**BBC Men’s Study of the Book of Revelation**

**Hope in the Darkness - Purposeful Suffering – Revelation 6-7**

**The Seven Seals primarily emphasize life between Jesus’ two comings will be marked by redemptive disruption. BUT** all this disruption serves God’s purposes for the Gospel for advancing the Gospel throughout history and among all nations. There is only one unshakable kingdom—the Kingdom of God.

 The first 4 seals represent a unit among the 7, each having a rider upon a different colored horse, (cf. Zech. 6:1ff).  They depict destruction and catastrophic developments for the inhabitants of the earth under the sovereign hand of God.  They also "demonstrate the self-defeating power of sin," (Morris).

**The first seal opened:  Rev. 6:1-2** *- I watched as* ***the Lamb*** *opened the first of the seven seals.* **(Cf. Luke 4!)**  *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.*

**International warfare** . . . nation against nation; tyranny; the abuse of power; "bow:" a symbol of violence; "crown:" a symbol of despotic rule; "white:" a symbol here of conquest; "conqueror bent on conquest:" lust for power and world domination.

**The second seal opened:  Rev. 6:3-4** *When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider* ***was given*** *power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.*

**Bloodshed among men**: The taking of each other’s lives; unconscionable slaughter; “red:" bloodshed; "large sword:" a weapon of violence; "**was given** to him to take away peace."  God limits the extent of the violence.

**The third seal opened:  Rev. 6:5-6**  *When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"*

**Economic chaos…** the uneven distribution of wealth and famine.  "Black:" famine and death; "scales:" an image used in the Scriptures for matters of justice and injustice (Lev. 19:36; Prov. 16:11; Ezek. 45:10; Hos. 12:7; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:11); "quart of wheat:" a laborer's daily ration; "do not damage the oil and the wine:" limitations placed by Gods' necessities of life; the "rich get richer."

**The fourth seal opened:  Rev. 6:7-8**  *When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They* ***were given*** *power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.*

**Death from various crises and tragedies**.  "Pale" color:"  "ashen grey pallor" of a dead body; "Death . . . Hades:" (cf. Rev. 1:18), Jesus is their master! (2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14ff; Rev. 20:13f); "a fourth of the earth:" again God is in control!  No need to relegate this number to a certain time period or war.  A large number is indicated.  "Sword, famine, plague and wild beasts," (Ezek. 14:12ff, 21, 5:17, 33:25ff; Lev. 26:25f; Deut. 32:26f; Jer. 21:6f).

**Two Important Cries from Two Different People Groups**

**The fifth seal opened:**Rev. 6:9-11 *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a* ***loud*** *voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been* ***was completed****.*

**The Cry of the Martyrs: “How long, Sovereign Lord?”** Consider John's experience (Rev. 1:2, 9). "Under the alter"- perhaps a symbol of the cross (Rom. 12:1; 2 Tim. 4:6); "How long, Sovereign Lord" - the cry for justice not out of a vengeful attitude but rather zeal for the Lord's glory.  They long for the final judgment in the best sense of the word; "until the number...was completed" - God is sovereign over the number of martyrs!  "Martyrs" - Rev. 1:9; 2:13; 3:8; 7:14; 11:3ff; 12:11; 14:12f; 20:4).

**The sixth seal opened: *(*Environmental Disruption)** Rev. 6:12-17 **-** *I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and* ***who can stand****?"***The Question of the Ages: “Who can stand?”**

**Revelation 7 answers this question with great majesty, joy, and overwhelming hope! –** 7:1 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. 2 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: 3 “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.” 4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. 5 From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, (same with) Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

9 ***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. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” 11 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, 12 saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” 13 Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” 14 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.

 15 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. 16 ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. **17**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.’”

**Questions for Reflection and Conversation**

1. Dear brothers, what had the most impact on you from your study this week in preparation for our gathering, and from Scotty’s talk this morning? What was encouraging, helpful, and maybe stretching?
2. Staying with our “Make Sure You See the Alps” approach in our study of Revelation, how does seeing the 7 seals as an overview of the whole period between Jesus’ resurrection and return actually give us freedom and hope? Let me put it another way, how does knowing that God is sovereign over wars, plagues, environmental disruption, etc... give meaning to suffering? How scary would it be to live in a world where God has left everything to chance, not to Christ?
3. Revelation 7 is one of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible, not just in Revelation. It is pregnant and explosive with hope, and shows us the ultimate resolution to all of the providential disruptions of the 7 seals. What brought you the most encouragement, joy, and hope as Scotty led us through Revelation 7?
4. How might this vision of where history is heading shrink our fears, deepen our love for Jesus, and fuel our commitment to live missionally?
5. Close with a good season of prayer worshipping Jesus and praying for each other.