# The Beginning of Birth Pains — Delivery Transcript

**Revelation 6:1–8 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, August 8, 2021** · *Birth Pains*

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Alright, well, thanks to the band for leading us in worship. Man, I just love that song. That last song we sang, it's one of my favorite songs. Probably will be till we finish this journey that we've been in through this great book of the Bible, the last book of the New Testament, the book of the Revelation, or the Apocalypse, if you want to use that terminology. So if you have your Bibles, we're in Revelation chapter 6. You can go ahead and turn there. If you have a copy of God's Word— if you don't, there'll be some passages on the screen that we're going to be looking at.

And you may actually put a thumb in Revelation chapter six and also go to Matthew chapter twenty-four, as we're going to be going back and forth between those two passages today. We're getting to the point of the book of Revelation where it gets— well, let me put it this way. We're getting to the point in the book of Revelation where nobody agrees on what's going on. The debates, the charts, the timelines, the I'm-right-and-you're-wrong, no, you're wrong and I'm right. And generally speaking, the people that I read, the scholars that I respect generally agree on most things.

When I'm studying a passage of Scripture and I'm doing this commentary and that commentary, there's disagreements on the sides, on the tertiary things, but on the main things, it's like there's pretty much agreement. But in the book of Revelation it's not that way. There is disagreement, like big-time disagreement among people I respect, people that I generally glean a lot from and learn from, and they cannot seem to agree on what's what and who's who and when's where in the book of Revelation, because your interpretation of chapter 6 on to the rest of the book is determined by the interpretive grid that you bring to the book of the Revelation.

And I'll be honest with you, when I first was putting out the preaching calendar for this series and I thought about this Sunday and this text that we're looking at today, I had it originally down as like a one-off Sunday. We're going to do these four horsemen and then move on. But the more I began to dig into this passage and the complicated nature of this passage, depending on what perspective you're coming from, the more convinced I became that I needed to maybe slow down a little bit to give you guys a big-picture, bird's-eye view of what's going on in the whole book of Revelation, and then subsequently a big-picture, bird's-eye view of how different people approach the book of the Revelation so that number one, you're not totally confused why you heard from me something totally different than you heard from Alistair Begg on the radio or whoever you may listen to on the radio.

And number two, you'll know where I'm coming from and where I will be taking us through the rest of this book of Revelation because it comes from a very particular perspective. The other reason I want to introduce you to all those different perspectives is because I'm— my personality type, I don't like to be too dogmatic about anything. I like to see where other people are coming from and can generally appreciate why a person thinks the way that they think and how they got to their way of thinking. I think there's value to that in the body of Christ.

I think we've become way too polarized, way too dogmatic, way too I'm-right-you're-wrong, my-way-or-the-highway kind of mentality. I think it does damage to the body of Christ and the fact that conservative, solid, genuine Jesus-loving believers cannot agree on how to interpret certain parts of the Revelation should give us pause to say, well maybe I don't have it figured out. And maybe I should draw from some of the strengths of these other points of view and I will be drawing from some of these other points of view. So with all of that being said, typically I try to preach sermons that are very invigorating and full of exhortation and almost to use a word I probably shouldn't use, entertaining, so that it's kind of fun to listen to.

It doesn't bore you to death. I hate, hate listening to boring sermons. Does anybody else just, oh, it just kills me. But today may be a little boring, I'm sorry to tell you. But I'm going to try not to make it boring at all. But it's got a little more teaching than preaching, okay? And there's a difference between teaching and preaching, good preachers do a little of both, but they may lean a little more teaching or a little more preaching, depending on their personality type. And I really typically lean more teaching anyway, but it may feel a little bit academic.

And if you feel like this is too academic for me, come back next week, it'll be back to normal. I just feel convicted that this is what we need if we're going to understand the rest of the book moving forward because there's so much— Alright, does that make sense? Everybody got an idea of what we're going to do today? Alright, so with that in view, Revelation chapter

6, starting in verse 1. And again, if you're new, if you're just now joining us, right out of the gate in chapter six verse one, you are introduced to characters and imagery that has been developed in chapters four and five.

So we'll do a real quick review. But let's just read chapter six verse one. John is writing this letter. He's ushered up into heaven. He says when I was there I then saw the lamb open one of the seven seals. And I heard one of the four living creatures say, with a voice like thunder, come. Now, if you're just now joining us, you don't know who the four creatures are. Why is this lamb holding a seal? I thought lambs had hooves. And all this other imagery. All that's been developed in Revelation chapter 4 and 5, okay?

When John— in Revelation chapter 4, he gets ushered up into heaven and he gets this picture of heavenly worship. And the first thing he sees is God the Father, or just God, Trinitarian God, seated on the throne. He is surrounded by these 24 elders, these multitude of angels, and what are called four living creatures. That's the creature you're introduced to in verse 1. These creatures night and day, 24-7, sing holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. They give praise to God because he created all things.

The emphasis is on his creative power. But then when you get to Revelation chapter 5, the scene shifts. The attention goes away from the throne and the God who sits on the throne and begins to zoom in on this scroll, and not only the scroll, but a search for who is worthy to open the scroll. We just sang about it. And the person who comes out of that search, at first they can't find anybody. John's weeping. He's despairing. The world will never be fixed. Then one of the elders tells John, No, look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,[1] he has conquered.

He has defeated sin. He has defeated death. He's defeated Satan in the grave. And he is worthy to open the scrolls. And so John looks and he doesn't see a lion, he sees a lamb. And not just any lamb, a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures. And so when we get to Revelation chapter 6 and it says the lamb began to break the seals, that's what it's talking about. It's talking about Jesus Christ, who is uniquely worthy, uniquely worthy to open the seals and unfold the scroll.

Why? Because Christ and Christ alone was God in the flesh, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied himself, took on flesh, he lived a sinless, perfect life of love and obedience to God the Father. He willingly laid down his life on the cross. Jesus says, nobody takes my life from me. I willingly lay it down. And the death of Jesus on the cross, he stood in our place, bearing the penalty for our sin. He was our substitute. Because he got God's wrath, we got God's mercy.

Because he was rejected, we could be accepted. And because he died, our sins can be forgiven. He atoned for our sins on the cross. Three days later God raised him from the dead, putting a stamp of approval, paid in full, and because Christ has defeated sin and Satan in the grave through his resurrection, he is worthy. That's what we're singing about. That's the background to Revelation chapter 6. He's the lamb opening the scroll. The scroll is sealed with seven different seals. In our passage, he's going to break the first four of those seals.

Now, again, an important question is what is the scroll? And I've attempted to say the scroll is simply the future plans of God for the rest of the earth. So the unfolding of the scroll is the bringing down of God's preferred history for the rest of earth. So when we say Christ is worthy to open the scrolls, what we're really saying is Christ is uniquely worthy to bring about God's preferred future to the rest of the world. He's uniquely worthy to bring about the judgment on those who reject him, and he's uniquely worthy to bring about the blessing on those who trust him, the blessing of sin being abolished forever, of every tear being wiped from your eye, every sad thing coming untrue.

Jesus Christ is uniquely worthy to bring that about. Okay, that's what the scroll is and does. Alright, with that in mind, so let's read verse one again. I saw the lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, come. I wish I had a voice like thunder, and I would say it like that, but I don't. I have a different voice. Verse 2. I looked and there was a white horse, and its rider held a bow. A crown was given to him, and he went out as a conqueror in order to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, come. And then another horse went out, this time it's a fiery red horse. And its rider was allowed to take peace from the earth so that people would slaughter one another. And a large sword was given to him. And when he opened the third seal I heard the third living creature say, come. And I looked, and there was a black horse. Its rider had a set of scales in his hand, and then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures.

In other words, the voice of God from the throne. And he said, A quart of wheat for a denarius, which was a day's wage, and three quarts of barley for a denarius. Now a quart was like a serving size. So basically a day's a serving's worth of food for a day's worth of work or three servings worth of kind of crummy food for a day's worth of work. But do not harm the oil, and do not harm the wine. When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, come, and I looked, and there was a pale green horse.

Think of the color of vomit, if you've got kids— that pale, gross— that's the vibe. Its rider was named death, and Hades was following after him. They were given authority over one-fourth of the earth to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth. All right. Now we're going to get into what the horsemen are, when they're going to come, but

first I want to give you a big picture overview of the entire book of Revelation because what we have in our text is four seals, which equal four horsemen, right?

Have you ever heard the phrase the four horsemen of the apocalypse? This is what that is referencing. But these four seals are followed by three more seals in the rest of Revelation chapter 6, culminating in how many? Seven seals, right? This is Roby math. Three plus four equals seven. Those seven seals are then followed by seven trumpets. And those seven trumpets are then followed by seven bowls. When I first had the notes I had it down to seven bowels of judgment, which to me is hilarious. And I almost didn't fix it, but I just had to fix it.

But I talked about it, so I guess it's the same thing. Those are three sets of seven. Now it's very tempting when you look at the book of Revelation to look at this big mammoth book of the end times and symbols and imagery and oh it's so complicated and so confusing. It's like a big forest in which I'm going to get lost. But it's really not. Just think of it as three sets of seven. Okay? Actually four sets of seven. Five sets. You got the seven churches, seven trumpets. Seven seals, seven bowls.

Okay? Three sets of seven. And I've got a chart up here to kind of show you how that plays out. It's not a timeline chart, it's a chart of how Revelation is broken down. And what's interesting is we have the four horsemen today, the first four seals. It's followed by three additional seals. What's crazy is when he gets to the seven trumpets, there's four trumpets followed by three woes. So the four plus three is significant. Why is that significant? The number four in Revelation has symbolic connotations to the fullness of the earth.

That's why when we had the four living creatures one had a face of a lion, another had a face of an eagle, another had a face of a man, I think the other had a face of an ox. It represented the entirety of the creation, right? The fullness of the created realm. Four. You see that with later in the book of Revelation, the four angels at the four winds of the earth, north, south, east, and west. So four generally speaking is a reference to the world or the created realm. Three is generally a reference to God.

You've got Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You've got in those doxologies, he says you're worthy who is and who was and who is to come. Got that tripartite breakdown there. You see the number three reference many times in reference to God. So you got the fullness of God, the fullness of the created realm. Put together, number seven, is kind of the fullness. And that's what the number seven means in the Bible. It's like the totality, the complete picture. The number seven is a picture that represents the fullness of a thing.

And so this judgment, these seven seals represent the fullness of judgment of God coming to the earth. You have them as seals, as trumpets, and then as bowls. Three plus four. The other thing that I think you need to know is that between each of those sets of seven is what's

called an interlude. You ever been to a play? You got the first half of the play. You're getting a little bit tired, you've got to go to the bathroom, so they have an interlude to kind of give you a break and they fill in the details of what's taking place prior to the interlude.

You have this in the book of the Revelation, you have an interlude between the seals and the trumpets, and then again between the trumpets and the bowls. And you need to think of these interludes. Some people call them parentheses. It's John's way of saying, okay, you had these judgments on the earth, now let me fill in the gaps of what's going on in heaven and the implications of that judgment on the earth. And it's like each interlude gets bigger and bigger. Okay? So the first interlude is one chapter long, it's chapter seven.

Can you go to the next chart? This is all the chapters of the book of Revelation, chapter one, all the way to chapter 22. This is John's past. This is the kind of the picture of Christ magnified. We did this in Easter. Then you have John's present. These are the seven churches of the Revelation in chapters two and three. We already looked at those. Chapter four and five was our series, Heavenly Worship, the Throne Room of Heaven. We've been there the last four weeks. Now we're here, chapter six. Those are the seven seals mentioned here.

Actually, just the first six. The seventh is mentioned right there. But after those six seals, you have what's called the first interlude. It's a chapter long, it's a picture. John gets brought up into heaven and he sees the Father seal the 144,000, which we'll get to later. You see a vast multitude of Christians from every tribe, tongue, and nation. And then we go to the trumpets. Well, after the trumpets, there's an even longer interlude that has even more details and more filling in the gaps. And that's followed by the seven bowls, which after that brings about the full climax of the book of Revelation.

The destruction of Babylon, the return of Christ, the establishment of a new heavens, a new earth, new kingdom, all that. So the way I think about it is like you've got a camera zooming out. You get the full picture. And zooms out and gives you a little bit more of the picture, and zooms out and gives you even more of the picture, filling in more and more details until you finally get the full story. Okay? Seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls. Now one of the things where people disagree is, are those 21 judgments, three times seven, are those twenty-one judgments sequential or are they simultaneous?

In other words, is it the case that the sixth seal and the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl are really one event being looked at from various different perspectives because it kind of looks that way? If you go and read the sixth trumpet alongside of the sixth seal and the sixth bowl you'll go, Ooh, there's a lot of similarities here. It almost looks like one event looked at from various different perspectives. Or, and the same is true with the seventh trumpet, by the way. Or are they sequential, like you cannot have the first trumpet until the end of the seventh seal?

Are they logical in their order? And people disagree. And I think there's good reasons to think that they might be simultaneous because the sixth and seventh trumpet, seal, and bowl do look very similar. It's kind of like after number seven, it's all done. There's this big climax and it's over. Number six looks like the cosmic signs. You've got the moon turning blood red and all this crazy earthquakes, all these things happening, all that corresponds with each other, six trumpet, six seal, six bowl. But there are also problems with that view because there are certain things that are happening in like the fourth and third trumpet that have timelines attached to them that don't fit neatly with seal three and seal four.

So there's problems with the view. And that's why, when some people try to put those two things together, it makes it even more confusing. So I just want you to know people look at it differently. I'm not quite sure which it is. You can make it make sense either way, but the thing I want you to take away is three sets of seven. Seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and that the book of Revelation is broken down according to that major structure. Now, the thing that we need to settle today— the two questions that rise to the surface, if you're anything like me, when you read those four different horsemen, the two burning questions that are in my mind is number one, what are these horsemen?

Who are they? What do they represent? And number two, when will they visit the earth? Right? Because whenever they come, I want to be ready. Or if they come out, I don't want to be here, depending on your perspective. Who are these horsemen and when will they visit the earth? And for us to answer those questions, that's why you've got to see these different approaches that I talked about earlier. There are fundamentally four different approaches that people bring to the book of the Revelation, and your approach will determine how you answer who these horsemen are and when they come to the earth.

I've got them all listed in your notes up here all at once. You've got the preterist view, which is basically an understanding of the book of Revelation as if it was fulfilled in the first century. So 70 AD, it's all one and done. Nero is the Antichrist. All of the prophecies are fulfilled within the first seventy years after the death of Jesus on the cross. That's preterist. Historicist says, no, it's not about the first century, it's about historical events that have taken place after the first century. So some of the trumpets were the invasion of the Romans by the Goths, or the seven churches represent seven epochs of church history, like, yeah, the early church in Ephesus, and then the Middle Ages, you got the church in Sardis, and then you've got the carnal church today.

That's seeing the fulfillment of Revelation throughout history. And generally they try to see it within their particular lifetime. We'll talk more about these. The third approach, this is the fastest growing approach, I think. It's called the idealist approach. This is really a way of spiritualizing the book of Revelation so that instead of getting caught up into the literal particulars, let's see the symbolic and spiritual significance of those things. So Revelation is

really about the triumph of good over evil. Revelation is really about the theological themes of the victory of Christ over Satan and death.

And we need to make practical application from those theological truths to the daily lives of the people we're preaching to. And then the fourth approach, this is the approach I'm going to take, is the futurist approach. And this says, and in fact some of these people draw from these three camps, but this camp would basically say it hasn't been fulfilled in history. It wasn't fulfilled in the first century. Yes, we should be practical application-minded, but fundamentally the things in the book of the Revelation have not yet happened. They are to be announced.

They are yet to be fulfilled. These are pointing to global, cataclysmic, big, major demonstrations of God's judgment that we have not yet seen in history to this point. Okay, that's the futurist approach. Now what I want us to do and I debated on doing this, but I really want you to see the benefits and weaknesses of each of these approaches because I think they bring value to the table. One of the things that I really appreciate about the preterist approach is the scholars who come at the book of Revelation from that lens have added incredibly valuable historical insight to the first century culture.

In fact, when we were going through the seven churches in the book of Revelation, so many of the commentaries I was using were preterist commentaries because they're so helpful, they're so insightful, because they're digging into all of the facts that were taking place in first century culture. And you'd be surprised. You'd be amazed, actually, how many parallels there are between the first century and the fulfillment of these prophecies in Revelation, the book of Daniel, so on and so forth. It really is possible that it was all fulfilled back then. My problem with that is it wasn't all fulfilled back then because we're still in a broken world.

The finale has not yet come. Jesus has not visited the earth a second time. He has not established his kingdom. Those prophecies seem to be literal, seem to be future. Didn't happen in 70 AD. Therefore preterism cannot be fully true. So some people say, well, I'm a partial preterist, which is kind of like having your cake and eating it too. I don't blame them. That's the strength, that's the weakness. The historicist, I think, has a little bit more weaknesses. A lot of Seventh-day Adventists have this view. They would approach the seven churches as seven epochs of human history, as I mentioned earlier.

They would say the trumpet judgments were the invasion of the Romans by the Goths[2] in AD 395. My problem with this view is every new generation comes up with a whole new explanation for the book of Revelation. It's like— have you guys heard about those books about the rapture? 88 Reasons Why the rapture is in 1988. You guys remember that book? And then he got it wrong because it didn't happen in 1988. So he then wrote another book, said 89 Reasons Why the Rapture Is in 1989. Then he went back and he fixed all of his problems.

Well, I think the value of that view is they have an eagerness and an expectation for Jesus Christ to return in their lifetime and I think that's commendable. We should be eager for the return of Christ. The problem with this view is they're a little too quick to associate headlines in the news with prophecies in the Old and New Testament. And with every new generation is a total renewal of those headlines and prophecies. And there's just so much disagreement and so much variety and really so much lack of a cohesive approach to these things that a lot of people have just said I don't want to be associated with that.

Too many weird uncles, too many failed predictions. The historicist approach is not for me. And that's really what caused the rise of the idealist approach. People like us and scholars who are saying, okay, enough people have gotten it wrong enough times. Maybe we should just focus on the main things, make the main things the plain things, and let's focus on the spiritual realities of the book of Revelation, and let's make it practical and let's apply it to people's daily lives and let's talk about the triumph of Christ over Satan and these theological themes.

And I think that the idealists have brought a needed rebuke to the weird uncles in the historicist camp and the futurist camps. We needed— I think we needed to make Revelation practical to the people who are hearing it. And we don't necessarily have this history here. And I'm not saying every church that preaches on end times does this, but there are camps that are focused on end times that almost have nothing to say to people's day-to-day lives. And I don't know if you had to choose between a sermon that was speculative and theoretical and got into the weeds versus a sermon that was not as speculative and much more oriented towards practical application for your life Monday through Friday.

How many of you want the theoretical, technical one over the practical one? Not very many. Some of you are like, I don't know which one I want. But we need practical application. So I think the idealists have done us a favor. But the problem with the idealist camp, in my view, is they explain away things that can't be explained away. Or they'll allegorize things that are not allegorical, or they'll over-spiritualize things that— I don't know if I'd go that far. And it's because it doesn't fit their theological schematic. Okay, so, since I can't make this fit my little box, my interpretive box, therefore I've got to change the obvious meaning of this prophecy or of this passage and I don't like that.

I don't think that's a helpful way of reading the Bible. Just because it doesn't fit doesn't mean you need to change the meaning. It means you need to change your box and make your box fit the text. So that's why I go with the futurist view. The futurist view, probably the most popular view. It sees these events yet to be determined, yet to have happened. I think we should draw from the preterist and draw from the idealist, and even draw that eager expectation from the historicist. But fundamentally there are things that are talked about in the book of the Revelation, one of them we just read, of one quarter of the earth being killed

by famine and wild beasts and pestilence and the sword, and we have not seen, I think the bubonic plague might have gotten close, but we have not seen that kind of judgment to date, and so I think it's yet future.

The only problem with this view is it's got a lot of weird uncles, and there's a lot of disagreement. It's a really big tent. How many of you have heard talks about the rapture of the church, talked about in 1 Thessalonians? There's disagreement on when that happens. I think everybody agrees there's a rapture, because the Bible talks about being caught up together to meet the Lord in the air in 1 Thessalonians 4. But there's disagreement. Do we go through some of the tribulation? Do we go through none of the tribulation?

Do we go through most of the tribulation? And then we're caught up at the end. There's not a clear— I won't say it's not clear. There's a lot of disagreement on to how clear the answer to that question is in the book of the Revelation. And so when you say you're a futurist, you better be ready to say what kind of futurist you are because there's a lot of different kinds. And I'm committed not to pre— I'm going to preach the book of Revelation, not in a very narrow, rigid camp, you got all those different camps in the futurist approach.

I want us to take a very broad, generally speaking, futurist approach, showing you the different views and why they get there and how they get there. But not getting too narrow. One because I'm not even sure what I believe. I believe one thing one week and another thing the next week, depending on what book I'm reading. Secondly, again, I just don't think it's helpful for us to say my view is the only view and it's my way or the highway. I don't want that kind of spirit in our church. And so you can have your view, have your convictions, but you should be gentle about it.

Alright, so let's answer the questions. Who are the horsemen and when do they come? Alright, and then we'll talk more about this next week. But I want to give you that big broad overview. I think the answer to those two questions really should be shaped by Jesus' teaching about these issues in Matthew 24. It is so crazy the parallels between Matthew 24 and Revelation chapter 6. It'll blow your mind. If you have your Bibles, look at Matthew chapter 24. And I want to show you these parallels. Jesus had just mentioned that the temple was going to be destroyed.

He was prophesying about 70 AD, the destruction of the temple. For his original disciples, if the temple was going to be destroyed and Jerusalem was going to fall, that was a cataclysmic event. For them, that is the end times: My world is over if the worship of God in the temple is abolished. And so they asked Jesus the question in Matthew 24, verse 3. While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and said, tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

Now notice, in the disciples' minds, they're conflating those two things. Destruction of the temple is the end of the age. And that's why a lot of preterists will say, see, they're the same thing. But just because it was the same thing in the minds of the disciples doesn't mean it's the same thing in the minds of Jesus. Because he replies to them, here are the signs you need to look for— which should be instructive for us. There's a tendency for a lot of Christians to say you don't need to look for signs.

Stop talking about the end times. Cool it with the charts and the timelines. Just preach the gospel and love people and let it all pan out in the end. And I've even been guilty of saying those kinds of things. But Jesus does not say that. He does not say don't look for signs. He says, no, there are signs. Here's what you need to look for. Verse four of Matthew 24, Jesus replied to them, Watch out that nobody deceives you. For— sign number one— many will come in my name, saying, I am the Messiah, and they will deceive many.

And you're going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you're not alarmed, because these things must take place. But the end is not yet, because nation will rise up against nation, kingdom against kingdom, there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All of these things are the beginning of labor pains. That's the title of our series, Birth Pains. He goes on in verse 9 to talk about persecution of Christians. He says you're going to be hated by all nations. Some of you are even going to die.

False prophets will lead many people astray. Lawlessness will increase. The love of many will grow cold. So the first four things mentioned by Jesus are number one, false Christ. Number two, wars and rumors of wars. Number three, he talks about famines. He associates famines with earthquakes and other natural phenomenon. And then the last thing he mentions is mass death. Jesus is focused in on the death of Christians. Revelation seems to be focused in on death, generally speaking. But I believe those first four things mentioned by Jesus are the first four horsemen mentioned by John.

The first one is in verses one and two. John talks about this white rider on a white horse. Let's just read it again. Revelation chapter 6, verse 1. One of the four living creatures said, come, and then verse 2, I looked, and there was a white horse. Its rider held a bow. Notice he doesn't have any arrows. The rider held a bow. He had a crown that was given to him. Whether it was given by Satan or given by God, there's disagreement. And he went out as a conqueror in order to conquer.

Now at first glance there does not seem to be parallels between false Christ and this rider, but it's interesting that there's another white rider in the book of Revelation, and there's another rider of a white horse in the book of Revelation, and it's Jesus Christ himself in Revelation chapter nineteen. And there are even people who say, this is Jesus. This rider is Jesus advancing the gospel on the face of the earth, leading up to the end of the age. But I think they're wrong. I think it looks like Christ, but it's not Christ.

Number one, because Christ has a sword, this guy has a bow. Number two, when Christ comes, he brings heaven and earth and the kingdom. This guy, when he comes, he's followed by war and famine and other bad mojo. So this guy's in bad company. I don't think it's Jesus. But it is someone who looks like Jesus, talks like Jesus, acts like Jesus. In other words, it is a false Christ. It's exactly what Jesus said would happen in Matthew 24. You will see people—do not be led astray. Do not go with them.

They'll say, I'm the Christ. Do not buy it. Now some people would say this is just generally, it is false Christ in general. It is people who rile people up, say, put your hope in me, put your hope in this, here's where you should find your confidence. And this rider seems to establish peace. And so, hey, if you trust in me, I'll make your life better. And there is a general sense in which that's true, but I don't think it's generally speaking about false Christ in general. I think it's talking about a very specific kind of false Christ known as the Antichrist.

And Jesus actually talks about that in Matthew 24 when he talks about the abomination of desolation. And then he says, let the reader understand the one talked about in Daniel. If you go back to Daniel 7, Daniel 9, Daniel chapter 11, it talks about the Antichrist. It talks about him as someone who goes out to conquer. It talks about the Antichrist as someone who gets incredible amounts of power, not by bloodshed, but by intimidation. There is a sense in which people raise the question, who can stand against this guy? It's as if he has this weapon or this tool that makes him invincible, and so nobody really wants to go toe-to-toe with him.

They just kind of submit to whatever it is he wants to do, kind of like a Cold War scenario. And what you seem to get in Revelation chapter 6 is this figure, this false Christ establishes a great amount of power for himself and seems to create some level of peace because that peace is disrupted by the second seal which is war. Okay, so I think it's a reference to the Antichrist. And that means the second seal is a reference to war. Look at verses three to four. He opened the second seal.

I heard the second creature say, come, and then another horse went out. This is a fiery red horse. It was allowed to take peace from the earth. So since it took peace from the earth, that implies that peace existed in a widespread fashion before he took peace from the earth. That's why I think the Antichrist is number one, establishing his quote-unquote artificial peace. But after that peace is broken, it says that people begin to slaughter one another, and a large sword was given to the rider. This is exactly what Jesus says happens in Matthew 24, verses 6 and 7.

He says, you're going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. Verse 7, he says, nation will rise up against nation, kingdom against kingdom. And so that's the way the Bible talks about the rule of the Antichrist. It says, I think it's in first Thessalonians, I've got it up there. First Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 3, it says, while people are saying peace and safety or peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them like what? Like labor pains.

Exactly what Jesus talked about in Matthew 24. So there's going to be this sense in which the people of the world following the Antichrist think this guy's the best thing since sliced bread.

He has given us world peace. I'm so happy things are so great. And then suddenly catastrophe will come upon the earth and it will be a widespread war. That war results in famine. Look at the fourth horse. I'm sorry, the third horse, the black horse. Seal one is false Christ, seal two is war, seal three seems to be famine and hyperinflation. The third seal, the third living creature said, come, and I looked and there was a black horse. Its rider had a set of weighing scales in his hand. Then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures say, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not harm the oil and wine.

Now, as I said earlier, a denarius was a day's wage, and a quart was a single serving. So you have a single serving of bread for a day's worth of work, which is terrible. This is inflation 16 to 18 times what it would have normally cost in that day, but it's not an equitable kind of inflation. You have incredible inflation on the basic necessities of life, but you don't have any inflation at all on the pleasures of life like oil and wine. Some people think this is a reference to class disparity, like the poor are going to get poorer and poorer and poorer, and the rich are going to get richer and richer and richer.

We've seen some of this with COVID, how the poor got more poor and the rich got richer. But that's going to be exacerbated and exacerbated to such a degree that a type of civil war is going to take place and people are literally going to tear each other apart, which is what many think Jesus might have been referencing. Either way, it's incredible inflation and food shortage as a result. If you want to look at the civil war thing, you can look at Isaiah chapter 19, Zechariah chapter 14; both of them speak about that.

Then finally we'll close with the fourth horse. It's the pale green horse, the color of just a sickly, sickly kind of color. The fourth seal: I heard the voice of the fourth creature say, come, and I looked, and there was a pale green horse, its rider was named death, and Hades was following after him. They were given authority by whom? I don't know. But they were given authority over a fourth of the earth to kill— to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Now if you compare that to what Jesus says in Matthew 24, in Matthew 24, verse 9, Jesus says that they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. Now again, Jesus seems to reference Christians, whereas the fourth seal in Revelation seems to be more broad stroke. It's a fourth of the earth. But I think Christians are in view in Revelation chapter 6 because if you look at seal 5, it's the martyred Christians. It is the saints who are saying, How long, O Lord, until you avenge our blood?

How long are you going to allow these evils to continue on the earth? And so I think that the fourth seal is in fact a reference to the mass martyrdom of Christians all across the globe because they are resisting the rule and reign of the Antichrist. And I'll close with this thought. If those parallels are what I think they are, and we should interpret Revelation 6 in view of Matthew chapter 24, I would suggest that seals 1, 2, 3, and 4 all revolve around this figure called the Antichrist. It is a description of his coming to power in the first seal, and it is a picture of the consequences of this man's evil breaking apart the rest of the world with these wars and famine and mass killing of Christians, anybody who tries to resist him.

Now people debate, is the church present or is the church in heaven? Okay, the rapture, is it before or after or mid-tribulation? We're not going to settle that question today. But even if the church is on the earth, the thing that we need to walk away with this morning is God is sovereign. You notice how many times the passage says, A crown was given, a sword was given, a voice from heaven said, this far and no further, this much and no more. Over and over again you see that this judgment or this wrath of Satan that's falling on the earth, it's being controlled by and overseen by a sovereign God in heaven.

The lamb is the one breaking these seals. He's the one in control. And so I want to close with this thought that even as Satan rages in your life right now, even though the devil is a devil, as Martin Luther said, he is God's devil, and he is on God's leash. And there is a temptation in the body of Christ, especially when you think about the end times, to be fearful and anxious and afraid. But we need not fear because our God is with us. He has promised to protect us and nothing hits your life, nothing, even the worst suffering of your life, nothing hits your life that does not first filter through the sovereign hand of an all wise, all loving, heavenly Father.

And so be not afraid. Only believe. And I know saying that some of you are thinking of incredible suffering that has hit your life very recently. I spoke about some of that suffering with some of you right before the service began. So I understand the pain is real. All I'm saying is allow the pain to be shaped by the presence of a God in heaven who knows your pain and is not allowing anything to hit you that does not first filter through his hand. Doesn't mean it won't happen. But it means as it's happening, it's not taking him by surprise, and even better than that, you do not have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with you.

The lamb who is breaking these seals is the lamb who was slaughtered. It's the lamb who wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. It's the lamb who walked this earth, felt the brokenness of this world, and knows what it's like to be human. And so you can draw near to the throne of grace with confidence that you're going to find help, custom fit help, the help that you need, because the God who gives you that grace is a God who understands your pain. He is sovereign, he is sympathetic, and he is available if you'll receive him.

And so as Taylor leads us through a response, I want to invite you. I don't know what kind of suffering you're going through right now, but I want to invite you to allow that suffering to be shaped by the sovereignty of God. I'll be happy to pray with anybody that wants to pray. Those of you who are here this morning and you're not a Christian, or if you're watching online and you're not a believer, this passage is a rich reminder of where this world is headed and judgment will come. There's a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to destruction.

And so don't be caught— recognize that truth before it's too late. Better to bow the knee now and receive the blessing of being submitted to God's authority and sovereign rule than to do it later, when it's too late. And so if there's a decision you want to make publicly, I'll be here to receive you. But let's all respond to the Lord however he leads. So Father in heaven, we thank you for this time. We thank you for this text. I know it's kind of crazy and out there and maybe even super future oriented and so maybe it feels irrelevant to some of us this morning.

But the truth of the matter is it is your history. And it's not irrelevant. It is a promise of what is yet to come. And though today might have been focused on the negative and the judgment and the difficulties that are associated with living life outside of submission to your authority, it is a reminder of the futility of living life without you. And the blessed hope we have of a God who is not up there distant and detached, but a God who comes to us like a shepherd, a God who knows what we need, and a God who is faithful and committed to giving us everything that we need.

And so Father, where we lack, would you fill us up? Where we are in need of strengthening, would you strengthen us? Where we are in need of repentance, would you challenge us to repent and believe? We give you this time, we pray your spirit move, according to your sovereign will, and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "the root of Jesse"; Revelation 5:5 calls him "the Root of David" ("Root of Jesse" is Isaiah 11:10; Romans 15:12). Source: Revelation 5:5 (CSB). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "the invasion of the Goths by the Romans"; it was the Goths who invaded the Roman Empire (Alaric I became king of the Visigoths in 395 and sacked Rome in 410), and earlier in this sermon it is put the right way round. Source: Wikipedia, "Alaric I." ↩