

When you think of Jesus seizing control of history... what comes to mind?

The way you answer that question will show what you think about God... and it will show whether God's concerns are your concerns... whether your concerns are derived from the Bible or from some other source.

So try now to be completely honest in the way you answer this question. When you think of Jesus taking over... do you think mainly about getting what you want? ... Do green grass and blue skies and happy smiles everywhere come first to mind?

Or are you concerned about what concerns God? ... When you are offended by people... is it because they are disregarding the first and greatest commandment? ... Do you think to yourself... *That person exists to love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength?* ... And when people offend you... do they offend you because... in what they are saying or doing... they are despising God?... In other words... is your primary concern for God's glory? ... Are the uppermost thoughts in your mind thoughts of how people owe God honor and refuse to give it?

Here's why I ask these questions: If your concerns are derived from the Bible... our passage this morning (Revelation 6) will not surprise you. ... But if your concerns are not derived from the Bible... Revelation chapter 6 will be very surprising.

The thoughts and questions that I have just expressed... are the introduction of Dr. Kent Hughes... as he opens the chapter of his commentary on Revelation chapter six. I would like to continue... briefly... with his line of thinking before we dive into our verses of study.

If you are primarily concerned with what concerns God... your primary concern will be for His glory. ... And if you are informed by such passages of the Bible... as Romans 1:21... you will know that God is just... and that God keeps His word. ... God created the world for His glory... and He has promised to punish those who do not glorify Him as God... or give thanks to him.

But if you are not primarily concerned with God and His glory... if you're not offended when His glory is trampled in the dust... you will have different thoughts about Jesus seizing control of history... and you are going to be surprised by His actions.

You see... God has been patiently storing up wrath for all these long ages. God has been allowing crimes and injustices and blasphemies and abominations for so long... and He has been tolerating slander, blasphemy, and lies to be spoken about Him all these years. ... Revelation 6 promises that will all come to an end. ... The debt finally comes due. Justice will be done. The wicked will give account. The righteous will be avenged. God will be glorified in his justice.

We need to have our minds and our affections shaped by the Bible. We need to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and we need to love God's glory. We need what Revelation chapters 6 – 19 give us... because it shows us how passionately committed to His own glory God is. We need to understand... first and foremost... that God is just... and He will justly repay all the ways that His glory has been despised... and His holiness has been defiled.

But there is a second reason we need what these next chapters in Revelation offer us. In order to live for Christ... Christians need to believe that it is worse to deny Christ... than to have our life troubled... upset... ruined... or even ended in this world.

We need to be assured that our heavenly Father will come for us. We need to be assured of God's promises so that our faith in God will be certain.

God has not only made promises to us... He has disclosed His plan. ...We need to know that God has a plan to deal with evil and pain... that He will be just... that He will be merciful... and that no matter what happens to us here on earth... He will come for us.

God's disclosure of His plan to judge evil and save His people frees us to trust Him no matter what happens to us.

If the earth shakes and buildings fall on us... if the laws change and we are persecuted for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus... if the political climate of our country continues down the path of placing judges and administrators in government position that restrict our religious freedoms and rights as US citizens... these chapters show us that God will deliver His people from every calamity... He will avenge every injustice done to His faithful ones

So if it gets so bad that you think the Antichrist is going to arise at any moment, if they send you to a forced labor camp for "reeducation," if they break all your teeth with blows to your face, if they take you from your children and put you to death, God has a plan to save and judge. He will

judge justly. He will save those who trust in Jesus. The gospel will go to the ends of the earth, and then the end will come.

The previous two chapters were introductory, setting the stage, showing Who was in control, and preparing the reader for the coming descriptions of judgments. The judgments can be divided into three main series of sevens—seven seals, seven trumpets and seven vials.

As we study the next fourteen action-filled chapters, keep in mind that John wrote to encourage God's people in every age of history. He was not simply writing *prophecy* in order to satisfy our curiosity about end times...
“Oh that’s how it all ends...”

The important thing for us to keep before us is the Great Tribulation is triggered from heaven. Jesus Christ directs the entire operation.

Now... there will always be those who study these events and conclude...
“I don’t like all this...” ... Well... Do you have a better suggestion as to how Christ should put down the rebellion on this earth against Him? ... How do you think He should put it down? ... Do you think they are ready in Moscow, in the Kremlin, to turn authority over to Him? ... How about in any other country? ... How about in our country? ... I'm telling you, they are not about to turn it over to Him in Washington, D.C. ... Neither of our political parties is interested in putting Jesus Christ on the throne. ... They have some very unworthy men and women on both sides who would like to be on the throne.

Christ alone is the One who is worthy. And how is He going to come to power? Exactly as the Psalm 2:9 says:

Psalm 2:9 (ESV)

You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The time of singing (which we saw in last week's chapter)... has finally ceased... for the hour of judgment has come. ... The Lamb... whose right it is to possess the earth... has received the earth's title deed and now must begin to take possession of His kingdom.

We saw last week that the scroll whose writing is within... had been rolled and sealed with seven seals. ... Before the great claim can be verified officially... the seals must be broken... and the writing openly displayed. Earth's squatter on Christ's property... and his human assistants must be expelled... before the Lamb's divine ownership will ever be openly recognized. Thus...as each successive seal is broken... the wrath of God takes successive toll on the earth and its inhabitants.

The judgments are executed in three series.

- The Seals...
- The Trumpets... (and then the most severe)...
- The Bowls...

These occur over a seven-year period... and are the most severe troubles the world will ever know. ... This is "the day of the Lord," the time when God breaks His age-long silence and speaks from heaven in mighty power. ...The great judgments of this period are described in words of fire by the prophets of the Old Testament... especially Isaiah and Daniel.

Revelation 6:1-2

Horses represent God's activity on earth... the forces He uses to accomplish His divine purposes. ... During the first century... a white horse was usually ridden by conquering commanders. It was ridden by generals in parades after a great victory. They usually would not ride them in battle as it would draw the attention of the enemy and single them out for attack.

The one who rides this white horse comes like a knight in shining armor.

There is much dispute as to what this rider on the white horse represents. Some identify him as Jesus... because in Chapter 19... Jesus appears on a white horse... wearing a crown (a different kind of crown... however) and bringing to an end all the terrible series of judgments that have come upon the earth. Jesus comes to end the trouble. This rider brings trouble.

What a mistake... I believe it is to identify our rider of the white horse in chapter six as Jesus... because the context is entirely different. Here we are looking at the beginning of the judgments of God... and in Chapter 19 we see the end of them. ... Also... the rider of Chapter 6... is summoned by one of the living creatures. But it would be unthinkable... for a creature to summon the conquering Christ of Chapter 19.

But it is significant that this rider on the white horse here bears some resemblance to the appearance of Jesus on a great white horse in Chapter 19. They both ride a white horse; they both wear crowns; and both are bent on conquest. It suggests that this rider is someone who is like Christ - but is not Christ.

Many of you are already anticipating what I am going to say: This is doubtless the long predicted antichrist... whom Scripture speaks of in

various places... who is to appear in the last days. The "Man of Lawlessness" is his name in 2 Th 2:3... and Paul calls him "the Lawless One" in 2 Th 2:8. He will appear and offer himself as though he were God's Christ.

Jesus himself said to the Jews of his day,

John 5:43 (ESV)

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.

This rider comes like Christ... but in his own name. ... He is given a bow... but NOTICE: no mention is made of arrows. ... Why? ... Because this appears to be a bloodless conquest he launches. ... I think it is clear that it suggests some kind of overpowering of the minds and wills of men... without physical destruction.

When the Antichrist comes... he will come promising peace... a mock millennium... and whatever else he needs to promise to rally the nations behind him. The tribulation actually begins with the Antichrist making a covenant with Israel by promising them peace and protection. ...

Remember what Paul said,

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (ESV)

While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Until recent years... I used to wonder how such deception could be done? Israel is very difficult to fool. They are suspicious of everyone. ... But I don't wonder about that any more. We are so inundated with delusions

today. ... Here in America... the majority is willing to elect ANYBODY to be our president. Their character and their past does not matter!

We are obviously living in a very deceitful age. What this rider on the white horse tells us... however... is that the worst is yet to come. We are living amidst great deceit... it is true... but it is not as bad as it is going to be.

There is coming an even greater lie. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in his second Thessalonian letter:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (ESV)

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

That makes it crystal clear, does it not? This first conquest by evil in the last days is set in motion when God takes off the reins and lets deceit have its way among men until it reaches a climax of delusion. Astounding delusion exists today... but it will get worse... and it will reach a climax on the WORLD STAGE with the antichrist.

Next the second seal is opened:

Revelation 6:3-4

This rider is easy to recognize. It is war, of course, but not war between great armies -- at least not at first. The word for *slay* is really the word "slaughter." It is a reference to civil war or civil anarchy where mobs of people group together to attack and destroy other peoples whom they do

not like... as in ethnic cleansing... or religious jihad... or like the gang wars we see raging in the streets of Baltimore... Los Angeles... Chicago... New York City... and other places. ... It is a murderous slaying of others by people unrestrained by any control.

The peace that the rider of the first horse brought to earth without bloodshed was short-lived... and soon peace will be shattered by a bloody slaughtering.

All rulers... including the Antichrist... will learn that you cannot have peace without the Prince of Peace... namely... Jesus Christ. ... Any peace obtained will be superficial... for underneath is hostility just waiting to break out. The end-time is not characterized by peace and tranquility.

Then we have the third seal opened, in Verses 5 and 6:

Revelation 6:5-6

Most scholars take this to be a reference to widespread famine on the earth. They say that the scales symbolize food being weighed out carefully. It is in such short supply that it must be rationed. Even then no one can get very much because it takes a day's wages to earn a single quart of wheat or (because it is cheaper)... three quarts of barley. This would only be enough food for one person for a day. You would work all day long and all you would be able to earn at best would be enough for your own physical needs. There would be nothing for your family or for anyone else. But the *luxuries*, the oil and the wine, are left untouched.

But perhaps this is not referring to famine because in the next seal, as we will see, famine is specifically mentioned as part of that judgment. What else causes terrible shortages and creates high prices so that people cannot buy adequate amounts of food?

It is inflation (economics out of control... panic in the marketplace!) ...

"But hurt not the oil and the wine" (we read in verse 6). Oil and wine were widely used, but not essential like wheat or barley. When poverty is rampant, there are those who engage in profiteering - big time from the hard times. The oil and wine represent the property of the wealthy, and these products are protected during the difficult times of the famine, so the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. So this time of famine and poverty that ravages the world will not be without the wicked exploiting people who only make the judgments of God worse by their cruel actions.

That brings us to the fourth seal, in Verse 7:

Revelation 6:7

The word actually is *chloros*, from which we get the word chlorine, a pale green horse, like chlorine in color.

Revelation 6:-8

This rider is named "Death"; and floating along behind, was a figure that is identified as "Hades," or Hell. Death takes the body and Hades takes the soul.

There are four forms of death that are related to this attack. First, the sword, which here is not war but murder... individual assault upon one another. It is people taking the law into their own hands and murdering other people without regard to justice or law.

With murder comes famine and widespread starvation. We are all familiar with the terrible pictures of famine areas, largely in Africa, and the swollen, distended bellies of little children with spindly legs as the flesh of their bodies disappears and they die a terrible death from starvation.

When civilization begins to crumble, the defenses of mankind against diseases are lost as well. Whole populations are decimated by such plagues. There may be a reference here to biological warfare, the willful spreading of diseases among people so that they are wiped out en masse. It covers also the appearance of previously unknown diseases.

Fourth, the wild beasts of the earth multiply, and humans are subject to attack by these predators. The account says that a "fourth of the earth" is given over to the four attacks. There are approximately four billion people on earth today and that would mean that one billion people, equivalent to the entire population of China, would be decimated by diseases. It is a picture of a desolated earth caused by man's hatred and barbarity.

These four seals confirm God's announced method of making men face up to truth. How does He make mankind stop hiding their heads and refusing to face reality? ... Answer... By allowing evil to have its full head!

Romans 1 declares that he "delivers men over" (Rom 1:24, 1:26, 1:28) to

their own passions... their own evil... and allows it unrestricted manifestation.

God will teach those who dwell on the earth to face up to unpleasant truth by giving them what they demand. ... If men want to believe a lie... then God will send the lie... (the lie of the antichrist). ... If men seek to kill and destroy and refuse to see the evil of that... then God gives them widespread anarchy... mob rule... and... murder. ... If men want more and more luxury and higher standards of living... they are given what goes along with it -- high inflation... which finally makes money worthless. ... If men demand power and control... what they are given is intrigue... murder... disease... and desolation in the earth.

These cannot be stopped... because they are inescapable consequences of the evil of mankind.

Now we are ready for the opening of the fifth seal,

Revelation 6:9-11

There will be a great revival during the Tribulation. Many will be saved as a result of the Jewish evangelists that spread across the globe (we will see next week in Revelation 7)... and from the Bibles, books, and Gospel literature that have been left behind after the Rapture. ... There will be a price for trusting Christ though. ... Believers will be martyred for the Word of God and their testimony. The Greek word *martus* forms our English word martyr. This word means "a witness." These folks will die because they will be witnessing for Christ.

But notice the prayer these martyrs pray. ... Their petition was “when will God’s holiness be vindicated. *“Judge and avenge.”* The supplication is for justice. So it speaks first of examination (*“judge”*) and then condemnation (*“avenge”*). It is a fair court. God’s way is that examination comes before condemnation. Investigation comes before indictment... probing before punishment.

The white color of the robe speaks of approval. It is a robe of honor. The persecuted saints will be honored in heaven. On earth they were despised, persecuted and martyred, but in heaven it will be different. They will be honored in heaven. Those despised on earth are often those honored in heaven.

Persecution on earth was not over yet; there was still more to come, and the martyred saints were to wait until all of this had been completed. God is giving the persecutors time to repent, but instead of repenting, they only add to their ledger of evil by doing more persecuting.

God made clear to these martyrs that their sacrifice was an appointment, not an accident; and that others would join them. Even in the death of His people, God is in control (Ps. 116:15); so there is nothing to fear.

Now we come to the sixth seal.

Revelation 6:12-14

It is a vivid description of chaos in nature! The whole natural world goes on a rampage. Again, in Matthew 24 Jesus describes this same event, in Verses 29-30:

Matthew 24:29-30 (ESV)

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

It will be a time of terror and anguish throughout the earth. What will be the effect of this on the people? ... John now sees the final scene under the sixth seal.

Revelation 6:15-17

This is a clear picture of the arrogance of man and the wickedness of sin. One would think that in the reality of this type of judgment, man would fall down before God and cry out for mercy. But pride won't let him; instead, this prayer is directed to the created, not the Creator.

The people reflected their stupidity in what they did and said. **First**, their stupidity in their desire. (Look at it in verse 16)... *“calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him Who is seated in the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.’”*

What a dumb desire! If the mountains and rocks fell on them, they would be crushed to death, not protected. Their protection from Divine judgment was not in physical things of the earth but in repenting of their sins so the Lord could protect them.

Second, notice their stupidity in their declaration. "*The great day of their wrath has come*" (in verse 17). Wrong. It was just beginning. If they think this was bad, wait till God lets loose all His judgments on the earth.

Third, their stupidity in their deduction. "*Who shall be able to stand?*"

These people knew the answers to many questions, but they did not know the answer to the most important question of all, namely, how to stand in judgment. ... They did not know how to be saved. ... Many folk are like that today, they may be experts in their fields but they do not know how to escape eternal damnation, they are ignorant of the answer to the most important question of life, namely, "*Who shall be able to stand (in the day of Divine wrath)?*"

But there was some wisdom (also) in what they said. They recognized the fact that it was the "*great day of his wrath*" ... they at least identified the traumatic and fearful phenomena as Divine retribution.

Today if you mention Divine retribution as the cause of earthquakes or hurricanes or tornadoes or other disasters, you are ridiculed and scorned greatly. How dare you think that the earth is being judged by God? is the foolish attitude of the world. Thus they will not repent when God sends catastrophes because of sin.

Repentance NOW and in the coming judgment is the way to stand. Have you acknowledged your position before God as a sinner who is completely unworthy of His attention and His salvation...? You must do this... and accept by faith that Christ took the punishment that you deserve... when He died on the cross.

Six seals have been broken by the Lamb and we have seen the result. The Antichrist is revealed, first as the promiser of a false brief peace under the symbol of the white horse, followed by the red horse of war, the black horse of famine and the pale horse of pestilence and death. The fifth seal revealed that amid all this tribulation there was a faithful remnant who had been martyred for their faithfulness and who will share in the kingdom glory. The sixth seal gives a graphic picture of the awful time of sorrow and death upon the earth when a fourth of the population will perish in war, by hunger and pestilence.

Why would God allow these things? I think that God wants a clear contrast between what results from embracing his rule and what results from rejecting it. God wants people to see what happens when humans reject the true God and embrace false gods. God wants people to see what happens when humans reject the rightful King, the Lord's Messiah, Jesus, and replace him with some chump who looks good and speaks well. So God lets these fools have their day in the sun, and he lets all the mayhem and ruin that results from their pride and folly defile his world. God lets all this happen so that his wisdom, his power, his righteousness will be seen clearly. God wants people to know that only he can bring peace, justice, security, and happiness. God wants to be worshiped as God, and he wants people to embrace the rule of King Jesus, the Messiah.

All the pain and death and horror of God's judgment comes because people do not honor God as God or give thanks to Him

Romans 1:21 (ESV)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give

thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They refuse to honor God, so God gives them over to their gods. But there is hope even in this.

So let me ask again the question that I asked at the beginning. ... When you think of Jesus seizing control of history... what comes to mind?

I hope that it is - God is just, and Jesus has taken hold of the scroll. Jesus will come and get us. And then... as He opens the seals of the scroll... Jesus will finally set in motion the outworking of God's justice.