

The Four Horsemen

Text: Revelation 6.1–8

Theme: God's sovereign judgments are His loving call of mercy through the ages

Introduction — the Four horsemen of the Apocalypse

- many meanings
- four football players at Notre Dame University in 1924
- quite famous photograph of them on horseback with heading beneath: The Four Horsemen

Other fascinating results from a Google search

- a hard rock band of the 1980s
- either a 1921 movie starring Rudolph Valentino or a 1962 film starring Glenn Ford
- could be a WWF wrestle group from 1980s
- a set of action figures
- and even the four primary telecommunication groups: Comcast, AT&T, Verizon, and Time-Warner

We know the phrase, but do we know the context from where it comes?

- Revelation 6, set out right before us this morning
- the seals on the scroll, from ch 5, are about to be opened
- the scroll is God's sovereign plan of salvation & judgment
- the only One worthy to open it is the Son of God Himself

Let me say one further word about how to interpret and understand ch. 6

- remember: Revelation is not a singular timeline depicting events chronologically
- that's not how John writes what he is given to see here
- especially from here onward, Revelation is more a series of cycles
- pictured here is history from the first century of the early church onward
- each cycle is parallel to the others
- each intensifies, but is giving us essentially the same picture
- and this then, leads us to the end

Consider this with me

- end of ch. 6, verse 16–17
- calling to the mountains and rocks, *"Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*
- this seems very much like what we'd expect the final judgment to be like
- ch 11 depicts a final judgment coming from the sounding of the seventh trumpet
- then in ch 20, at the end of that chapter, we have depicted the final judgment
- this isn't because there are 2 or 3 final judgments, as if ch 6–20 were a clear timeline
- there will be only one final judgment
- what is going on is we're seeing the same thing happening but from a different perspective
- add this to the mix: 16.17, after seventh bowl poured out, angel says: "It is done!"
- but then again, in Rev 21.6, we have another angel saying the same thing: "It is done!"
- same thing; different angle, different perspective

Also, remember, that biblical prophecy, OT, NT, and especially here in Revelation isn't just one off

- most often, partial fulfillments given until ultimate and final fulfillment comes

- time doesn't permit me to give numerous examples, but just think of Isaiah 7.14
- a virgin shall conceive and bear a son
- this was fulfilled in Ahaz & Isaiah's day, but ultimately fulfilled with Mary & birth of Jesus
- so, when we see wars coming in ch. 6, this isn't the first time this has happened
- and it's not simply for some future time
- Jesus said, Matt 24
- *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*
(Matthew 24:6–8 ESV)
- is this only fulfilled once? If so, when?
- because Christians since the day of Pentecost have been wondering: is this it?
- there's a war coming; Rome is going to pound us into the ground; is this the fulfillment?
- and all through the intervening centuries, this goes on, again and again
- this helps us understand that what we're seeing in ch 6 and following follows this pattern

So, what are we to think when people say ch 6 is the end of the world

- well, one option is to think that everyone is wrong
- whoever identifies some current event with ch 6 & four horsemen is wrong
- or...
- everyone could be right: wherever we see war, famine, pestilence, conquest, and death
- we see the four horsemen going forth, in other words, with partial fulfillments
- these four horsemen are not a one time occurrence at end of the world
- rather, they are God's judgment, in part, upon the wicked of this earth, through history

First, let's look at...

I. THE WHITE HORSE

- there have been various understandings of who the rider is
- some say just a figure, some say Christ, some say antichrist

1. Is this Christ?

- in Rev 19, we see Christ coming on white horse
- name is Faithful and True, wearing many crowns
- here, only one crown; clear difference in crowns
- both horses are white does not mean they are the same thing
- white, color for conquest; white flag today means surrendering to the conqueror
- victorious generals rode into cities upon white horse
- so, could be Christ, but most likely not
- Christ isn't followed by famine and pestilence and death
- also, four horses seen as a unit, not a group of three with one different leading off
- imagery from Zechariah 6.1
- *Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them strong.*

(Zechariah 6:1–3 ESV)

- very similar thing here in Revelation 6
- strange if one was Jesus and other three are judgments

2. So what is this horse?

- call him conquest
- leaders, nations, people, trampling upon others to conquer them
- evils of the other horsemen follow such conquest and such

Let's consider...

II. THE RED HORSE

- this horse takes peace from the earth
- note this carefully: God is the One granting this
- He grants these to war and slay others
- this is not saying anything about rightness / wrongness of war
- this says nothing about any particular war, i.e., Ukraine vs Russia currently
- this is saying that God is sovereign over war
- and sometimes God sends them as judgment against nations and rulers
- one thing to consider here is this: as bad as our world may seem
- it could be much worse; yes, it could
- think about Romans 1, where God gives rebellious men over to their own minds & desires
- imagine it: ever increasing wickedness
- the worst thing God could do to us is let us act like ourselves, our very own natures
- God keeps sinful humanity in check more than we ever realize
- we have a tendency to think we're basically good and the world makes us bad
- it's the other way around: the world—and that includes us—is bad apart from Christ
- and God restrains that vileness so that the world is not as evil as it could be
- and it is His judgment when He lifts His restraints
- that's what's happening here: peace is taken, wars are carried out, and it is awful

After this horse, comes...

III. THE BLACK HORSE

- this is the horse of scarcity, of economic hardship and depravation
- not necessarily famine, but a great lack of food is given here
- Roman soldier given enough bread for one day
- his day's wage was a denarius; and now, this is going to purchasing just food for one day
- supply is exceedingly small and demand is quite high
- therefore, prices are highly inflated; prices are vastly more than they normally would have been
- \$30 for gallon of gas; \$20 for gallon of milk
- oil and wine not touched...why?
- some say these are commodities for the rich; poor are starving
- most likely, conditions are miserable, things are not as bad as they could be
- God's hand of restraint is still in operation here
- is your life affected by political upheavals and war?
- if it is not now, it might soon be
- by revealing these things before they happen...
- God is preparing His people to trust Him
- thru these devastations & judgments which human governments create, God is still on His throne
- it is vital that we keep seeing God's sovereign hand over all these matters
- this is what holds us: God is on His throne
- the Son, the Lamb that was slain, is ruling over all this
- even His divine judgments, coming upon the earth, are clearly in His control

And now comes the fourth horse...

III. THE PALE HORSE

- the word can literally mean “green” color of sickness, death
- he looks a little green behind the gills, is a saying about illness
- sequence: conquest leads to war which leads to scarcity and hardship
- this leads to people dying
- Hades follows Death, the rider upon this pale horse
- now, I hope you’ll recall, we’ve talked about Hades before
- this is not hell — NT usage would be Gehenna, or simply hell
- this is the abode of the dead, like Hebrew word Sheol
- so, the scene is doubling up here: Death and the place of death come
- this horse & rider given power over one-fourth of the earth
- again, see God’s sovereign restraining hand
- death comes by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts
- in ancient world, these were the most common means of death
- *For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast!*
(Ezekiel 14:21 ESV)
- Lev 26:18: the Lord will discipline with judgments His people if they refuse to listen to Him
- *“Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins.”*
(Leviticus 26:21 ESV)
- v. 22: I will let loose the wild beasts among you
- v. 25: I will bring a sword upon you
- v. 25: I will send pestilence among you
- v. 26: I will break your bread supply
- Rev 6 envisions God judging the earth just as He promised
- to Moses & Israel, thru Ezekiel, and now thru John in this apocalyptic revealing

Let me ask this question, as we draw our time to an end:

IV. WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THIS?

- all fascinating, but what are we to take away from this
1. **Christians ought to refrain from making end of the world predictions**
 - we just look silly doing this sort of thing
 - it has happened too often, from well-meaning Christians,
 - people asked Jesus, “When?” He refused to answer
 - *He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”*
(Acts 1:7 ESV)
 - Christians in every generation have thought, “This is it! This is the last!”
 - and they were wrong...and we will be too, if we try to do this
 2. **The Bible does speak to the last days**
 - the four riders have ridden forth, are riding forth, and will keep riding forth
 - until Jesus comes, these four horsemen will be quite apparent
 - it is an ongoing judgment of God against this wicked world
 - perhaps there have been partial fulfillments of this
 - and there will be an intensification of this as the true & final end draws near

- but the reason each generation of Christians thinks they are in the end times is...
- ...because we are: as Peter preached on Pentecost—these are the last days
- the Bible thinks of it like this:
- there's before Christ, there's after Christ, and then there's heaven with Christ
- read Matthew 24–25 where Jesus gives all sorts of signs of the last days
- and we see them all around us, both in Revelation and in our lifetime
- Jesus said, “Such things must happen, these are the beginning of birth pains, then the end will come”
- birth pains are a good analogy: series of hurts, no epidurals to go around—they are painful to endure
- but they are part of the process of bringing new life

3. **Recognize and rest in the truth that all things are under God's sovereign control**

- ch 4: the One seated on the throne
- look at the four riders again: four living creatures call forth these horsemen
- who is in charge of these four living creatures? God is, of course
- God never relinquishes one iota of His sovereign rule, not for one nanosecond
- remember question: who is worthy to open the scroll of God's sovereign plan?
- God's Son, that's who
- I know this also simply because of the text
- v. 2: a crown was given to him
- v. 4: its rider was permitted to...
- v. 6: the voice in middle of four living creatures...most likely this is God's own voice
- He says: only so much; only so much
- v. 7: they were given authority over...
- God has not vacated His throne; He reigns from His throne
- it is His judgment and He gives its authority to those who will carry it out
- so instead of running from God's sovereignty, run to it and be kept safe

4. **Christians of all people should not be naive about this world's troubles**

- don't watch the news and start crying out like Chicken Little: the sky is falling!
- there is always breaking news and will always be breaking news
- there will always be these types of things
- social media platforms allow this kind of reporting to run rampant
- no one checks it for reality or truth, they just report their experience of whatever it is
- our response should not be alarm & fear, like our security were bound up with this world
- instead, we should have anticipating and confidence: Jesus the Lamb is on the throne
- His history is secure in His hands, He

Conclusion – see all this as God's mercy

- God's sovereign judgments are His loving call of mercy through the ages

Let every scene of conquest

- every description of war
- every event of economic scarcity
- every gruesome picture of death
- be a warning to us: a warning of greater judgment to come upon the world
- some of this judgment comes upon a wayward church: judgment begins with household of God

- some of this judgment is upon unbelieving world, the enemies of Christ
- small judgments foretell a larger, harsher judgment
- some of this judgment even comes against the church
- not in wrath, but why do we, if we think we're the last generation before Christ's return, think we get a free pass?
- tell that to the martyrs under the throne that we'll look at next Lord's Day
- not truly a judgment of God's wrath; we're kept from that
- but it is a trial that tests our trust and hope in God's good providence

So our response should be like that of Jesus when tower collapsed & killed many

- Jesus skips all the opportunities for comparing who is good and who is awful
- no, He simply says, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish"
- this tells us that every act of judgment upon the world is an act of mercy from God
- it is God saying, "Come! It's not too late. This is not as bad as it will get. So repent & come!"
- to him who has an ear, let him hear and overcome