

Blessed Are Those: A Journey through Revelation – Part 7

The Opening of the Seals - Rev 6:1-17

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Feb. 16th, 2025

Intro:

- This morning, we continue our journey through the book of Revelation as we now come to chapter six. Please turn in your Bible to that chapter, or you may use the Bible in the pew in front of you and turn to page 1065.
- Last Sunday, in chapter five, we finished the glorious throne room scene where a scroll was held in the right hand of the one seated on the throne. The scroll, sealed with seven seals, has writing on both sides and contains the plan of God for the culmination and conclusion of His creation. Then a strong angel called out, inviting anyone worthy to come and open the scroll.
- None was found, save one. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the Lamb who had been slain, was worthy and able to open the scroll. At that point, all heaven and earth broke out in praise.
- In chapter six, we will witness the Lamb of God opening the seals on this scroll, one by one, revealing a new wonder with each seal. From chapter six to chapter sixteen, we will observe the breaking of the seven seals, the sounding of seven trumpets, and the pouring out of seven bowls. They function like nesting dolls, where one is opened to reveal another and then another, each one concluding with a final judgment. All of these judgments intensify as they progress forward. Similar to First John, John revisits themes and shows us more with each pass. Or think of it as three cameras capturing the same event from three different perspectives. I have included a comparison chart at the end of your notes for further study and comparison.
- There are many different opinions about when all of these events occur. Some believe that everything in Rev. 6-16 is in the future, others think it is all in the past (excluding Christ's return), and others propose that some of the seals and trumpets are currently happening, while others are meant for the future. I do think there is a difference between the "end times" and the "last days." I believe that "end times" are the time between the ascension and return (2nd coming) of Christ, and the "last days" happen right before He returns. I think that some of the seals we will see today have been opened already, and these things have been happening in the world since the ascension of Christ and are intensifying over time, where the final seals have not yet been opened.
- On our journey forward, we will encounter many creatures, including the four horses, various beasts, fantastical locust-like beings, creatures from the sea and earth, and a seven-headed dragon, to name a few. We will witness fearful riders, powerful angels, great witnesses, and countless armies, along with other curiosities and wonders, until the great city of Babylon is defeated, evil is undone, and the new heaven and new earth are established forever.
- You'd better "buckle up" because it's going to be quite a ride. We will be blessed by reading, hearing, and treasuring these things in our hearts (Rev 1:3), which will cause us to sing with the angels, strengthen our resolve, and bolster our faith until God makes all things new and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- Before we reach the house of the Lord forever, there are some things that we and this world will face. And it isn't easy. Jesus told us this. Just before His crucifixion, John records that Jesus told the disciples that He was leaving and exactly what they could expect between His ascension and His return. He warned them that they would be hated and killed. "In the world, you will have tribulation," He said. "But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Anyone who tells you that you can have “your best life now” and suggests that this is the message of the Bible, is telling and selling you lies.

- Testing, trials, and tribulations come to us all to give evidence as to who we are. If our faith is indeed genuine, there will be “praise, glory and honor and the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7). “But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:8) at the final judgment.
- Because we live in a fallen world, and we all have rebelled against God and are bent toward evil, this world has been cursed until the final judgment and revelation and renewal of all things. As John the apostle stated, as Christians in this world, suffering, kingdom, and patient endurance are ours in Jesus (Rev 1:9). Be encouraged that God will see us through and reward us in the end. Our faith in and following of the Lamb is going to be well worth it in the end. He will be with us through it all, even to the end of the age. We must understand that God takes sin, fallenness, and wickedness seriously, and we must trust His timing, wisdom, justice, goodness, grace, and transformational power in Jesus.
- So now, we are going to turn to our text, where we see the Lamb breaking the seals one by one. The first four seals unleash the four horses and their riders who bring more unrest, killings, wars, economic hardships and inequalities, famines, diseases, and deaths than we have ever seen.
- When each of the first four seals is broken, one of the four living creatures calls a horse and rider forward. Each horse and rider has a specific power and aim. The riders on the horse are not identified; they are some sort of “spirit” or supernatural being.

Behold the four horses

Rev 6:1-2 NIV

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” 2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

The White Horse of Conquest

- This horse and rider cause the people they affect to desire to conquer that which is beyond them at the time. These people have been given authority and power, symbolized by the crown; these are leaders of people with authority and power whom this spirit has infected. These are the caesars, dictators, kings, queens, nobles, presidents, prime ministers, governors, generals, military officials, and the like, down to everyday people with a measure of authority like you and me. These are people in authority and power who are bent on conquest, always wanting more.
- There is an endless list of leaders who have been afflicted with the desire to conquer. Some who come to mind are Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), the King of Macedonia, created one of the largest empires in history. Roman emperors like Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) and Augustus (63 BC – 14 AD) set out to conquer the world. Attila the Hun (406–453) ruthlessly invaded the Roman Empire. William the Conqueror (1028–1087), the Duke of Normandy, conquered England. Genghis Khan (1162-1227) was the leader of the Mongol Empire, which became the largest contiguous land empire in history. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), a French military leader, conquered much of Europe. There are leaders we are more familiar with, like Hitler (1889-1945) of Nazi Germany, Stalin (1878-1953), the Soviet dictator, Mussolini (1883-1945) of Italy, and Tojo (1884-1948) of imperial Japan.

- This desire for conquest can affect and infect any leader of any kind with any measure of power or authority throughout all of history, including in this country, from world leaders to the person next door. People use and abuse any power they have to get “more.” We must be aware of this spirit working and resist it in our own hearts and recognize that the Spirit of Jesus gives us humility and a servant’s heart, which is the Spirit that should inhabit God’s children.

Rev 6:3-4 NIV

When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” 4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword.

The Red Horse of Strife

- This horse and rider were given the power to take peace from the earth, causing people to live in disharmony with others, causing conflict, turmoil, dis-ease, and strife. We become discontented in our circumstances, with each other, and with ourselves. This lack of peace can cause people to do all types of terrible things to themselves and each other, from small slights and disconnect to gossip and slander, to anger and rage to escalating violence and murder. These things have happened, are happening, and will happen all throughout the nations and the neighborhoods. It is estimated that 1 out of every 8 people in the world live in places with extreme and high conflict, including places like Palestine, Myanmar, Syria, Mexico, Nigeria, Brazil, Lebanon, Sudan, and Ukraine (<https://acleddata.com/conflict-index/>).
- As Christians, we are to walk in a different Spirit, the Spirit of Peace. God has given it to us by His Spirit, and we can and must choose to “walk by this Spirit.” (Read more about this in Gal 6:13-26). This red horse and its rider must be resisted in our hearts and endured in the world because they cause havoc, violence, and strife of all sorts.

Rev 6:5-6 NIV

When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, “Two pounds of wheat for a day’s wages, and six pounds of barley for a day’s wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!”

The Black Horse of Economic Disparity

- The weapon in the hand of the rider on the black horse is not one we would commonly think of, like the bow or sword of the first two riders, but this weapon is an oppressor and life-taker of epic proportions. It is a “pair of scales,” an economic measure that weighs how much you have against how much you can buy. And the prices are incredibly high.
- One had to work hard all day for “two pounds of wheat,” just enough to sustain a single worker for a day. Or “six pounds of barley” for a day’s wages, a cheaper grain that is not of the same quality that perhaps could provide for a family. Could you imagine working all day every day, just to earn enough to have some food to eat for that day? There are places in the world where this is the case today.
- Currently, in 74 countries around the world, 343 million people are facing acute hunger, struggling to find enough to eat just to survive (<https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis>). Moreover, another 1.9 million are living with catastrophic hunger, on the brink of starving and dying from a lack of food. I have visited some of these places and witnessed these situations firsthand.

- I have been to garbage dumps in Mexico, where hundreds of people sift through rotting garbage to find something to eat. I have been to their one-room tin and tire houses, which lack electricity and sanitation, and I have sat on their broken chairs and slept on the dirt floors with bugs and dogs and flies.
- I have traveled to India and walked the streets lined with open sewers, where men and women toil all day in the rice fields, only to return home to cook their beans and rice in a broken tin pot over an open fire fueled by cow dung and straw, where I had more money in my right pocket than they earn in a year.
- I have been to Liberia, Nigeria, and Kenya and seen joy in children’s faces to receive a cup or a bowl of porridge as their main meal in their ratty and worn-out clothes. I have been in their stick and cow dung houses and seen their emaciated bodies.
- While we are freaking out going to the grocery store and finding limited and high-priced eggs, I have walked into grocery stores in Romania where there was hardly any food at all available, where there were empty shelves after empty shelves. These things make you cry, and they should not be so. While we in America are dying because we have too much, other places in the world are dying because they have too little.
- Did you notice that this black horse and rider were not to “damage the oil and the wine?” These are the goods that are consumed by the rich folks. These are the luxury goods that are only accessible to the wealthy who can have as much as they want, oftentimes working little, while those who work incredibly hard barely have enough to survive. These economic disparities are happening to Christians and non-Christians alike all over the world and even in our country.
- This is where we as Christians are called to make a difference by the Holy Spirit in us, to be compassionate, generous, and sacrificial for the desperate needs of others in our world caused by disparities beyond their control.

Rev 6:7-8 NIV

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The Pale Horse of Death

- The horse has the color of death, and death is its rider, and Hades was following close behind him, swallowing up the dead. Death comes by means of the sword, famine, plague, or by the wild beasts of the earth. These are all horrible ways to die, and up to a fourth of the inhabitants of the earth die by these causes—by the violence of various kinds of famines that have swept the earth, by diseases of all stripes and colors, and by animals, the things they do and the things they carry. All of us know people who have died of these causes.
- With the Spirit of Christ in us, we are called to fight these things, to bring life, hope, and help. We need to help in any way we can, bring comfort and aid, and bring the good news of eternal life in Christ.
- All of these horses and riders are brought on because of the brokenness of our hearts and the fallenness of our world. Collectively, God has “turned us over” to these things (Rom 1:18-32) while offering help, life, and salvation to all who respond to Him in faith and trust Him with their life.
- And now the fifth seal is to be broken, which is different from the first four. In this we hear the voice of the martyrs crying out for justice.

Hear the voice of the martyrs

Rev 6:9-11 NIV

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

- Okay, wow, this is incredible. I don't know exactly where the altar is in this vision, but I know that it is near God and “under” the place where life was taken to benefit others. Those who are calling out to God have been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they maintained. They believed in and lived their lives based on the Word of God and did not fold or shrink back or deny their faith unto death.
- The list of those who have been killed for their faith is long. On this list are all of the Apostles and most of the early church fathers. It includes those burned as human torches and fed to the beast as sport. It includes people like John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and William Tyndale for translating the Bible. It includes people like Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian who were missionaries in Ecuador. It includes Christians in the Middle East that ISIS and other groups have killed. It includes Christians in North Korea who are executed or sent to labor camps for their faith. It includes Christians in Pakistan and India who have been killed and maimed for their faith. It includes Christians in Nigeria who have been targeted and killed for their faith by Boko Haram and Fulani militants. You can read about what is happening in the world because of persecution from organizations like these in the *Voice of the Martyrs* or learn about the stories of those who died because of their faith from books like *Jesus Freaks* or *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.
- Notice that they still remember what had happened to them, and notice that they still cry out for justice, knowing that it has not yet been done. Also, notice that God does not stop this from happening and that it will continue to happen until the full number has been fulfilled.
- One of the plans for the earth is that Christians will die for and because of their faith, and there is a set number of people who will do so. This does two things. One, it gives an opportunity for those who die to testify to others about Jesus and proves that they indeed have a genuine faith. Two, it gives others an opportunity to respond and repent, and it gives evidence of who they really are. These things happen in full view of God, both His grace and His justice. To give time for His grace until it is time for His ultimate justice, both in wrath and in reward. We are to stand up for our faith even unto death and wait on the One who will bring all things to their rightful end.
- The next seal that is broken sets into motion the events that happen in anticipation of the great day of wrath which happens on the opening of the seventh seal.

See the anticipation of the great day of wrath

Rev 6:12-14 NIV

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.

14 The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

- This imagery of all of creation responding to the anticipation of the great day of wrath is startling and telling. The earth greatly quakes at the coming. The sun, in all its brilliance, puts on black clothing of mourning. The moon, which is a reflection of the sun, turns blood red. The stars in the sky shake and flee in terror, and the heavens roll themselves up as a scroll while every mountain and island hides.
- I don't think this is literal because if all this happened literally, there would be no living thing left on earth, and there is after this. We even read next how the people of the earth also respond in terror and go to the mountains to hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb. All creation sees this coming and anticipates its arrival by closing down shop, fleeing, and going into mourning.

Rev 6:15-17 NIV

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face 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 can withstand it?"

- The day of the wrath of the Lamb is the great equalizer. No power, position, or purse will save anyone on that day. All will stand in front of the Lamb on equal ground, and none of the things in this world will shield one from this day.
- Instead of people running to the Lamb and calling to Him for mercy, they instead run and hide and call to the mountains to hide them. They pray to the mountains for help, but they do not pray to the only One who can help them.
- This day is indeed the great day of wrath; no one can withstand it, and no one will escape it. It is better for us now to realize this reality and to call on Jesus now for the forgiveness of our sins, to be shielded from the wrath of God by the Son of God.

Conclusion

- As we close our time in Revelation 6, we are reminded that the Lamb who was slain is also the Lion who reigns. He is the One opening the seals, unveiling God's sovereign plan, and bringing history to its ultimate conclusion. These judgments—the four horses and their riders, the cry of the martyrs, and the cosmic upheaval in anticipation of the great day of wrath—serve as a sobering warning and a call to faithfulness.
- For those who belong to Christ, these events are not meant to terrify us but to strengthen our trust in God's justice, wisdom, and faithfulness. He has not abandoned His people. Though trials, suffering, and persecution will come, the Lamb will lead us through. He has overcome the world, and in Him, we will endure.
- But for those who reject Him, the final day of wrath is inescapable. No status, power, or wealth will shield anyone from the judgment to come. Yet, even now, the Lamb extends mercy. The time for repentance is still open, and the call of the gospel still goes forth.
- So today, let us respond rightly. If you have not yet placed your trust in Christ, do so now before it is too late. And if you are in Christ, stand firm, walk in the Spirit, and proclaim the hope of the gospel to a world that so desperately needs it. The Lamb is on the throne, He is in control, and He is coming again.

Benediction

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit strengthen you as you walk in faith. May you stand firm in the midst of trials, holding fast to the Lamb who was slain and who reigns forever. And may His peace sustain you until the day He makes all things new. Go in His strength and hope. Amen.

Questions for Growth Groups

1. **What stands out to you the most about the imagery in Revelation 6?** How do the four horsemen reflect the realities of our world today?
2. **The White Horse of Conquest** represents a spirit of power, authority, and the drive for more. In what ways do we see this spirit at work in history, in our world today, and even in our own hearts? How does Jesus call us to a different way of leadership and influence?
3. **The Red Horse of Strife** takes peace from the earth, leading to conflict and violence. Where do you see this spirit of division at work in your relationships, community, or the world? How can we, as followers of Christ, be peacemakers in a divided world? (See Galatians 5:22-26.)
4. **The Black Horse of Economic Disparity** reveals the reality of hunger, injustice, and inequality. How does this challenge our understanding of wealth and provision? What are practical ways we can respond with generosity and compassion?
5. **The Pale Horse of Death** reminds us of the brokenness of this world and the certainty of mortality. How does this passage challenge or strengthen your perspective on suffering and the hope we have in Christ?
6. **The Cry of the Martyrs** shows the faithfulness of believers even unto death. How does their example inspire us to live boldly for Christ? What are some ways we can prepare our hearts to stand firm in faith, even in the face of opposition?
7. **The Sixth Seal and the Coming Wrath of God** reveal a world that runs to the mountains instead of to the Lamb. Why do people often resist turning to God? How can we live in such a way that points others to the mercy and salvation of Jesus before it is too late?

Bonus Question: After studying this passage, how is God calling you to trust Him more, resist the ways of the world, and live with greater faithfulness in these days?

The Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl Judgments

The Seven Seals Rev. 6:1-7 & 8:1-5	The Seven Trumpets Rev. 8:6-9:21 & 11:15-19	The Seven Bowls Rev. 15:1-16:21
1. wars of conquest	1. hail, fire, and blood fall on the earth; a third of the vegetation is burned up	1. festering sores on the earth's inhabitations
2. international unrest; people kill each other	2. mountain thrown into the sea; one third of the sea creatures die, one third of maritime commerce dies	2. sea turns to blood; all sea creatures die
	3. star falls from the sky on rivers; one-third of the rivers and spring poisoned; many people die	3. river turns to blood
	4. sun, moon, stars are struck; one third of the day becomes dark	4. sun scorches people
3. famine, hunger		
4. sword, famine, plague, wild animals; one-fourth of humankind killed		
5. persecution	5. sun and air darkened with locusts; locusts torment humankind	5. the beast's kingdom is darkened; agony on earth
	6. demonic cavalry, one-third of humankind killed	6. river dries up to prepare way for armies for the final battle
6. earthquake (a) sun darkened (b) moon turns blood red (c) stars fall from the sky (d) sky recedes like a scroll		
7. silence (a) thunder (b) voices/rumblings (c) lightning (d) earthquake	7. announcement of God's reign (a) lightning (b) voices/rumblings (c) thunder (d) earthquake (e) great hailstorm	7. proclamation of the end (a) lightning (b) voices/rumblings (c) thunder (d) great earthquake cities of the nations collapse; final judgment of Babylon; islands and mountains disappear (e) huge hailstones

*Chart from *40 Questions About The End Times* by Eckhard Schnabel (p. 51-52)