

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

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Date: 28 June 2023

- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 6.
- Revelation chapter 6. And if you just read from the beginning. Revelation chapter 6.
- The rider was permitted to take peace from the earth so that people should slay one another. And he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come.
- And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be 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 wine.
- When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come. And I looked, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death.
- [1 : 3 8] And Hades, or hell, followed him. And they were given authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and pestilence, and by wild beasts of the earth.
- In 1887, a painting was produced by the Russian artist Viktor Vasenov.
- Viktor Vasenov. This is the painting. It's a painting that would have an impact upon the much-discussed and debated topic of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.
- The four horsemen of the apocalypse. And as you can see from the painting, there's a white horse, a red horse, a black horse, and a pale horse. But if you notice that beneath their feet is a scene of chaos.
- It's a scene of chaos and confusion. And throughout the years, many have fantasised and even fanaticised about the four horsemen of the apocalypse.
- [2 : 4 4] And they make it out that it's a scene of terror. But the thing is, the four horsemen of the apocalypse is not a scene of terror, but a scene of triumph.
- The four horsemen of the apocalypse is not a scene of terror, but a scene of triumph. Because if you remember, last Wednesday evening, John was reminding us that the book of Revelation is calling us all to look up.
- As we said last week, the message of the book is stop looking inward. Start looking upward. Stop looking inward. Start looking upwards. Because when we look upwards in Viktor Vastnetsov's painting, when you look upwards, if you notice at the very top of the painting, you'll see that we not only see myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands of angels around the throne, but at the very, very top, you see the lamb in the midst of the throne.
- You see a book that is opened. You see a rainbow above his head. And he's there because the one seated upon the throne, he is sovereign, superior, and supreme over all things.
- And what I want us to see this evening is that the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they are not a scene of terror, but a scene of triumph. They're not a scene of terror, but a scene of triumph.

[4 : 08] And this evening I want us to consider these four horses and their horsemen. So you'll be shocked to know that I don't have any alliteration for you this evening. I only have colours.

Four colours of four horses. Four colours of four horses. And so the first colour of the first horse is the white horse. The white horse.

We read there in verse 1, John says, Now I watched when the lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, come.

And I looked and behold a white horse, and its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

And as you know, and as we've said many times before, the book of Revelation, it's one long revelation. It's a revelation from Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ, for the church of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 09] And it was for the church of Jesus Christ, primarily in the first century, but also us here in the 21st century. But in the first century, the church was being persecuted. As you know, all the apostles, they had been executed for their faith, except for the apostle John.

John was exiled to Patmos, and while he was praying on the Lord's day in Patmos, he received this revelation, this apocalypse, this apocalypse, where the Lord is lifting the veil, he's pulling back the curtain, and revealing Jesus Christ, as the risen, ruling, and reigning king, who is going to return.

And this revelation was important, because the church needed to be reminded, and reassured, that in the midst of opposition, and in the midst of obstacles to the gospel, as a church, they were to remain focused, they were to remain fixated, and they were to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

They were to stop looking inwards, and start looking upwards. And that's what the book of Revelation is all about. It's calling us to lift our eyes heavenward, and live life with an eternal perspective.

Stop looking inwards, start looking upwards. And that's what has been gradually, and you could almost say, gloriously been revealed to us in this revelation. Because back in chapter 4, John told us that God the Father, he is the one seated upon the throne.

[6 : 37] He is the one upon the throne. And around the throne are the 24 elders. And also there are four living creatures. And day and night we're told that they never cease to say, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

Then in chapter 5, we saw last week that John saw a sovereign scroll. A scroll was in the hand of the one who was seated on the throne. This sovereign scroll containing a complete and comprehensive plan of God's eternal decrees.

They are in the powerful right hand of the one who was sovereign, supreme, superior, and seated upon his throne. But this sovereign scroll, we're told, was sealed with seven seals.

It's seven because it's the number of perfection. Therefore, the only one who's worthy to break the seven seals and open the scroll or the book is the one who is perfect. Which led to an angel asking the question, who is worthy?

Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals? And we read that John wept. But while John wept, those around the throne worshipped. Because Jesus is revealed in the scene, he's revealed as the sinless and spotless Lamb of God.

[7 : 59] And heaven, we read heaven rejoiced in this revelation. They sang this new song, as we read there in chapter 5 at verse 9. And all around the throne, there was this picture of praise as the voice of the 24 elders and the four living creatures and the thousands and thousands and thousands of angels are singing.

They're all singing, as we read there in verse 12, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

And so as you can see, this revelation, it's been gradually and gloriously revealed to us. And so as we continue in the revelation, we read in this chapter, chapter 6, that the first four seals on this sovereign scroll, they reveal the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Now the reason the first four seals reveal the four horsemen of the apocalypse is because four is the number of the world. Four is the number of the world, like as in the earth.

Not the world as in worldliness, but the world as in the earth. We see that elsewhere in the book of Revelation. The number four is used. The four living creatures. They depict different creatures from the earth.

[9 : 41] There's the four angels. That's at the beginning of chapter 7. There are four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, which north, south, east and west.

So four is the number of the world. And there are four horsemen of the apocalypse because from an eternal perspective, they show us that human history is galloping to its climax and culmination with the return of Jesus Christ.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse, they depict to us and describe to us this eternal perspective that human history is galloping to its climax and culmination with the return of Jesus Christ.

But as we said earlier, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they're not a scene of terror. They are a scene of triumph. They're a scene of triumph.

And it's a scene of triumph because at the centre of the scene, right at the top of the scene, is the one who is sovereign, superior, supreme and seated upon his throne.

[10 : 58] I'm going to start calling him my good friend, but he'll never replace J.C. Ryle. My good friend, Joel Beakey, he writes in his commentary, Life can be frightening. Sometimes we are bewildered by what is going on around us.

Great forces and powers bear down upon us and we have no control. We feel like a cork in the ocean, tossed about by economic forces, spiritual forces, social forces and psychological forces.

When we feel paralysed by worldly forces, we must remind ourselves that the powerful horses that are unleashed in human history are saddled and bridled by Jesus Christ.

And with that, John tells us that when he watched and witnessed the Lion Lamb of Heaven open the first of the four seals on the scroll, he heard one of the four living creatures issue a gospel imperative.

That's the first thing John hears. The gospel imperative, come. And he hears it every time a seal is opened, come.

[12 : 08] The next seal, come. The next seal, come. And every gospel imperative, it ought to emphasize and explain to us that the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they're not a scene of terror, they are a scene of triumph because they each have a gospel purpose.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse have a gospel purpose. where the gospel is going to triumph in the world because the gospel imperative is come.

We see that all the time with Jesus. He issues the call, the gospel imperative, come. Whosoever will, let him come. Come unto me, says Jesus.

Whoever thirsts, let him come to me and drink. That's the gospel imperative. And we see the triumph of the gospel even there in the first horse, the white horse, where John writes, verse 2, I looked and behold a white horse and its rider had a bow and a crown was given to him and he came out conquering and to conquer.

Now, over the years there have been many weird and wonderful interpretations as to what the white horse represents and who is even the horseman on the white horse.

[13 : 31] Some say that he's the Antichrist, some say he was a Roman Emperor, some say that he was Hitler, other people say it's the devil. But as always the best commentary of scripture is scripture itself.

That's our confessional position. Our confession of faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith, it states that the infallible rule for interpreting scripture is scripture itself.

That's the rule for interpreting scripture, scripture itself. And when we compare scripture with scripture, the identity of the rider of the white horse, if we carry on in the Revelation as it continues to be revealed, you come to chapter 19 where John writes in Revelation 19, then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse.

The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True and in righteousness he judges and makes war. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood and on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So the horseman on the white horse, it's undeniable as to who it is. It's not the Antichrist, it's not a Roman Empire, it's not Hitler, it's not the devil.

[14 : 49] He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He's clothed in a robe dipped in blood.

But you know what's amazing if you continue the confessional position that we have that scripture interprets scripture. When we compare other parts of scripture with this scene we see the same imagery that we were singing about in Psalm 45.

Because in Psalm 45 that we were singing we have a love song. It's the Father's love song. The Father's love song about his Son the Lord Jesus where God the Father is describing his Son.

He's describing him as a king with a crown on his head and a bow in his hand just as what we see here. That's how the Father describes his own Son in Psalm 45.

A Son who rides forth in majesty and power and triumph. He rides forth in the power of the Gospel. And just to quote to you Psalm 45 that we were singing it's the Father speaking about his Son.

[16 : 00] You far excel the best of men your lips are full of grace for God has blessed you evermore his light shines on your face. O mighty one take up your sword and bind it on your thigh with glorious splendor clothe yourself and with your majesty ride forth in state victoriously for meekness truth and right let your right hand display your deeds of awesome power and might.

Then he says let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of those who hate the King and all the nations of the earth into subjection bring. You know it's a beautiful picture this wonderful apocalypse it's a beautiful picture of who Jesus is but the revelation is not about what might happen in the future for the church of Jesus Christ.

That's not what this is about. the revelation is about what is happening in the church of Jesus Christ today and it has been happening since the conception of the church of Jesus Christ because the white horse shows us and symbolises to us that the gospel will triumph the gospel will advance and it will advance to the four corners of the world because as this white horse as Jesus gallops with the gospel out to the four corners of the world from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth he will gallop he will ride forth as we were singing in Psalm 45 he'll ride forth victoriously the arrows from the king will pierce hearts they'll bring people to their knees they'll bring them to confess Jesus as Lord and what's wonderful is that when you consider this horse riding throughout history you see it you see that he's been doing it he has been there through the preaching of the apostles through the preaching of the early church fathers through the preaching of the reformers through the preaching of the Puritans and the Covenanters through the preachings of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield the Great Awakenings and through revivals through the missionary movements throughout China and Africa and Latin America all these things the white horse is galloping forth with the gospel he's riding forth victoriously and the arrows of the king are piercing hearts in all the four corners of the world bringing sinners to salvation and what this picture is showing us is that nothing nothing will hamper or hinder the advancement of Christ's kingdom in this world and that's why

John is saying look up stop looking inward start looking upward because nothing is going to hamper or hinder the advancement of Christ's kingdom in this world as Daniel was praying he is building his church the gates of hell will not prevail against it that's what Jesus promised and that's what Jesus is doing he is riding forth victoriously it's not a scene of terror it's a scene of triumph but as you can see there closely following behind the white horse is the red horse which is what we see secondly so the red horse John says in verse 3 when he opened the second seal I heard the second living creature say come and out came another horse bright red its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth so that people should slay one another and he was given a great sword we said that our confessional position is that the infallible rule for interpreting scripture is scripture itself and remarkably there's another red horse mentioned elsewhere in scripture it's mentioned in the book of Zechariah and like the book of Revelation which is a book of encouragement encouraging the Lord's people to look up to the Lord the book of Zechariah is also a book of encouragement and we looked at

Zechariah I think during lockdown or just as we came out of lockdown it was a book that was written during or just after the period of Babylon where the exiles had returned to Jerusalem and there was opposition there were obstacles to the Lord's people as they tried to rebuild and restore the city of Jerusalem and like the apostle John Zechariah received an apocalypses an apocalypse a vision a revelation where Zechariah says in chapter one I saw in the night a man riding on a red horse I saw in the night a man riding on a red horse and of course the colour of the red horse symbolises war and bloodshed and since the time of Christ there have been wars as you know and rumours of war throughout every single century Jesus promised and prophesied that that would be the case right until the end right until his return and even in the last century alone you consider the wars that there have been millions and millions have encountered and experienced war and bloodshed whether in the first and second world wars whether in the killing fields of

[21 : 51] Cambodia the genocide in Rwanda the conflicts in the Middle East Ukraine Yemen mentioned in prayer tonight there's been war wars and rumours of war war has been an ongoing menace in the world and it has continued to bring forth bloodshed but this red horse should not only symbol symbolises bloodshed in war it also symbolises bloodshed through persecution because as Jesus said he said to his disciples do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth I have not come to bring peace but a sword which actually makes sense of the image and the illustration of the red horse and taking peace from the earth and carrying a great sword because throughout history the red horse of persecution the red horse of bloodshed has followed behind the conquering white horse of Jesus

Christ because as the white horse continues to gallop with the gospel to the four corners of the world and ride out victoriously with nothing hindering or hampering the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world closely followed behind is the red horse of persecution because wherever the gospel is preached and proclaimed persecution follows you remember it was Tertullian the early church father who said it was the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church wherever the gospel was preached and proclaimed persecution followed in fact I was reading that book I mentioned from Asia Link I took it with me tonight to show it to you buy it it's brilliant really good book so it's the grand tour a 90 day prayer journey across the continent of Asia and the first country it goes to is the country of

Iran and this is what it said about Iran despite its fierce opposition to the gospel Iran is currently home to the fastest growing church in the world we'd never think that but despite its fierce opposition to the gospel Iran is currently home to the fastest growing church in the world the red horse is following the white horse the red horse is following the white horse where the white horse is galloping with the gospel to the four corners of the world the red horse of persecution is often following behind and you know the Christians greatest assurance is that despite the bloodshed and persecution Christ's kingdom will triumph and the gospel will continue to advance my friend the four horsemen of the apocalypse they're not a scene of terror they are a scene of triumph they're a scene of triumph which brings us thirdly to the black horse the black horse we read there in verse 5 when he opened the third seal

I heard the third living creature say come and I looked and behold a black horse and its rider had a pair of scales in his hand and I heard what seemed to be 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 wine when the third seal of the scroll is opened the gospel imperative come that is quickly followed by the black horse and the black horse symbolises poverty it symbolises poverty the scales which are held in the hand of the horseman as you can see there they're not scales of judgment they are scales of poverty and we're familiar with the scenes of poverty we're familiar with them from other countries in the world where there's famine and drought and where there's greed and corruption but this poverty it's much closer to home because this is poverty caused by inflation it's poverty caused by inflation we read there in verse 6 we read that a quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius now a quart is about if you're good with baking it's about 16 ounces and so and also 16 ounces of wheat for a denarius was a day's wage a denarius was a day's wage so you'd earn a denarius in order to buy 16 ounces of wheat or three quarts of barley which is 48 ounces of barley and that's for a day's wage a denarius in other words it wouldn't get you very far because the price of wheat that's described here in verse 6 is four or five times higher than what it would usually be so it's not a picture of starvation it's a picture of inflation the scales have been tipped there's an imbalance a complete imbalance where people can barely make enough money to feed themselves and as you know that's not something that's going to happen in the future that's something that we're seeing now we're seeing it now our economy is in crisis the cost of living is crazy the price of food is astronomical food banks are now the norm for most people inflation keeps on rising our prime minister will tell us that he's 100% on it but all of it and this is what's beautiful all of it even the black horse he is in the powerful hand of the one who is sovereign superior and supreme and seated upon his throne and it also reminds us that the Lord will use every means possible every means possible to bring us to our knees and turn us to himself the

Lord will use every means possible even an economic crisis leading to poverty he will use it for the advancement of his kingdom and the furtherance of the gospel and through it all the white horse continues to lead the way he continues to gallop with the gospel riding forth victoriously because Christ's kingdom will triumph his church will be built the gates of hell will not prevail against it and so the four horsemen of the apocalypse they're not a scene of terror they're a scene of triumph they're a scene of triumph which brings us to consider the fourth and last horse the fourth and final horse is the pale horse the pale horse and look at verse 7 when he opened the fourth seal I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say come and I looked and behold a pale horse and its rider's name was death and Hades followed him and they were given the authority over a quarter of the earth to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth so when the fourth seal of the scroll was opened and the gospel imperative was given come John sees a pale horse literally it's a pale green colour it's a sickly colour it's a colour of decay it's a colour of death but we're not only given the colour of the horse we're also given the name of its rider we're told that his name was death his name was death and hell followed with him he was called death and hell followed with him and what's solemn about death is that death was given power and authority to kill either by sword famine pestilence or beast death was given power and authority to kill either by sword famine pestilence or beast death which means that death doesn't discriminate death doesn't differentiate death never asks us how old we are death comes to all of us and it either comes by war or famine or illness or accident that's how it's going to come death comes to all of us that's what we're being told either by war famine illness or accident so regardless of how it comes death will continue to gallop across our entire world and it will continue to gallop until Jesus Christ the risen ruling and reigning king finally returns so none of us will escape the pale horse we may escape the red horse of persecution we may escape the black horse of poverty but none of us will escape the pale horse of death unless we are here when the risen ruling and reigning king Jesus finally returns which is why we need to remember that

[31 : 41] Jesus is out in front we always need to remember that he is on the white horse he is out in front he's leading them he is using them for his glory and Jesus is using the red horse of persecution for his glory he's using the black horse of poverty for his glory he's using the pale horse of death for his glory he's using it all for his glory because they are the means by which the gospel will continue to gallop and spread and sinners will come to faith they are the means by which the arrows of the king will pierce hearts and bring sinners into subjection of this king and they are the means by which Jesus will continue to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it my friend the four horsemen of the apocalypse they're not a scene of terror they are a scene of triumph they are a scene of triumph because they are bridled by king

Jesus they are directed by king Jesus they gallop across the stage of history for the good of God's people and the furtherance of Christ's kingdom in this world therefore says John the message of the book of Revelation is look up look up live life with an eternal perspective and see that Jesus is in control stop looking inward start looking upward to the lamb who is in the midst of the throne they're not a scene of terror these horsemen are a scene of triumph well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray O Lord our gracious God may give thanks this evening for reminding us that Jesus is a conquering king that he is one who is riding forth victoriously and he has been riding and galloping with the gospel throughout the scene of time throughout all the ages of history and that even in this present age that we live in a day that seems to be a day of small things and yet he is still there riding forth victoriously sending his arrows from his bow into the hearts of his enemies bringing them to subjection bringing them to salvation in Jesus and Lord our prayer is that even as the gospel is proclaimed week by week in our own community and in our own congregation we pray Lord that these arrows would pierce hearts and bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus that they would come and follow him and that they would realise that in every providence that they are facing that the Lord is speaking to them speaking to them and reminding them that he is there as one not to drive them away from him but to drive them to him to drive them to their knees and confess like one of old and say what must I do to be saved oh Lord that they might believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ and be saved bless us Lord we pray bless us in our being together that thou wouldst have all the glory in everything we say and do that Christ would ultimately have the preeminence and that we oh Lord as thy people that we would be blessed that we would know blessing because as thy word reminds us that as Hermon's Jew the Jew that doth on Zion hills descend for there the blessing God commands life that shall never end hear us then we pray and do us good for Jesus sake Amen well we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening and we're going to sing in Psalm 68 Psalm 68 in the Scottish Psalter page 305 Psalm 68 page 305 in the Scottish Psalter we're singing from verse 32 down to the end of the

Psalm Psalm 68 and verse 32 O all ye kingdoms of the earth sing praises to this king for he is Lord that ruleth all and to him praises sing to him that rides on heavens of heavens which he of old did found lo he sends out his voice a voice and might that doth abound and we'll sing on down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 68 to God's praise O all ye kingdoms of the earth sing praises to this king for he is Lord that ruleth all unto him praises sing to him that hives on heavens of heavens which he of old did find though he sent out his voice a voice in might that hath of about strength on to

God do ye ask strive for his excellency is over Israel his strength and is in that love's most high that from thy temple dreadful Lord Israel's own God is he who gives his people strength and power oh let God bless thee the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more amen