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Sermon Notes

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The Lamb Opens the Seals

Revelation 6:1-17

Context: So far in Revelation, we have seen the Apostle John's circumstances in receiving and writing this book... he was in exile on the Island of Patmos for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus...

He had a vision of the resurrected and glorified Christ walking amongst seven golden lampstands, holding in his hands seven stars. The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the messengers of these churches. This represents his continual and active ministry to, judgment of, and protection over every local church on earth in every era of human history

What followed in Revelation 2-3 was Christ speaking by the Spirit to every church in the world and in every era of redemptive history... by his words of encouragement, praise, warning, rebuke and judgment to the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, Christ teaches us what he loves in his church, and what he hates. He loves churches to love him with a HOT passionate love, and to love each other; he loves his churches to work hard and serve him diligently with unflagging dedication; he loves his churches to hold fast to his name despite bitter persecution; he loves his churches to embrace and fight for sound doctrine, and to reject false teachers; he loves his churches to be holy, to harbor no secret sins, especially sexual sin. Conversely, he hates it when he church grows cold in his affection for him, or becomes lazy in service, cowardly in witness, dead in worship, lukewarm in their hearts, deceived by false doctrine. This is

what the Lord Jesus Christ is fighting for in every generation: the full salvation of all his elect against the powerful foes of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Then, Revelation 4 gave us a magnificent vision of the heavenly glory of Almighty God. John was invited to go through a doorway standing open in heaven, and he was given power by the Spirit to obey that command. There he saw immediately a throne in heaven with someone seated on it... the infinite majesty of God enthroned, who sits above the circle of the earth, and before whom all the people of the earth are like grasshoppers, and all the nations of the earth are drops of water from a bucket and dust on the scales. The radiant glory of God enthroned emanates out causing the twenty-four elders and the countless angels and spiritual beings to worship him continually as the God who CREATED ALL THINGS and who SUSTAINS ALL THINGS... God the Creator!

We come in this chapter to one of the most famous images in this book... the so-called "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"... the first four seals unleash not just four different colored horses as in the vision given to Zechariah, but four RIDERS as well, and the focus is on the power of the riders to bring about massive effects on earth

The progressive breaking open of the seals by the Lord Jesus Christ corresponds to unfolding events on earth... that is clear especially from the second seal in which the rider of the red horse has power to take peace "from the earth" and make men slay each other... looking at each of the seals, we can see the same dynamic... Jesus breaks open a seal and mighty events happen on planet earth, events that represent the wrath and judgment of God on the sinful human race.

Two possible approaches to the seven seals: 1) the events corresponding to the seven seals are for the final years of tribulation on earth, the "Great Tribulation" that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24

Matthew 24:21-22 then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again. ²² If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

In that way of thinking, none of the events of the seven seals has happened yet; all are yet to come. 2) the events described in the first six seals especially represent recurring patterns of wrath, judgment, and suffering that will happen again and again throughout human history all over the earth until the last and worst aspect of them occurs in that final tribulation

Matthew 24:6-9 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹ ¶ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

During the unfolding history that God has ordained, there will be regular patterns of peaceful conquest (the first horseman); war (the second horseman); famine (the third horseman); and death (the fourth horseman).

While all this suffering is going on in every generation, the gospel of Jesus Christ will keep spreading to every nation and language on earth:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The rise and fall of wicked rulers and the general hatred of the human race for the gospel will result in much persecution and suffering in every generation of redemptive history, including the apostasy of many false believers who buckle under the pressure of persecution:

Matthew 24:9-10 you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that

time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other

Thus the fifth seal unveils the ever-growing number of martyrs who will have to pay the price in their own blood for the spread of the gospel:

Revelation 6:9-11 *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.*

For the first five seals at least, it is possible to make the case that these patterns, which we most certainly DO SEE in every generation, will repeat themselves again and again until the end of the world; but we could expect a great intensification of them in the final phase of human history under the Antichrist...

Repeated patterns... dress rehearsals for the final phase:

Matthew 24:37 *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

That is a KEY IDEA for me when it comes to studying the end time:
 "As it was... so it will be" ... repeated patterns, culminating in one final cataclysm right before the Second Coming of Christ.
 "ALREADY//NOT YET"

I do not necessarily hold that this is true throughout all aspects of the judgments of God that unfold in the Book of Revelation... the seven trumpets and seven bowls that will fill the pages of Revelation 8-9 and Revelation 15-16 seem different than anything the human race has ever experienced... different in nature (openly demonic beings unleashed to ravage people on earth), and different in scope and magnitude (pollution of the sea that kills first 1/3rd, then every living creature in the sea...

So, I am just focusing today on the six seals... but I am embracing that second approach to the six seals: the first five at least unleash patterns that are seen again and again in human history

God's wrath is already poured out on the wicked every day; and the great suffering of the nations under the wars and natural disasters are part of God's judgment on our wicked human race

Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness

But the final outpouring of God's wrath will hit levels such as we have never seen before, and that final tribulation will begin by following the pattern unfolded in these seals.

In each of the six seals of this chapter, I will approach it by an describing the "already" interpretation (how we have already seen this in every era of human history) and the "not yet" or final fulfillment (what the final generation will experience)

I. The First Seal Broken, the First Rider Unleashed: Deceptive Peace

Revelation 6:1-2 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.

A. The Lamb Initiates Everything

1. Though human rulers think they are running the show, behind everything that unfolds on earth is the plan of Almighty God...

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations.²⁷ For the LORD Almighty

has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

2. When Christ breaks open the first seal, events start to move IN HEAVEN FIRST! One of the four living creatures cries out “COME!!” in a voice that sounded like thunder
3. Many times in Revelation, voices come in heaven that have overwhelming volume... loud voices that sounded like thunder or like an earthquake or like a waterfall (rushing, roaring waters)
4. It's like the seraphim who call to one another in Isaiah's vision, “Holy, holy, holy” and when they cried to each other, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke AT THE SOUND OF THEIR VOICES... not even at the sound of God's voice!
5. These powerful voices of heavenly creatures give a sense to John and to us all of how weak, puny, insignificant we are... how small is our voice, how weak is our influence!
6. But when one of the four living creatures called “Come,” the first horseman of the Apocalypse rode forth on the surface of the earth

B. The First Horseman Described

1. The image of a horseman riding on the surface of the earth is terrifying... to a foot soldier, the sight of a mounted warrior riding at full gallop toward him would be enough to cause him to run for his life... but how could he escape?
2. The horse alone, weighing over half a ton, running at over 40 miles per hour, could easily trample you to death
3. TERRIFYING image... for all four of these prophetic horses!!

4. But this first one is unique... the horse is white... so physically attractive, delightful, appealing even
5. And the rider carries a BOW but no arrows are mentioned; yet despite this lack of open weaponry, this rider rides forth like a conqueror bent on conquest
6. He seeks to build an empire by means other than the usual—military conquest; yet the bow in his hand implies the threat of war

C. The First Horseman Interpreted

1. Some commentators believe this rider on the white horse represents Christ and the spread of the gospel
2. To some degree, this makes sense, since in Revelation 19:11, the Lord Jesus Christ in his Second Coming glory is said to be riding a white horse
3. So, these interpreters think this represents Christ advancing at the beginning of the church age with the victorious and peaceful spread of the gospel
4. HOWEVER, it seems very unlikely that the LAMB (Jesus Christ) would break open a seal and a living creature would command a rider on a white horse to COME and that rider IS Christ... the very one who broke open the seal... also, why would Christ come at the command of a heavenly living creature?
5. Better to see this rider as more of a COUNTERFEIT Christ... imitating him in some way... we will see especially with the Beast of Revelation 13 the Satanic mimicry of a FALSE CHRIST who will come to rule the world
6. So I think this represents the devious, sly, secretly wicked conquest of a false Christ who advances his kingdom by peaceful means with the threat of war always lingering behind...
7. ALREADY/NOT YET: these first four seals represent the “beginning of birth pains” and signs that we see in every generation... but which then come to a final consummation at the end of the world

Matthew 24:24-25 false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.

8. Throughout history, there have been devious, wicked, sly politicians who have skillfully conquered lands by evil and treacherous treaties and false diplomacy
9. The prophet Daniel speaks of such a ruler in Daniel 11:

Daniel 11:21 "He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.

Daniel 11:23-24 After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. ²⁴ When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did.

Daniel 11:27 The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time.

10. This man in Daniel 11 represents a Greek king who lived several centuries before Christ, who makes covenants with the Jews and achieves his ends POLITICALLY through intrigue and threats; this ruler lies and acts deceitfully, and intimidates and flatters and achieves amazing ends through treacherous diplomacy...
11. This real ruler in Daniel 11 sets a pattern we see acted out in history again and again; but it will ultimately come to a consummation in the Antichrist, the final world ruler, who rises to power by deception and by an ALLURING outward appearance of righteousness and beauty and a promise of peace, but always with a threat of war
12. This same pattern we saw in Adolph Hitler's peaceful conquest of Czechoslovakia in 1938 before World War II; Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of England went to Munich, met with Hitler; was impressed by him, convinced that because of their agreement to trade the Czech people for a treaty with Hitler had achieved "PEACE IN OUR TIME!"

13. Hitler then broke the agreement, took over all of Czechoslovakia, less than a year later, invaded Poland and started World War II... he LIED to Neville Chamberlain and by treachery and flattery attained a peaceful conquest
14. This is a pattern that will continue to the end of the world, but especially employed by the Antichrist

D. The Temporary Success of the First Rider

1. This first rider is GIVEN A CROWN and rides for conquering and to conquer
2. He is given power and authority for a short time
3. So the final world ruler, the Antichrist, the Beast from the Sea will exercise authority over the world for 42 months... his time is very brief
4. So also is the false peace the first rider brings.... Like his own beauty and apparent righteousness, the peace he establishes is a lie... war soon follows

II. The Second Seal Broken, the Second Rider Unleashed: War

Revelation 6:3-4 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.

A. The Lamb Initiates Again: the Second Seal is Broken

1. Christ rules always... God makes the plan, man carries out his will
2. When the second seal is broken the second living creature said "Come!"
3. The chain of command is again established... heaven initiates, earth follows

B. The Second Horse and Rider Described

1. The second horse is more terrifying than the first one... this one is FIERY RED
2. This rider is given power to take peace from the earth and make men slay each other
3. To this rider is given a large sword
4. There is little doubt what this represents... the symbolism is obvious... this is the terrifying stampede of WARFARE resulting in bloodshed
5. The false peace that came with the first rider is over; the true murderous intentions of the evil ruler are made known, and the ruler advances his empire in the usual way, with the invasion of an overpowering army that sweeps away all opposition

C. The Second Horse and Rider Interpreted

1. As with these seals, we will see an “ALREADY/NOT YET” aspect to this horseman as well
2. Warfare has long plagued the human race, stampeding and trampling down through the pages of history with blood red hoofprints

Matthew 24:6-7 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

3. We should note that the fighting of one wicked army against another is just Satan’s way of slaughtering them all
 - a. When the Red Army of the Soviet Union went forth at the command of the wicked tyrant Joseph Stalin to fight the Nazi Army of Adolph Hitler that had invaded Russia, we should not imagine that God was pleased with either of these men or their godless soldiers

Isaiah 34:2-3 The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to

slaughter. ³ Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.

- b. So the red horse and its rider have POWER to take peace from the earth and make men slay each other with its large sword of war
- 4. NOT YET: there is an endtime fulfillment of this as well... for the Beast from the Sea will be given power to rule over the entire earth, including the power to wage war against the saints and to defeat them

Revelation 13:7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

- 5. This second horseman ultimately represents the bloody conquest of a final world ruler who will begin his conquest through deception and intrigue and false diplomacy, but who will end his conquest by warfare... by the swinging of a LARGE BLOODY SWORD given to him for a short time

III. The Third Seal Broken, the Third Rider Unleashed: Famine

Revelation 6:5-6 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!"

A. The Lamb Once Again Initiates the Next Horse and Rider

- 1. He breaks open the seal
- 2. The next living creature does his part and summons the third horseman of the Apocalypse

B. The Third Horse and Rider Described

1. The horse is black... an ominous color; a color that is no color, but rather the absence of light
2. The black horse is ridden by a rider holding a pair of scales in his hand
3. The scales are associated with merchants in that era... the weighing out of merchandise and the weighing out of money... of silver and gold to pay for the merchandise
4. The scales were generally a long wooden bar with a pair of pans suspended from each end, and the whole thing held up in the middle... or sometimes, with weights on one end and one pan on the other
5. As this black horse and its rider move across the earth, John hears a voice among the living creatures giving the significance... like a merchant calling forth his price for his commodities
6. The careful weighing of a small amount of wheat—effectively a QUART—for a denarius (which was a day's wages) is FAMINE conditions
 - a. Wheat was the staple food of the ancient world, better quality and more desired than barley
 - b. So a worker would labor for an entire day to earn not enough for himself or his family to eat
 - c. The barley also is rationed, however... a larger quantity would be available for a day's wages... three quarts... but again, this is not really a suitable meal; barley was often used only as fodder for animals
 - d. Famine is the logical consequence of war... men are slaughtered; farmers can't plow or sow or reap... fields lie fallow; navies blockade nations' ports; populations are gathered into cities and fortresses trying to survive
 - e. In Somalia and Ethiopia and other nations at this present time, the famine there is caused directly by the effects of a lingering civil war

f. After World War II, economies had collapsed in Europe, China, Japan... only massive aid from the United States in the Marshall Plan prevented worldwide starvation

g. So Jesus said “There will be famines in various places”

C. BUT the Famine is Not Universal

1. The voice that called out for the famine conditions limited it, saying “Do not hurt the olive oil and the wine”
2. So the famine is not as bad as it could be... some look on the “oil and the wine” as the symbol of luxuries that will still be available; some commentators believe this means that there will be much more suffering among the poor people than among the rich... the privileged lifestyle among the wealthy will continue undamaged for a time
3. This limitation perhaps points only toward the NOT YET aspect of these seals... since other famines in human history have been total and devastating to every level of society

IV. The Fourth Seal Broken, the Fourth Rider Unleashed: Death

Revelation 6:7-8 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.

A. Now Comes the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse!

1. Again this terrifying rider rides forth only at the command of heaven
2. It starts when the Lamb, Jesus Christ, breaks open the fourth seal and the fourth living creature commands the horse and rider to come

B. The Fourth Horse and Rider Described

1. This horse is PALE, perhaps with a green tint... the Greek word is “chloros” from which we get the word “chlorophyll”... the green tint in all vegetation
2. So this rider has a ghostly pale green color, characteristic of the decaying of a corpse
3. The rider is clearly identified: his name is DEATH... and HADES (the grave) followed close behind him
4. This horse and rider together have power to kill a fourth of the earth by sword, famine, plague and wild beasts
5. These are the standard plagues the prophets always spoke of to the nation of Israel
6. Notice the great escalation of horror from the other three horses... a quarter of the earth’s population slaughtered is absolutely mind-boggling
7. This has an ALREADY aspect, in that in every generation war and famine are followed by death
8. The world death total connected to World War II must extend beyond battlefield casualties, for there were massive civilian casualties because of bombing, polluted water supplies, disease, famine, concentration camps, exposure to the elements and other war-related sufferings... it’s impossible to give an accurate accounting of people who died directly because of the war
9. Some estimates go as high as 60 million... the world population in 1940 was 2.3 billion... so that means that only 2.6% of the world died as a result of the war
10. This plague of death extending to ¼ of the earth’s population is beyond our ability to conceive... in our present age, it would equate to almost 2 billion people dying
11. Yet... as terrible as this will be, Jesus says

Matthew 24:8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

The judgments that will fill the pages of the rest of this awesome Book of Revelation will be even worse.

As we've been following Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24, it is reasonable to see the next stage in Jesus' predictions:

Matthew 24:9-10 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

V. The Fifth Seal Broken: Martyrs Slaughtered

Revelation 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.

A. The Lamb Initiates the Slaughter of His Own People

1. Christ breaks open the fifth seal
2. The result is the slaughter of many of his own people... martyrs whose blood soaked the earth
3. They are slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained... the testimony of Jesus Christ
4. This is a major theme in the Book of Revelation... the witnesses of Jesus courageously standing before the wicked powers of the earth to testify to the truth of Christ and of the gospel
5. The martyrdom of his precious people is of powerful interest to Christ
6. It is part of his sovereign plan for the advance of the gospel

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

B. Already and Not Yet

1. Martyrs have shed their blood in every generation for the love they had to Christ, for the courage of their bold witness to Christ

Tertullian: the blood of martyrs is seed for the church

2. However, the end of the world will see a GREAT INCREASE of this level of suffering...
3. The Antichrist, the Beast from the Sea, the “Little Horn” of Daniel... this one world ruler... will be given power to slaughter the saints of God, as we mentioned earlier

Daniel 7:20-22 I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell-- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. ²¹ As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

Daniel 7:24-25 After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

4. The Kingdom of the Antichrist will be a reign of terror for the saints of God alive at that time... they will run for their lives and hide in caves and other locations to try to survive... they will refuse to receive the mark of the Beast, so they cannot buy or sell anything... they will be men and women of whom the world will not be worthy, for they will

Hebrews 11:38 wander in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

C. The Righteous Cry for Vengeance

1. The slaughtered saints are seen IN HEAVEN, under the altar of God
2. This is a picture well known in the Old Testament... people running for their lives would seek refuge in the temple, holding onto the horns of the altar; a plea to God for mercy and protection
3. BUT they did not receive miraculous deliverance... for it was God's will that they should seal their testimony with their own blood
4. They are already under this blessing:

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

5. But notice their CRY FOR JUSTICE?!! Their righteous cry for VENGEANCE!

Revelation 6:10 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?"

- a. It has long been the cry of the suffering people of God... "HOW LONG, O LORD until you act for us???"

Psalm 94:3 How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant?

Psalm 74:10-11 How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? ¹¹ Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them!

- b. We should not imagine that such a cry for justice and vengeance is somehow UNWORTHY
- c. Of course, Jesus said "Father, forgive them..."
- d. And Stephen as he was dying said "Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge"

- e. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies and pray for their conversion
- f. BUT YET, the desire for justice and vengeance actually LINES UP with the very thing God is planning on doing to vindicate his suffering people

Romans 12:19-20 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

- g. God has promised VENGEANCE IS MINE... I WILL REPAY!
- h. No book in all the Bible so clearly depicts God repaying the wicked for the way they attacked and murdered the righteous as does the Book of Revelation

Revelation 16:4-7 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." ⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

- 6. Notice also that these dead saints are aware of the events on earth... they KNOW that their murderers, the inhabitants of the earth, have not yet been repaid for their wickedness
- 7. Also, God refrains from punishing these people as a final display of his patience

Romans 9:22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction?

The patience of God is supposed to lead them to repentance and salvation through Christ:

2 Peter 3:15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation

BUT these wicked people do not use the patience of God properly,
but only harden their hearts and store up more wrath

Romans 2:4-6 do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

D. The Martyrs Comforted and Partially Rewarded

Revelation 6:11 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.

1. The white robe represents the atonement Christ worked for their sins
2. Even the holiest martyrs who courageously lay down their lives for Christ are still sinners saved by the grace of God in Christ
3. Their sins are paid for by the blood of Christ; and their unrighteousness is covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ... they are seen to be HOLY and PURE as they wait in heaven
4. They must WAIT... this is a picture of the imperfection of their heavenly state... they are morally pure, and have in some sense received their reward by gaining access to heaven... but they are still WAITING for the fullness of what they expect... total vindication from God against their enemies
5. Heaven is a place of WAITING... all of the dead saints are

2 Corinthians 5:8 absent from the body, and ... present with the Lord.

6. The dead saints are waiting for their resurrection bodies

7. And in particular, these dead saints are waiting for their vindication from their murderers, their wicked enemies
8. And all of heaven is waiting for the FULL NUMBER of the martyrs who were to be killed as they were to come it
9. Everything is NUMBERED... all the days ordained for us were written in God's Book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139); even the very hairs of our heads are all numbered (Matthew 10); and the total number of martyrs to die as witnesses for Christ is also numbered... preordained by the plan of God

VI. The Sixth Seal Broken: The End of This Heaven and Earth

Revelation 6:12-17 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?"

- A. These Sights are Breathtaking and Overwhelming... the End of the Universe
 1. To some degree we can see here the end of the universe as we know it
 2. The earth itself is shaken and moves beneath the feet of the inhabitants of the earth... every island and mountain is removed from its place
 3. The celestial bodies, the sun, the moon, and the stars are shaken... the heavens are completely affected by these judgments
 - a. Copernicus rightly discerned that the earth revolved around the sun, not the other way around

- b. However, the sun, moon, and stars were put in the heavens FOR AN EARTHLY PURPOSE

Genesis 1:14-17 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights-- the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth

- c. But when the events of human history have run their course, the sun, moon, and stars will end their existence in the heavens... the universe EXISTS for an EARTHBOUND PURPOSE!!
- d. The sun turns dark, the moon turns blood red, the stars fall from the sky like figs from a fig tree
- e. I cannot understand what this means in terms of cosmology... the stars are incomprehensibly distant

B. The Terror of the Earth's Inhabitants: the Great Day of God's Wrath

1. God has a terrifying and active WRATH against sin... God is not mild or indifferent toward it... he is ANGRY... sin enrages him

Psalm 18:7-13 The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry. ⁸ Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. ⁹ He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. ¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. ¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him-- the dark rain clouds of the sky. ¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. ¹³ The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.

2. Though God expresses his wrath every single day, most people do not recognize it as such
3. God has patiently deferred the full display of his wrath on the earth's wicked inhabitants; he is patient, and has reserved his wrath

for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed

4. There is something called "the Day of the Lord"... that day is the coming day of wrath
5. As the sixth seal is opened, the inhabitants of the earth recognize the day has come at last!! And they are terrified of it
6. There is a vast PRAYER... but the prayer is NOT TO GOD!! This prayer comes from the mouths of every single unsaved person on the face of the earth... cutting across ALL socioeconomic and governmental levels:

Revelation 6:15-17 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! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

C. Only One Refuge... and they Missed It!!

1. They are calling to the earth to hide them... to the mountains to give them refuge
2. But the earth will DISCLOSE the blood shed upon it
3. The earth will not hide these wicked people!
4. And no one can hide from the eyes of the Lord:

Amos 9:1-6 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. ² Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. ³ Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. ⁴ Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will

command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good." ⁵ The Lord, the LORD Almighty, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn-- the whole land rises like the Nile, then sinks like the river of Egypt-- ⁶ he who builds his lofty palace in the heavens and sets its foundation on the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name.

5. They will seek a refuge from the wrath of God and of the Lamb, but there was ONLY ONE refuge, and they missed it
6. The only refuge there is from the wrath of God is the grace of God in Christ
 - a. Christ took the lightning strike of the wrath of God for us
 - b. Christ is the refuge, Christ is the hiding place

Romans 3:24-25 Sinners are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness

- c. We must flee to him NOW

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

D. How the Sixth Seal Relates to the Rest of Revelation

1. The sixth seal really seems to predict the end of the world
2. If every part of the universe is shaken, if the stars fall from the sky, if the sun is darkened, is that not the end?
3. Furthermore, the stars in the sky fall to the earth with the sixth seal, but when the fourth trumpet is sounded...

Revelation 8:12 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.

4. So this gives me a strong sense that the Book of Revelation covers the same ground again and again... just in more detail the second and third times around

E. At Any Rate... Keep in Mind this Significant Teaching

1. This is how the universe will end! By the sovereign power of God

T.S. Elliot's famous poem, "The Hollow Men":

This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 Not with a bang but a whimper.

2. No, T.S. ... the universe will end with an open display of the wrath of God against humanity for its sin
3. At that time, there will be no refuge, no place to run to, nowhere to hide

2 Corinthians 6:2 I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

FLEE TO CHRIST NOW!!

VII. Applications

A. Understand the Sovereign Power of Christ Over Events on Earth

1. When Christ breaks open each seal, events start to move on earth
2. So even now, as history is unfolding, it is unfolding as Christ has determined, as he controls it

3. Christ owns earth; and the “title deed” of the earth is his by right; as he breaks open each seal, the judgments that follow are his righteous reactions to the sins of the human race
4. As a Christian, do not fear that the world is spinning out of control, even when we see many of these “beginning of birth pains”: wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes in various places

B. See the Pattern of “Already/Not Yet”

1. These things are already happening, because we are already in the Last Days
2. But there are some things that are unique to the end of the world
3. We must realize the “as it was, so it will be” aspect of End Times teaching
4. History is giving us dress rehearsals of the final drama that will end human history

C. Prepare for the End of the Universe by Living a Holy Life and Spreading the Gospel

1. This universe is temporary... we need to understand that completely and not live like we will be here forever
2. There will come a time when the stars will fall from the sky, when the sun will be darkened and the moon turn blood red... even the celestial beings are not eternal
3. Peter made it plain that the best way we can live in light of the temporary nature of the universe is by holiness and evangelism

2 Peter 3:11-13 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

4. We need to put sin to death because the wrath of God is coming for such sins
5. We need to warn our unsaved neighbors, because the end is coming
6. We need to LOOK FORWARD to the Day of the Lord... Look forward to the New Heavens and New Earth

D. Recognize the Place of Martyrs in the Plan of God

1. Many more brothers and sisters in Christ will have to die before the end has come
2. This is not an accident... the number of martyrs is already preordained and fixed by the sovereign plan of God
3. We need to be courageous in our witness and not shrink back from the gospel and from suffering for the elect to come to Christ

E. Embrace the Doctrine of the Wrath of God for Sin

1. It is biblical to understand God's passionate reaction to evil
2. If we don't accept it, we can not accept the atoning work of Christ on the cross, or the rest of the Book of Revelation

F. Once More... Flee to Christ NOW!!!