

## Revelation 6-7 Seals, Suffering, and Salvation

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
[www.calvarydcmetro.org](http://www.calvarydcmetro.org)



Image via: <http://chriskoelle.com/the-book-of-revelation>

We're going through the book of Revelation, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. We've seen some pretty wild stuff, and we're going to see plenty more, but the things we're about to see starting in chapter 6 all deal with events that we believe are yet future. They won't happen until after an event known as the rapture when Jesus suddenly removes all the living Christians from the earth.

We've seen the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3, but now, in chapters 6-19 as we look at the events known as the Great Tribulation, we don't see the church mentioned on earth a single time. If these things were to begin happening tomorrow, Christian, you would be watching it all unfold from the balcony.

So, here's how we're going to approach it. We moved pretty slowly going through the seven letters to the churches, but now we're going to pick up the pace. As I mentioned, these are future events, and because they are future, there has been a lot of speculation about them – speculation that we're not going to enter into. We're not going to spend any time this morning discussing, for example, who the antichrist is, and whether he is alive today.

We're going to focus on breadth instead of depth and make sure we see the big picture. Having said that, if you want a good in-depth study of Revelation, let me know, and I can recommend one to you after the service.

But, for now, let's see what we can learn from chapters six and seven in a sermon I've titled Seals, Suffering, and Salvation.

Let's start reading here:

**Revelation 6:1** Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." 2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

Back in Chapter 5 you remember there was this big question – God had a scroll in His right hand, sealed with seven seals, and there was no one who was worthy to take it from Him. So John wept. But then, an angel showed him – look, Jesus is here, and He is able. And John saw a Lamb that had been slain approach the throne and take the scroll, and when that happened, all of Heaven erupted in worship.

They sang:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,  
And open its seals;  
For you were slain,  
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood  
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
And have made us kings and priests to our God;  
And we shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9-10)

The ability to take the scroll cost Him His life, and now, as He opens it, it will cost the lives of many more as judgment and justice are poured out on the earth.

The first seal brings a conqueror. The Bible tells us that one day, one man will rule the planet. It will be a government inspired by Satan who, if you remember, once offered all the kingdoms of earth to Jesus if He would only bow down and worship Satan, and Jesus didn't tell him he didn't have the authority. He just rejected the offer, but one day, someone will take him up on it. And this man will rule over all of God's creation, but without giving any thought to God.

He's followed by another rider:

3 When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." 4 Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

That's an interesting way to put it, isn't it? That it was granted to him to 'take peace from the earth.' That's the exact opposite of what happened at Christmas, isn't it? When the angels appeared to the shepherds in the sky over Bethlehem one night and announced (Luke 2:14):

"Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Friends, I don't know if you ever think about this, but the peace we experience is a gift from God to man. There are whole cultures that are built on revenge – someone wrongs you or someone from your tribe or clan, and now it is incumbent upon you to avenge your kin or to restore your honor. It's hard to have much peace when you live like that – when you're living by strongman rules – where he who has the most strength makes the rules.

This rider comes and removes peace all together and simply brings to the surface the murderous thoughts that dwell in the hearts and minds of men who have not been washed in the blood of Christ – men who show no mercy because they have known no mercy. God's greatest commandment is that we should love Him and love others as ourselves, but this rider brings the complete reversal of that Great Commandment.

And there's another rider right behind him:

5 When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

A quart of wheat was the equivalent of one man's rations for one day, and a denarius was the typical pay for a day's labor. Now, under normal conditions, a denarius bought anywhere from eight to sixteen quarts of wheat and 3-4 times as much barley. So what we have here is, people living hand to mouth with nothing left over. And, actually, it's worse than that. A man would work all day and receive only have enough to feed himself – not a whole family. A day's labor for a day's rations – it sounds like prison or boot camp, and what about all the other expenses of life? People will try and try to get ahead, but there will be nothing left at the end of the day.

So, in addition to the conquering and bloodshed brought by the first two riders, now there's a famine, but notice it's only a partial famine. Staples like grain are hard to come by, but olive trees and grape vines have deeper roots and are not immediately affected by a dry season in the same way as the more shallow roots of wheat.

This creates a radically two-tiered society where luxury goods like oil and wine are still available but the average person is starving. It has happened throughout history and we see it happening all over the world today. Income inequality they call it. The rich sip Merlot and Chardonnay in private while the poor struggle to survive. It's the stuff riots and revolutions are born out of.

But even those with enough money to avoid the famine cannot escape the next disaster:

7 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." 8 So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him

who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

A fourth of the earth - if this happened today, we're looking at over a billion people dying - assuming that some significant amount have already been raptured.

These four riders are only the beginning of the judgment of God on a world full of the selfishness we call sin. There are many more judgments to come, and we need to remember, these judgments only last for a relatively short time on the earth - When they die, those outside of a relationship with Christ will suffer for all of eternity.

In fact, because this planet, and our lives, and our relationships on it are so infected by sin, even Jesus-loving Christians will suffer at times in this life. And that's where we turn our attention now as we move on from the riders to the martyrs.

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

These are people who have been murdered for believing what God has said is true. These are Christians who died violent deaths on earth. ISIS killed twenty-one of them last month on a beach in Libya while they cried out in Arabic, "save us Jesus." Their souls are in Heaven and John sees them under the altar, which is appropriate since they have given up their lives as a sacrifice.

Friends, I'm really torn by this. Because, on the one hand, I'm grateful for the home I live in. I'm thankful for my two cars that run, for the roof over our heads, and for the fact that no one ever jumps when there's a knock on our door. I'm thankful that I live in a land of peace and that we can gather freely to worship God; that we have a website, and sermons on iTunes, and signs out front telling everyone who we are and what we're doing in here.

But I know it's not like this everywhere in the world. I know it hasn't always been this way and that it won't always be this way. And there's a part of me that wants to hide that and deny it.

But honestly friends, we must remember the history of the Church has many pages that are written in blood...it started on the first page with the blood of Christ, and there's still blood on some of the pages being written today and there will be even more in the days to come.

You and I sitting in this room, this morning, have a comfortable a faith in many ways. A convenient faith. But do we have a faith that can be tested? A faith that can be tried? A faith that you are willing to stand for at all times, no matter the cost?

Friends, we need to realize that this stuff is real. We complain about petty grievances and minor frustrations at church while people suffer for the sake of things we take granted, the things we assume, the things we think are a right. They suffer and they cry out:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

When I stop and think about this, instead of just glazing over the words, it makes my soul hurt – to know that this kind of pain and suffering has happened, and will continue to happen, that it could, quite possibly happen to us, or to our children. Not in the Tribulation, we won't be here for that, but there's no guarantee that the peace we've always enjoyed as Christians in America will continue forever.

We have no guarantee of peaceful lives as Christians just because there has been peace in the past and it makes my soul hurt because, honestly, I enjoy my easy Christian life. I don't want to have to think about how I would respond if I had to choose to between pain and Jesus.

I know the right answer, and I know what I would choose, but I don't want to think about it. And yet, here I am reading this and I have too. I have to realize these people suffered and died because they chose Jesus just like He had chosen them.

But, I also notice a difference here. I see a difference between Christian martyrs and the martyrs of Islamic terrorism. Those martyrs take the lives of others through raids and suicide attacks and assume it will get them into paradise, but Christian martyrs have only ever been described as those who suffer their own loss. Christians, like Christ, give their lives for the sake of others and for what they believe.

So we find these souls of Christians who have been slain for the Word of God crying out in Heaven, asking to be avenged, and you know what they're told? They're told they need to wait, because there is going to be even more.

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were*, was completed.

How does this fit? Think with me about this – the first four seals – the four riders, all brought consequences and judgment on earth, and so will the sixth and seventh seal, and the bowls and the trumpets and the woes that we'll see in the coming chapters – they all focus on something negative happening on earth. So what about this – how does the suffering of the martyrs fit?

I'll tell you how – the point is not their suffering – the point is the fact that God has heard. Their suffering isn't the consequence; the consequence is coming *because* they've suffered. God hears the cries of His children, and just like any good parent, He confronts what is threatening them. Watch what we see next:

12 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became

like blood. 13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

The cosmic catastrophes of the last days are described in several places in Scripture. It's hard to tell exactly what's going to happen since so much of this is poetic language, but we know it will be real, and it will be stunning. The effect of it all, as one commentator said, is to show people nothing is safe any more. Instead, "The end will be a time when the most reliable things in the universe will become a disorderly and terrifying chaos."<sup>1</sup>

And no one, no matter their rank or title or net worth, or level of education will be able to escape what is coming:

15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and 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 His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

They understand that it is God they have offended. The great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? That's worthy of being underlined or highlighted in your Bible, and for you to come back to and chew on.

Friends, we need to remember that God is a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath, a God of justice, and a God of judgment. He has to be. The question is: who will receive that wrath, that anger against injustice? Will you? Or will you allow Jesus to receive it for you?

That's the question we all must answer. We'll talk about it more in a moment, but I want you to see this in your mind – these people – rich and poor, famous and powerful are so terrified that they're running off and hiding, begging to die instead of having to face God. Of course, once they die, they'll face Him anyway, and then what?

**Revelation 7:1** After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;  
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;  
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;

---

<sup>1</sup> Barclay, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Also, see Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12, 18.



6 of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
7 of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
8 of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed;  
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed.

Now, unlike the martyrs, these people aren't going to die – they're going to live through the events described in this book. They'll make it out alive, but it's not going to be fun. There's some debate over whether this 144,000 is a symbol or a statistic, whether it's a literal 144,000 people or a picture of something - it's another one of the things people have a variety of opinions on. One thing is for certain though, they're only a very small part of the total number of people who have been and will be saved by Christ.

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,  
10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Finally! Something comforting. Something encouraging. After all we've seen now we get to some worship again!

And there are two great things to notice here. First of all, we see that the work of international missions will be accomplished – one day, before the throne of God we will be surrounded by people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue and we will all worship together.

And their worship reminds us of the Triumphal Entry – Christians celebrate it next Sunday – Palm Sunday – the day we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and the crowds going before Him with palm branches shouting Hosanna! Which means, save now!

Well, here they celebrate the completion of that salvation – they were looking forward to it in Jerusalem, here we see them celebrating it in Heaven. And as they celebrate, look what happens – remember, we said last time, true worship is always contagious:

11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,  
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,  
*Be* to our God forever and ever.

Amen.”

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”

14 And I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and 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 dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

O, my friends, despite the suffering, there is a hope. A blessed hope. There will be a day when there is no more pain, no more tears, and you will feel the hand of God Himself gently touch your cheek and wipe them all away! What a glorious day! If that doesn't stir your soul, I don't know what to say.

So, what do we make of all this? How do we conclude? In the course of two chapters we've moved from conquering to comforting and seen a lot suffering and pain in between. What can we say about it all?

Let me offer these closing thoughts.

First, we need to realize and accept that we do suffer at times, but God hears the Christian's prayers, and gives us a blessed hope instead of a mournful cry.

Let's pick that apart.

First of all, Christians do suffer. Jesus promised His disciples while He was still on earth: Matt 24:9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.”<sup>2</sup>

Christians have, will, and do suffer for their faith, but it won't go on forever; there is a limit to it all. God is working toward a specific end, and it's an end He has set. Remember, the martyrs were given a white robe “and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.” There was an end in sight. Some number had to be reached, and when it was, it was all over.

We might not like it all right now, we might wonder why it had to be, wonder why God set the number where He did, but one thing is for certain - God is very definitely in control even when His people suffer.

---

<sup>2</sup> Also, see Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12, 18.



And, God has set points in history. There was a time for Jesus. There was a time for Him to be born, Galatians tells us, “when the *fullness of time* had come, God sent forth his Son.” And there was a time for Him to die - over and over again He said, My hour has not yet come, My hour has not yet come, and then, shortly before His death, He said, “My hour has come.” We know that there is also a time when the preaching of the gospel on earth will cease – Jesus said, “This *gospel* of the kingdom *shall be preached* in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end *will come*.”

The point is: God rules over time and history. We don’t understand it all, but He really is in control. So, when the martyrs cry out, He tells them, (Chap 6):11 “Be patient a little longer, until...”

Friend, can you accept a God who tells you, while you’re crying, “Be patient a little longer, until...?” Does He have the right to do that?

Your answer to that question says a lot about your relationship to Him. It reveals whether you think He’s the foundation of your life, or just a little spiritual accessory – like a rabbit’s foot on a little key chain – a little trinket that brings you good luck and helps you get what you want.

Friends, if your God can’t tell you ‘be patient a little longer’ even when life hurts, you don’t have the real God, you’ve got a god you made up. The real God, the God who is revealed in these pages, tells us what to do, and not vice versa.

But, notice, that doesn’t mean He is inconsiderate, or mean, or rude. Not at all. Notice that although He allows us to suffer at times, He also hears our cries. *The cries of the martyrs were heard*. The cries of the Israelites suffering in Egypt *were heard* and God sent them Moses, the cries of the people suffering under the Philistines *were heard* and God sent them judges and kings. The cries of the early church *were heard*, and Peter was released from jail. The cries of Paul *were heard* and people were saved. God hears the cries of His people. He may not respond the way we want Him to, or when we want Him to, but He still hears. And we need to know that and trust Him.

Because more than just hearing *us*, He’s hearing the other members of the Trinity cry out as well. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit cries out for us with groanings that words cannot express, and that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father always making intercession for us. God hears us, He hears the Spirit, He hears the Son, *He hears your cries!* So cry out, weep, shout if you need to, if the pain is that bad – and then trust. Trust Him to do what is right when it’s right. But know that He hears.

I think one of the things we learn in Revelation is that everyone cries – the only question is, will you ever find comfort? Compare the cries of the Christian martyrs to the cries of the unsaved. Those who ran to the caves also cried, but they cried out for the mountains to fall on them because they could not stand before God. The great day of His wrath had finally come.

Man's has been trying to hide from God since the very first sin in the garden, but you can't do it. The only way you'll ever be able to see God's face, and stand in His presence, is to receive forgiveness of your sins in Christ.

Paul said

1 Corinthians 15:1 I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received and in which you stand.

Peter said

1 Peter 5:12 ... this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

And the book of Romans says:

Romans 5:1-2 - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, who is worthy to take the seal and open it, offers you forgiveness and new life. Have you received it? Will you escape this coming judgment? And if you have not, will you receive it today? Will you come to God and ask for forgiveness for your sins, and ask for the strength, guidance, and direction to live the rest of your days for Him – even if they involve suffering, trusting that hears?

If so, then you will join us all one day when even those of us who are worthy to stand before God in Christ will fall down in worship and sing.

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,  
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,  
Be to our God forever and ever.  
Amen.”