

The Seven Seals pt 3

Rev. 6:12-7:17

03.21.17

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For the past few weeks we have been studying Revelation chapter 6 together and in that chapter - as you are aware - Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain and who lives - has taken the scroll containing the decrees - that is the plans - of Almighty God for the redemption of the world from the right hand of God the Father, and he has begun to open the seals of the scroll; and as he opens each seal, the content of each respective seal is put into action. These actions reveal to us events that from John's perspective in time, were soon to take place. What this means for us, from our perspective in time, is that the events which each seal contained have BEEN taking place already on earth, through the centuries.

We have examined five of the seven seals thus far; and what we have determined from those five seals - the conclusions we have reached about the seals and what they denote, is:

First, that Christ and the gospel has gone forth conquering and to conquer - and in every year, every decade, every century, for two millennia now, the gospel has been conquering - as the church has been established and as children, women and men have embraced the gospel by believing on Christ - and the result of this faith (if you remember the sermon from this past Sunday) is that their hearts have been purified by faith in Christ because of who Christ is and what He has done.

Next, we have seen how on the heels of the white horse and Christ, it's rider, going forth conquering, is that a red horse with a rider rode forth - and the red horse and rider brought with him slaughter - for that is what the seal represents - and the slaughterer in part denotes the slaughter of believers - for where ever the gospel is spreading, persecution follows in it's heels.

Third, we met another horse - this time black in color - and that horse was ridden by a rider carrying a set of scales - and we said this horse represented economic hardship, and poverty due to injustice - and this has been the case in every generation - especially toward some in the church;

Then we saw a pale horse - and it's rider was Death, with Hades following after; and this horse's rider had power to kill - by war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts, a fourth of humanity - meaning many would loose their lives but not all;

And the pale rider was followed by the opening of the fifth seal - and after the fifth seal was opened John saw the souls of those who had been killed for their witness to Christ and for the word of God, under the altar that appeared in his vision - and these martyred souls were crying out to God seeking vengeance on those who had killed them. And what were they told?

They were told to rest and to wait and they were told why. They were told to rest and wait UNTIL the total number of martyrs who were to be killed as they were, were actually killed for their witness to Christ and to the Word of God.

From all this, we determined that the four horsemen, as well as the martyrs under the throne, represented events on earth, that would take place in every generation - and which have taken place in every generation since Christ ascended and the church was established. In other words, the first five seals of Revelation chapter six revealed to John's readers and hearers *what would take place soon after the vision was given - things that would take place in the near future to them*; and these events did begin to take place soon after John recorded them - BUT, they have continued to take place, in cycles, throughout history, until we arrive at our day.

Looking back over time, we see that in every generation including our own, Christ has been conquering through the gospel. Further, there has been a red horse and persecution in every generation, as well as a black and also a pale horse and rider, bringing with them slaughter, economic hardship and mass death to many. And finally, there have been, through to our time, numbers of martyrs, who forfeited their lives for Christ, the Word of God and for the gospel. And while the intensity of these events have varied from century to century and generation to generation, yet, this cycle has run over and over and over. The whole of the church age has been characterized by all this.

Following the fifth, we have the sixth seal (6:12-7:17): And as the sixth seal is opened John sees a **scene of cataclysm** (vv.12-14), soon to come **judgement** (vv.15-17) and **great victory** (7:1-10). In verses 12 to 14 John records **six natural phenomenon** in such a way so as to represent a cataclysmic event:

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- 1) Earthquake
- 2) Sun becomes black
- 3) Full moon turns blood red
- 4) Stars fall from the sky to the earth
- 5) The sky vanishes like a scroll that is being rolled up
- 6) Every mountain and island is removed from its place

What is happening here? Elsewhere in scripture, these statements are used to describe cataclysmic events, particularly related to divine visitation, and judgement.

For examples, see in the OT: Isa. 13:9-13; 34:4; Ez. 32:6-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15-16;

For NT examples see Matt. 24:29; Mk. 13:24-25; Acts 2:19-20 cp.w/ Joel 2:30-31;

These descriptors and the parallel passages tell us that something cataclysmic is about to take place - and that something is the judgement of the earth and people on earth; and the verses following affirm this. **These events are the precursor to what comes next** (vv. 15-17). Notice, five groups of people are mentioned, who are terrified of the wrath of the Lamb:

- 1) kings the earth;
- 2) the great ones;
- 3) the generals;
- 4) the rich and powerful;
- 5) everyone, slave and free.

What are these groups doing and saying? They are hiding and they are calling. They are hiding in caves and among the rocks of the earth and they are calling to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them - from what? From the wrath of the Lamb - because the great day of His wrath has come, and who can stand?

Clearly, this is a scene soon to come judgement - and I would say, it is the prelude to the final judgement; and we know this by seeing how this same language is used elsewhere in scripture and elsewhere in Revelation. For example:

Isa. 2:19-21 uses similar language to that of Rev. 6:15 - notice the reason this language is used;

Hosea 10:8 uses this language due to God's judgement for the idolatry of Samaria and Israel

Luke 23:30 Jesus uses this language re the coming judgment and destruction of Jerusalem - so the preterist sees Matthew 24:29 and Rev. 6:12-17 as referencing the destruction of Jerusalem of 70 AD.

Rev. 20:11-15, John tells us about final judgement

Putting all this together, John is given a picture through the first six seals, of things that would soon take place, near future to him. Christ would go forth conquering and to conquer through the gospel. This would be met with persecution of a couple of types: violent persecution/slaughter, and economic oppression through injustice; and in addition to this, wide spread death would ail our world as a result of war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts. This would, and does, characterize life on earth. Meanwhile, many, many martyrs result - until all those appointed to martyrdom die in that way; and then - when the last martyrs die for their witness to the word of God and to the gospel, the day of the Lord's wrath arrives - and final judgement is just around the corner for all this who were in rebellion against God, who spurned His truth and His goodness, who rejects His Christ and who persecuted His people.

Here we have the pattern of the ages, which will end with judgement for those who do evil and also final salvation for those who are righteous. A question which arises at this point is, how does one escape the wrath of the Lamb? How does one fare well, on this great and terrible day of the Lord?

Those whose names are written in the book of life, referenced in Revelation chapter 20, are those who belong to Christ - those who by faith, have had their hearts cleansed and who are recipients of Christ's righteousness. Jesus speaks of these in John chapter 10 when he refers to His sheep - who know his voice, are known by Him and who follow Him. We came to be His when, as we understand the gospel, we place our faith in Him, who He is, what He did, believing He did it for us. These are those whose names are written in the book of life.

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For them, when judgement comes, they escape - for in Christ they are secure. For everyone else, they will not be able to stand. Let me explain why:

Psalm 1 speaks of this judgement (see Psa. 1: 1-6);

Jesus spoke of this judgement (see John 5:25-29);

Paul spoke of this judgement (see 2 Cor. 5:10);

John speaks of this judgement (see Rev. 20:11-13)

And from these passages we learn several truths about judgement and it's basis.

First, judgment will be according to ones works - which will include our actions and intentions and our words, both idle and purposed;

Next, we see how all our works are recorded - and so, there is a record of what we have done in the body;

Third, we learn the righteous will inherit eternal life and the unrighteous eternal infamy;

And finally, we learn why the kings, great ones, generals, the rich and powerful and everyone else, slave and free, will be so terrified. They will know, on that day, that they cannot stand; and they will know from the works revealed that they are guilty and there is no escape.

So, rejoice, you who know Christ - and be afraid those who do not - and before the great and terrible day of his wrath arrives, surrender your life and believe on Christ. May the Lord make this so for all of us. Amen