

Study 13 – Revelation 6:1-8

1 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!"

Heaven is a loud place! John heard voices like trumpets and thunder. When heaven speaks, it is impossible not to hear. Men can ignore, turn their back, say that the voice belonged to someone or something else, disobey or misinterpret or twist what was said, but it is impossible not to hear.

Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "**I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.**" **The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him (John 12:28-29).** The Father was so pleased with Jesus that He interrupted history by interjecting His voice that sounded like thunder to some and was attributed to an angel by others. But that voice was the Father's!

But the voice in this verse is from one of the four living creatures. What if the four creatures are symbolic of the church as we assumed in a previous study. That means that the voice of the Church is powerful and should be heard in all the earth.

What did this voice say? It said, "Come!" That is the message of the Church: to come to God! Too often, I am afraid, our message has not been to come but to stay away! We have not always made it easy for people to come and see what God is doing, but rather to stay away until people are clean and holy. But there is no way for anyone to get clean and holy unless they "come" to God and the Church.

The Lamb opened the first seal. Let us see what this opening represents.

2 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.

The first seal reveals another image of the Lamb. This time the image is not of a docile little lamb, but of a rider with a bow on a white horse. This symbol of Jesus is used in other places, so we are safe in defining this symbol as Jesus. When the Bible interprets itself, you are always on solid ground in your interpretation. When it doesn't, you must be very careful not to "stretch" the interpretation to fit your own understanding.

The more Bible you know, the more "restricted" you are in interpreting and preaching. You cannot teach what you want the passage to say, what you think it says, or what "the Lord showed you." You must discipline yourself to a careful interpretation of symbols and difficult, obscure passages. That requires some study and understanding of basic principles of interpretation.

Jesus is riding a white horse. Normally, the battle leader may not wish to distinguish himself with such a horse, not wanting to attract undue attention to himself from the enemy. But Jesus rides in front of the Church as its leader, taking the main attack of

Dr. John Stanko

the enemy on behalf of His "troops." Jesus is the head of His church and will lead it to victory! Even in spiritual warfare, He is the leader and conquering rider.

The rider of this horse is holding a bow. What does a bow represent? It takes strength to pull a bow and skill to use it effectively. Jesus is our strength and protection. He is accurate with His bow and it always achieves the effect that He chooses. There are no random misses when Jesus uses His bow!

Jesus was not given a battle helmet but a crown! He is the King and He rides out as a conqueror. Jesus wants to vanquish His enemies and win the nations for His Father.

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"

Notice that the living creature doesn't speak on its own initiative. The creature speaks as the Lamb opens the seals. Jesus takes the lead and the Church interprets what He says and does for the world to see and understand.

4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

At one time, I thought God was involved in church history but secular history just somehow plodded along, going nowhere in particular. That of course is a wrong perspective. God rules in the affairs of men, both in and outside the Church.

I cannot explain everything that God wants to do by releasing this fiery red horse. But I know that the Lamb on the white horse is also released and men can either take refuge in the Lamb's protection or be exposed to the rider with a large sword on the red horse. I have chosen the white horse! Jesus is my protector.

The twentieth century was the most violent in history and more people lost their lives then in wars than in any other century. We may hate and need to work to prevent it, but there are consequences from sinful man's decision that release terrible judgments from the throne of God. Unfortunately, wars will always be a part of the human experience.

There is only one source of peace on earth. It is not cultural exchange or tolerance. It is the Lamb on the white horse who can make war while He gives peace to those who are in His army and under His protection.

Sinful man sometimes blames God for his troubles and trouble does come. But do man's troubles come from God or are they the result of man's attempts to live apart from God?

Jesus was also the protector of the churches to whom Revelation was addressed.

5 When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand.

The rider of the black horse is holding scales. Either he is weighing out justice or a business transaction. The next verse informs us that it is an economic scale. The color black is obviously negative, so this is another horse that perhaps represents lack and famine. That would seem to go with the red horse of war, for where men war with each other, it generally leads to a food shortage.

Remember, Revelation is a book of symbols. You cannot attempt to tie this horse to any particular famine or historical event. This black horse conjures up a powerful image in the mind of the reader, especially the reader of the first century who was more familiar with the horse as part of everyday life.

6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "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!"

God has released seasons of distress throughout history. God initiated the plagues in Egypt. He was the one who sent Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Jerusalem. We are told in **Psalm 105**, **"He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; and he sent a man before them-- Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true (verses 17-19).**

Is this just an indication of how cruel God is? No. God uses even these difficult situations to have men turn to Him for salvation. I know in my own life that lack and tragedy has caused me to cry out to God in a deeper, more meaningful way.

A quart of wheat for a day's wages sounds like a high price. Inflation, rising prices with no increase in income, erodes the buying power of individuals. This is part of the black rider's effect on humanity.

7 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"

All four creatures have now spoken in response to the four seals that were opened. The Church should speak from a total perspective when it addresses and interprets the things of God. It should not just speak from prophecy or the Word or church history. Too often churches have relied on one means of inspiration and illumination.

The Church is the only institution that can interpret the acts and ways of God.

8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power

Dr. John Stanko

over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

This is a terrible judgment, for the rider of the pale horse is riding among those who don't know God and their death leads to hell. Again, the only protection here can be in the rider of the white horse. The red, black and pale horses all lead to a destruction that men cannot avoid or escape. It is sudden and swift.

I think of the terrorist attack in America on September 11, 2001. It was swift and those who lost their lives had no chance of escape. But those who relied on the Lamb, the rider of the white horse, had a certain salvation that counteracted the results of the pale horse that came to the Twin Towers that fateful day.

Everyone in life will encounter one or more of these four horses. While this may seem cruel, we know that God desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. He is merciful and just. Yet He works after the counsel of His own will and His ways are inscrutable. I cannot understand all that God does or why He does it.

Jesus, I trust you to be my champion on a white horse. I need you and rely on you to do for me what I cannot do for myself. I am powerless to resist death and the dangers of a sinful world, but You are all powerful. Protect me and lead me to victory in the power of Your great name.