

Apokalypsis – Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls!

Text: Revelation 6,8, 16.

Theme: The Book of Revelation, End times, prophecy, Apocalyptic Literature

- We were in chapters 4 and 5 last Sunday which are central chapters to the whole prophecy of Revelation. Chapters 4 & 5 are John's vision of Throne of God! Everything to come – all that “must take place after this” (4:1), flows out of the sovereign, majestic, rule of God's throne! What that means is – everything to come (in this prophecy and in our history) will flow God's justice, righteousness, holiness, mercy, and perfection. Remember that cause things are about to get heavy!
- Chapter 5 ended, with the Lamb, the only one worthy to take the scroll from God's right hand and open its seals. Let's remember 5:5-7 - Then one of the elders said to me, **“Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”** ⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.... ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.
- As chapter 6 opens, the seals are indeed opened. Before we get to them I want to you know that there is structure to this book. The bulk of chapters 4-22 are a series of 3 “7's”. Remember I mentioned John loves the number 7! There are 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls . The seals, the trumpets and bowls are judgments from God upon planet earth or “Tribulation”. The purpose of these judgments is not to destroy but to bring people to **repentance**. We will see that. Only the 6th seal, the 6th trumpet, and the final bowl judgments bring total destruction. They indicate the end of all things.
- First the seals are opened here in chapter 6. The seventh seal becomes the 1st trumpet call and that doesn't happen until chapter 8. The 7 trumpets begin blasting in 8:1 and ring out all the way till chapter 16. (With some other visions thrown in there too). The seventh trumpet begins the 7 bowls in chapter 16!
- For me, these 3 “7's” – the seals, the trumpets, and the bowl judgments are not chronological but visions of God's judgments to come which will bring much tribulation to the earth. With each series of 7 judgments, the intensity increases until the end of ends!

- Also after each 7 – the seals, the trumpets and the bowls - the return of Jesus is referred to. Which gives the church a lot of hope in the midst of tribulation.
- So here is a quote from Bible Commentator Utley which I think helps: “There is a fluidity in the NT between the “already” and the “not yet.” The book of the Revelation itself illustrates this tension. It was written for the persecuted believers of the first century (and every century) and yet prophetically addresses the last generation of believers. Tribulations are common in every age. The seventh seal is the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls. As has been noted, each is more intense than the previous one. But it seems to me that the sixth seal and the sixth trumpet describe the end of the age. Therefore, these are synchronous [occurring simultaneously] in nature and not chronologically sequential. The Second Coming is discussed three times, at the end of the seals, bowls, and trumpets and not just in chapter 19. This is the structural pattern of the book. It is an apocalyptic drama in three acts! ¹
- And so I don’t believe the Book of Revelation is to be understood chronologically – as if these seals and trumpets and bowls can be laid down on a time line. That to me would simply be guess work and Jesus already told us to not worry about days and times. Instead he told us to watch, wait, pray and be ready! In Matthew 24 especially Jesus told us general signs to prepare and warn people of his century, of every century and those alive on this planet during the last century of human history – when that will be we do not know. And so, “This book has first-century relevance, every-century relevance, and last-century relevance”. (Utley)
- Let’s take a look at the seals...
- 6:1 – “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”.
- **1st Seal – white horse – conquest / War**

¹ Utley, R. J. (2001). *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation* (Vol. Volume 12, p. 60). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

- 6:3 - ³ 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 men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.
- **2nd Seal – fiery red horse and rider. "take peace" - not just war – but violence. Look at the increase of both of those in our day! Our cities are rank with violence!**
- 6:5 - ⁵ 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, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"
- **Third seal = famine!**
- 6:7 - ⁷ 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.
- **4th Seal = Death to ¼ of the earth!** Through war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts – what that will look like I have no idea.
- 6:9 - 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 number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.
- **5th Seal – martyrdom.** Look at the last century in terms of martyrdom! It has calculated that more Christians have been martyred for their faith in the 20th and 21st centuries alone than during the previous 19 centuries combined. According to Open Doors – a international non-profit ministry which supports and strengthens persecuted Christians - A minimum of 100 million Christians worldwide face discrimination and

alienation, or suffer interrogation, arrest and even death for their faith in Jesus Christ. The top 10 nations seeing the most extreme and violent persecution of Christians: North Korea; Iraq (In Iraq **Christians have shrunk from 1.5 million to 300,000. They are being massacred by ISIS**) ; Eritrea; Afghanistan; Syria; Pakistan; Somalia; Sudan; Iran; and Libya.

- In Nigeria - Hundreds of thousands of Christians are facing massacre by radical Islamic terror group Boko Haram. Nigeria is deeply divided between a Muslim majority in the North and a predominantly Christian population in the South. In the North, terrorist group Boko Haram seeks to expel all Christians from the area. Its atrocities include: slaughtering over 2,000 Christians, kidnapping 200 girls in the Christian town of Chibok, bombing Christian churches, and inciting terror by kidnapping and murdering Christians. (Read more at <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/>)
- According to Christian Freedom International - every five minutes a Christian is martyred for their faith! They claim more than 200 million followers around the world currently face persecution, making Christians the most persecuted faith group on the planet. Christians currently face persecution in 105 of the world's 196 countries in a geographic sweep which extends across northern and western Africa, across the Middle East, throughout Asia and down into Indonesia.
- The martyr's question by the way in verse 10 is eventually answered in chapter 16!
- **¹² 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 late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴ The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man 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 stand?"**
- 6th Seal = A Great Earthquake and a cataclysmic end! This is a glimpse of the end of all things. Definitely a shift with this seal. This seal is described again with the final bowls of chapter 16.
- The 7th Seal opens the 7 trumpets and that happens in chapter 8. Turn there. Overview the trumpets...

1. HAIL AND FIRE MIXED WITH BLOOD – 8:7 - ⁷ The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

2. SEA (SALT WATER) TURNED TO BLOOD – 8:8 - ⁸ The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

3. FRESHWATER TURNS BITTER – 8:10 - ¹⁰ The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water— ¹¹ the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

4. COSMIC DARKNESS – 8:12 - ¹² The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

***(NOTE THAT THESE 4 ARE ALL NATURAL DISASTER JUDGMENTS – and if they were not enough the end of chapter 8 tells us things are about to get even worse)

5. PERMISSION GIVEN TO SATAN AND HIS DEMONIC HORDES TO TORTURE THE UNBELIEVING WORLD! - 9:1-11 - An army of evil spirits released.

6. FOUR ANGELS OF DEATH – 1/3 OF UNREPENTANT HUMANITY KILLED – 9:13-21. Humanity still refuses to repent.

7.WORSHIP IN THE THRONE ROOM! 11:15-19 - reminding us God is still on the throne

- Then the bowls...“bowls of God’s wrath” - in chapter 16...
- **15:1 – “ I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues – last, because with them God’s wrath is completed...”**

- **16:1 – “ Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth”.**
- These are poured out on unrepentant humanity...
 1. Ulcers – ugly and painful, oozing sores. - 16:2
 2. Sea (salt water) turned to blood – every living thing in the sea dies! -16:3
 3. Rivers and springs – so freshwater turned to blood - 16:4 (Martyr’s are avenged)
 4. Sun scorching people with fire – 16:8-9
 5. The kingdom of the final great “Anti-Christ” is thrown into darkness – 16:10-11
 6. The Euphrates river is dried up paving the way for a great end battle. – 16:12-13
 7. The Voice of God declaring “It is Done”! From that voice an earthquake like no other flattens the earth. 100 pound hailstones fall on people. It’s over folks! - 16:17-21

And guess what? Through all of these plagues, humanity refused to repent! Like Pharaoh in the time of Moses. In fact they continue to curse God! You can read that throughout chapter 16.

- So woah! Heavy stuff eh! Overall – in between Jesus first coming and his second will be what? A whole lot of bad stuff! Violence and suffering on the planet! Look around! According to this prophecy – things will get worse. Ah! But Jesus is coming! In chapter 16, right after the 6th bowl and before the 7th – Jesus make a promise: 16:15 – “Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays away and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed”. **TRANSLATION – BE READY!**
- Come next week and we will learn how God will preserve and protect his own through all of these seal, trumpet and bowl judgments!
- Summary – so the picture Revelation gives us is a gift. Human beings will reap what they have sown. The wages of human sin is death and because of unrepentant sin, judgment is coming. God’s judgment is not out of control – it is holy, loving wrath with a purpose – the purpose is to cause people to repent so they are saved from further judgment. The picture we get however that even these judgment make people harder and not softer before God. The hope in the midst of it is the return of Jesus! He is coming back to take us home! A time is coming in the future, when the judgments are so severe that they are final! Complete. No recovery from them. New “heaven on

earth” – there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Eternal glory has come!

- And so twice after the 7th trumpet sounds and before the final bowls are poured out we are told this:
- **Revelation 13:10 – “...This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints”.**
- **And again in Revelation 14:12 – “¹² This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.**