

Revelation 6:9-17

This morning we step off the shelf into the deep water.

ARE OUR ATTEMPTS TO UNDERSTAND Revelation DRIVEN BY THE WRONG QUESTION?

If so, we will have difficulty with its interpretation. (Art Az)

What question drives most of us when we read Revelation?

WHEN will these things take place?

It's not a bad question per se; it's just not the one that will help us understand and find the most benefit from the book. The Revelation was not written to answer that question. Jesus himself was vague about the issues of precise timing. He wanted our attention to be turned toward how we are to respond. "Be Ready"

The book unfolds with a series of 7's – SEALS, TRUMPETS, HISTORIES, BOWLS OF WRATH, AND SEVEN various visions.

The seven cycles retell the same story dealing with the period between the first and second coming of Christ. They glimpse the reality from different angles but are all dealing with the same time frame.

[The First Seal—Rider on White Horse- Conquer](#)

[The Second Seal—War](#)

[The Third Seal—Famine](#)

[The Fourth Seal—Death](#)

As we look at the famous four horsemen of the apocalypse, we see events in human history that play out over and over: conquest, the breakdown of peace; death in war, economic injustice, famine and disease. Since the judgments symbolized in the seals and the trumpets cycles affect only a fraction (v.7) of rebellious humanity and the earthly environment, they are a prelude to the broader judgment seen in later chapters.

THERE ARE TWO WAYS OF FACING THE HORSEMEN

Fear – it makes us susceptible to the schemes of the Devil...

Fear of death leads to slavery.

Faith – that God is in control and is using even the Horsemen for His glory and the advance of the kingdom. It may be counter-intuitive, but it beats the alternative of a life of fear.

His sovereign design that even includes the horsemen is part of the same design that included the Cross.

6:10 It is natural to cry, "How long O Lord?"

THE CONCERN of Jesus and of John in Revelation is the PRESENT, not the future. The concern is for how we are to live in time of trials. The "signs of the times" that are discussed in the NT are not so many hints about when the end will come, but rather they are pointers to the reality of the status quo for this age between the first and second coming of Jesus.

"The terrifying events of the first four Seals, which those who have to live through them might imagine to be signs of Christ's return and of the close of the age, are in fact the commonplaces of history. The four horsemen have been riding out over the earth from that day to this and will continue to do so." Michael Wilcock

This passage in chapter 6, like ALL OF Revelation, is a gracious gift of God as He warns us so that we may prepare for what is to come. Those who are Elders and shepherds in the church have no greater burden than to help each one of us be prepared for our appointed time to meet the Lord. We don't know when that will come, and John doesn't really give us a timeline. He does give us Hope that will put steel in our spiritual spine so that we might stand firm in the faith.

What takes place on THAT DAY of judgement should make a tremendous impact on how we live TODAY.

John is answering the question, “How Should we then live?” (Ezek 33:10), not “How many days are left until the return of Christ?”

The issue for us today is not “why” is this happening or “how can I make it stop?”, but “What does a spirit empowered response look like?”

Your response is more important than the reason why: (Michael Todd)

The Fifth Seal—Martyrs

9 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

V.12-17 coming up in a few minutes

What do we do with this biblical teaching about the great day of wrath?

In all honesty, many Christians are embarrassed by it, or at least by the way it is often proclaimed.

EX: campuses across the south 1970-1980’s often saw the public air preaching of “Brother Jed” – he was a fire and brimstone preacher who would take a public common area and turn it into a revival center. He would point to and call out students individually for the way they dressed or behaved in public. His antics were the subject of ridicule by most students and Christians were embarrassed. Sadly, lost in the theatrics and bombast was a biblical truth that has never been popular.

“The modern habit throughout the Christian church is to play this subject down. Those who still believe in the wrath of God say little about it; perhaps they do not think much about it. One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was ever very popular, yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly. One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigor with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God’s wrath...Clearly, the theme of God’s wrath is one about which the biblical writers feel no inhibitions whatever.” J.I. Packer ch 15 KNOWING GOD

One reason we don’t think much about the wrath to come is summarized in the 1985 book title, Amusing Ourselves to Death, Neil Postman –1985 twelve years before NETFLIX (1997); 27 years before the iPhone (2007)

“Tyrants of all varieties have always known about the value of providing the masses with amusements as a means of pacifying discontent. But most of them could not have even hoped for a situation in which the masses would ignore that which does not amuse.” 1985

While we may not think much about the wrath to come, verse 9 gives us a hint as to what God is doing. What does John SEE UNDERNEATH THE ALTAR??

The souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they maintained. TESTIMONY = WITNESS = MARTYR

One reason the horsemen are unleashed on the nations is a response to the shedding of the innocent blood of those who bore witness to Christ and His kingdom.

This goes deep into the Jewish experience in the OT and the experience of the early Christians in the NT. Ps 2, 3, 7, 10, 13, 14, 74, 79, 89 echo a theme of God’s people being assailed by the nations of the earth

Psalm 2:1 Why are the nations in an uproar
And the peoples devising a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,
3 Let us tear their fetters apart
And cast away their cords from us!"
4 He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The Lord scoffs at them.

The CRY OF VERSE 10 is also echoed through the OT and the NT.

,"How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

This is not a cry for vengeance, but for justice from the one who is 'holy and true.' God would be considered unjust if He DOES NOT punish those who rebel against Him and who persecute His saints.

***NOTE THE PATIENCE OF God...is has 'refrained from judging'. God has been gracious. He has given sinners time to repent.

THIS CRY IS NOT ANSWERED WITH A TIME FRAME, but with symbolic equipping for perseverance. Rather than an answer, God gives a white robe – see Rev 3 Sardis

4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels

What we need in times of trial and tribulation is to KNOW that Christ walks with us, He makes us worthy, He will not erase our names from the book of life, and He will confess our names before His Father and before His angels.

A central purpose of this book and of our corporate worship is to remind us of these things.

"Is a new creation coming?" IT IS

"Is it good that we remind ourselves of this?" IT IS (Andrew Peterson)

In this pastoral, prophetic, apocalyptic letter, John is seeking to prepare the church for suffering and for their death in the Lord. The longed for relief may not come soon so John gives numerous calls for endurance (ch 1, 2,3, 13,14) He commends those who "conquer" by standing firm.

Christopher Ash, pastor and Author commentary on Job makes this observation...

"At my ordination I was charged 'to prepare the dying for their death.' Although the intention here may have been the narrower one of ministry to those near the point of death, the charge has wider implications. All Christians ought to be engaged in preparing one another for their deaths and for suffering, so that when suffering comes, we may be so shaped by God's Word that we may be able, as it were, to put our hands into the hand of God even in the darkness."

*** How do we do that? It is better done in circles, not rows. With that in mind, on March 6th we'll begin a season of CROSS groups during SS. We've done this a couple of times in the past and we found it to be very valuable. We will ask folks to 'sign up' so that we can plan the logistics for leaders and locations.

In verses 12-17 John lays out a response from God that resonates with Ps 2. Here we see God's answer to those who say there is no God, who devise a vain thing and take counsel against Him.

The Sixth Seal—Terror

12 I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14 The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free

man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they *said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Honestly, my gut reaction to this passage is Y-E-A---UH!! Bring it on.

I'm not saying that this is the most sanctified response, I'm just being honest.

I'm also NOT saying that it is not a sanctified response. Ps 58:10, 107:42

I've not suffered like the saints who cry, “How long O lord,”, but in a small way I get it. And in response to their cry, John gives the comforting news that God will come and vindicate His Name and His people.

The devastating events anticipate the dissolution of the first heaven and earth to make way for the new heaven and earth as seen in chapters 16ff.

The 'earth-dwellers' are those who are perfectly at home with all that this life offers. They don't look for anything beyond this life. In various ways they make idols out of the things or even ideologies offered on earth. It is Rom 1

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The most stable parts of creation will be shaken as will the earth dwellers from all walks of life.

This passage of ch 6 shows that God's judgement will fall on ALL who rebel against him, from the kings, great men, commanders, the rich, the strong, and every slave and free man.

When it comes to judgement and redemption, God is no respecter of persons. He judges with righteousness and equity.

NO ONE CAN HIDE OR STAND before the great day of wrath, even if they try to hide or call the rocks and mountains, “Fall on us and hide us”.

1:5: Jesus is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

He displays His rule as the true judge of His enemies and the redeemer of His saints.

The only safe place in the day of wrath is under the blood of Christ.

That's what this TABLE REPRESENTS.

As you come today, you may be asking, “How long O Lord?” You may not be persecuted for your witness, but you may be suffering from the manifestation of the horsemen.

Let the table remind you of the white robe of security and identity that is yours by faith in Christ.

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