

The Seven Seals

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[0:00] Is he safe? Is he safe? Remember the Pevensy children asking Mr. Beaver about Aslan, the figure of the Christ, the lion, the witch, and the wardrobe.

They've been hearing about Aslan on the move. He's a lion. And they ask Mr. Beaver, is he safe? Is he safe? This morning I want to ask the question, is the lamb safe? Many of us in the room really want him to be safe.

Maybe you've come wanting a safe Jesus. This morning I'm going to ask a question of you over and over again throughout the sermon.

Here's the question. Is this your Jesus? The Jesus, the risen lamb we see in Revelation chapter 6, is this your Jesus?

[1:09] Is this the Jesus that is your first love? What we're going to see is the lamb who was slain is on his throne and he is in control of all things.

And he's carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time. And it includes devastations and destructions. He's turning up the heat as he's carrying out God's plan.

And this morning as we turn to Revelation 6, I'm going to do my best to get us through the opening of the seven seals of the scroll of God's plan for the fullness of time.

And this scene actually starts earlier than Revelation chapter 6. It starts in Revelation chapter 4.

And there we are shown one seated on the throne.

He is brilliant in his glory and he's surrounded by 24 elders and four living creatures who are constantly falling down and praising him without ceasing.

[2:17] They're praising him. Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and who is and who is to come. And then in chapter 5, there we see in the hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll with seven seals.

You've got to think of those seals as kind of authorizations. Only one person can break open those seals. And we learn from chapter 5 who that one person is.

Who has the authority? Who's got the credentials? Who's got the qualifications to open the seal?

It's the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. And what qualifies him to conquer is his blood.

In verse 6 of chapter 5, Look, in the midst of the throne, John shows us the one who is cross-certified to open the seven seals.

Quote, I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain. End quote. There with God in the midst of the throne is the risen lamb, Jesus Christ.

[3:36] Is this your Jesus? Standing in the midst of the throne? The lamb that's been slain? It was by his death that qualifies him.

It's his death that qualifies him to break open the seals. And it's his death that has conquered sin.

It's his death that has thrown down the devil onto earth. It's his death that handed death its death notice.

In chapters 4 and 5, All of heaven is going nuts in their praise of the lamb and the one seated on the throne.

It's a loud place. Chapter 4, 5, and 6. Heaven is a loud place with the praises of God. And so what we see happening in 4 and 5 is God's plan for the fullness of time to save men and women from every tribe, language, people, and nation is also a plan to bring judgment on all the inhabitants of the earth.

It's a plan to bring utter devastation to the current heaven and the earth as we know it. And this plan has been placed in the hands of the lamb on the throne.

[4:59] And the lamb is going to execute God's plan for the fullness of time to the uttermost. And so this morning I want you to see that the risen lamb is on his throne.

He's in control now. And he's carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time. Is this your Jesus? By the time we get to chapter 6, what we see happening is the lamb begins to open the seven seals of the scroll of God's plan for the fullness of time.

It's the plan being enacted. And so what we're going to see is again and again, as the lamb opens seal after seal, we're given vision after vision of immediate happenings of cosmic proportions.

It's going to make you a little uncomfortable. Is this your Jesus? We're going to see the lamb in a light this morning that that you may have never seen him before, or maybe you care not to see him like this.

The question is, is it true? The lamb is on the throne. He's in control. And he's carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time.

[6:30] And he uses calamity and destruction according to his will for God's glory. So here's how we're going to move forward. We're going to look at the lamb and the four horsemen.

Seals one through four. And then we're going to look at the lamb and his martyrs. Seal five. And then the lamb and his wrath. Seal six. And then the lamb and the ominous silence.

Seal seven. So we're going to focus on chapter six. Take a, kind of dip our toe into chapter eight.

And you might be wondering, well, what about chapter seven? We'll come back to that next week.

You'll understand why in a little bit. Let's look at the lamb and the four horsemen. Seals one through four.

We're going to take them all together. This is chapter six, one through eight. Every seal that the lamb opens is an authoritative act of him carrying out God's plan for all time. And what I want you to see is he's turning up the heat on humanity.

[7:34] These first four seals are all related. They have a lot of similarities as you go through him, through them. And if you're wondering about these four horsemen, like where did John think these things up?

He actually didn't think them up. He's actually riffing off the four horsemen in Zechariah chapter one and chapter six. And those horsemen were sent out by God to patrol the earth.

They were agents of God's purposes. And the horsemen we're going to look at now are agents of God's purposes. Here's what we're going to see over and over again.

We're going to see the lamb open a seal. And then we're going to see after the opening of a seal, one of the living creatures, they cry out, come! And they call forth one of the horsemen.

And one of those horsemen, there's a horse that's either white, red, black, and pale. And then there's a rider on one of those horses. And usually one of the riders is given something.

[8:41] The rider of the white horse in chapter six, verses one and two, he's given a bow and a crown to conquer. The rider on the red horse in chapter six, verses three and four, he's on a red horse and he's given a great sword.

And he is to remove the peace on the earth to men slay one another. It's a picture of war and bloodshed. The rider on the black horse in chapter six, verses five and six, has a pair of scales. And there's a voice from the midst of the throne saying, a quart of wheat is worth a denarius. One day's food is worth one day's wage.

Scarcity. Economic difficulty. And then the rider on the pale horse. Literally, corpse green horse.

And the rider on that horse, chapter six, verses seven and eight, it's the only rider that's been given a name. Death. Accompanied by his partner Hades, the place of the dead.

[9:53] And that rider is given authority to bring the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts to kill a fourth of humankind.

The four horsemen of Revelation chapter six, these four seals, they represent calamities that are sent forth by the lamb.

Human conquest, the rider on the white horse, to conquer. National, international power grabbing.

Control, human dominance. And that results in great bloodshed. The rider on the red horse with the great sword.

Human conquest, the prideful dominion over one people over another, leads to the shedding of great blood of one people over another.

[11:01] Which, of course, results in economic scarcity. Famines brought on by war. Famines brought on by bloodshed.

Famines brought on by the exertion of human will to conquer. Just think of North Korea and the famine that's been going on there for years. And then it all lands with death.

Death after death after death after death. Here's what's going on with these four seals.

What I want you to see is that Jesus is setting each one into motion. He opens a seal. A living creature says, come.

The horse and the rider come. They're given something. And they go. And they wreak havoc on the earth. So, the risen Christ, who's positioned on the throne with one seat on the throne, in all his cross-certified authority, sends calamity after calamity onto the earth.

[12:14] Is this your Jesus? Who's reigning on high? Remember the pedantry children?

Upon hearing of Aslan, is he safe? This Jesus that we're looking at is the Lion of Judah.

He's the Lamb who was slain. And he ushers in calamity on the earth. I mean, he said he would. Matthew 24, chapter 24, verses 4 through 8.

If you want to turn back to that. This is Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 24, verse 4 through 8. He's talking about the end. What will happen? And we hear him say this.

See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ. And they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed.

[13:23] For this must take place. It must take place. But the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. What we are seeing in the four horsemen are the birth pains. I want to help you guys think about something.

It's not when the four horsemen will come. It's that they have already come. You hear horsebeats, hoofbeats already.

Every time you open up your news feed on your smartphone, and you hear about devastations, think hoofbeats. When you see the news, when you hear on the radio, things that make you say, no, not again.

Hoofbeats. Hoofbeats. I mean, if you are familiar with the genocides over the last hundred years, how many millions of people have died?

[14:30] How many Armenians died at the hand of Turks? How many Jews died at the hand of Nazis? How many Russians died? How many Cambodians died? How many Africans have died of famines? And North Koreans have died of famines?

How much death has happened? Hoofbeats are sounding all over the place. We're living in it. Why is this happening?

The end is coming. We're one day closer. We read in the book of Romans chapter 1 that sinful humanity exchanges the truth of God for a lie.

It's idolatry in the first order. And if you're God, and you get swapped out for something you've made, it is a tremendous offense.

In the words of Paul in Romans 1.28, since they, sinful humanity, did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what not ought to be done.

[15:44] The Lamb, the Lamb is handing an idolatrous generation over to its cravings and consequences.

And we're hearing hoofbeats all over the place. The Lamb's turning up the heat. Now, if you started showing symptoms of a headache and a cough and a temperature and chills, chances are you're going to start thinking, well, I think I got the flu.

I need to go get checked out. But if you ignore it, you ignore it to your own peril. Think about the other symptoms going on that Jesus is describing.

Human conquest, great bloodshed, famine, scarcity, death, death, death.

Symptoms of the times. Hoofbeats are sounding all around us. Jesus is raising the heat. We can't ignore it.

[16:56] Billy Graham is quoted as saying, the sun that melts the butter hardens the clay. The sun that melts the butter hardens the clay. And depending on the condition of your heart, when you experience this kind of heat, will determine how you respond.

And for those who have a tender heart, Jesus is giving us time to repent and to turn to Him and bow our knee.

But those with a hardened heart, ignore at your own peril. You'll see what will that happen in seal six. Is this your Jesus who's on His throne, controlling all things and carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time, turning up the heat with hoofbeats?

Those are the four seals. Now let's look at seal five. The Lamb and His Martyrs. This is chapter six, verses nine through eleven.

The fifth seal. That word martyr, the word martyr has an interesting history. Literally, the Greek word, it actually shows up in this chapter.

[18:20] And it's the word witness. It literally means, martyr literally means in the original language, witness. Like you witness in a court of law.

But over time, as Christian after Christian bearing witness to Christ to their death, martyr evolved into the meaning to faithfully bear witness unto death.

And what we see happening in seal five is we're given a vision of the faithful martyrs in heaven.

Those who've gone before faithful to professing Jesus all the way to the end of their own lives.

And in verse nine, we are explicitly shown who they are. I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain. The souls of those who've been slain.

The soul is kind of the disembodied saint. They are absent from the body but present with the Lord.

They are in God's presence in His heavenly temple. And they're there because they've been slain.

[19:35] And notice what they were slain for. The word of God. And there it is. It's a witness they bore. And what I want you to notice is exactly where they are.

They are under the altar of the heavenly temple in the presence of God. Now in the Jerusalem temple complex there were two altars.

The altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense. And when an animal was sacrificed on the altar of sacrifice do you know where its blood would pool?

Under the altar. What John is showing us is a very vivid way to describe the martyrs of Jesus as an offering sacrificed unto the Lord.

They are in a place where blood would pool. Who are these martyrs? Think of Stephen in the book of Acts.

[20:46] John Wycliffe. John Huss. William Tyndale. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Jim Elliot. I was reading about Gracia Burnham this week. Kayla Mueller this week. There are men and women from all different ethnicities and languages who have given their lives for Jesus.

And Jesus knows every one of them. Maybe you've seen brothers on YouTube who have been beheaded for being Christ followers in the Middle East under the altar.

And notice what they are crying out. They are crying out with a loud voice. Oh Sovereign Lord.

That's to the Lamb. Oh Sovereign Lord.

It's the word we get despot from. Oh Sovereign Lord. Ruler of all. How long before you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

When will you vindicate us? When? They are crying out to the Lamb. Bring your justice.

[22:05] How long? How long will you avenge until you avenge us? On those who dwell on the earth. It's a very important phrase in the book of Revelation.

Those who dwell on the earth. And when we hear that we probably think of like the seven point whatever billion people inhabitants of the earth right now. Well the book of Revelation it's a little bit more specific and technical.

Here's what I mean by that. As we make our way through the book of Revelation when that phrase show up the dwellers of the earth here's what's true of them. They are deceived by the false prophet to worship the beast.

They are deceived. They make an image of the beast and worshiper. The dwellers on the earth. The dwellers on the earth are given the mark of the beast. The dwellers on the earth become drunk with the wine of immorality of the great prostitute.

And so when you start to understand how the book of Revelation uses that phrase the dwellers of the earth you realize it's not all the inhabitants of the earth. It's those who have refused to become followers of Jesus who are still in their sin.

[23:14] They're idolaters. They're unbelievers. not all the earth's population. These are the ones who have turned from the lamb to worship anything but the lamb and these are the ones who make it difficult for the people of God.

And the martyrs are crying out how long how long until you vindicate us. Did you notice did you notice that the martyrs they're talking about the lamb as the judge of all.

Come judge and vindicate avenge. Is this your Jesus? Just as the writers were given something now these martyrs are given something.

They're given white robes. And what these white robes are in verse 11 they are they're to show that they share in the lamb's conquering in his victory. It's assurance.

It's like hey you guys are legit. You should be here. I've shed my blood for you. You're in my conquest. My victory. Not just that.

[24:38] They are told something. They're told to rest rest a little longer. Rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete who were to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

This is really sober stuff here. Because what we're reading about is Jesus is giving us a kind of a of a marker.

these martyrs have run their course faithfully to the appointed end of giving their lives for Jesus.

And what we're learning now is that hey rest wait until the full number of the martyrs comes in.

There's a set number of martyrs apparently. We're being given a reference point. In Matthew 24 14 we're given another kind of a reference point by Jesus.

Jesus talks about the end will come after the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed throughout the whole world to all nations. Then the end will come. So what we know is the end won't come until that happens.

[25:58] Here we're given another kind of a marker. That as the gospel is proclaimed to the nations there will be brothers and sisters who will be giving their lives to that.

There's a set number of martyrs. People will die for the cause of Jesus. Loving people helping them pointing them to Jesus.

Maybe this will help. Have you ever seen those kind of like desktop daily countdown calendars? It sits on your desk and there is like the date January 20th and then you rip it off and the next day is January 21st and it's all going down to the last day.

Think about the lamb having a kind of countdown calendar but it's not by days. It's by martyrs. martyrs.

He knows them one by one. One at a time. Count down of the martyrs until they're done.

[27:12] And then the end comes. It's sobering isn't it? Stakes are high. The worship of the lamb is at stake.

What we've learned here is that the lamb is the sovereign Lord who will judge with vengeance all who oppose him and his faithful martyrs.

As the judge he knows his own. He loves his own. He hears his own. He's heard their cries. He loves them.

He shed their blood for them. He will vindicate them. And just imagine if you're one of the seven churches in the first century that received this and you're also being told that you're going to be facing persecution and some of you will die.

This is going to be encouragement to you. He's on the throne. He's in control and he's carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time including martyrdom.

[28:22] is this your Jesus? Maybe you're asking is he safe?

The sixth seal we read about in chapter 12 verse 17 and it is related to the fifth seal. I love movie previews.

I like getting early to movies to see the previews. And you know how previews work. They give you a kind of present limited glimpse of a future release.

So you get like 30, 60 seconds of something coming later that is going to be two hours of wonder. The sixth seal is a present glimpse of a future destruction of the first heaven and the first earth. It's describing what Revelation 21 describes as the passing away of the first heaven and the first earth. Let me read it for you.

[29:29] Chapter 6 verse 12 the sixth seal. When he opened the sixth seal I looked and behold there was a great earthquake and the sun became black as sackcloth. The full moon became like blood and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

What a visual. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Again Revelation 21 describes this as the first heaven and first earth passing away.

If you turn to 2 Peter chapter 3 2 Peter chapter 3 describes this in a little different terminology. In verse 7 we read this.

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

And if you look down to verse 10 we read but the day of the Lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

[30:48] What Jesus is describing what we see here in the sixth seal is the final devastation of the present heaven and earth. It's a preview of cosmic destruction to come.

The earth as we know it will be dramatically changed. It's describing an event earthquake. Did you see the word earthquake?

Earthquake throughout the Bible usually is connected to God's coming. A theophany an appearing. And here is the great earthquake.

I looked and behold there was a great earthquake and we see the results of it in verse 14. Every mountain and island was removed from its place. But it's more than just a quaking of the earth. It's a cosmic quake because the heavenly bodies are dramatically shaken and altered too. The sun has turned black. The full moon has turned blood red. Stars fall to the earth and the sky vanishes like a scroll.

[31:58] The scope and scale is absolute devastation of the present heavens and earth as we know them. And who set it in motion? the lamb.

Is this your Jesus? The lamb is on his throne in control and carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time.

And here he is as the catalyst of the destruction of the heavens and the earth as we know it. He opens the seal and heavens and earth are dissolved.

is he safe? I wouldn't put him in a safe category at this point. In verses 15 and 17 we move from absolute devastation in 12 and 14 to another preview of the absolute terror and fear for those who are still left present on the earth when the great day of God's wrath comes.

we read this. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and powerful and everyone slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains calling to the mountains and rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of the wrath has come and who can stand?

[33:29] We move from absolute devastation to absolute terror for those left on earth. Now the question my wife asked last night is well where are we?

Where are the redeemed? The church? Look at that next week in chapter 7. But these are the dwellers of the earth.

What I was telling you before of those who have opposed the lamb and his people, those who have rejected him for idols, they're still on the earth and when this devastation hits, they are terrified. And notice, it's a diverse group of people. Kings, great ones, generals, rich, powerful, everyone, slaves and free. Everyone who hasn't bowed the knee and is on the planet when this happens are going to be terrified.

I mean, think about it. Kings, great ones, generals, rich and powerful, they're not the type that should be hiding. Usually, people hide from them.

[34:35] But now, they're hiding. They're afraid because they know what has now come upon them. It's going to be extensive devastation.

They're united in their fearful chorus. Look what they say. They're calling to the mountains and rocks. Notice, they're not calling out to the one seated on the throne or to the Lamb.

They're calling to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him. These are the big dudes of the world. Hide us from Him who is seated on the throne.

Don't let us see His face. Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb. They are still unwilling to turn to God even at this point.

They're hiding like Adam and Eve hid in Genesis chapter 3 from God's presence because of their wrongdoing. But on this day, no one escapes God's presence.

[35:48] No one escapes the wrath of the Lamb. which raises a really interesting question. When you think about the Lamb, I'm guessing you don't think wrath. It's almost paradoxical.

Why is the Lamb so full of wrath? That He would destroy the heavens and the earth that He created? That He would terrify the inhabitants of the world?

Why is the Lamb so full of wrath? Well, you've got to understand, God's anger is not like our anger. His anger is always sinless. It's never kind of quick-tempered.

His anger is always just and right. It's a holy wrath. And His wrath is the outworking of His perfect justice. We read in John 3 that those who do not believe in Jesus, they're under God's condemnation.

They're under His wrath now. Now, when you sin against a holy, just God, when you swap Him out for something else as an idol, it provokes His wrath.

[37:02] It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, Hebrews says. Is He safe? Is this your Jesus, Lamb?

His wrath will be poured out on all those who refuse to submit to Him, who swapped Him out for something else, and who mock and hurt those who follow the Lamb.

His wrath will be final, it will be full, and it will be forever. Forever. forever. And we have an announcement.

Verse 17. These terrified ones, they announce the great day of God's wrath has come. How about that for a preview?

The destruction of the world and those left on the planet who has not yielded to Jesus hiding from Him.

[38:22] But I got to tell you something. If you're afraid right now of the wrath of the Lamb, you don't need to be afraid. Because right now He is offering you to be free, forgiven.

You don't need to wait until that day. Today can be the day in which you turn to the Lamb who was slain for you, who bore God's wrath on the cross.

So you don't have to bear God's wrath on that day. It's an incredible display of mercy. The Lamb who is wrathful bore God's wrath for his idolaters today.

And He offers it to all. Don't miss the question that gets asked at the end of verse 17 by the ones who are terrified.

They say the great day of the wrath has come and then they ask well who can stand? It's a rhetorical question. They don't think anybody can stand. But chapter 7 answers the question who can stand?

[39:34] Briefly look at chapter 7 verse 9. After this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all

tribes and people and languages standing before the throne crying out with a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Chapter 7 is really good news for us. It answers the question who can stand? We'll come back to that more next week. But now would you turn to chapter 8 verse 1 and the last seal?

We read when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. I mentioned earlier that the throne room has been a relatively loud place up until this point. Chapter 4 people all sorts of beings praising the one seated on the throne. chapter 5 everybody around the one seated on the throne and the Lamb giving praises to him.

Chapter 6 with the seals. Seals 1 through 4 we have the four living creatures yelling come. And seal number 5 we have the martyrs calling out how long? And then seal number 6 we have those dwellers on the earth who are facing God's wrath yelling out fall on us to the mountains.

[41:03] chapter 7 it's loud praise of the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb. Salvation belongs to him. We see that up until this point revelation this set of visions is just loud.

And then chapter 8 verse 1 silence. The seventh seal the last seal silence in heaven for half an hour.

Very specific. Here's how to be thinking about this ominous silence. It's the calm before the storm. Specifically it's the calm before the fire storm.

Because when you see the trumpets and what gets poured out on a third of creation it's all burning. Chapter 8 verse 1 through 5 transitions us to the second or the third cycle of judgments the trumpet judgments and we're going to look at that in two weeks.

But seal seven ends on a rather ominous note. I've been asking you a question throughout the sermon. Is this your Jesus?

[42:36] Is the Lamb of Revelation chapter 6 the Jesus who is your first love? Who you will live for all the days of your life no matter what you face?

Is he your Jesus? And maybe you're still asking the question something like the Pevensy children is he safe? Well here's what I can tell you.

The Lamb is on his throne. He's in control and he's carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time including devastations and destructions.

I wouldn't put him in the safe category but you remember what the Beaver, Mr. Beaver told the Pevensy children when they asked is he safe?

He said he's a lion. He's not safe but he's good. The Lamb is good. The Lamb who was slain for you is good.

[43:42] He is good and he's on the throne and he's in control and he is carrying out God's plan for the fullness of time and he is good which means you can trust him all the days of your life no matter what you encounter to be faithful to the end.

Is he safe? He's good. He shed his blood for you. He's raining on high. Let's pray.

God would you press this into our hearts and help us to respond with the appropriate reverence and sobriety, long-suffering, willingness to endure that is in keeping with those who follow you.

O risen Lamb, will you give us the strength to press forward regardless of what comes. It's in the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.