage us that it will stand forever because there are forces that are against it. He talked about that in the Gospel Lesson.

In the vision that John has, we see a lot of things that are coming. In [Revelation 7](#) we are going to hear about these four angels. But previous to that, in [Chapter 6](#), there are four things that are a little more famous that we hear about—those four horsemen, often called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. We don't have it in our text, but shortly before that it talks about those four horsemen who represent different things—of famine, of war, of pestilence, of death.

Let's think about famine. Are there places in the world today where it is hard to get food? A couple years ago, were there fears of food shortages, or even something silly like the shortage of toilet paper, where people might go and hoard toilet paper because they are afraid it's going to run out?

What about pestilence or diseases? There is fear of disease and things spreading around the world. War—the world is in this constant state of war in different places. We see a big war in Europe right now. And death; we know death is around us and it is the consequence of many of these things.

These are the four horsemen—these things that God says are part of the End Times. So do we think that the End Times are coming? It's important for us to know that *we are already in the End Times*. These four horsemen, these pictures of what we are facing, are here. The End Times (we'd say the New Testament Era), what Jesus describes as the End Times, are really the time after Jesus rises from the dead and that New Testament Church begins until the time when He returns.

Why is it important that we talk about the End Times being now? Those four horsemen and then what we talk about here in Revelation 7 about the four angels, sometimes people say "Those are things that are coming. Things are maybe bad now, but it's going to get really worse." Have things been bad for Christians in the world? Has the world seen horrible things? Think about the Roman world and what the Christians faced—being crucified upside down. Even today, still in places like Africa where Christians are round up and killed because of their faith. The persecution of Christians is something that has been going on forever. We are in those End Times and it's important for us to understand that yes, things could get worse, but we know that God is watching over and that these things have been going on.

When we look at Revelation 7, he talks about what God is doing in those End Times to protect us. He says this: ***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.*** He is saying He is holding back

those four winds. Just like there are the four horsemen, there are these four angels with the four winds from the four corners. Four in Revelation often represents the earth—how God is working things on the earth. It's important as we study Revelation, sometimes people take it very literally, but we know it's a vision so we have to let the clear parts of Scripture explain the more difficult parts of Scripture. We know that this is a vision and there is a lot of symbolism here. So as we see these four angels holding back the four winds, we see God protecting His people. Even in those End Times, even as there are a lot of things to fear, and persecution, the angels are holding things back.

And he continues: ***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: "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."*** He is saying God is protecting them and He is going to seal them when he says "put a seal on their foreheads." As I look out, do we have these seals/stamps on our foreheads to show that we're servants of God, that we are God's chosen people? No, we don't have a seal on our forehead. It's representing what God has done for us. He says that *we are sealed and saved*. We are protected.

So how has God sealed us? Think of when you go to the store to buy something, it has that safety seal on there that protects it and you know that this is good. God has sealed us and protected us. Think of one of the classic children's cartoons/movies, Toy Story. Andy has these toys and what does he do to protect them, to show that they are his? He takes Woody's boot and writes his name on his boot to show that he is his. That's a way that God writes and seals us, by putting His name on us.

How else does He seal and put a sign on us?—through the waters of baptism. When we baptize a child or an adult, what do we say? We say "Receive the sign of the cross on your head and on your heart to seal you, to mark you as a redeemed child of God." You are sealed. You have that sign and that assurance, not just through the sign of the cross, but also through the waters. That's where God adopts us and makes us His child. And He says that your sins are forgiven and through those waters, that old Adam is continually washed and drowned and a new person arises. We are now God's child. We are sealed and safe. What does that Baptism do? It connects us to Christ. It connects us to what He has done for us—that He died for us and rose again. So in that baptism, as we think about dying and then rising, we are connected to Christ's death and resurrection. We are sealed and saved. So those sins that we see and we struggle with, we can daily drown them in our baptismal waters and say "Lord, thank you! I know my sins are forgiven because of what you have done." We are washed. We are cleansed. We are forgiven. Nothing—not my heart, not the things that I've done, not the devil (who will condemn you over and over again and says, "God can't forgive you. Look what you did again.")—can take away that forgiveness. We are sealed. We are safe. We are forgiven in the hands of the Lord.

But do we live that way all the time? Do we live like we are safe? We live in an area where I think we are very safe and God says He is going to protect the Church forever and we are protected, we are safe, but do we live that way? I think often *we act as if there is no safety*. How does that show itself? Maybe as we talk about things and we get so worried that things are going to get so much worse. "God isn't really in control. How can He let these things happen? Look at where the world is going to? It was so much easier when we were kids. Now this generation, they have no idea." People always talked about the United States being a Christian country. What happens if it's not so Christian anymore? You don't have to ask that. We are living in a world where Christianity is not so popular. It's not the cultural norm anymore. But do we have to fear that?

Do we have to fear the other things going on in our life—the financial worries of what the stock market is going to be like, or what about my health? There are all sorts of things that we can be afraid of and we can fear. That's not saying that there aren't tragedies or sicknesses or death. These things are real. Yes, there are sicknesses that can ravage people and people can be gone in such a short time. But, because we have Christ and the promises of what He says about the Church, we have hope. We have an answer even in the midst of these difficult times. So we don't have to fear like the rest of the world. We don't have to fear what might happen if "this" goes this way. That's why we understand we are already in the End Times. Could it be worse? Maybe, but God is protecting us, and it has been bad, and He has protected the Christian Church.

I think about what could happen in the United States. When I was living in China and it was a Communist country, was there still Christianity? Were there still Christians and people who were sharing that Gospel and sharing the peace of Christ? Yes, they were. It was a safe place. Did we fear for our safety? No, but spiritually, was it a place that didn't have much of God or Christianity? Yes, but even in a place spiritually dark, we still saw how God was working and saving people and was bringing people into His number. That's really what the rest of this text is about. This number that he talks about and how he lists the Tribes of Israel. He talks about the 144,000 from the Tribes of Israel and then lists each of them—12,000 from each tribe. What he is telling us here is that *we are counted among the saints*. We are among that number.

There are a couple of things to explain that will help us understand how we are counted, how all the believers are counted in that number. Again, remember Revelation is a vision, so there is symbolism here. There are some people who believe that number 144,000 is literal. The Jehovah's Witnesses say only 144,000 are going to be in heaven. Is there a problem with that? How many believers are there in the world right now, let alone the history of the world? I think a little more than 144,000. So we know that number cannot be a literal number. It represents something.

What could it represent? Think about those twelve tribes of Israel—those 12 rocks that they stacked up in the [Book of Joshua](#)—representing the Old Testament. Is twelve another important number in the New Testament, those twelve disciples? My math is a little bit rusty but you take twelve times twelve and you get 144. A cool thing, even in that twelve of the Old Testament and New Testament, those believers, you get three and four. Three is God (the Trinity), times four (His working on earth), and that gives you that twelve. So you have the Old Testament believers (Israel) as twelve, the New Testament believers as twelve, and you multiply that and it equals 144. That's all the believers from the time before Jesus came looking forward to the Messiah, and the time after the Messiah came that we know and believe that He did come.

How do we know that also with the 144,000? You get  $10 \times 10 \times 10$ . Ten is the number of perfection. So  $12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$  is a perfect number. We know that it's not just the nation of Israel because you look and it uses names. There is a small problem with that. There are two names of the tribes of Israel that are missing—Ephraim and Dan. Levi and Joseph were not parts of the tribes of Israel, so we know this is representing more than just Israel. It is say "you," those believers, all of us are represented in that number.

Why is that important? There is a lot going on. There is a lot in our lives to stress and worry about. But when we look and we see that it is perfect, that through faith, through that faith that we are given (as Jesus talks about in the Gospel Lesson), that God works that faith in us, through the Word, through baptism, we are protected. No matter what we may face, no matter what time in life, as we maybe are getting close to death, we can hold onto that truth of that perfect number. The number that God says from Old Testament, from New Testament will be with Him. That isn't just 144,000. It's ALL believers—Old Testament and New Testament. Does that include us? Yes, by faith, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

So we don't have to doubt. We don't have to worry. We have safety. Even here, where physical safety is not hard to find, in another place or another time in the future, where maybe physical safety is a little harder, but especially when there is a spiritual challenge. You will have spiritual challenges in your life, times of doubt, times of worry. But do not worry. The Lord is with you. The Lord is your Redeemer. The Lord is your strength. You are sealed. You are safe. You are loved and you are redeemed. This is the message we get to hold onto until our dying day, knowing the Lord has redeemed us, sealed and safe for eternity. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.