

Rev 26-01-07b

We're ready to resume our study. And what is fascinating to me is we always think of Revelation as a view of the future times. We were gratified to see in the preceding chapter that the white robe throng of saints from every nation and tribe and kindred and tongue are up in glory and not subject to the conditions and the effects that take place as the seals begin to open and as the trumpets begin to blow and as the thunders begin to crack and as the vials are poured out, we are safely with our Lord Jesus Christ above and beyond it all, observing and praising God and praising His Son, the Lord Jesus, for our salvation.

So you would think, well, this is mildly interesting. Won't that be a bad deal? The Statesman Quartet, one of my favorite songs by them, not least because Chet Atkins plays guitar behind them, and that's two of my favorite musical entities combined, but they sang a song called Everybody's Gonna Have a Terrible Time Down There. And it's in a minor key and Chet does some great fill work there.

But we can say, I'm just mildly interested in what's happening with the seals. But here's the thing. This is so pertinent and so applicable because this is the approach of the enemy and this is the sequence in which our personal challenges often take place.

The first thing that happens is there is a threat to our mental equanimity. Something changes. There is a loss.

There is a difficulty. There's a circumstance. A relationship changes.

We have to move. We are finished with one phase and moving to another and there is uncertainty and there's a lack and a gap in continuity. And we are generally change averse.

Something changes and it brings about pressure. And we can look for peace in the wrong places. The world is gonna look for its peace to this rider on the white horse.

He's got the crown. He's got the bow. He's got the ability to suppress things that are threatening me.

Let's be big fans of him. Let's rely on him. Let's place our faith in him.

And it is so often the case that the first thing that gets us off track and diverts us from the narrow road leading to the straight gate is we forget where our peace comes from. We are not subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune when we remember who we are and why we're here. We walk by faith and not by sight, not what we see and what we hear and what we feel.

In these days, our sight tends to land on a device connected to the internet or to the media. And we see things at a great distance and it unsettles us. It distracts our mind and we start worrying about what's going to happen here or what should happen there.

And why are these people prevailing and why are they doing bad things? And we lose our peace. We hand our peace away. So this is the first thing for us to watch for personally, whether it is in our immediate vicinity, whether it is in our locality, whether it is in our nation or in the wider world, don't let anyone take your peace.

That's the message of the first seal. We should be careful to preserve, to value the peace that the Lord Jesus died to give to us. Peace with God, peace with one another.

And as much as it is possible, as we saw, to the extent that it is up to us, live peaceably with everyone. There are times when people won't accept it. That's when we turn to God for grace and guidance.

And as each of these seals unfolds, we see that primarily for us, the value of Revelation chapter six is the warning of what to watch for as the power behind the beast, Satan himself wants to unsettle you and wants to unsettle me. He wants to take us over. He wants to dominate us.

He wants to divert and deflect us from a godly life, laying hold of righteousness by faith, being evidence that God is right and he is wrong. He wants to end that. And this strategy that he implements via the first beast is what he does to you and me, just writ large on the world stage.

So by looking at what he endeavors to do and what God allows him to do, and God allows him to threaten us, the devil roams the earth seeking whom he may devour, resist him steadfast in the faith. Why does God allow him to roam the earth? Why doesn't God throw him in the bottomless pit now? God has a reason for letting him do what he does. So that is the value of this passage for us, and we don't wanna miss it.

So think about that first seal. Don't give away your peace. The second seal, the threat of violence, we see bloodshed, there's war and rumor of war.

There's in the third seal, there is famine, there's pestilence, there is economic distress. And then the fourth seal, the threat of death. Let's look at that fourth seal in chapter six, because you have the pale horse and pale is green.

And it's so interesting because this seal is described as green, and this same word is used elsewhere in scripture. The feeding of the 5,000. Do you remember it? You can go to Mark.

I think it's, I forget the chapter, but if you look at the account in Mark, it says that the Lord Jesus told his disciples to have the people sit down, and they sat down on the green grass. It's the same word. It's chloros, C-H-L-O-R-O-S.

Chlorophyll gets its name from this, and that's what gives green leaves their color. They used to have dentine, and it had chlorophyll and reticin in it to make your breath fresh. Green, sometimes a pale green or a deathly green or a corpse-like green.

And this is the color of this horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death. This is

Thanatos, T-H-A-N-A-T-O-S, Thanatos.

The reason I bring that up is Hades follows with him. Power was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword. We already saw the sword in the preceding context, the second seal.

He's given a great sword. With hunger, this now progresses beyond what was allowed in the third seal. Harm not the oil and wine.

You need oil to turn the wheat into something edible. You need wine to wash it down. This is something you can drink that doesn't make you sick from contamination.

The reason they drank wine in the ancient world is water could often get contaminated and create dysentery and all other kinds of disease. But now, when that phase ends and the reign and rule of the Antichrist, the beast, is deteriorating, now death follows. And this is out of his control.

So kill with the sword, with hunger, with death. And a lot of translations say with plague. And Thanatos is often, both in secular and in biblical Greek, translated plague.

This is disease. This is death by bacterial infection, viral infection, physical malfunction, and by the beasts of the earth. This is violence.

So these different kinds, you can be a casualty of war. That's the sword. You can be a casualty of disease.

You can be a casualty of where the economic stuff gets out of hand. The Lord Jesus speaks from the midst of the four living creatures and says, government, you are not allowed to starve the people completely to death. But now, death is gonna reign.

And this is the loss of control. The beast can't control what is happening. Started out with his policy riding the white horse, now people are dying in four different categories.

And four is the number of universality. There is death of every shape, size, and description. And he's completely lost control because human ingenuity cannot fix human problems.

This takes the power of God, the grace of God, the renewal and the life of God. And without it, this is always the course, whether it is in our personal lives or in the larger context of world events. So this is our challenge, is to look at these and in various areas of our life, we can be doing wonderfully well in some areas.

And we say, you know, I'm really hitting on all eight here. I'm praying regularly. I'm listening to the word of God and thinking about it and so on.

But then there can be some other area. Maybe it's in the area of some relationship or some situation. And we have fumbled away application in that particular area.

And it isn't enough to say, well, at least I'm doing good over here. We should be faithful and obedient in every area. And if we've got besetting sin, if we have a pattern of failure, just in some area.

Every time I get in this context, everything unravels. I wind up in sin and in pattern sins. I wind up engaged in an accessory after the fact in the sins of others.

And we need to bring the power of God to bear in every area of our lives and not just say, I'm okay because this part over here is working well. But notice the progression of this failure. And this damage and hardship and suffering, it increases.

And if at any point we see an analogy or a reflection of this pattern in our lives, it is regulated, it is measured. God allows us, the Lord Jesus Christ allows us to wake up, see what is happening and repent. And so in that third seal opening and that economic hardship, the Lord Jesus says, I will not let them die at this point.

Harm not the oil and the wine. There's got to be basic subsistence. Food may be scarce, but it's available.

And if you work all day, you'll be able to get enough to stay alive. But notice once the fourth seal, if there's been no repentance at the point of false peace, if you buy into that and don't return to the Lord, if at the point that there's actual warfare and conflict and hardship, and things really begin to come apart, we don't recognize that we've lost our way and return to the Lord Jesus and to the Father through Him. If it comes to the point where God is actually now removing provision and we're down to just basic subsistence rations, we're just barely getting by because God is beginning to remove blessing.

We don't have time, but you can go back and look at the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy on Israel. And if after this, you do not repent, here's the next phase, and it intensifies all the way down. And what a pastor of days gone by used to call the five cycles of discipline.

If you don't respond after the first cycle, you move into the second. If that level of hardship doesn't wake us up, you go to the third and to the fourth. And under the fifth cycle, you go out.

Well, there is an analogy here that under the fourth seal, if you haven't responded, if you haven't repented, death in four different forms is rampant. And there is hunger, there is the sword, there is plague, and there is violence, the beasts, the wild beasts of the earth. So we think about disease, catastrophe, feeling vulnerable to the slings and arrows of circumstance.

Hebrews 2, verses 14 and 15, for as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, the Lord Jesus, He Himself also likewise took part of the same. He became one of us, He was incarnate, that through death, He might destroy him that had the power of death. And that's Satan, the power of death.

And it is gonna be granted to Him to bring about death in this phase of history. Through death,

the Lord Jesus might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. We should no longer harbor a fear of hardship or deprivation or death because God is in His heaven.

I've never seen the righteous go hungry. I've never seen His seed begging bread. Oh, my head nearly exploded because someone in a very bad commentary on Revelation was comparing the promise of pearly gates and golden streets and so on, and saying Revelation can't be inspired because Jesus would have never been in favor of His followers being wealthy.

He thought people ought to be giving all of their stuff away. And if someone asks you for your coat, give the cloak also. And He said, Jesus and His disciples were beggars.

They were itinerant beggars. And I'm sorry, but even my level of tolerance is taxed to the very limit when you hear such characterizations. The Lord Jesus and His disciples were not beggars, and neither are we.

The righteous do not go hungry, and their seed does not beg for bread. God in His heaven knows what we need before we ask Him, and He makes provision. If we see provision drying up when there is the promise, the absolute ironclad promise from God that He will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory, think about these seals and the progress.

We need to look around and see if there's something we have ignored or have deceived ourselves about in our own life. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, except under extraordinary circumstances, will never lack for provision. And if our provision dries up, that is God in the last phase of getting our attention.

Something is seriously wrong. My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

He knows what we need before we ask Him. Look at the lilies, Jesus said. They toil not, they don't spin.

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these. Take no thought for what you will eat or what you will wear. You think about that verse we just saw.

In 1 Timothy 6, six through eight, we brought nothing into this world. We're going to carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.

The Paul's assumption there is you will have food and you will have clothing. You will have sufficient basic needs because of God's promise. And if those ever disappear, we have moved out of the conditions under which God can and will fulfill that promise.

So fix it. This is personal application. I'm not nearly as worried about the people in the by-and-by as I am in being pleasing in God's sight and being a reflection of what He wants communicated in this life.

So fifth seal. Look at this now in verse nine. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they hold.

And they cried out with a loud voice saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth. Then a white robe was given to each of them. And it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer until both their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

It is clear that as a result of conditions that have prevailed in the opening of the first four seals, this is a progress of time. And there are those who have come to faith at the inception of the 70th week, all believers have left. And that which restrains has been taken out of the way, which is the presence of the Holy Spirit individually and corporately in the midst of church age believers.

They are in heaven. You see them in chapter four. You see them represented by the 24 elders.

Never see those 24 elders in the Old Testament representations of God's throne in Isaiah and Ezekiel and elsewhere. It is only after the rapture, after chapter four, verse one, you suddenly see these 24 elders, white robed, singing the song of redemption and those that have been blessed to make their robes white in the blood of the lamb and who will eventually reign on the earth. And they sing a song.

And you see that toward the close of chapter five. So where are these believing martyrs coming from? They have died after the rapture and before the sixth seal opens. As a result of these things we have just reviewed, there are believers who are going to die unjustly and God is going to allow it.

Being a believer is no guarantee that you are not going to be taken out in warfare, in hardship. We trust God for the time of our life and for the moment of our death. We can't, by worrying, turn one hair white or black or extend our lives by one day.

We trust God to use us while we're here and to take us home when he's ready. And we have confidence. If our departure is the result of violence and injustice, we commit that to God.

And that's what these unjustly murdered individuals are told. How long until you balance the scales? We were wrongly and unjustly slain. It wasn't our fault.

We did nothing wrong. And it is told to them, a white robe was given to them and it was said to them, we don't know who is speaking, but it is said to them and it is said to us, trust God for the timing. God is just, justice will come.

It may not come as soon as we would like. It may not come in the way that we would like. We are not omniscient.

We are not aware of all of the aspects of God's plan and purpose, but God will use the death of these individuals to their benefit and his glory. They are going to receive a special white robe. The church, martyred or not, has already been given their white robes.

And from other contexts, we know that the judgment seat of Christ will take place independently of these events. These are Old Testament saint martyrs who die during this seven-year period. Once the church leaves, you're back in the age of Israel.

Those who come to faith, as these individuals do, are heirs of the Old Testament covenant promises. So they will be given a different kind of white robe. This is not the white robe of the saints of chapter five or the elders that we've seen previously.

This is an indication that they have been judged righteous. They have been approved. They have this robe for the martyrs.

The fact that they are their souls under the altar is a metaphorical reference to the Old Testament altar of sacrifice. What happened when the animal is tied to the horns of the altar and slain? Their blood runs out and pools at the base of the altar. The life of the flesh is in the blood.

So the souls, and in Hebrew, this would be the nefesh. And nefesh is translated life almost as often as it is translated soul. So the blood of the martyrs cries out from the ground.

And this arcs all the way back to the blood of Abel that God tells Cain is crying out to him from the ground. And this is a metaphor. There are people who try to take this literally and say, look what we can learn about the afterlife.

These individuals have bodies because they can wear a white robe and they can speak. So they have a voice box. And this is an argument for the interim body for those that have died and have not yet been resurrected.

This is metaphor. There is the thought that people are dying in the tribulation at the behest of, and because of both the perpetration of policy and the failure of policy by the beast. And righteous people are losing their lives.

And the question arises, this is very unjust. When will this be rectified? When will the righteousness and justice of God assert itself? And we know that these are tribulational martyrs for a couple of reasons. A, their blood is at the base of the altar.

These are Old Testament martyrs in this 70th week of Daniel. Secondly, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren. You don't talk about brethren so much when you're talking about every nation, tongue, kindred, and tribe in chapter five.

Their brethren, these are, when you come to faith in the age of Israel, you are added to Israel. And if you're not hereditarily linked to a tribe, you get assigned to a tribe. And so they're

brethren.

And that's why there are both. You see the word both there? Until both, and it says the number of, you can scratch that out. They should rest a little while longer until both their fellow servants and their brethren.

Fellow servants, these are fellow believers, servants of God, and brethren. They are associated, again, by their link to Israel, whatever their heredity, they are assigned to Israel. And that becomes their brethren in the same way that church age believers are brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of heritage.

Who would be killed? This is at the fifth seal. Some people have already died, and there are more who are going to die. The complement of martyred believers in this period is not yet complete, but they are of a peace.

They're brethren. So these are not all the martyrs of every age. They're specifically those who have died.

And so what is the principle? I'm fascinated by this, and it makes good sense to me in the context of the 70th week, and the beast, and his failed hegemony, and so on. But what does that mean to us? These individuals have suffered to the point of death. Remember the letter to Smyrna, the second letter in Revelation 2? Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

You will have tribulation 10 days. There are some believers, and they exist today. There are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our brothers and sisters, who are being murdered, who are being martyred in other countries.

Not so much in this country yet, but you go to Africa, you go to South America, you have to dig to even find the accounts because media does not choose to cover it. But there are believers who are dying for their faith every single day at the hands of various factions, other religions, tribal governments, gangs, and other thugs that have local power. And they are slaying Christians and taking their property, taking their stuff daily.

They will be raised, they will be rewarded for their faithfulness in the church's time at the judgment seat. This is different. But there, even in the present day for us, is great injustice that is unresolved.

People are extremely unfair, and they can character assassinate you without taking your life. In other places, they actually do take your physical life. What about that? So injustice, persecution, even to the point of losing our lives.

You remember, again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, verse 10 through 12, and this should comfort us. "'Blessed are they which are persecuted 'for righteousness' sake. 'Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' 'Blessed are you when people revile you 'and persecute you and say

all manner of evil against you "'falsely for my name's sake.'" And this can be positions that we hold because we believe that they are biblically based.

They are founded in scriptural truth. So we believe certain things about what government should and should not do and what people should and should not do, what should and should not be supported and allowed and encouraged in our culture, in our society. And we stand up for one man and one woman.

We stand up for don't take the life of a human being in the womb. And we stand up for other beliefs that are scripturally grounded, and we are reviled and persecuted, and all manner of evil is said against us for the sake of our witness and our testimony. And we're not bashful and we're not shy to claim these positions because I am a believer in the Lord Jesus, and my views and my opinions are my best attempt to reflect what I understand from the word of God.

I am not ashamed of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God for deliverance, not only from this life into eternal life, but deliverance from evil and falsehood and deceit and vile activities in this life. We are delivered not just eternally, but also out of this present evil age.

Rejoice and be glad when these things take place, for great is your reward in heaven. That's how they persecuted the prophets who were before you, those others who were not bashful about telling forth the righteousness and the justice of God, even when they were persecuted and hounded. And in some cases, slain for their witness.

Romans 12, 19, dearly beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but give place to wrath, disinvest, let anger dissipate and go away. Do not be waylaid by anger. Don't let your personal indignation blind you to the greater responsibilities.

Give place unto wrath. It is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. These souls under the altar aren't handed swords and say, go forth and avenge yourselves.

Rest. Here's your white robe. Rest in the knowledge that you have acted in righteousness.

You have reflected the truth of God. Here's your white robe. It is going to reflect brightly the glory of God.

Rest a little while longer. There are others. You are not alone.

Remember James? Don't think that some strange thing has happened to you. And don't think that God is unrighteous to allow some suffering and in some cases, loss of life. Trust God.

Psalms 56, verse eight. You tell my wanderings and put my tears into your bottle. Are they not in your book? God knows our suffering.

He knows our tears and he saves them up. He's aware. Our tears are in God's bottle.

And there's a time when his righteousness and his justice will assert themselves. But

interestingly, the only martyrs whose deaths can be avenged on those who dwell on the earth are those who die in this period because their murderers are still alive. They're, you know, these are not martyrs from the church age saying, dig up the people that slew us, dig up the inquisition people and the Islamic armies and the rest of them, dig them all up and make them pay.

This is a short-term affair. So these are very clearly what you might call tribulational martyrs. So this is our personal application.

When we look at these seals, it is exciting and fascinating to anticipate what is going to unfold. But prophecy is the revelation of patterns. We're going to take a pause in a near upcoming session to look at the way these patterns are revealed, especially in the Old Testament.

And as you look at them, they include or exclude various aspects of God's plan and purpose. You can look at these things that foreshadow the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the difference between the Levitical offerings that foreshadow Him in different ways, in different aspects.

Look at the career of Joseph as it anticipates the Lord Jesus. Look at Joshua and the book of Joshua as it anticipates the Lord Jesus. Look at the book of Ruth and the kinsman redeemer.

You can do this for yourself. It's a fascinating exercise in spiritual thought. And believe me, you have to ask God for wisdom when you do this.

But just read the story of Joseph and read the story of Ruth. Both of them directly anticipate the Lord Jesus as kinsman redeemer. And I'll close with this thought.

Do you notice in Revelation 5, the lead up to this, in verse 2, John sees a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals. What do you think about that? Think about it. Who is worthy to do two things? Number one, open the scroll.

Number two, loose its seals. Isn't that backward? Don't you need to loose the, who is worthy to loose the seals and to open the scroll? Why is it backward? And it's not just once. Look at further down where it says in verse 3, verse 6, stood a lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

He takes the scroll because up in verse 5, do not weep. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, he has prevailed to what? Open the scroll and its seven seals. Scroll first and then seals.

Again, two times, open the scroll first, loose its seals second. So in both cases, he is accounted worthy. Why? Remember the scroll is written on the outside and on the inside.

On the outside, I speculate to be opened only by, and then there are qualifications. A kinsman of those who dwell on the earth. That immediately disqualifies all the angels, even the seven spirits of God, even the cherubim.

If the writing on the outside of the scroll says, you can't open this scroll unless you are a kinsman of humanity and unless you are perfectly righteous as God himself. I think the writing on the outside of the scroll dictates who is authorized to open it. And there's only one individual in all of creation who is worthy and meets the conditions written on the outside of the scroll.

So he is worthy to take the scroll and to open it and to loose its seven seals. You have to be authorized to open the scroll before you can break the seals. Who's qualified to open it? He's the one who can break the seals because then he will open it.

So this is our Lord Jesus Christ. This is our savior and redeemer, our kinsman redeemer. But if you compare the story of Joseph and see the foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus who seems to die and his blood is on the coat, but he comes back in sort of a resurrection to save his people.

That's one aspect of his work. But you look at Boaz as the kinsman redeemer and you look at Ruth as representing the Gentile bride and Naomi representing the nation of Israel who has been exiled. And in order to come back, she tells Ruth about Boaz, but it is only through Ruth that she meets and enters into relationship with Boaz.

She knows of his existence, but it's only through Ruth that Naomi is blessed by Boaz. And there's such a picture of the interaction and God's unfolding plan of Israel and the church. Pattern, these are patterns and different parts of the pattern will apply to different areas of narrative and different areas of prophecy.

And we're gonna see these patterns again and again as a revelation unfolds. But always we are driving toward personal application answer the question. I just looked at those seals, so what? How should I then live? Watch for threats to our personal peace.

Where do we turn for the solution? Watch for disruption and conflict. What does that do to us? And where do we turn for a solution? Watch for deprivation and hardship. What do we turn to? Do we recognize that this may be God signaling us that there's an area where we need to repent, change our minds and return to the source of peace and provision? Think about these seals.

Are they opening in my own life? Is there some area where I need to repent? These people are gonna go through all seven seals and all seven trumpets and all seven thunders and all seven bowls, because they never wake up and change their minds and turn to God. Those that do may endure hardship. They may even become martyrs, but the righteousness and the justice of God will prevail if they rest, if they wait, if they lay hold of righteousness by faith, the white robe.

Well, much more to see as we continue next time. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for how profoundly it shines a light on our path, on our hearts, on our lives. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us see the pertinence and application individually and

collectively as we seek to represent the Lord Jesus now and in the ages to come. We ask it in his name, amen.