

Revelation 6:1-8 The Four Horsemen

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

This is not a chapter for the faint of heart. There are no angelic proclamations around the heavenly throne. But don't be tricked into thinking that this chapter is devoid of mercy and good news. **When the Bible shapes our view of God more than our culture, then we learn that the warnings of God's righteous judgment in chapter 6 are indications of God's mercy.**

The warnings are occasions for our attention to be focused on eternal truth and embrace the grace that comes through Christ.

EX: parent warning children about dangers and consequences if there is disobedience. You and your child may not have ever thought of it as a mercy, but it is. It is a mercy to warn the child of the potential danger and of the consequence. The warning is an occasion of discipline for the child to move forward in the right direction. Loving parents discipline the children they love, just as God disciplines those whom He loves.

In the Revelation schema I handed out around week #2 we have arrived at the next set of SEVENS – seven seals.

In chapter 5 we saw John weeping as no one was able to open the scroll because it had 7 seals. Then he heard the good news that the Lion of the tribe of Judah was worthy and able to open the scroll.

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.

Now we get to the breaking of the seals and honestly, I'm wondering if John is happier because as I read about the seals being opened it makes me want to cry. BUT for John, he is giving hope to believers who are going through very difficult situations. **When our lives are punctuated with hardship and injustice, we want to know that righteousness will one day prevail.**

Anybody recognize these guys??



Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore their names are Famine, Pestilence, Destruction, and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds this afternoon.^[4] Grantland Rice

As I read Revelation 6 I picture the horsemen more like this...



The First Seal—Rider on White Horse

1 Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.” 2 I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

The Second Seal—War

3 When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.” 4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that *men* would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

The Third Seal—Famine

5 When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard *something* like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.”

The Fourth Seal—Death

7 When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.” 8 I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Before we look at the specifics, we need to get the big picture. This chapter reminds us that Christ rules over the seemingly chaotic events of the world. Friends, that is the challenge to the life of faith.

The most common objection to the existence of God is the seemingly chaotic and random suffering that happens in the world. The same issue is often at the root of doubt and fears in the hearts of believers. All too often, it just doesn't look like Jesus / God is in control.

Here's where we can take heart. Can you think of a time in the gospels when it really looked like Jesus was NOT in control?

THE CROSS – the disciples scattered and the people passing by mocked him. He didn't look like a savior at that moment. YET, was God in control? Yes!! It was His design.

Acts 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. **24** But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Why does God permit the horsemen to remain active?

While we may never get an answer to that question in this lifetime, we can have faith in knowing that it was the Lamb who was slain who sends the Horsemen.

So, as we read Revelation 6 ff we must remember that God is still in control. We may not understand why He is doing what He is doing, but we can trust God and His heart. Biblically speaking, the tribulations and suffering seem to have two designs – the punishment of those who oppose God and the purification of the saints.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, **7** so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is

perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

What Revelation shows us is that the triumphant Lion – Lamb is already exercising his judgment on this world, even as he uses the same trials for the perfecting of His saints. If our view of Jesus doesn't include His judgment along with His redemption, then we are not getting the full picture of who Christ is.

As we look at the famous four horsemen of the apocalypse, we see providential 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 God's tools to give us a preview of the broader judgment seen in later chapters. Since the coming of Christ, the later days and the kingdom of God have been inaugurated. They are not fully realized, yet. But they will be one day.

In this waiting period, we as believers take our cues from the Lamb – the one who would be great must be the servant of all; while being reviled, he did not revile in return; don't return evil for evil but overcome evil with good. We don't seek to rule with the sword of man, but be ruled by the Sword of the Spirit, the WORD OF God. That is our mission. John commends the churches that demonstrate patience, faithfulness, perseverance, service, faith, and love. (Rev 2-3)

Christ the Lion will take care of exercising His justice in His own way, in His own time.

These horsemen represent God's real-world plan of judgment and redemption.

Now, there is much discussion about the white horse, and godly bible teachers are on both sides. What that tells me is that the identification of the first rider on the white horse is not critical to the overall purpose of this series of seals.

Arguments can be made for both sides. It makes more sense to me that in this passage the rider on the first horse is NOT Jesus. Yes, Jesus does come on a white horse in chapter 19 but the context here is different.

This rider is one who comes to conquer and that desire to conquer leads to war, not peace– the Red Horse. I think it makes biblical sense to see this horse and rider in connection with the three that follow. All together these four horsemen represent the suffering that come from political/military aggression and the ongoing conflicts that plague humanity from one generation to another.

Jesus spoke of this, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains" (Mark 13:8).

Those living at the time of this letter certainly saw examples of all of those.

What we do know is that Christ is seated in heaven and rules with the Father. All things are under their control.

The riders/ horses that are sent out in the first four seals show how this divine control extends to suffering sent from the hand of God. We saw reference to such suffering in the letters to the churches – chap 2-3.

In any case, these riders are at the command of heaven. The commands the riders obey come from the four living creatures standing before the great throne and the weapons they employ are given them in heaven. The Lord is sovereign over the earth, and He rules over these riders as they go forth.

NEWS ALERT:

This world in which we live is a place of battle, of struggle; and warfare to the death is underway. In our zeal to create some sort of utopia, human beings are often only dimly aware of the deep underlying realities.

Paul has to remind us 12 that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. – Eph 6

For many of us that sounds so weird that it doesn't make sense and we may be afraid that it opens the door to all sorts of crazy spiritual theories and practices. YET, deep down we know that when we look around and see the things that have happened and are happening in the world, we know that there is more here than meets the eye. From the slave trade to the holocaust to the Ukrainian genocide of the 1930's to the killing fields of Cambodia to the abortion industry, we are tongue tied to explain how things could go so wrong. Coming closer to home we can look at our own lives and see real spiritual battles.

EX: I'm reminded of the final word in Bridge over River Kwai – "MADNESS"

That evaluation doesn't do justice to the real situation. It certainly seems like 'madness' to us, but there is more to it. There is a spiritual reality in the heavenly places where God is still on the throne.

If this passage and these four horsemen should tell us anything it is that the COVID pandemic is NOT a surprise to God.

Unless I'm miss reading chapter 6, it seems that the past two year are in line with the third seal
5 When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard *something* like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."

This horseman symbolizes economic injustice and hardship. Money and goods were so tight that it took a full day's wage for one person to have one typical meal – a quart of wheat.

Has anyone experienced a slowdown in supplies getting to the store shelves? Has anyone's weekly grocery bill gone up in the past year? Is it just 'misinformation' when we're told that the largest corporations and online vendors have made big bucks the past two years while small businesses have suffered?

<https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/longevity/497519-more-than-100000-small-businesses-have-permanently>

The Covid pandemic is but one example of the "horsemen" sent out over the past 2000 years. Every generation has its share of conquest, war, economic hardship, famine, and death.

Unless I'm miss reading chapter 6, it seems that the past two year are in line with the fourth seal...

7 When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." 8 I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The two words underlined, Death and pestilence, would pretty well describe the past two years.

Think back to 2019, i.e pre-Covid. Do you remember those days? They weren't perfect....BUT Prices were low, income was up, unemployment across the board was at the lowest since the 1960's. Schools and malls and gyms and small businesses and restaurants and theaters, etc were open and no one was in lockdown.

Despite all the suffering of the past two years, we in this country still have so much to distract us. Even in areas where tight restrictions are in force, people are better off than most of the world has been for the past 2000 years. That actually obscures the deadly and dangerous reality of the attacks, overt and subtle, of the enemy.

Under cover of these calamities, believers are still persecuted around the world. That has been a constant reality since the early church.

If you're like me, you hear these words of chapter 6 and you silently ask, "Is God really in control of all of this?"

YES. For me, that is certainly better than the alternative, i.e. it's all just random, neither good or bad. It just is.

Here's a question for us, **"Do we really believe that our spiritual enemy is scheming to do us harm?"**
We may say that we believe the bible but when it comes to the hard-core reality of spiritual warfare we may be agnostic at best and unbelievers at worst. Scripture says, **Eph 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.**

Do we believe it?

Do we believe that the devil is scheming? While we believe the Bible, we have a hard time believing that the Devil is actually scheming.

If so, what might it look like?

Is he hiding behind a bush in a red onesie with a pitchfork ready to jump out and scare you?

No, he is scheming to devour us through questioning the heart and the promises of God and by sowing division among us.

The Devil uses the fears of the flesh to promote the deeds of the flesh – Gal 5

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

He also uses self-righteous moralism, another aspect of the flesh, to promote the same things.

But isn't God in charge? These horsemen are the tools that God has ordained to bring about aspects of His judgment on a rebellious human race and purify his people.

Yet God is not the author of the sin instigated and perpetrated by the influence of the horsemen. We are responsible moral agents accountable to God.

Embrace the tension- Remember Acts 2

Acts 2:23 this Man, Jesus, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Eccles 7:2

**2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart.**

THERE ARE TWO WAYS OF FACING THE HORSEMEN

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

Hebrews 2: Christ Himself likewise also partook of the same (sufferings), that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

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.

6:12 It is natural to cry, "How long O Lord?"

God is not aloof and isolated from the suffering of this world. Jesus came and suffered with us. He knows what pain is; he knows what it is to be rejected, to be falsely accused, to be tired and even homeless.

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

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