

Good Morning His Place. I'm Matt Tanksley, one of the deacons here at His Place. Most of you know me already, but for those of you that don't, I'm Shannon's husband. It's my distinct honor to teach the Word of God with you today, and whenever we study God's Word, it is important that we study what the Bible teaches, not our speculation about what it doesn't.

We need to pay close attention to what a passage is trying to say, in context, and not try to find hidden meanings that are outside of the point that scripture is trying to make. In the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is being revealed to us. Many of the elements of this book are shrouded in symbolism, and therefore remain a mystery to us. And that's OK. Let's learn what we can, and not get so caught up in speculation that we miss what we're supposed to be paying attention to. This is a Revelation of Jesus Christ!

An important concept to be familiar with is "The Day of The Lord". It is mentioned, or referred to, all throughout the Old Testament. It refers to any time in which God moves in a mighty way. Most often it is used prophetically to refer to some future time when God will rescue His people, vindicate them against their oppressors, and bring judgment, justice and mercy. It was used to describe God's destruction of the Tower of Babel, God's rescue of His people from Egypt, His salvation against opposing nations, but also His punishment to Israel when they had gone astray and they were exiled to Babylon. Some of the prophecies regarding the Day of the Lord were fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus the Messiah, and many more we now look forward to in His 2nd Coming. So, whenever you see phrases like "on that Day", or "The Day is coming" in scripture, it's most likely a reference to this idea of "The Day of The Lord".

Who have we met so far, who are the characters? First, we have John the Apostle who is the one writing this book, and he is featured as the narrator who interacts with the unfolding events. Next is Jesus. John identifies Jesus at the very beginning of this book, and it is who this whole book is all about. We first meet Jesus in a startling and unexpected revelation as John hears a sound like trumpets, but turns to see Jesus in his Transfigured state. This is going to be a recurring motif, "I heard, but then I saw". This phrasing is used throughout the whole book of Revelation, and it is used to help John understand something that was initially hidden or misunderstood. Be on the lookout for John's expectations, and how he is amazed when the truth is revealed.

Then there is God Himself, seated on His throne. Represented by colors of Jasper and Carnelian, and surrounded with a rainbow or iris that looked like Emerald. As Pastor Joe pointed out previously, these colors were assigned to some of the tribes of Israel. In fact, they were first assigned to them as gemstones that were affixed to the Breastplate of Judgment that the High Priest would wear when exercising his duties including entering into the Holy of Holies. Don't miss this, it's important. This breastplate was called the Breastplate of Judgment, because the High Priest "shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually". That's Exodus 28:30 in the King James version. So John sees God, sitting on his throne, and he is shrouded in these colors which I believe indicates that God is sitting in

Judgment, he's about to declare his Verdict. But a verdict for what? We'll get there, trust me.

Lastly, we have the Four Living Creatures. These are the throne bearers of God, the Cherubim. They also appeared a few times in the Old Testament, alongside God on His Throne, described similarly but not exactly. We can find them in the first chapter of Ezekiel, and also in the 6th chapter of Isaiah. The ancient Jews often used numbers symbolically. In Hebrew, some numbers were often used to describe certain types of completeness. For example, 4 often represents the whole of creation, as in the 4 corners of the earth, 4 winds, 4 directions, etc. These represented the whole entirety of creation. Remember that about the Four Living Creatures, and any other mysterious foursome that might come across today.

So let's briefly catch ourselves up, and brace yourself because this will be fast. In Chapter 4, John has been caught up to Heaven while "in the spirit", and finds himself in the presence of God and in His throne room. There's 24 Elders present, and the Four Living Creatures. They're all worshiping God for His majesty, eternity, and creativity. Then in Chapter 5, we see that there's this awesome scroll, with writing inside and out, with 7 freakin seals on it, and this loudmouth angel cries out "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?". We have no idea what's in this thing, but apparently it's impossible to find anyone that is able to open it. John gets a bit weepy about it, and the angel tells him to dry up because the Lion of the Tribe of Judah can do it. John turns all excited to see this amazing Lion, and instead he sees someone that looks like a lamb that was slain. There's that reversal of expectations! I told you to be on the lookout for it. Don't worry there's more. So the Lamb, who turns out to be Jesus Christ (tada, revealed again!) is the only one throughout history, on the earth, above it, or under it, that is worthy to open this scroll. The self-sacrificing deity, that redeemed humanity; He alone is worthy. So, as you do, the whole assembly busts into song.

All of this begs the question: What the heck is this scroll? And more importantly, Why is only Jesus worthy? To answer that, let's look back in our Bibles and find another scroll mentioned in scripture, specifically in some Old Testament prophecy. What do we not read enough of? That's right, the Old Testament. Don't worry, I'll get you plenty today. That will help us to unpack the symbolism of the scroll.

Ok, Context. Back in the day, during the time when the Kingdom of Judah was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. The noble families of Jerusalem were all exiled out of their homeland and carted off to Babylon. About 5 years into that captivity, God called out a prophet by the name of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:3

the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was on him.

Ezekiel is granted this amazing vision, and in it he was caught up in a whirlwind and somehow found himself in the presence of God, on His throne, and the Four Living

Creatures are there. Sound familiar? So he's standing there in the presence of God, but He can't stop writing about these crazy wheels that just blow his mind, so finally, a chapter later, the Lord speaks to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 2:1-2

He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

God then decides to tell Ezekiel that He is going to send him out to the Israelites as a prophet, but they won't listen to him. He tells him that no matter how they treat him, he must obey and faithfully deliver the message of the Word of the Lord.

Ezekiel 2:9-10

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

So here we have a scroll, written on both sides, and God himself unrolls it for Ezekiel. The message of the scroll are words of lament, and mourning, and woe. Got it? Ok, so back to our scene with John in the book of Revelation. We again see God, on His throne, and holding a scroll. Only in this case, the scroll that is first presented in Chapter 5, is the Verdict or Judgment of God. As we dive into our main text here, in Revelation 6, I want to also take a moment to talk about seals. What is a seal? A seal was placed on a letter, a scroll, or a chest for a number of reasons. First and foremost was authentication. The seal marked the originator and sender of the item to its recipient. The recipient would recognize the seal and would then know the authenticity of the sender. If an item was received claiming to be from someone of importance, but the seal did not match that person, then it was known to be a forgery. It was also Protected, because a broken seal was evidence of tampering. By sealing the item, it was obvious if someone had somehow altered the contents of it. Lastly, for security. The seal indicates that what is inside has remained a secret. The recipient can trust that the contents will be for their eyes only when they open the seal. Remember what I said about the ancient Jews and their symbolic numbers? Well, the number of seals carries a lot of symbolism too. The number 7 represents the perfect and holy divine completeness. The 7 spirits of God represent the perfect, holy and divine completeness of God's Spirit. The scroll having 7 seals symbolizes divine completeness, or perfection of the scroll. It is perfectly sealed or that its contents are perfect. Alright, you read? Let's dive in.

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!" 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.

The rider on the is not Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb, opening the seal. Nor is he the Antichrist. The rider is summoned by one of the Throne Bearers of God, at the behest of Jesus himself. He is given a crown, and wields a bow. This symbolizes the conquest of Kings.

Revelation 6:3-4

When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword.

War! Swords! Fiery red! Destruction! Is there any better imagery for a young boy to get him to think of the Bible as fun as his Comic Books? I think not. This rider symbolizes War and Conflict between people, tribes and nations.

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. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

Famine? Pestilence? Injustice? Oppression? This rider symbolizes famine, and the havoc that it wreaks on societies. Why aren't we damaging the oil and the wine? I'm sorry, I don't know. But I'm OK with that. For now.

Revelation 6:7-8a

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him.

This rider, pretty obviously, symbolizes Death. However, when we hear the term Hades, I believe most understand that as a synonym for Hell, which we imagine as the place of eternal torment for the wicked. However, to John and the original audience, Hades was the Greek name of both the god of the underworld and the underworld itself. To the Greeks, the underworld was the home of all dead souls, and encompasses both Tartarus for the wicked, and the Elysian Fields for the good. In the Old Testament time period, before the advent of the Greek Empire and exposure to the Greek language, the Hebrew people referred to this simply as Sheol. A term they used interchangeably as either the physical grave that your body is placed into, the metaphysical realm of the dead that your soul goes to, or metaphorically as a place of despair.

Revelation 6:8b

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.

Ok, so here we have the infamous Four horsemen of the Apocalypse. This is not the first time we meet them, and John would have been well familiar with them, as they pop up twice in Zechariah, and once in Ezekiel. However, their symbolic presentation in those prophetic visions was a bit different, I believe that they reveal to us that they are more than just their current tasks. At their core, they are simply Agents of God, working throughout the created earth. Here again we have the number 4. Four Horsemen, given

power each over a fourth of the earth. Not every theologian agrees on this interpretation, or any interpretation for that matter, but hear me out, and you can decide.

Zechariah 1:8–11

During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man mounted on a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses.

I asked, "What are these, my lord?"

The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are."

Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth."

And they reported to the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

Here we see the four horsemen, going throughout the earth, reporting back to the Lord and finding that the world is at peace.

Zechariah 6:1-8

I looked up again, and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains – mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled—all of them powerful. I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"

The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."

When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth.

Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north."

Here we have four chariots, and they are called the four spirits of heaven, going to the four corners of the earth.

Ezekiel 14:12-23

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its people and their animals, even if these three men—Noah, Daniel and Job—were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.

"Or if I send wild beasts through that country and they leave it childless and it becomes desolate so that no one can pass through it because of the beasts, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate.

“Or if I bring a sword against that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass throughout the land,’ and I kill its people and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved.

“Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath on it through bloodshed, killing its people and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness.

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals! Yet there will be some survivors—sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. They will come to you, and when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought on Jerusalem—every disaster I have brought on it. You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Lastly, we have four dreadful judgments proclaimed, that God will send on Jerusalem, and they wield the sword, death, plague and famine. Sound familiar? On That Day, when God moves in power and might, you should not be surprised that He wields the full force of His Creation. He uses the conquest of Kings, the war of tribes and nations, famine and pestilence, and/or the death of people. None of this is new, He has wrought His purposes through the use of these means many times in the past. In Jeremiah 15, God describes His use of these 4 agents of his judgment as Pestilence, The Sword, Famine, and Captivity. These four horsemen are simply agents of God’s hand through his created order. They’ve gone throughout the earth to report back to God, to keep watch over the earth, or when needed to bring about disaster. In this vision in Revelation, these four horsemen are assigned the roles of punishment. They are each summoned by the four living creatures, the throne bearers of God, to carry out the verdict in the scroll, and they will use the tools of conquest, war, famine, and death in the process. Again the number four here is symbolic of the whole, or complete, created order. They will have an impact over the whole earth, and its people. It is important to note here, that the mere use of these tools does not make God evil, for it is His benevolent use of them that proves that only He is worthy to wield them. As we saw in that last passage in Ezekiel,

Ezekiel 14:23b

“...for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

These four agents report directly to, and only to God alone, so the use of them is appropriate as seals on this scroll. They authenticate that this scroll is from God, and the judgment inside is Holy and Pure.

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. 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?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

Souls of the Martyrs: This is the reason that God is acting. The souls of the martyrs call out for Justice, and God alone can provide that, and along with it, redemption for the rest of His people. But why are they found "under the altar"? In Exodus 29, we have a description of the consecration of the Altar of God, and of the High Priest and his sons. In this passage, they are instructed, after anointing the horns of the Altar with the blood of a bull, they were to pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the Altar. This is indicating that the lives of these martyrs, those that had been killed because of their faithful obedience, and steadfast witness for Christ, was a sacrifice unto God and now their blood, their very souls cry out to God. This is not surprising, as Paul tells us in Romans

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

God responds to these cries! In Exodus chapters 2 and 3, God tells Moses that he has heard the cries of His people in bondage. But the very blood of mankind also calls out to God. Let's go all the way back to Genesis and see how God confronted Cain after the murder of his brother Abel:

Genesis 4:10

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

This blood is precious to God; the blood of His Image Bearers. We were created in God's Image, so that we could reflect that image to the rest of creation. Because of this, God demands that we respect that life and that blood.

Genesis 9:5-6

And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

***"Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind.***

When Moses was near death, he made one last address to the people of Israel. Towards the end of it, he gets this prophetic glimpse into Israel's future. He foresees their future apostasy, God's judgment and calamity, but also His redemption of His people, and His restoration to them. He closes it with this line:

Deuteronomy 32:43

***Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants;
He will take vengeance on His enemies, and make atonement for His land and people.***

The Lord is the redeemer, restorer, and avenger of blood.

Psalms 9:7-12 (NIV)

The Lord reigns forever;

He has established his throne for judgment.

He rules the world in righteousness

and judges the peoples with equity.

***The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.***

Those who know your name trust in you,

for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Sing the praises of the Lord, enthroned in Zion;

proclaim among the nations what he has done.

For he who avenges blood remembers;

He does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.

Are you excited? Woooh! I get worked up on this. Justice is coming, the righteous will be redeemed. I think people read this passage too often and all they see is a pissed off God looking to destroy someone, and who better than the people he put on this earth. They see God wielding his weapons of mass destruction, and ascribe motives of anger, selfishness, malice, destruction, and torture. I don't see it. I see love, I see mercy, I see redemption, I see vindication. I see Judgment, Holy and Pure. The only one worthy to wield the horseman, the only one who has the authority to avenge the souls of the martyrs, is the only one that took the weight of the wrath of God upon Himself, and allowed his perfect, holy, immutable Godness to be put to death like a criminal. He suffered all the injustice that he came to redeem us from all the way to the Cross. Who else is worthy like that? He's the only one I trust to open this scroll. Okay, we aren't done yet, we got two seals left.

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, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 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 withstand it?"

What a picture of absolute calamity in the very world we live in! The earth shakes, the sun turns black, the moon turns red, and the stars fall from the sky. The skies themselves ripping open. It's no wonder that the high and mighty run and hide like the common people. They all call out for shelter, but who can stand on the Day of the Lord? Who? Who?

Revelation 7:1-8

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

The Agents of God have taken their place. The earth takes a breath, before the storm that's about to come. But God has a plan. The whole reason he's acting right now is in judgment against the wicked that have oppressed His people, and defamed His name. John hears the number of those whom God will protect from this great calamity, those that he is not acting in Judgment against, but rather acting in Mercy to preserve. He hears about the Tribes of Israel, but just you wait because here comes the revelation, the reversal of expectations.

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

"Amen!

***Praise and glory, and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever.***

Amen!"

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,

"they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne, will shelter them with his presence.

'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne, will be their shepherd;

'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

This is a picture of the Triumphant Church of God! People from every tribe and nation, praising God for his Goodness. For saving them, in all of his wisdom, power, and strength. One of the Elders tells John that they have been purified by the blood of the Lamb, and then quotes from Isaiah the prophet. Just in case we didn't know that none of this is new. God has been saying this for thousands of years. In my view, this one scene here summarizes so much of what God is doing. It helps us put into perspective who our God is, why he's doing this, and most importantly How he's doing this. He's executing judgment on the wicked, righteously, and the only one with the authority, power, and ability to wield this judgment is the one that gave himself up and was crucified for us. As we dive into the rest of Revelation over the coming weeks, keep this perspective in mind. Remember who your God is, and then remember the people that we are called to be. Let us strive to be like Christ so that in the end we can bring our praise to the Lamb, Amen!.