

We're going to jump right in to Revelation because I always have too much to say and tonight is no exception. In fact, I had this ridiculous notion that we could finish chapter 6 and do all of chapter 7 tonight. Which is hilarious because actually all we're going to accomplish is to look at the 6<sup>th</sup> of the 7 seals and at the first 3 verses of chapter 7. My goal now is to finish this series before Jesus returns and tells us all what the book was really about. Anyhow, before we read about this sixth seal we need to zoom in on a point that John has been making that we in 2020 take for granted.

Most of us in this room have been loving and serving Jesus for a lot of years and are big fans of God's word. I can readily assume when preaching in this room that this crowd can define, as best as anyone can, the Trinity. Yep, Godhead – three in one – eggs, clovers, ice – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Move it along, nothing new here. As a result we've been reading the scripture for the entire length of time that we've been following Jesus and interpreting it in light of our understanding of the blessed Trinity. Jesus is God – cause the whole three in one – He was not created, but was begotten. We know that before there was time there was God. We know God created the world and that present at creation was also God the Son from whom all things were created and have their being. We know that the Holy Spirit was present too – hovering over the whole world that at the beginning was formless and empty. We are totally comfortable with Jesus baptism and the fact that God the Father spoke in a loud voice acknowledging that Jesus was His Son and we're good with the Holy Spirit taking the form of a dove and in no way find that weird, troubling or worth questioning. When Jesus tells the disciples that because they've seen Him they've also seen the Father we say – of course! And, when the Jews get angry and pick up stones to kill Jesus for blasphemy because he, a mere man, has claimed to be God we're flabbergasted at their stupidity. How do they not see it?

But, they didn't see it. Because the Jews had one God – Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And, Jesus comes saying He's God, but that God is His Father so with no understanding of what a trinity is – since that word is never actually in the Bible – they assume there are now two gods and that's not a thing. This makes no

sense to us because we've all grown up with the concept of the trinity – not three gods – three in one. But, they had one God and as far as they knew they as the nation of Israel were God's son.

So the New Testament writers take a lot of time to explain things that we already know. We read the Old Testament and we see Jesus, but we see Jesus because the New Testament authors taught us to do so and we didn't even realize it. Matthew, writer of the Gospel, reads the book of Hosea and when the prophet says, "Out of Egypt I called my son," Matthew gets really excited and recognizes that even though Israel came out of Egypt but wouldn't live in obedient response to that deliverance that now Jesus as the greater Israel, the true Son is now repeating this so he quotes it and put it in his book and says it fulfills the prophets words. No one read that verse in Hosea and thought – I bet there's a Messiah coming that will also escape to Egypt and then be brought back to fulfill God's plans and purposes for that son. But Matthew saw it and now we read it and go – yep, makes sense – it's so obvious.

When I was growing up my dad described Gayle Erwin's book, *The Jesus Style*, as revolutionary. That book was published when I was 3 years old so I have no memories of it not being in my home. My dad taught from it and many of you benefited either from reading it yourself or from hearing it taught from this pulpit for 35 years whether you realized it or not. Always I was told that this book was amazing in explaining the nature of Jesus – it will change the way you see everything about Jesus. Finally as an adult I thought, you know I've never actually read that book and I should really do that. I start reading and I keep thinking – I wonder when the revolutionary part will come into play? I read the whole book and thought there's nothing revolutionary in here – this is just stuff about Jesus that everybody knows. There was, like, nothing new in there. Then I realize, oh, it's not revolutionary to me because I grew up in a home where this book had already taken hold. What was new to my dad was common place to me because it impacted the way he understood Jesus, which means it impacted that way he taught me about Jesus.

So it is with the New Testament writers. It isn't revolutionary or new to us because their understanding of the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Jesus and their

understanding of God, His Son and His Holy Spirit is what filled the pages of the New Testament which to us is now all so obvious. But, 2,000 years ago when they wrote it down it was revolutionary.

Here's the part we've missed in Revelation because we already know – John has been showing his original readers that Jesus is part of the Godhead. That's a given for us. We take that for granted that he would even need to make it a point because it is so central to our belief system. John has taken the words of the prophet Daniel that described God – the ancient of days, seated on a throne, white hair, white clothes and then assigned that description to Jesus too in chapter 1. To the people of the Old Testament God would tell the prophets to write what would next take place. In Revelation 1 John makes sure to tell us that it's Jesus, who looks like God, that told him to write "what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later," not to Israel, but the seven churches. In chapter 4 we see God seated on the throne and being worshipped and in chapter 5 with very similar words, imagery, and descriptions we see Jesus on a throne beside God also being worshipped in an equal manner. We watched as the same authority that God has was also given to Jesus because of His death on the cross. In chapter 6 we're told that it's the Lamb who opens the seals and oversees the judgment that is being poured out. This was a big deal because John is making a huge theological point that Jesus was both fully man – it's how He could be deemed worthy to open the scroll – and that He is fully God, which is how He can also sit on a throne and play the same role as God has played regarding judgment. It's huge, but we take it for granted because we already know it. But, we need to be reminded of it before we go any further because we need to keep seeing the way that John will continue to make that point and how he'll keep using Old Testament language to show what is now being fulfilled. It will also color his understanding of Israel and the church. John's going to see the church not as a replacement but as a new layer of fulfillment of the scripture. He'll see Israel as having played a role and still having a role and the church as final fulfillment. There are layers of fulfillment happening here. John's teaching the early church what it means to be grafted in to the family of Abraham. So we see a lot of language about Israel but we'll find out that he's also, at the same time, talking about the church.

Don't forget that John is a Jew who loves Jesus – he has a vested interest in literal Israel and the figurative Israel, that is the church, being found around the throne. Layers is a good way of viewing most of this book. There are layers of meaning, symbolism and explanation.

Christopher J. H. Wright in his book, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, gives an example about a father in the years before cars were built promising his then 5 year old son that on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday he will receive a horse of his own so that he can ride around and be independent. But then over the next 16 years cars become a thing and so on the boy's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday the son wakes up to find a car parked outside and a card, "with love from Dad." Wright says it would be a strange son who would say you didn't keep your promise. You said I would get a horse not a car! The promise, of having transport which would allow him to be independent, has been kept it's just that it looks a little different than he expected when the promise was originally made. Quoting from him he states, **"Even though the New Testament fulfillments may look different from the literal words used in some Old Testament prophecies, they are still true fulfillments. God has kept his promise, even if it looks like he gave four wheels instead of four legs. In Christ, God has given us all he promised."** Christopher J. H. Wright

With that we look at the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. If you'll remember from last week we are still in the throne room and John has watched as the Lamb, Jesus, has opened five seals – the first 4 were seals of judgment where he saw the horses from the prophet Zechariah's vision carry various judgments to all parts of the earth – the sinful, fallen world. Judgment, in these seals has been happening, is taking place, and will continue to increase until Jesus return. He also saw those who had been slain for their testimony in Christ taking protection under the altar in heaven and crying out on behalf of those who are still suffering, **"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been."** Revelation 6:10-11 The next seal envisions that the "little longer" has passed and the "full number" has been met because it shows total

destruction of the earth and you can only literally destroy the earth one time. For that reason it appears that if you were going to make a chart, and I'm not, but the time frame between seal 5 and seal 6 seems to be quite lengthy and seal 6 will need to be right up at the end of all things. You can have lots of earthquakes between now and then, you can have individual stars fall or burn out, you can have blood moons too, but when you have all the stars leave the sky, the sun go dark, the sky roll up and all the mountains and the islands disappear all at once what you've got is the end of the world as we know it. Just sayin'.

Now, as we read the words of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal here's what you need to know – there is only one phrase, every mountain and island was removed from its place, and one added description, and from the wrath of the Lamb, that John has not lifted straight from judgment passages from the Old Testament. His added phrase adds to the finality of it all and as I've pointed out tonight John is making sure the churches understand that this time judgment will come from God and Jesus and the words that have long been assigned to God regarding punishment for idolatry and injustice are also now ascribed to Jesus for the same sins. All the passages John quotes from are passages that described judgment for nations that oppressed Israel such as Babylon and Egypt, or God's punishment for Israel, or God's judgment for all the nations of the earth, or the Day of the Lord's wrath. These are also the same passages from which Jesus quotes in His conversation regarding the end of all things with his disciples in Matthew 24. Basically, as John is seeing the sixth seal opened he's going judgment, judgment, judgment, woah this just escalated.

John writes, **"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, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 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! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"**

**Revelation 6:12-17**

Note the use of the word "their" – it's a big deal!

I've made a chart, not that kind of a chart, to show where all of this came from, and for those who are listening to the podcast I'll do my best to talk through this, but a transcript of the message has been added to the website for those who are interested in seeing the chart.

<b>What John saw</b>	<b>Old Testament Passage</b>	<b>Context of Original Passage</b>	<b>Also found in Matthew 24</b>
<b>Great earthquake</b>	<b>Isaiah 13:10</b>	<b>Prophecy against Babylon</b>	
	<b>Isaiah 24:19</b>	<b>Devastation of all the earth</b>	
	<b>Joel 2:10</b>	<b>Day of the Lord's wrath</b>	
	<b>Joel 3:16</b>	<b>All nations judged</b>	
<b>Sun turned black</b>	<b>Isaiah 13:10</b>	<b>Prophecy against Babylon</b>	✓
	<b>Isaiah 24:23</b>	<b>Devastation of all the earth</b>	
	<b>Joel 2:10, 31</b>	<b>Day of the Lord's wrath</b>	
	<b>Joel 3:15</b>	<b>All nations judged</b>	
<b>Like sackcloth</b>	<b>Isaiah 50:3</b>	<b>Israel's sin</b>	
<b>Moon turned to blood red</b>	<b>Isaiah 34:5-6</b>	<b>Judgment against all nations</b>	
	<b>Joel 2:31</b>	<b>Day of the Lord's wrath</b>	

<b>Stars fell to earth</b>	<b>Isaiah 13:10</b>	<b>Prophecy against Babylon</b>	✓
	<b>Isaiah 34:4</b>	<b>Judgment against all nations</b>	✓
<b>As late figs drop...</b>	<b>Isaiah 34:4</b>	<b>Judgment against all nations</b>	
<b>Sky receded like a scroll</b>	<b>Isaiah 34:4</b>	<b>Judgment against all nations</b>	
<b>Mountain and island</b>			
<b>Kings</b>	<b>Isaiah 24:21-22</b>	<b>Devastation of all the earth</b>	
<b>Hid in caves...rocks...</b>	<b>Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21</b>	<b>Day of the Lord</b>	
<b>Fall on us...</b>	<b>Hosea 10:8</b>	<b>Punishment for Israel's idolatry</b>	
<b>Hide us*</b>	<b>Genesis 3:10</b>	<b>*We hide we realize our sin</b>	

I've put an asterisk by "hide us" ... Adam and Eve have sinned and recognized their shame and so they hid themselves as if by doing so they could hide from the judgment of an all seeing, all knowing God. So the fact that they are trying to hide from God and the Lamb during this final judgment as they recognize they've nowhere to run is very reminiscent of Genesis. It's sort of a full picture moment. Even though it's not a direct quote, given John's use of Garden language throughout the book it seems likely he had this moment in mind when he penned those words regarding the 6<sup>th</sup> seal.

So judgment, and final judgment, is coming for those who have worshipped other gods and have not lived according to God's purposes. This has always been the case – idol worship affects our relationship with the true God and injustice towards

others is what takes place when we do not worship God alone and live in obedience to His commands. This is why Jesus could sum it all up by saying Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. When you fail these two twin commands – idolatry and committing injustice or failure to love God with all you have and your neighbor as well – there will be judgment. John makes clear that even now under this new covenant and new era that Jesus has ushered in with His death and resurrection that is still the case. Judgment by God for idol worship and injustice sounds very Old Testament – we like to talk about Jesus and love and mercy. Ok. The same punishments listed in the Old Testament and overseen by God for idol worship and injustice are seen here in their final and greatest form as overseen by God and Jesus for those who do not love God with everything they’ve got and love and treat their neighbor fairly as an outflow of that love and worship of God and Jesus. It is not mercy to let sin go unpunished.

**G. K. Beale, who is a premier scholar on the book of Revelation, sums it up this way, “The basic sin of men is still idolatry. Their idolatry is focused on the very things which are to be removed – the dimensions of the physical world in which they live...Christians are only pilgrims on earth, whereas the earth-dwellers are at home in this world, with its material wealth, injustice, false religion, and moral pollution, some or all of which they have made their god. In contrast to pilgrim Christians, the ungodly earth-dwellers are at home in the present world order and trust in earthly security...Humanity has become perverted and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator.” G. K. Beale**

The judgment in the 6<sup>th</sup> seal comes on the whole of humanity who have worshipped another instead of God and there is no where to run and no where to hide. Those experiencing this end of the world, day of the Lord’s wrath, total destruction are begging to be hidden from His face – don’t look at us, don’t see us, don’t find us guilty. And, therein lies the problem – we’re all guilty.

Then comes the final question of chapter 6, **“For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” Revelation 6:17**

Chapter 7 answers that question. Now I cannot stress this enough that we are going verse by verse and looking at this book in the order that John wants us to read it, but



that may or may not have anything to do with the order things will actually transpire. So the timing of things can get confusing and I'm not intending to help you out with that. The best way to understand chapter 7 is through a reference that only about 12 of you are going to understand – but basically John calls a Zach Morris time out. For those of you got that this chapter has instantly made more sense and for those of you who were grown ups and doing productive things with your life on Saturday mornings in the early 1990's let me explain. Zach Morris was the lead character in a sitcom called Saved by the Bell, which was about 6 teenagers at Bayside High and often times in the middle of a scene Zach would call a timeout. Everyone around him would freeze and he would then address the audience and explain something we needed to know or give us a glimpse into a couple of ways this might play out or he might just talk through how this would benefit him personally – once the audience was “let in” on what was happening or about to happen he'd time in and the scene would continue where it had left off. The time out was still part of the show and Zach Morris was still in character it was just an added piece of information within the plot but the actual scene never changed.

In order to answer the question John calls a time out and the scene in the throne room freezes – we return to it in chapter 8 – but for now he describes what he hears and sees in regards to the question. So it's still part of the same vision but he's called a time out to give us this answer, which includes a cool bonus scene and then he'll call time in and we'll pick up with the seventh seal. This is the best way I could come up to explain what happened here.

**“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. 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: “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.” Revelation 7:1-3** Now remember that numbers are a big deal and 4 is code for fullness – so here we have 4 angels, 4 corners, 4 winds and a second ago we had 4 horses and we've also seen 4 spirits. It's all sort of the same

thing. As I've said before it would be super helpful if we could use consistent, literal language throughout the scripture, but they don't. The prophet Isaiah in describing the whole earth says that God will **"assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth."** **Isaiah 11:12** and Ezekiel uses the same expression in talking about the entire land of Israel, **"The end has come upon the four corners of the land."** **Ezekiel 7:2** 4 Quarters and corners are representative of the whole. Jeremiah does it as well, **"I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam's exiles do not go."** **Jeremiah 49:36** –

Incidentally, Elam is another word for the Chaldeans because you know we like to call things by multiple names. In Zechariah 6 the prophet sees 4 chariots with 4 horses attached and when he asks what they are the angel said, "These are the four spirits of heaven," and the word spirits here is also translated winds. The point is in the scripture the 4 corners or 4 quarters of the earth represent the whole. It actually has a literary name – synecdoche – a part of something represents the whole. And, in scripture winds and angels and spirits and horses have at one time or another all been used interchangeably in regards to their role in bringing judgment on the whole earth. So where the first 4 seals landed on a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the whole – meaning only part of the whole or a representative group within the whole – now we're talking about something coming on the whole. This would be coming from the 4 corners and would cover the whole earth and affect everyone. Because again – mountains and islands disappearing and the sun, moon and stars all gone has a real crazy destructive feel that affects the entire earth. John sees the angels holding back this 6<sup>th</sup> seal from blowing on the whole world and apparently they'll keep holding it back until the servants of God are sealed – and those that are sealed are those who are able to stand when the 4 winds, spirits, angels let go the judgment they are holding back.

To understand this seal or marking of the servants of God we need to go back in time...

Where else would we go but back to the Passover in Exodus 12. We visited this passage a couple weeks ago and we're popping in again. This is the final plague

being unleashed on Egypt to encourage the Pharaoh to let God's people, whom have been enslaved there for some 400 years, go to worship their God. Moses has told the people, **"This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal.' Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel."** Exodus 11:4-7 God had a plan for marking the Israelites so that their houses would not experience the death that was coming over Egypt. God's people were told to kill a lamb or goat and put some of the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they were going to eat the meal and in this way their homes would be marked. **"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."** Exodus 12:12-13 This is exactly what happens. God's people did not experience the final judgment planned for the Egyptians because they were marked and sealed for protection. This provides the precedent for God protecting and saving His people. Fast forward to the prophet Ezekiel during the time of the exile. He has a vision where he sees horrible idolatry taking place within the temple. The people think God was no longer paying attention and didn't know or care what they're up to. But, God has seen and was angry with them and says He will not pity or spare them and even if they shout directly into His ear He won't listen. Next in this vision a man with a writing kit shows up and before the idolaters are struck down the Lord tells the man with the pen, **"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.' As I listened, he said to the others, 'Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men**

**and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary.’ So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.” Ezekiel 9:4-6** Ever notice how judgment always begins with God’s people and inside the temple/church? Ezekiel’s vision has everyone dying because of **“The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land; the Lord does not see.’” Ezekiel 9:9** Sin in the form of idol worship and injustice are rampant and judgment comes to all those except the ones that have been marked by God.

Fast forward back to John – he sees the same thing. Final judgment has come on the people – all the people – kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man. I thought I was doing okay on that list till the end – oh, we all got included. Who can stand when there is no where to run from God and the Lamb? But, then John gives that time out and explains that this judgment is being held off so that the servants of God can be sealed. God always provides a way of protection for His people. The word here for servants in Greek is actually slave. It tells us that these who are being sealed and protected are the ones who are completely owned by their master – they are servants/slaves/bonded to only One Lord and Master. They submit fully to His Lordship, serve completely for His pleasure, and live only as He commands. The people marked as God’s – I belong to God – are the only ones spared. In Ezekiel – the first time foreheads were marked – they were going only among God’s people and singling out those who were not involved in the sin that was so rampant. This seal in Revelation isn’t for those who simply identify as Christians – it’s only for servants of the Lord Jesus Christ who have totally and completely sold out to worship Him alone and live in response to Him. Is that you? Because it can be if it’s not already.

What do we learn from this passage?

**We learn that God is jealous for our affection.**

From the beginning God has longed to walk among His people and be in relationship. It grieved His heart when Adam and Eve sinned and broke that trust. He chooses Abraham and his descendants to be His people and He leads this family

out of slavery and tells them, **“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.” Exodus 12:4-5** Over and over through horrible judges, evil kings, and exile into pagan lands God longed for His people to return to Him and worship Him alone. He remained jealous for their affection.

Nothing has changed - we are to worship the Lord alone and no other. All other gods will be brought down and idolaters will be punished. Only those who are sealed as servants of the Lord will be found around the throne. Finally, God will dwell again with those whom He loves and who love Him. He is jealous today for your whole heart, your whole life, your whole attention.

**We learn that God still has a plan of protection for His people.**

The truth is I have no idea what part of the tribulation – normal, great or any other type – that this seal falls within. I don’t know if it means by the seal we will be physically spared this destruction and pain or if we’ll already be in heaven when it comes. That’s chart stuff and someone smarter will have to figure that out. What I do know is that God is faithful and unchanging and in the past He provided a way of protection and salvation, which gives me reason to believe He’ll do it again for His people. For those who serve God there is protection over our hearts and minds to give us the strength to maintain our testimony in difficult circumstances. There is salvation for those who endure till the end. To those who overcome there is promised eternal life without pain or suffering. God is good and God will be good to those who love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Finally, **What is the revelation we get of Jesus in this chapter?**

**We see Jesus as fully God.**

At the close of chapter 5 we saw the one who sits upon the throne and the Lamb worshipped equally in the same manner and now at the close of chapter 6 we see the one who sits upon the throne and the Lamb have equal roles in overseeing judgment. We have seen Jesus the man who is the lion of the tribe of Judah, we’ve seen Him as the Messiah, the King who came from the root of Jesse, but tonight we see Him as God. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,**

**and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” John 1:1-2** And, now at the end of the world as man knows it we have God and the Lamb together judging their creation. This is why He is also the Alpha and the Omega for Jesus was there in the beginning both with God and as God, and He will still be present at the end both with God and as God, and then in the new heaven and new earth Jesus will still be reigning on the throne with God and as God. He was fully man, but do not forget that He is fully God. How can this be we ask? Pastor James Montgomery Boice says, **“We believe the doctrine of the Trinity not because we understand it, but because the Bible teaches it and because the Spirit himself witnesses within our heart that it is so.” James Montgomery Boice** We get a revelation of the Trinity, of the deity of Christ right here in this chapter and the Spirit confirms it to us – it is so. Jesus is who He said He is.