

## Six of the Seven Seals are Broken

Call to Worship: Psalm 2

Hymn #25 (supp)- *'Til the Storm Passes By*

1<sup>st</sup> Scripture: Luke 21

Hymn #79- *Though Troubles Assail Us*

2<sup>nd</sup> Scripture: Revelation 6

Hymn Insert- *Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus*

### **Introduction:**

In preparing to receive the revelation of “the things which must take place after this,” we saw last time, that John was first given a revelatory glimpse of God’s heavenly court. And upon reviewing that scene, we found three critical pieces of armor that we must wear at all times, if we are to overcome the many trials and temptations that we will face in the times ahead, in accordance with all that is revealed in Revelation, chapters 6-22. First, we were reminded of the importance of consistently pondering God’s pure and perfect holiness, which assures us that He must and will avenge His afflicted and persecuted saints. And then secondly, we were also reminded of the importance of remembering that God is the glorious Creator of all things in heaven and on earth and under the earth, assuring us that He is all sovereign, and more than capable of avenging His persecuted saints and fulfilling His every promise to them in Christ. And then, lastly, we were called to regularly bring to mind the fact that Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the slain Lamb, has Himself overcome by His shed blood on the cross, guaranteeing the victory of His saints, who are given the eternal Kingdom of God in Christ. In fact, it is by Christ, the only One who is worthy to take the scroll from out of the right hand of God and to loose its seals, that we find this scroll of God’s completed plan of redemption, opened and enacted, guaranteeing the unfolding of all of its contents in time and space. And now, as we come to chapter six of Revelation, our Lord begins to break the seals that are on the outside of the scroll, which will in turn lead to the opening of the scroll and the exposing of its contents from chapters eight on.

This morning then, we will consider the revelation John receives as our Lord breaks the first six (out of seven) seals on the scroll. For, we find that even before opening the actual scroll itself, our Lord reveals very significant, general details regarding the hardships and terrifying

desolations that will fall upon the earth, until He returns to close out history as we know it. And these general hardships will be faced by all, including Christians (throughout the entire duration of the church age), who will face various forms of persecution and satanic attacks as they seek to remain faithful to God and Christ in a contrary world of darkness.

To this end then, we will consider the following two things, pertaining to this vision:

- 1- We will consider a general survey of the six seals that are broken in this chapter
- 2- We will consider the meaning and motivation of this portion of the vision

### **I. A general survey of the six seals that are broken in this chapter**

When the first four of the seals are broken, we find what has commonly been called the “Four Horsemen,” being called upon to execute various forms of judgments upon the earth. Each one of the four living creatures calls forth one of the horsemen, assigning them various cooperative tasks for bringing about calamity, hardship and terrifying desolations upon the earth. These are general realities that are set in motion throughout the history of the church age, which will serve to bring about great destruction and chaos on the earth. However, while these hardships will cause much disaster and terror in the world, they are partial (they are limited as to their extent and scope) and they spread out throughout the entire duration of the church age. They are always active throughout the entire history of the church age, but not necessarily in a global, worldwide sense. In other words, their cumulative effects will be great (when considered over the full period—thousands of years—of church history), but they will never bring about any form of universal, worldwide destruction. That said, those Christians who experience the sufferings that come through these world judgments, must be prepared, lest they fall into temptation and/or despair. We must maintain a proper perspective on these hardships, if we are to persevere and overcome through them, while the world at large is set in a stir, and in a frenzy, having no solid hope to stand upon as their very lives are severely threatened.

Now before defining the specific types of hardships that each of these horseman bring, let me give you an example of what I am saying here. There are many, many examples of specific individual events that have shattered different places in the world at different times, by means of

wars or famine or pestilence (and disease) or natural disasters...etc. We were fortunate enough to have suffered very little at the hands of “Hurricane Irene” recently, but suppose the damage and devastation was much worse? Some lost electricity for a while, others suffered flood damage, others suffered property or material damage because of fallen trees or debris, but overall, by the grace of God, we fared pretty well. There were very, very few major casualties. But suppose, God were to send a category four or five hurricane right over us? And suppose that in His good providence, it rested over us for several hours such that even homes in the middle of the island were swept away by massive flooding, and large vehicles were tossed around and many more died and life was never the same because of it...perhaps something along the lines of what happened to those down south as they faced the infamous “Hurricane Katrina” or those in Japan who faced significant earthquake damage recently. Would we be ready? Or suppose that our economy completely bottomed out and the dollar snapped? Or suppose what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>, hit the “nuclear level” right here on Long Island? Or suppose all of our computer technology was instantly shut down and we were invaded in some significant and yet unexpected way? You see, these kinds of things would bring terror, devastation and hardship to the extent that many lives would be forever changed as a result of them. These kinds of local events shatter communities and towns and cities and states and even countries, because they have nothing secure to hold onto when the heavy winds come, as it were. Their foundations lay in this world, leaving them with nothing solid to hold onto, when the world breaks beneath them. And so, these horsemen, who do indeed bring severe judgments throughout the world and throughout history, are sent to remove peace, where peace and complacency have resided for a time. They are called to shake what is generally thought of as unshakeable. The first century Christians felt this, when the unbreakable, untouchable Roman Empire was rocked and shaken at times and ultimately sacked and destroyed several hundred years later.

Well, let us then consider some of the ways in which these horsemen are sent to bring about terrifying desolation and destruction throughout the world. And as we do this, we will find them working individually and yet together in somewhat of a consecutive fashion.

[Read verses 1-8]

Now, as we seek to understand the general hardships and terrifying desolations that these four horsemen bring upon the earth throughout the entire church age, let me read again part of what we had read in our first Scripture reading, where our Lord spoke mostly of the ultimate destruction that would come upon Jerusalem (and the temple) in AD70. As you will often times find in Scripture, past events can often foreshadow and/or give insight into future events, especially those events that involve major desolations and destruction. I believe that the destruction of Jerusalem contains some key elements that can help us grasp the great destruction that will ultimately come upon the whole world.

In Luke 21:5-24, our Lord speaks of general devastations that will come upon the world prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. And while these devastations will be severe and will greatly test the faith of the saints, they are not to be recognized or equated with the final events surrounding the actual destruction of the city. I believe that our text in Revelation, concerning the devastations brought about by the four horsemen (throughout the entire church age), are a reflection of some of those very destructions that fell upon the world, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. [Read Luke 21:5-24]

The key to unlocking the four horsemen lies in verses 5-11. There we find that there will be wars and commotions prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, which were not to be confused with the end of the city itself. And nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...and there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. These are the general hardships that will come upon the world, but the people of God, though tested by them, must not fear, and they must not be surprised by them nor consider them the immediate signs of the end. Well, the four horsemen serve such a purpose as well, from the time John was given the Revelation until the end of time itself. They bring about similar devastations, which precede, but are not to be identified directly with the signs of the very end of all things.

Horseman #1- A white horse, carrying a crowned rider, who had a bow, was sent about conquering and to conquer. This horsemen represents the reality of ongoing conquests throughout the history of the church age. In other words, nations would rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms. Finding security in any particular country would be foolish in the light of this reality. For, by means of one kingdom, another could very easily be overcome and

conquered in accordance with the divine will of God, by the working of this horseman. The white horse and the crown symbolize royalty, and the bow symbolizes conquest.

Horseman #2- As a partial result of the working of the first horse, the second horseman would cause great bloodshed, as people fought and killed one another. There would be all manner of wars, civil, global and localized, leading to devastation and the shedding of much blood, symbolized by the fiery red color of the horse that this rider rode on. The rider had a great sword, as he would lead charges all throughout the world, taking away any sense of ultimate peace and stability from the earth. Again, the people of God, lest they be swept away with the fears of the ungodly, should anticipate unrest, turmoil and instability all throughout the history of the church age. This world will bring no peace; it will only; it must only take peace away.

Horseman #3- In part, as a result of the first two horseman, the third horseman brings about essential scarcity throughout the earth. The black horse carrying its rider, who had a pair of scales in his hand, represents famine, drought and scarcity. People would starve, as a result of essential resources being made scarce. “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius...” A day’s wages would be sufficient enough to purchase the meals for one person for the day. Families would have to settle for barley, and people would live to eat and eat to live, with nothing more. Prosperity would be taken away and replaced by famine, scarcity, hunger and starvation. Only, “do not harm the oil and the wine.” The less necessary and more luxurious items would remain intact, especially as the demand for them would decrease because the very basic and staple resources would consume all of their wages (may also serve to further harden the rich).

Horseman #4- In much accordance with the workings of the first three horseman, the fourth and last horseman would bring about pestilences, disease and ultimately death. The pale horse carrying its rider, represents sickness, malnourishment and deadly disease. And the riders name was “Death” itself, as he would carry people out of this world in droves, when their bodies would succumb to all manner of deadly illnesses, infections and diseases. And following along with him was Hades, the grave, to whom death would deliver all of its victims. This last rider, “Death,” would follow behind the first three riders, who would, by their destruction and terrifying devastations, deliver their victims over to him. “Power was given to them [Death and

Hades] over a fourth of the earth [throughout the history of the church age, they would claim many lives], to kill with the sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.”

And so, brethren, these four horsemen represent conquest, war, famine, and death, all of which have and will continue to infect this world throughout the course of the church age [throughout the course of history till Christ returns]. These four seals reveal the general hardships and terrifying devastations that will constantly shake the world, robbing it of any peace. Now presently, it might be difficult to appreciate these realities in the United States of America, as God has been ever so gracious to us in these regards, but we must remember two things: First, you can look throughout the rest of the world at any time, and find them always in sight. And second, things may change for us, even soon. We may be the target of these horsemen (in a very significant way) even in the very near future. And so, we never want to make this world our comfort and our peace in any respect. One way or the other, at some point, we will all realize that this world’s foundations are temporary and unstable, if at no other time, at least at the time of our own death. Christianity, even under the best of circumstances, will never bring heaven to earth, as long as these four horsemen ride. In fact, the very opposite is true.

Following these four seals, which form a unit, our Lord then breaks another fifth seal, and another general reality comes forth, which will make its way throughout the entire history of the church age, confirming my last statement. [Read verses 9-11].

Here, we find another reality that will make its way throughout the entire duration of the church age. And again, while we may not appreciate this as much in the US (at the moment), the reality itself has always put its stamp on every portion of history. Until Christ returns (in fact, according to verse 11, time is measured by this reality), Christians will suffer persecution and martyrdom for their faith. And there is a sense in which all who have been slain for the sake of the Gospel await their vindication. From the world’s standpoint, they were weak, beggarly, foolish, outcast criminals. But in the end, God will vindicate them and all will see that these are His precious godly and righteous ones. They died not for their own sin but rather for their faithful witness to the Word of God and the Gospel; they died nobly and honorably for the cause of Christ, and their honor will be known to all at the final judgment. And until that time; and until the time that the very last witness has been killed, there is a sense in which their vindication is greatly anticipated and longed after. This is not to say that these beloved saints are in

anguish...this is only a vision, but their prayers and their very lives, which were sacrificed on the altar for Christ, continually speak to God, calling for His justice, vindication and vengeance. And it is, in part, by this means; by the prayers of God's beloved, persecuted saints, that God will bring about His trumpet judgments and bowls of wrath upon the wicked (which is to be seen when the scroll is later opened). But in the mean time, God rewards His beloved saints with white robes, confirming that their vindication is already in place from His standpoint, guaranteeing the fuller blessed universal revelation of their vindication at the final judgment. Suffice it to say, brethren, that the people of God will suffer opposition in various ways (some even unto death). This is a general reality that comes with the breaking of the seals in accordance with the divine will of God. But those who endure this suffering even unto death, will, in the end, be rewarded by God. They will wear the righteous robes of Christ, confirming both their salvation and their faithfulness in light of this Christ-wrought salvation.

And then lastly, a sixth seal is broken (leaving one more to break before the scroll is completely opened in chapter 8). [Read verses 12-17].

Here, we have a recording of that final event that must come about at the end, when Christ returns to bring judgment upon the wicked and to gather in His elect at the consummation of His glorious kingdom. There will indeed be wars and famine and pestilence and death throughout all of New Covenant history, and the saints of Christ will suffer oppression, persecution and martyrdom throughout the same period, but all of this will and must (in accordance with the completed divine will of God, enacted by the Lamb that was slain) ultimately lead into the final, *visible* return of Christ, where He will bring about a total and complete destruction of the wicked, who have rejected Him and who have persecuted His saints. The prayers of God's people will be answered and they will be vindicated, and Christ will be recognized as the supreme and sole, eternal King, who will reign over all things forever and ever! There will be a great earthquake; there will be signs in the heavens; the world as we know it will be destroyed; its elements will melt down to nothing; life as we know it will collapse; everyone outside of Christ (kings and great men and military commanders and the rich and the poor, and every free man and every slave; every person, regardless of nationality or their position in life, who is outside of Jesus Christ) will run for the hills and the caves, pleading with them to fall on top of them, out of terror because of the wrath of the Lamb. They will all wish they were

never even created! They will close their eyes and wish that they could simply wish themselves out of existence—annihilation would be a comforting option at that point—but it will not be granted. They will face the wrath of the Lamb, the Final Judgment and eternal hell fire! And this reality will be reiterated throughout the Book of Revelation. For example, the last Trumpet and the Last Bowl judgments will bring us right back here. “For the great day of His wrath will come, and who is able to stand?” Chapter 6 ends with these words, and next time, Lord willing, we will see how chapter seven answers this very question, before the final seal is broken in the beginning of chapter eight.

## **II. The meaning and motivation of this portion of the vision**

Brethren, there are two great principles that we must and ought to take from this chapter, where six of the seals are broken off of the scroll, revealing the general hardships and terrifying desolations that will take place throughout the history of the church age:

1) The Lord wants us to know these things in advance, so that if and when we experience such hardships; if and when we should face the surprising devastations coming upon the earth, we will be prepared to endure them, maintaining a faithful witness for His glory. He has told us beforehand that there will be catastrophe and war and famine and pestilence and death...etc, so that we are not shaking our fists at God when we are called to face such things. These hardships are faced by all; they are general judgments, but all people feel them. Those who dig their heels into the soil of this world; those who ground their lives in the foundations of this world and all of its material temptations, will be shattered when they face such things...for they have defined life in accordance with the abundance of possessions and worldly successes they have enjoyed. But, in Christ, we must always have a different vision in mind. We must consider ourselves seated with Christ, passing through this world, as if it were a hotel or a truck stop, leading to our main destination. Only then, will we be able to stand and endure, no matter how hard the foundations of this world are rocked and shaken. Should we lose everything material tomorrow; should life as we know it *in this life* change forever, tomorrow, could we still stand? Only if our ultimate hope and rest are in Christ and in Christ alone. For that ground cannot be shaken! Building our houses on the foundation of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ is the equivalent of building



our houses on a solid foundation. And when the heavy winds, the rains and the storms come, our houses will not fall, if they are grounded in Christ! The Christian life was never meant to be a picnic...we do not see that here at all (or in Scripture as a whole—consider our Lord’s “Farewell discourse”). We do not see that with the two churches who were faithful, back in Revelation chapters two and three. What we do see is suffering, trial, battle and opposition. In fact, even as we reach out more with the Gospel right now; even as we bring the light of Christ out of our own midst and into satan’s realm, in the present, we can expect, and we are already seeing various forms of opposition. Does this mean that we are necessarily doing something wrong? No, in fact, much to the contrary, we are probably doing something right! There is nothing naturally joyful about the general realities revealed by the opening of these seals...nothing *naturally* joyful, but there is great joy, even throughout the worst of times, if our joy is bound up in Christ! “In the world, you will have tribulation,” our Lord told His disciples. But He also told them that *in Him*, they would have peace, even during those tribulations, because He has overcome the world for us! In other words, this is not to cancel out our sufferings, but rather to assure Christians, that as they abide in Christ, though every foundation of this world should crumble beneath their feet, they will always find joy, rest, stability and comfort standing in Christ, a foundation that can never be shaken! The cross has forever put us on solid ground, brethren! But we must maintain this focus! That is the major point here! There is no rest to be found in this world...so, don’t look for it there. There is only rest found in the Lamb! [The Gospel!!!]

We cannot get lost in the world or attempt to rebuild our foundations here, lest we be swept away in the fears and terrors that overcome those who are not prepared to face whatever providence should bring our way, and this brings us to our last and final major point for this morning.

2) Brethren, who is it that has broken these seals? What are we to make of the “Calling forth of these horsemen” by the four living creatures? What are we to take from the words, “*And it was granted to the one who sat on [the fiery red horse] to take peace from the earth”* (vs. 4), and, “*And power was given to [Death and Hades] over a fourth of the earth...(vs. 8)...etc?* What our Lord wants us to see here is a textbook example, confirming all that we have gone over in chapters 4 & 5, when we entered the heavenly courtroom of God. He wants us to know that all of these things (all of history is) ordained, governed and carried out under the sovereign hand of

God. These general hardships ultimately are all rooted (every last one of them), in the sovereign working of God, as He unfolds and carries out *His will*. As the old saying goes, “history is His-story!” And because of that, the most unexpected things can happen from the standpoint of the world, but all who are in Christ, have nothing whatsoever to ultimately fear, and in fact, they ought to expect exactly what we find here in chapter 6.

Friends, do we get this? All of the economic problems with the US economy; unfathomable debt; worldwide conflict; a nation divided...do we think for a moment that this is going to get better...before it gets devastatingly worse? Oh brethren, you don't have to be a prophet to say that we, right here in the so-called safety of our own free country, are being set up for a great, great, devastating collapse, very possibly in our lifetime. Don't be blinded by the world and what it sees at the surface. Even the world is getting edgy for that matter, but as a whole, we really are not facing reality. When you bring the sovereignty of God into this picture...we of all people must see, brethren, that this is all going to come crashing down. And what makes this most devastating is that, generally, the tipping point, tips over very quickly before there is much time to prepare. And for the world, this means chaos and devastation. But the Christian has a resting place in Christ! The Christian can endure it, and be an example to others throughout it, because the Christian's hope is not fixed in this world. And the Christian knows that God can feed him by the mouths of the ravens, and by the widows oil and etc.

And most importantly, the Christian can stand through the most terrifying and fearful event in all of history, namely, the return of Christ. In fact, we wait for Him now and say, “Even so Lord, come quickly!”

Next time, Lord willing, we will elaborate further on this reality as we consider, “the great day of [God's wrath],” and “who is able to stand?”

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24&25