



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Week 5 - Small Group Study

Chapter 6 & 8:1-5

READ: Read the passage out loud. Listen carefully for anything that stands out to you. After the reading, pause and wait on God. Ask Him to highlight something for you.

REFLECT: According to Darrell Johnson in his book *Discipleship on the Edge*, chapter 6 is about the conflict going on in our world today (as it was then, for the first recipients), between the Kingdom of God and the demonic powers opposed to God and the Way of the Lamb. “Come” is repeated four times, not as a command for the horsemen to come from heaven, but as a prayer for the Lamb to come and establish His Kingdom and bring His justice and peace. How do you see prayer at work through this whole passage? Compare this cry for God (which is coming from the four living creatures, who represent creation), with Romans 8:18-27.

As soon as this prayer is uttered however, opposition appears. The horsemen represent the resistance and opposition that occur as a consequence of the world rejecting the Way of the Lamb. The horsemen are symbols of both demonic power and human evil working together to cause all suffering, sickness, injustice, and death. This scene does not describe an actual historical event, as such, but what is going on behind all historical events.

The white horse is the power of evil imitating Jesus with a bow and a crown. It is the ‘angel of light’ – one that appears to be good, but deceives many and who is bent on conquest and tyranny. What are some of the examples of this in our world today?

The red horse is the symbol for war. As evil seeks to assert itself against the Lamb, it chooses violence, and generates war. Most all of the wars on earth are rooted in spiritual conflict. What is the connection between the first and second horse?

The black horse is the symbol of injustice. Bread, a staple for the poor, becomes worth a whole day’s wage. Wine and oil (the luxuries of the rich) are protected. It is greed and injustice that leads to hunger and famine in the world. Again, think of regions of the world where there is hunger and suffering. What are the causes of this? How is the gap between the rich and the poor widening in our country? What are the causes of this gap?

The ashen horse represents death, but it isn’t just the guilty that die, many innocent victims lose their lives because of the destructive ways of those in power, and behind them (and all human evil) stands the father of lies, the devil, whom Jesus calls a “murderer from the very beginning.”

These four horses are the inevitable consequence of what happens when people, but especially those in positions of power, are spurred on by demonic forces, and resist the coming of the Kingdom of God. Darrell says: "Seal one says if we do not go the Way of the Lamb there will be greater and greater conflict and the drive to conquer. Seal two says if we do not go the Way of the Lamb, there will be greater and greater violence. Seal three says if we do not go the Way of the Lamb, there will be greater and greater injustice and hunger. Seal four says if we do not go the Way of the Lamb, there will be greater and greater sickness and death." (Johnson pg. 174)

The fifth seal tells us that unfortunately the church is not exempt from the suffering caused by the world's resistance to the Kingdom of God. We see the martyrs underneath the altar because that is where the blood of the animals sacrificed ended up. This is John's way of saying that the death of Jesus' followers is a priestly, sacrificial act, an act of worship that He remembers and will repay. Yet, the saints cry out, "How long will you let this go on? Why don't you assert your rule?" What is God's response? Think back to the defining scene of Revelation, in chapter 5, the way of the Lion (the ruler), becomes the Way of the Lamb (the suffering servant). How is God dealing with evil in the world? Why does this sometimes look like weakness? The saints are told to wait a while longer for a pre-determined amount of time. Read Col. 1:24. How does Paul's understanding reflect this teaching?

The Sixth Seal is the result of what happens in the world when human corruption goes unchecked. The world becomes chaotic and begins to unravel, and human power cannot stop it, we cannot control the world. The point is that judgment is not imposed from without but comes from within. If we will not go the Way of the Lamb, God will let us have our own way. Self-rule leads to self-destruction.

The six seals reveal the history of the world and the consequences of rejecting the purposes of God as revealed in Jesus. As Jesus opens the seals and reads from the scroll (of God's word and will), God's inbreaking Kingdom is resisted, and this leads to conflict (see Rev 1:9). The people blame God: "save us from the wrath of the Lamb," but they should really blame themselves, and cry out to God for mercy. Why do you think the Lamb of God is filled with wrath? What is God angry about? What is he doing in the world as the expression of his wrath? How can this inspire our prayers?

A question is asked at the end of chapter 6: "who can stand?" Chapter 7 is the answer to that question (read it if you have time). Those who hide themselves in the Lamb, who follow the Way of the Lamb, will be saved and healed – they will stand with God forever.

After the seventh seal is opened, there is silence in heaven as God receives the prayers of his people, the cries of the earth's inhabitants, and the groaning of creation itself. Imagine – the worship that has been going for all eternity stops so that God might listen to our prayers! The incense represents the prayers of the saints crying out "How long?" This prayer is gathered into a great bowl, mixed with the fire of the Holy Spirit, and is thrown to the earth in answer to the prayer. God is responding to our prayers and is moving in power! How long will the wicked prosper? Not much longer! God is making his justice known, God is at work, and He is greater than our enemy! This connects us to the great 'royal priestly' role of the church in Rev 5:8-10.

How does this passage encourage us to pray? What do our prayers accomplish? What kinds of prayers are acceptable to God, according to Rev 6 & 8?

RESPOND: Spend some time praying for the world, the church, each other, for our leaders and our government, and for places where we see injustice or war or sickness or death or tyranny in the world. Take some time to worship Jesus, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.