

Revelation Ch6v1-17 - How Long, O Lord?

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[0 : 00] Nation. Nation.

Nation. Nation. Nation. Nation. Nation. Nation. Nation. Nation. We're going to read Revelation chapter 6 this morning.

Let's read God's word together. I watched as the lamb opened the first of seven seals.

Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like a thunder, Come! I looked and there before me was a white horse. Its rider held a bow.

He was given a crown and he rode out as a conquest, bent on conquest. When the lamb opened the second seal I heard the second living creature say, Come!

[1 : 55] Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other.

To him was given a large sword. 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. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures saying, A kilogram of wheat for a day's wages.

And three kilograms of barley for a day's wages. And do not damage the oil and the wine. When the lamb opened the fourth seal I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come!

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

[3 : 04] When he opened the fifth seal 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.

They called out in a loud voice, 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 while longer until a full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters were killed just as they had been.

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black with sackcloth made of goat hair. The whole moon turned blood red and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as figs dropped from the 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 free and slave, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

[4 : 21] 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? Well, I'm going to ask you to stand as we pray. So you can stand as we pray.

If you're able to, if you don't want to stand, that's alright. It's also a physical exercise. Get some blood into the legs. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father God, we ask that you would help us now as we read your word, as we study it together.

That you would speak to us by your spirit. and that you would change us and work in us, we pray. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Please take your seats. It's been a very sad and difficult week for our nation.

[5 : 37] As the community of Creslo have been grieving, as we have turned on our televisions and watched funeral after funeral, we see the heartache and we witness the emptiness.

But as the dust settles, questions begin to arise. Where is God in all of this? And I think it's a question that we all ask as we face our own personal struggles and suffering.

It could be an illness. It could be a disappointment. It could be a broken dream. And we ask, where is God? Why is God allowing this?

What is God doing? Well, chapter 6 might not answer our every question, but it will help us to see life from God's perspective.

Remember, have a look back at chapter 4, verse 1. John is given his second vision. He says, after this, after the first vision, I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven so we can imagine him looking up and a door opens before him.

[6 : 57] And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, come up here, come up into heaven, and I will show you what must take place after this.

You see, we've been invited with John to go through the door into the throne room of heaven. And as we enter, we get to see life from God's perspective.

But that's not all. Look at chapter 5, verse 1. As he is in heaven, he says, I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

So God is seated on the throne, and he has a scroll with writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals.

What's written on the throne? Well, it's God's purposes and plans for history in the world, from the resurrection of Christ to the return of Christ.

[7 : 59] As that seal is opened, so we will begin to see what is God's plan, what is God's purposes for the world as they are laid before us.

So we're going to look at the first six seals this morning. And as we open them, we will see what we can expect to happen.

First, there will be times of suffering. As the first four seals are opened, we see four horsemen being unleashed on the earth with devastating effects.

But before we see what they do, we need to ask, who are these four horsemen? Well, at some level, they seem to represent the powers and authorities of this world.

So we come to them in verse 15, where it talks about the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich and the mighty. But as we read through chapter 6, we see there's something darker and more sinister.

[9 : 16] Behind the evil actions of the powers and authorities of this world is the work of Satan, whose purpose is to bring death and destruction.

So as these four horsemen are unleashed upon the world, we see the rulers carrying out the sinister intentions of Satan and his minions.

So what can we expect to happen? Well, there's four things that we see here as we study the first four horsemen.

First, there will be military conquest. Look at verse 2. I looked and there before me was a white horse. Its rider held a bow.

This is a weapon of war. And he was given a crown, so he has a certain amount of authority. And he rode out as a conqueror, bent on conquest. Now that's familiar, isn't it?

[10 : 18] Because right now there are wars and conflicts all over the world as rulers expand their borders. We see it in Yemen, in Syria, Ethiopia, Central Africa, Kashmir, Myanmar, and of course the daily reminder of the war in Ukraine.

In fact, right now there are over 490 separate wars going on in the world right now.

But not only will there be military conquest. We're told there will be violent bloodshed. Look at verse 4.

Then another horse came out. A fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other.

To him was given a large sword. Again, our news is filled, isn't it, with stabbings, shootings, domestic abuse and violent crime.

[11 : 24] Whether it's the slaughter of innocent children in the creche in Thailand. Or a mindless murder at that funeral in Tralee. Gangs on the street.

Or the wealthy suburbs. It doesn't matter where we look. People kill each other. They take each other's life. But it's not just military conquest and violent bloodshed.

We see economic injustice. Look at verse 5. I looked and there before me was a black horse. Its rider was holding a pair of scales.

This is a weighing scales in his hand. And I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures saying, A kilogram of wheat for a day's wages.

And three kilograms of barley for a day's wages. And do not damage the oil and the wine. It's scarce. We must be careful with what we have.

[12:25] This is a picture of extortion and inflation gone mad. A kilogram of wheat would have fed one person.

Yet it would cost a day's wage. So how were people meant to feed their whole family on a day's wage? But again, that's nothing new for the majority of the world's population today.

The cost of living crisis is nothing new. What they earn today in the majority of many countries is not enough to feed themselves adequately.

It's the effects of economic injustice as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We get military conquest, violent bloodshed, economic injustice, and then fourth as we look at the last rider, relentless death.

Look at verse 8. I looked and there before me was a pale horse. Its rider was named Death and Hades. That's the place of the dead. And he was following close behind him.

[13:37] They were given power over a quarter of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Now we know death comes to all. And it is very rarely quick and painless. Tragically, death comes through disasters like floods and famine, sickness and plagues, through the attacks of men and at times through the attacks of wild animals.

The point is, we can't avoid death. And mostly it comes with great suffering. The scene before us is devastating and horrific.

And we don't have to go looking into the future for these things to happen. They have happened. They are happening. And they will happen.

In fact, as we continue to read through Revelation, we will see that things only escalate and get worse. This is what life is like. This side of the return of Jesus.

[14:49] It's what John and his readers experienced in the first century as the Roman Empire went on their military conquests, inflicting violent bloodshed, causing imminent economic injustice and leaving countless dead.

It's what we've seen in recent history. The war in the Balkans, invasion of Iraq, genocide in Syria. Thousands, millions have been slaughtered while others face starvation through failed crops and droughts.

These are times of suffering, aren't they? But let's be clear. This is not evil unrestrained or Satan uncontrolled.

Now we've got to remember, where does this vision take place? In the throne room of heaven, where God is in control of all things, even the powers of darkness.

You see, Satan is controlled. Satan is controlled.

[16:10] Look who gives permission for these things to take place. Who is it that's breaking open the seals to let this take place? Did you see it? Verse 1.

I watched as who? The Lamb. That's the Lord Jesus, who opens the first of the seven seals.

Verse 3, the Lamb opened the second seal. Verse 5, the Lamb opened the third seal. Verse 7, the Lamb opened the fourth seal. The order comes from the throne room of heaven.

You see, Satan is not acting at will. He is under God's supreme control. It's God who lets Satan loose.

It's God who moves. But this is not uncontrolled chaos. Evil. Evil is restrained.

[17:15] Look at verse 4. Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. its rider was given power.

Did you see that? The rider was given power. It doesn't have its own power. It was given power to take peace from the earth.

Power, but it's restrained. Again, look at verse 8. The middle of verse 8. They were given power over a quarter of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague.

You see, it's restrained. It's just to a quarter of the earth. Now, this isn't just to say to take that literally just a quarter, 25% and that's it.

No, it's saying you can go this far and no further. There are boundaries you will not cross. You see, we need to be clear that God alone rules over the powers of darkness.

[18 : 21] Satan may be intent on causing evil, but he remains on a leash. He cannot do what he wants or pleases. So if God is in control of these times of suffering, then why doesn't he make it all stop?

Isn't that the question? If he's in control of it all, why doesn't he pull the leash and restrain Satan that little bit more and put him back in his cage?

Why? Well, that brings us to the second big idea. Not only is there times of suffering, there will be cries of longing.

Because it seems that these times that we live in will be doubly hard for Christians. Not only will we face the suffering inflicted by man, but Christians will also endure times of opposition and persecution.

Look at verse 9. Verse 9. When he opened the fifth seal, 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.

[19 : 50] Just as the lamb had been slain, so the followers of Jesus will be slain. Remember Jesus' words to his disciples, if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

You see, the world and Satan are actively opposed to Christ and his church. That was the experience of the churches that John wrote to.

Have a look back at chapter 2, verse 10. Chapter 2, verse 10. Chapter 2, verse 10. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

This is written to God's church. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for 10 days.

Now again, I think it's saying this is for a specific time and no more. Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

[21 : 07] A crown awaits for the Christian but in the meantime, be prepared for prison and possibly death. Look at chapter 2, verse 13.

I know where you live. I know where you live. And Satan has his throne there. Yet you remain true to my name.

You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas. Well, who's Antipas? Well, he was just a faithful brother, a faithful Christian.

My faithful witness who was put to death in your city where Satan lives. You see, where the church is, whether that's in Carigoline or Jelan, Satan is also there and he is intent on destroying and breaking up his church, God's church.

So it shouldn't be a surprise that Christians will be opposed and will die. Go back to chapter 6, verse 9. The reason why we will face opposition and persecution is because, end of verse 9, because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

[22 : 34] Now, as we go through our times of suffering, we can identify with their cry. Look at verse 10.

They all cried out in a loud voice, How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true? How long will this suffering go on for?

How long must we put up with this brutal war in Ukraine? How long must we have to hear of yet another violent murder?

How long must we watch as children become victims of poverty? How long must we have to see so many loved ones die painfully?

We understand verse 10, don't we? They called out, How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood.

[23 : 38] When will justice be done? When will all those intent on doing evil be held accountable? When will the wealthy corrupt be treated as they deserve?

When are the Christians in North Korea going to be released from their suffering in prison? When will the pastors and churches in Mali and Egypt stop being attacked?

When will the young women, disciples in Afghanistan stop being raped? When will the 5,898 Christians who died for their faith last year, when are they going to get justice?

justice? And when will the 3,829 followers of Jesus who were abducted and trafficked to other countries, when will they get justice?

When is God going to haul Satan in and end all this evil? how long will this suffering go on for?

[24 : 55] How long sovereign Lord? How long? How long? Well, God does answer our cry and it's both a comfort and a challenge.

Look where these faithful saints are as they cry out. Did you see where they were? Verse 9. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain.

It's temple language. It's talking about the new temple and the new heavens. They're present in heaven. And look what God does.

Verse 11. Each of them was given a white robe. John has already spoken about these white robes. Just go back to chapter 3 verse 4. As he writes to the church, as he talks about these people, he says, you have a few people in Sardis who have not spoiled their clothes.

[26 : 16] That is, they have not turned from God, but they have remained faithful. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. And I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my father and his angels. We can picture it there. These saints who have been put to death because of their testimony of Christ are given a white robe to wear, a sign of their victory presented by Jesus.

Their names forever in the book of life, never to be erased or taken away. How long they cry to God, how long will this suffering go on for?

We don't know, but as we wait, we keep pressing on because our reward awaits us. Our white robe will be given, and our names will be forever in the book of life.

[27 : 38] But there's also a challenge as well as a comfort. Not getting on great with our flicker today. The challenge of suffering, because there is a challenge, isn't there?

Look at verse 10. They call out in a loud voice, How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you had judged the inhabitants of the earth and avenged 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. the time for it all to end is not yet. Not until Christ returns.

The full number of those who will die for their faith is not yet complete. We must wait a little longer. Yes, God has the power and authority to intervene, as we will see in a minute, but God's plan and his purpose is, not yet.

[28 : 54] Not yet, not until Christ returns. Yes, there will be a day when the last Christian will be killed. There is going to be a day when the last Christian will suffer, and then it will be all over.

But that day is not yet. we must wait a little longer. Now, for those who are suffering, to say this is a challenge is an understatement.

It's difficult, it's hard to understand and to accept. Why does God not intervene and act now? God is sadistic, well, if God tells us to wait a little longer, then it must mean that God has some very good reasons.

It's not like God is sadistic, that he's somehow enjoying the suffering that takes place. No, God is both grieved, and yet God is in control of our future destiny.

His plans and his purposes are always right, and they are best, even if we do not always understand them. So, there will be times of suffering, there will be cries of longing, and there will be a day of wrath.

[30 : 28] look at verse 12. I watched as he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake.

The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair. I don't think any of us have any of that lying around the place, but so knitted together so tight that the light can't penetrate through it.

The whole moon turned blood red. The stars in the sky fell to earth as figs drop from a fig tree, or as we might say leaves fall from the tree as shaken by a strong wind.

This is cosmic and cataclysmic. The sun, moon, and stars once spoken into being by God and held in place by God are thrown into chaos.

This is a universal upheaval, a sign that judgment has come. Of course, it's not the first time the sun turned black. Remember when God brought his judgment against Pharaoh and the Egyptians?

[31 : 43] He did it through a plague of darkness. For three whole days there was total darkness. You couldn't see a thing. So when God tells us that the sun will turn to darkness, us, we know that judgment has come.

The day of waiting will be over. The day of justice has arrived and it will be terrifying. Verse 15. The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, the leaders of our nations and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks and the mountains.

They call 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. The slain lamb is also God's ruling judge.

Remember what he was like? The description we were given of the lamb in chapter 5 verse 6. The lamb had what? seven horns, a symbol of his power, seven eyes because he could see all things, which were the seven spirits gone into all the earth because the lamb, the Lord Jesus, sees and he knows all the suffering.

He has heard the cry of all his people. He knows the injustice that has been endured. He has seen the military conquests, the violent bloodshed, the economic injustice, the relentless death.

[33 : 26] He has witnessed the suffering of his people, every single one. And so a day will come when the waiting will be over.

Evil and Satan will be reeled in once and for all. God's judgment will be unleashed and there will be no one to hold it back.

no wonder there is fear and panic. Look at verse 17. For the great day of their wrath has come and who can withstand it?

You see God will have the last word. God's will in heaven will be done on earth. He rules over all things and all people and he will bring his justice.

But we're still left with the big question aren't we? Why doesn't he come now?

[34 : 29] Well he could, I get that, I understand that. But why doesn't he come right now? Why doesn't God bring an end to all the suffering and injustice and all the heartache?

Why doesn't he just end it now? And maybe that's the cry of your heart and you're asking why doesn't God end my suffering now, today?

Well I'm not going to pretend to have all the answers or reasons. But I think this text points to two things that might help us.

First, there is a warning of judgment. You see, these times of suffering that we're looking at are signs of a greater suffering that is to come.

They're warnings of the ultimate judgment that will fall. The wars, the violence, the injustice, the relentless death that screams at us through our television and social media every single day should waken us up to the reality that one day God is going to come in justice.

[35 : 45] But not yet. He's patient. He's giving us time. Bible is very clear to tell us that he longs that none would perish and that none would have to face his judgment.

He longs that all would turn to him. You see, if God did what we asked right now, if God answered my prayer and say, Lord, come right now and stop all the suffering, then that would be it, wouldn't it?

His justice would fall and there would be no opportunity to turn and repent. Our friends, our neighbours, our loved ones, time would be up.

They would be like those of verse 16. calling to the mountains and the rocks to fall on us. They'd rather suffer death like that than face God's judgment.

So in God's mercy he says, no, wait a little longer. Be patient. The day will come, but not yet.

[37 : 03] I have many, many more to bring into my kingdom. so there is a warning, but there's also a promise.

You see, these times of suffering also point to times of salvation because it is through suffering that salvation ultimately comes.

I mean, let's think about this together. As Jesus died on the cross, what do we see happening? The forces of evil and Satan are unleashed.

Together they march in military conquest seeking to destroy the Son of God. They act with violent bloodshed as Christ is crucified and crushed with a crown of thorns.

Weak and poor, Jesus goes to the cross suffering abuse and injustice. He's innocent. And from the cross he cries out, how long sovereign Lord, why have you forsaken me?

[38 : 12] And from the cross there is silence. There is no answer. Death's relentless call takes over and Jesus dies.

But this is not uncontrolled. This is not unrestrained. This was meant to be. This was God's will. This was God's plan and purpose.

it's all being unfolded for our good. Because what do we see as Jesus is on the cross? What happened to the sun? It turned dark.

From twelve noon until three p.m. when the sun is at its highest and brightest, the world was plunged into darkness as the judgment of God was poured out on Jesus Christ for you and for me. The judgment that we deserve fell on him. And so as we turn in repentance we are saved, we are rescued.

[39 : 14] Through his suffering comes our salvation. Maybe if it was us we'd say no, intervene, take Christ down from the cross.

But there would be no salvation. You see there is purpose in the suffering. And that means there is purpose in your suffering too.

There is purpose in your suffering too. As we look to Christ who suffered for us, as we cry out from our hearts how long oh Lord, as we turn in trust to him, as we long and wait for glory to come, as we wait for the white robe and for victory, as we wait for heaven itself, so we on our journey are causing others to stop and to turn and to look to Jesus Christ.

They will see in us, in our longing and in our cries, where our hope lies, that our hope lies in Jesus Christ, who died for you and for me, who was raised from the grave, defeating death, to give life to all.

Why doesn't God intervene right now? I don't know all the answers. There's a mystery and we shouldn't try to answer everything.

[40 : 50] nothing. But it is clear that he is giving the nations and us time to turn to him. There is more to come into his kingdom.

And the way in which he will do that is he will use your suffering. As you look to Christ, so others will be drawn to him. It's God's way.

we need to trust him. Let's take time to pray. Let's just take time to reflect. Father, we identify with the cry of your saints.

How long, O Lord? How long? As we think about our world, as we think about our own individual lives, we long for you to intervene.

And so we pray that you would give us patience and perseverance to trust that you are working out your good and excellent plan for us and for the world.

[42 : 17] Give us strength, Lord, to keep looking to you in the knowledge that heaven is to come and you will be with us and you will walk with us.

Please, Lord, bring many more into your kingdom. Use us to show others who Jesus is.

In his name we pray. Amen. We're going to sing together a song that brings our thoughts together. Together. There is strength within the sorrow. There is beauty in our tears. And when you meet the heart, you will be in the heart. You will be in the heart. You will be in the heart.

You