



DATE: January 15, 2012

TEXT: Revelation 6: 1-8

TITLE: The Structure of History

We continue in our study of Revelation. Let me say this sermon is not as exciting as my previous sermons.... as a matter of fact it probably will be fairly boring.... but it is critically important.

I begin with a brief recap of what we have seen. Revelation is a series of visions given to John. The first vision is a vision of Jesus giving praise and condemnation of the 7 churches of Asia Minor by extension to the churches today. Two sermons ago we began the second vision. This vision last to chapter 16. We first saw the very throne room of God. We saw the wonderful act of worship. Last week we, for the first time, saw the lamb of God.... we saw Jesus. We saw the wonderful coronation of the lamb. Jesus is our King. Jesus is our Lord. We also saw the scroll... first in the hands of God the Father than in the hands of Jesus. Remember the scroll is the plan of God for the redemption of humanity. It is the history of humanity before it took place. But the plan of God was sealed... and only the lamb... only Jesus could open the scroll... only

Jesus could carry out the plan of redemption.

Our text this morning is the opening of the seals. As a matter of fact the rest of this book is the revelation of God's plan for the redemption of humanity. As I said last week... it is good news. It may not seem like good news... but it is God's plan.

Before I turn to the 4 horseman of the Apocalypse I have to share a critically important lesson. It has to do with the structure of the book of Revelation. I know that sounds boring... but this is the critical truth.... we are not only looking at the structure of the book of Revelation ... we are looking at the structure of all of history REPEAT. Revelation reveals history....past history and future history. Remember it is in God's right hand... he is in control of history. I will share 2 different understandings of the structure of Revelation and the structure of history. Let me tell you at the very beginning I will adopt the second understanding.... but many, many great biblical scholars adopt the first understanding.

Understanding # 1 Revelation (and therefore history) is set up as a linear time line that, from this point on, deals with the future return of Christ. The events described in Revelation 6 to

chapter 21 take place one after another until the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth. Allow me to try to give you a summary of this time line. Let me say it is very, very complex and therefore hard to do.

1. The partial return of Christ
2. The rapture of the saints. All Christians removed from the earth
3. The beginning of the 7 year tribulation.
 - a. The judgement of the 7 seals and the appearance of the anti-Christ
 - b. The judgement of the 7 trumpets
 - c. The appearance of the 2 witnesses (mid trib)
 - d. The judgement of the 7 bowls
 - e. The conversion of 144,000 Jews and the restoration of the Old Testament sacrifices
4. The battle of Armageddon. Satan is bound
5. Christ returns to earth to reign on David's throne for 1000 years (the Millennium)
- 6.. Christians remain in heaven during Millennium
7. Many new children born... some are believers some are not
8. after 1000 years Satan loosed again
9. Christ defeats Satan. Final judgement of all non-believers.
10. non believers born during Millennium judged
11. New heaven and new Earth return to earth. Christians join converted Jews and believers of Millennium. Christ reigns forever.

Let me say this understanding is far more detailed than I have given. This understanding has a name... it is called Dispensational Pre Millennialism. Read the book series Left Behind by Tim LeHaye to gain a full understanding. They are fun to read. Also let me say that this is a fairly new understanding. It was developed in the mid 1800's by a man named John Nelson Darby. However... it is very, very popular today. It uses a very, very literal understanding of

scripture and minimizes symbolism.

I close this understanding with this point and this is wonderful good news. In this understanding... none of the historical actions we read in the book of Revelation will apply to us.

We are gone. We are raptured out of the world. We will not experience the breaking of the seals or the sounding of the trumpet or the pouring of the bowls. We will not fight in the battle of Armageddon. We are gone. I guess this is one reason I do not adopt this understanding... it makes preaching on the book of Revelation very hard... it does not apply to us. The key is this.... Revelation and therefore all of history is seen as a linear time line.

Understanding # 2 Revelation is seen as structured in 7 parallel sections or cycles with each section telling the story of Christ from his first coming to His second coming. Each cycle moves us further and further into the future. This is called Progressive Parallelism.

I want to share with you a quote from the book The Bible and the Future by Anthony Hoekema. This book is considered to be the best book on this understanding of Revelation.

Note that though these seven sections are parallel to each other, they also reveal a certain amount of eschatological progress. The last section, for example, takes us further into the

future than the other sections. Although the final judgement has already been briefly described in 6:12-17, it is not set forth in full detail until we come to 20:11-15. Though the final joy of the redeemed in the life to come has been hinted at in 7:15-17, it is not until we reach chapter 21 that we find a detailed and elaborate description of the blessedness of life on the new earth. Hence the method of interpretation is called *progressive parallelism*

Let me share a chart with you that I found

CYCLE	THE END OF THE AGE
The first cycle (Rev. 1:1-3:22)	----- *
	*--
The second cycle (Rev.4:1-8:5)	-----*--
	*--
The third cycle (Rev8:6-11:19)	-----*--
	*--
The fourth cycle (Rev. 12:1-14:20)	-----*--
	*--
The fifth cycle (Rev. 15:1-16:21)	-----*--
	*--
The sixth cycle (Rev. 17:1-19:21)	-----*-----
	*-----
The seventh cycle (Rev. 20:1-22:21)	-----*-----

Let me give some practical lessons on this understanding.

First, we believe in the rapture. Believers will indeed join Jesus as he is descending to the earth.

They will continue to come with Him to the earth and the final judgement will take place and the new heaven and the new earth will be inaugurated.

Second, We do believe in the millennium. However we do not believe it is a literal 1000 years.

We believe the millennium is the time between the first coming and the second coming of Christ.

In other words we are in the Millennium right now.

Third, We do believe that the trials will increase immediately before the return of Christ. A time of tribulation will take place. The church will of course be part of that tribulation as we continue to share the message of Christ preparing the world for His return. It makes no sense to me that the church will not be part of this time. It is the time we can share the love of Christ to a very hurting world.

Fourth, The judgements of God will take place... as a matter of fact... they are already taking place. The 4 horseman of the Apocalypse are already here. We already are experiencing deceit, war, famine and death. Yes, it will increase... but it already is occurring. The seals and the trumpets and the bowls are reiterating and expanding on the truth that Christians face persecution and Christians face difficult times as we live on this earth.

Remember, John was a Pastor. He was writing to real people who were facing terrible, terrible persecution. He was writing to give hope to these people and to people throughout the age of the church that face difficult times. He is writing to you and to me. He was explaining

why God allows difficult times in the life of Christians. I can preach from this book because it applies to our life today.

I know this is boring... but do you see why it is important. The book of Revelation explains history to us. The book of Revelation explains suffering to us. The book of Revelation reveals God's plan not just for the future.. But for the past and for the present.

I want to close this sermon by looking at the first horseman of the 4 horseman of the Apocalypse. I will read *Rev. 6: 1-2*

1 I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

I want to take a survey. Don't be afraid to vote because you can not be wrong. Do you believe this is a positive image or a negative image? Vote. Positive? Negative? As I said, you can not be wrong. This is a great debate. I will give you both sides of the debate and preach on both of them.

First, many see this as an image of Christ. It is similar to the picture given to us in Rev. 19

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

William Hendrickson in his book More than Conquerors states this...

The idea that the Conqueror upon the white horse is the Christ is in harmony with the very genius and purpose of the book of Revelation. We have indicated that the very theme of this book is the victory of Christ and His Church. Thus, again and again our Lord Jesus Christ is represented as the One who has conquered, is conquering, shall conquer. The idea of the conquering Christ is a thread running through this book from beginning to end.

Last week we saw the coronation of the Lamb. But Jesus does not stay on the throne.

Jesus is also the conqueror! Jesus is coming back.... and in a sense through the Holy Spirit and

through the church, Jesus is already present. He is already the conqueror. He is already the

victor. Yes, we face persecution. Yes, we face tragedy. Yes we face death. Yes, we face

illness..... but Jesus is the conqueror. He is victorious so we are victorious!

Others who believe this is a positive sign believe this is the Gospel of Christ going forth into the world. Many of the 2nd and 3rd Century Christians held this view. The Gospel was going forth into the world to conquer the world. The Gospel could not be stopped. The Gospel is victorious. The white ride is Christ or the Gospel of Christ. Powerful images and wonderful good news. It will preach!

Second, Many other believe this is a image of a judgement of God. It is negative. They argue that all the seals are judgements. They argue that all the 4 horseman are evil and horrible. The question is this.... if it is evil, what does it represent? It is believed that the White rider is the anti-Christ who uses deception at his greatest weapon.. Scripture speaks of Satan dressing in sheep's clothing.

The greatest weapon of Satan is half truths. Jesus is the Light. Jesus is the truth. Satan deals with half truth and in the dark. In a direct confrontation Jesus wins...so Satan does not confront.. He deceives. We are absolutely surrounded by the deceptions of Satan.

The Bible is seen as containing truth... not being truth
 Morality is defined as what feels good as long as you don't hurt someone else.
 Truth ti seen as relative to the situation... there is no such thing as absolute truth.
 The church sees it's task as loving the world at any cost even it you have to compromise truth
 The goal of life is comfort and happiness rather than obedience, evangelism and joy.
 History is seen as centered on humanity rather than centered on God

Here is a challenge... turn on any T.V. show and see the subtle twisting of truth. The sexual immorality. The alternative lifestyles. The subtle ridicule of Christians. The White Horse is the anti-Christ deceiving the world.... very effectively. It is a sign of the return of Jesus. Come Lord Jesus come. Stop the deception. This too will preach.

Which is it. I don't know. To wrap up this sermon. If you hold the first understanding of Revelation it must be a negative image. It is in the future. It occurs during the Tribulation. If you hold the second view... it could be either. It applies to the church today... either as the victory of Christ or as the deceit of the church today.

Next week we look at the other horseman.

AMEN