

Who Can Stand?

What a powerful message Pastor Sarah brought to us last Sunday morning. If you missed it, you need to go to our website or to our Facebook page and watch. She took us to the throne room of heaven and to the worship that's happening there. At the end of the 11:00 service we had an extended time of worship. Janene Hazelrigg came to Sarah just as we were concluding that service and they were unable to get my attention but she received a word from the Lord, a vision actually during that time of worship. Sarah asked her to write it down so we could share this word with you. (If you don't know, the Hazelriggs are missionaries to Mexico and are home on furlough at the moment and attending here). Janene wrote, "As we worshipped, I saw a picture of the throne of God, surrounded by light as it is described in Revelation. I saw the backs of the saints, elders, and angels (and a precious friend who died recently) worshipping around the throne. It was beautiful and powerful. I also saw a stream of light coming out from that scene and piercing through CAG sanctuary ceiling and entering as we also worshipped. I saw the church floor glowing and two other streams of bright white light shooting out to the Kids upstairs and down the hall to the Ark Park. A moment later, the light blew out the walls and ceiling of the sanctuary and exploded into the surrounding community. Then, I saw as people began to leave the church, the light went with them. It lit up their homes, their workplaces, their schools, everywhere they went, the light accompanied them. They were full of the Holy Spirit and He was working through them to reach the lost and hurting. It was His love overflowing to the world."

I believe that is a word from the Lord to us. Interesting that the light specifically went to the kids and Ark Park and then exploded into the community. It's one of the biggest ways we impact this community - through our children's ministry and outreach. This is what's supposed to happen after being in the Lord's presence, impacted to go into a darkened world and bring the light and love of Jesus. It's how we engage the world: aware of the darkness and brokenness, but aware of God's presence and the victory of the Lamb. With an eye on heaven and another on the needs around us, we share his love with the world. With that in mind, I want to go back to the book of Revelation and begin where Sarah left off last week. Go with me to Revelation 6.

Revelation was taught to me with a pre-determined point of view. Everything happened in succession. We've got the letters to the churches and the church age and then comes the rapture and then Revelation 4 and 5 we are all rejoicing in heaven and then beginning in Revelation 6 God begins to pour out judgment on the earth as the seals are opened. One event

after another happens and we have seven years of Tribulation and the mark of the beast when we all get computer chips implanted and if you don't they cut off your head. It's all spelled out. That may very well be, but like much of Scripture I feel there is often a prophetic word that applies to a future event, but also a word that speaks to us in the present. I don't want to undo your understanding of the end times. Don't go home and throw away your John G. Hall prophecy chart, but I want to see if we can find ourselves in Revelation 6 and 7 and hear a word from the Lord for today. Remember, this book was written to the churches in first century Turkey and they applied it to their circumstances, not to 21st century America.

Last week we were in the throne room ascribing to the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever. The saints of God were focused on worshipping the Lamb and at the very same time John writes, **“I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, ‘Come!’ I looked and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow and he was given a crown and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.”**

Revelation 6:1-2 This introduces what some call the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. If you read on, after this white horse and rider representing conquest, there comes a red horse and rider representing war and conflict. Next comes a black horse with a rider carrying a pair of scales. He represents famine. The fourth is a pale horse with a rider named Death and he was given power to kill a fourth of the inhabitants of the earth. The beginning of Great Tribulation all right.

I was taught the rider on the white horse was the Anti-Christ who comes to conquer the nations. I was surprised to discover the ancient church fathers believed the white horse and rider represented Jesus and the gospel being proclaimed. As the influence of the gospel spreads, conquering the world, the response of the world and the devil is to increase violence and famine and greed and death. The horses and riders that follow are coming as an evil response to the advancement of Gods' kingdom. The gospel breaks loose and then all hell breaks loose.

I've got no problem believing there is a time of Great Tribulation coming, but the fact is, we live on a planet where these things are happening and have been happening as long as history has been recorded. John was writing to churches that were experiencing persecution or were about to experience persecution. They were experiencing tribulation like they had never seen before. For 2,000 years the book of Revelation has been read by people facing prison or death for merely having the bible and the book of Revelation in their possession. The church has read this

during times when war and violence engulfed the whole world; they've read these passages during times of famine and drought, dying from hunger; they've read this book for comfort as death from disease and natural disaster visited their towns and villages.

And here we are today. Most would say things are dark and desperate. I don't necessarily see these things happening one after another. There is overlap, all happening at once. John says of the second horse and rider, **"Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other."** **Revelation 6:4** That's today's headline. The red horse and rider have stolen peace from the earth. Violence is escalating and strife and conflict are everywhere. There is no such thing as civil discourse. We hate and denigrate people with opposing views. We have to teach our children how to protect themselves from active shooters when they go to school. People are full of rage, fighting and killing over anything, over nothing, over everything. Things are getting worse and once the church is raptured it will get darker and more violent but it feels pretty hopeless and frightening right now.

The black horse and rider bring famine. It's estimated that 25,000 people per day die from hunger and related causes. 9 million people a year. Whether it's now or later, whether you call this the tribulation period or just another day with nothing to eat, if you don't have food, hungry is hungry! 9 million people a year, a third or more are children that die of hunger. The voice in Revelation 6:6 says **"A quart of wheat for a day's wages and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"** **Revelation 6:6** Eugene Petersen comments about this saying, "What is necessary for minimal living is unavailable while the luxuries of life, oil and wine, are abundant. Greed does it." People starve to death while others enjoy too much oil and wine. It sounds familiar.

The fourth, pale horse carries the rider whose name is Death, representing sickness, disease, famine, pestilence, pandemics, violence, you name it. It's kind of all encompassing. Then a fifth seal is opened and John wrote, **"I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."** **Revelation 6:9** They asked how long before the Lord would avenge their deaths and they were told to wait a little longer because more would die for the faith. Imagine how John's readers felt as they read this with the trouble they were encountering. Revelation has brought encouragement to martyrs and believers facing persecution throughout the centuries. It's still bringing hope as it's read today in Middle Eastern Countries, in Communist China, in dark places across the globe.

The sixth seal is opened and it's as if the earth begins to fall apart, natural disasters that threaten our very existence. Climate change on steroids. It seems as if there is no place to hide, no place to run. John writes, **“Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 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 stand?’” Revelation 6:15-17**

I haven't felt inclined to call for the mountains to fall on me and I'm not fearing the wrath of the Lamb, but I have to admit, it certainly looks like harder times are coming, natural disasters, drought producing water shortages and famine, higher prices for everything. There is so much happening. The point is, whether you view this as all future events reserved for the Great Tribulation or you consider this as images of the nature of things in a fallen and sinful world, any way you look at it, it is a broken world. It's a mess. The bible speaks of truth staggering in the streets. That's our world. Pride and greed and evil and abuse and betrayal and lies and disease and disaster and violence, no regard for others, no regard for life, no hope, no way out. It's why at the end of chapter six the question is asked, **“Who can stand?”**

If you are wondering that same thing, let me remind you of what John has already seen and has already shown us. In the opening chapter of Revelation, John heard a voice speaking that sounded like the sound of rushing water and when he turned around, he saw One like a son of man whose face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. John fell at his feet like a dead man and then heard him say, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever and I hold the keys of death and the grave.” The power of life and death are in his hands. This image of Jesus is the key to reading the rest of the book of Revelation! If you wonder who can stand, if you wonder whether you can make it through whatever you are facing, remember who is in control.

John sees Jesus, the Living One, standing among the churches, involved in the intricate details of the life of his people, his body the church. He knows what you are facing, he knows what's going on and he rules and reigns. Then John sees Jesus as the Lamb that was slain, standing in the midst of the throne of God and he sees all of creation worshipping him and declaring “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever.” All of creation declares all power belongs to him. This is what Eugene

Petersen called “the centering reality of God’s rule and redemption.” Before you start wrestling with the evil in this world, before you give up or give in to fear and worry, before you surrender to temptation or despair, look at the Lamb again. Look at the throne room. Get in his presence again and remember who he is and that you belong to him. Who can stand? We can! You can!

In Revelation 7 we see an angel coming with the seal of God. The angel seals 144,000, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. This is one of those things where we take much of Revelation as figurative and then we take this as literal. It may be better to see the number 144,000 as symbolizing completeness. Who can stand? God says, “I’ll show you who can stand: All those who have placed their faith in Christ. All those who have been sealed by my Holy Spirit, all those who bear the mark of Jesus, who have surrendered their lives to him.” It’s not just 144,000 because John looks again and writes, **“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes...and they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” Revelation 7:9-10**

Who can stand? We can! How will we make it through all the trouble that’s happening now and will continue to happen on this planet? We will stand because salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb. We trust in him. We lean on him. He has sealed us with his Spirit and power and presence so we don’t have to give in to fear or despair regardless of the news.

John wants to know who all of these people are and the elder tells him, **“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Revelation 7:14-17**

I know, we say that is talking about the future, people that come out of the tribulation period. Try explaining that to those Christians that read John’s Revelation who were being tortured for the faith and torn apart by wild beasts for the amusement of Roman society. Try hearing it this morning as a word from the Lord for you! “I don’t know if I can stand. I don’t know if I can make it. I don’t think I can last. I can’t hold on.” Yes you can because salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb. He has saved you and because you look to him he will deliver

you. He is going to see you through. A day is coming when there will be no more hunger, no more lack, no more loss, no more tears. Just hold on a little longer. Deliverance is coming!

And you have to see one more thing. The seventh seal is opened in Revelation 8.

“When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour...another angel who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” Revelation 8:1-4

The first seal is a revelation of Jesus and the gospel going forth to conquer, going forth in triumph and the seventh seal is a revelation of the silence in heaven as the prayers of every believer is heard and answered. In between those two seals is all of the evil we just talked about, violence and famine and disease and death. It’s strategic placement. Eugene Petersen in his commentary on Revelation writes, **“Evil is not minimized, but it is put in its place, bracketed between Christ and prayer...Evil is not explained but surrounded.” ...Eugene Peterson**

Evil is everywhere. It looks like the devil is winning. Who can stand? Be assured, evil is limited, bracketed by Jesus and the prayers of God’s people. God has evil surrounded. The devil will fall and God’s people will stand. We are in Christ and we have already triumphed over the enemy! We have victory in Christ Jesus, we are sealed in Him. We will stand, in his victory, in his mercy, in his power, in his grace, forever and ever! We overcome by the blood of the Lamb.

Do not fear and do not be afraid of the things that come upon the earth at this season for the Lord himself has called you for such a time as this. He will strengthen you so that you will stand, even in an evil day. He will uphold you so you will not stumble or fall. The light of His glory will shine through his church if you will walk humbly, surrendered completely to him and fully dependent upon his Spirit, His power and His grace.

If you feel like you can’t stand, I want you to stand! Take a stand and look to Jesus! He is your strength and your portion, your provision and your supplier of every need.