

Double Vision

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to be with you again in church. If you haven't got your Bibles open there, we are up to Revelation chapter 6 and 7.

And we're going to be scooting through that today and landing where the bishop has just read for us. Let me pray and we will launch straight in. Gracious God, we thank you for your word. And as I stand here this morning, I am very mindful that anything good and eternal that has worked in the last 11 years is because you, God, have been gracious to us in that you have allowed us to see the glory of the Lord Jesus through your word and by your spirit. And so we'd ask that you do it for us again. Continue to do your work in us, we pray for Jesus' glory. Amen. Revelation 6 verses 7 and 8.

I looked and there before me was a pale horse. Its rider was named Death and Hades was following close behind him.

[1 : 03] Now, the learned and the educated and artistically astute amongst us this morning will undoubtedly know where those words are most famously quoted in artistic culture.

No, I know that most of you, your mind is going right now to Victor Vasimtov's 1887 painting, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

That's not what I was thinking of. It is, of course, the 1985 Western Pale Rider starring Clint Eastwood. In the movie, Clint Eastwood rides a pale horse, wears a dog collar and plays a character called the preacher.

He is introduced with these verses and then proceeds throughout the movie to give a whole new meaning to the terms pastoral care and church discipline.

One of the things of the movie, and in fact of the book of Revelation, is you ignore the horsemen at your peril.

[2 : 17] At the start of the movie, as is often the case in life, people are trying to live contented lives, building wealth and security and comfort and hope here on earth.

And the movie begins with this group of miners and their families who have set up a peaceful life amongst the beautiful scenery of the Midwest frontier.

Their naivety in life is exposed as a group of horsemen bent on their destruction rides over the top of them. And that scenario is at the heart of the book of Revelation.

Revelation is a vision that God gives the Apostle John, one of his key followers, as he is suffering in the prison island of Patmos because of his faith in Jesus.

It's first century and the formidable Roman Empire is ruling. Christianity is spreading throughout the empire and gathering momentum.

[3 : 22] And so the empire strikes back. Two movie references in the first minute and a half. And the purpose of this letter is to help the Christian overcome the pressure of following Jesus.

To triumph. To be victorious in the end as Jesus himself is victorious. So Revelation tells us where we are going, who is in control, so that we can live lives of hope and purpose, even when it's tough being a disciple of Jesus.

Now this is valuable because in our secular world, the culture around us doesn't have an answer, a solution to suffering and death and tyranny and chaos or how to even grow through it or bear under the weight of it.

The French philosopher and atheist Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that everything that exists is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance.

That's the secular mind.

[5 : 14] Realistic plan and a purpose for history. So there's an outline for today's message in the St. Paul's app. If you want to grab that, try to make it real simple for us.

Three points. Two opposing forces, two kinds of people and two final destinies. So just think in double vision really is all you need for today. Two opposing forces. Last week, we were taken into the throne room of the creator God in Revelation 4 and 5.

We also saw there that there is a scroll in that throne room that no one is able to open. And there is great distress because this particular scroll was written on both sides, extensively on both sides. It is the plan of history. And so the conclusion in the throne room is life, is history a mystery? Who will know?

What is the plan of God for destiny? Now, the good news is revelation literally means the unveiling. And so there is a great joy when Jesus Christ, who was slain for the sins of all people, he is the one who holds the scroll now.

[6 : 29] Great rejoicing that the scroll can finally be opened. He is the only one who can open it. And therefore, he is the key to destiny.

He is the interpreter of history. Chapter 6 and 7, the scroll gradually gets unraveled. That's what we're up to today. Scroll gradually gets unraveled. Unraveled as the seven seals are opened up, reveals the scroll in its context, and the plan of history is laid out before us.

Now, what we're doing here in 6 and 7 is looking at the grand scope of history between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. So what do we see?

The first five seals reveal a cosmic battle between good and evil being played out behind the scenes of the pages of history, throughout history as well.

And the sixth seal takes us to the end of history. What we first of all see in the first seal is broken is a loving conquest. Chapter 6, verse 1, Now, over time, there's been a whole heap of discussion amongst scholars as to the identity.

[8 : 06] of this first horseman. It appears to be Jesus because in chapter 19 of Revelation, Jesus appears on a white horse wearing crown.

Others say it can't be Jesus because the other three horsemen are so dastardly, images of destruction.

So you can't have Jesus as one of those four horsemen of the apocalypse. This must be, therefore, a bad horseman, a false Jesus who is bent on conquering all.

Now, I've got to be honest with you. Either way you go here, you still end up at the end of Revelation with Jesus sitting on a white horse conquering. And I, in the past week, have even wavered, as scholars have wavered on this one.

But here's why I've gone with the interpretation that Jesus is, in fact, this first horseman. It's the first message. The first thing in terms of the plan of history that these disciples hear.

[9 : 19] Firstly, and mainly because it's the parallel here to chapter 19, who is clearly Jesus. Secondly, because in Revelation, the reason I've gone with Jesus is, secondly, is because in Revelation, the color white always represents purity.

Number three, this is the only rider who's crowned as Jesus himself is crowned. And number four, because except in chapters 11 and 13, conquest.

Conquest is seen as the work of Jesus Christ and his followers in Revelation. So this first horseman galloping through the pages of history is the conquering Jesus Christ who reigns over all time and eternity.

The one who is seated on the throne in chapters 4 and 5, the crucified lamb, Jesus Christ, is seen here in the first opening of the Revelation of history, is the one who wins the nations to his allegiance.

The first thing to be unveiled in history is that Jesus Christ has conquered and is conquering. He wins. And so the implication is that if we link our life with him, we too win.

[10 : 42] The great English pastor John Stott wrote, Here is the Christian's testimony worked out through history.

This is my testimony. This is your testimony if you are someone who is in Jesus. Before the creation of the world, Jesus Christ thought about me.

He thought about you. We are told in Isaiah that when he thinks of me, when he thinks of you, he has carved his name in his hand.

Your name in his hand. He made the world and he made it habitable for me, for you. He created things that I love.

He created the Bible. He created my wife Natalie, my girls. He created the church. He created fun, rest, scenery, running, recreation, feral pigs, bunnings.

[12 : 04] Clint Eastwood Westerns. Those kinds of things. He made it all. He's the source of it all. And then he came into this world that he created that he loved so much that he became a human being.

He identified with us in order to exchange places with us. He became my substitute because I was born into and I had linked my life with the world that had rejected his rule.

And he died a horrific death so that God's judgment could be turned away from me. His wrath would be turned away from me for living life as if he doesn't exist.

He died so that I could be forgiven and welcome back into relationship with him. And 2,000 years later, he knit me together in my mother's womb and he put people into my life who loved me and raised me.

He also put people into my life as I lived ignoring him who told me about the message of the cross and God's love for me in Jesus. And through these people, God graciously opened my eyes to see the wonder and the beauty and the glory of Jesus.

[13 : 24] He opened up the Bible to me and he has kept me and he has helped me. Time and time again, I have failed him and he has forgiven me and restored me and filled me with hope every single time.

Time and in the future, at some point from this moment on, I will die. And the promise of his Easter resurrection is that I will stand with him in eternal joy and he will say something like this to me.

Steve Jeffrey, how good to see you. You've been on my mind a very long time. That is his conquest of me and you if you're a Christian.

It's a remarkable conquest. From the beginning of time, I am deeply loved by the divine merciful conqueror. His love has conquered me.

That is the Christian story. And he has won to himself billions of people from every tribe and language and generation and nation.

[14 : 45] And will continue to do so until he finally comes to bring an end of history as we know it. And nothing can stop his conquest.

In 1948, just to use an example, Chinese authorities decided to stamp out Christianity and expel all foreign missionaries from the country.

The Western church went, oh my goodness, it's the end of Christianity. So small was their vision. How many Christians are there in China today?

Well, it's hard to know exactly. But Operation World puts the figure at approximately 105 million. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the conqueror.

He's the conqueror of a loving, selfless conquest. And nothing can stop it. It is utterly essential that we link our lives with him because he wins.

[15 : 52] And so I plead with you today, have you linked your life with Jesus, the conqueror? Is the story that I've just shared your story?

If you're not sure, can I just say, just pause for a moment, make contact with us here at St. Balls. If you're sitting in the building, see Adrian, see James in our mission team and explore the essential truth of Jesus Christ, the good news of Christianity.

That's the first horseman. The next three are on rampant destruction. The vision here, of course, in Revelation is not just one of victory for Team Jesus.

The other three horsemen are bent on destruction. They are seals 2, 3, and 4. They spread economic corruption, war, disease, mayhem, death.

That's their goal, is destruction. That is, what we see here as the pages of history are unveiled, the interpretation of it, is that there is a cosmic war between good and evil, which you'll notice if you go back through all kinds of different mythology and the stories of every different culture.

[17 : 16] It is a fight against good and evil. Even Disney is about good and evil. And the princess generally wins. It's everywhere in the pages of history, it's about good and evil.

And that's what we have here. Carnage and chaos walk alongside the conquest of the gospel. And therefore, at the very least, the Christian must be a realist.

Their triumphalism has no place in the life of the Christian. The unveiling of the scroll here reveals a double vision of history.

A battle between good and evil, between right and wrong. There will be highs, there will be lows, there will be hardships, and there will be joys. And even as I reflect upon the last 11 years, 11 years of Vision 2020, we ought to conclude that any gospel progress that's been made has always been hard fought.

Always. It comes at a cost. There have been losses and there have been gains. Our celebration should never flow over into triumphalism.

[18 : 30] There should be a weight to it. We also see, therefore, there are two kinds of people here.

The cosmic battle between good and evil means that all the people of history are lined up behind one or the other, depending on who they are being conquered by.

In verse 9, we read, this is chapter 6, of those under the altar who have been slain because of their faith in Jesus. They've been won over to allegiance by Christ, by his grace, and they have suffered, suffered for linking their lives with Jesus.

A judgment has been made against them by the inhabitants of the earth, as we are told here. But a judgment for them has been made by the conquering king who sits on the throne.

And in verse 10 of chapter 6, they cry out from under the altar for justice because they have been slain by the other group, described here as the inhabitants of the earth.

[19 : 43] They are calling God to vindicate them. Now, the phrase inhabitants of the earth is a very specific reference.

At first reading, you go, well, that's everyone. Inhabitants of the earth. Well, we're inhabitants of the earth. You know, my feet are planted on the ground. That must include me. But it actually is not if you're a Christian.

The reference here is very specific to those who are fundamentally earthbound. Fundamentally earthbound, which means that the Christian is fundamentally heavenbound.

The inhabitants of the earth here are those who have turned from the living God to idolatry.

Anything apart from their creator and their redeemer is the controlling passion of their life.

Back in the first century, it was often a part of creation that became the controlling passions of people's lives as they worship the sun, the moon and the stars. Today, particularly in the Western world, it's money, power, acclaim, pleasure.

[20 : 53] Whatever it is, the inhabitants of the earth here are totally committed to building life here and now while rejecting their creator God who gives them life.

And finally, we have two final destinies. We have two competing realities marching through the pages of history. All of humanity is split into two competing groups.

And then as the sixth seal is opened, we have two final destinies. The opening of the sixth seal in verse 12 brings about cosmic disruption.

The language of the sun turning black, the moon turning blood red, the stars falling from the sky in verses 12 and 14 of chapter 6 is taken from Isaiah 34.4 and Joel 2.31.

And very importantly, just as a side point, when you're interpreting the book of Revelation, Scripture interprets Scripture. Scripture interprets Scripture. And it's the case with the book of Revelation.

[22 : 06] Every vision and piece of information here is found in the rest of Scripture. And the language here in 12 and 14 is not merely the language of an empire falling.

It's the language of the end of history. The sixth seal is where God, who's been working behind the scenes, steps onto the stage of the drama and he calls it over.

All of the inhabitants of the earth have looked to and built their lives on that which will be swept away on this final dreadful day of the Lord.

The thing that they think is the most secure for them, the thing that they have lived for, the thing that they have put their hope in, this world will in fact be proven insecure.

The foundation of their hope will literally break underneath them as the great earthquake is revealed at the sixth seal. What amazing irony for the inhabitants of the earth as the sixth seal is opened and there is a great earthquake.

[23 : 33] Verse 15, we see a description of the inhabitants of the earth. Those who have been caught short on this great and dreadful day.

They are described as the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty and everyone else, both slave and free. That's everyone.

It's a comprehensive list. Everyone is caught up in this cataclysmic disaster on the day of judgment.

Even on this great and dreadful day, we are told that they are still looking to their broken dreams for hope. They are still looking to the earth as it crumbles around them for their hope.

They hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called out 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.

[24 : 34] For the great day of wrath has come and who can withstand it? The entire history of humanity, all four corners of the world are finally confronted with the righteousness and the power of the sacrifice lamb whom they have ignored.

There is no escape. Even death is a mercy for them in this moment. If only death meant it was the end.

The fourth horseman is called death and Hades. The goal of this horseman is not just to take life, but in fact take life forever. Hell is what the name Hades means.

Eternal punishment from the hand of the conquering King Jesus. Now let's be clear here. God's wrath here, as it's described, it's not a temper tantrum. It's not a fit of rage.

God's wrath here is he settled, unchanging hostility towards sin, evil and injustice and it will never end.

[25 : 51] And so friends, here is the scope of history. And Revelation is calling us to win, to overcome.

If you want to win in life and you want to win forever in life, we must link our lives with Jesus Christ, the conquering King, the crucified lamb.

And instead of hiding from the wrath of the lamb, as we see here of the inhabitants of the earth, we are in fact, with irony, run to the lamb who has turned God's wrath away from us.

And find refuge in him, the lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. He might be the ruling, conquering lamb.

But he is conquering and he will continue to conquer. But he's also the one who will bear the full force.

[26 : 58] He has borne the full force of God's wrath against sin. He's turned it away from us for those who find refuge for him. If we continue to ignore it, he will not be there.

He will in fact bring the wrath of God. The God who holds us accountable for our sin is the God who turned his wrath upon himself.

He takes our punishment to set us free, to make us purified, forgiven and granted life forever. So instead of opening the seventh seal, we instead get a glimpse of this final destiny of all those who have found refuge in the lamb.

It's like a pause. Let's pause before we go into the seventh seal. And let's see for those who overcome, the conqueror brings final, final victory.

What we see here in chapter 7 is that throughout history, this conqueror has been gathering his people from the four corners of the earth.

[28 : 10] So very quickly, chapter 7, verses 1 to 8 and verses 9 to 18 are two pictures of exactly the same thing.

The first eight verses where we have all of God's people assembled like soldiers in a victory parade. And the message here is twofold.

Number one, God's promises to his people starting at Abraham thousands of years earlier have come to fruition. They've never been lost. They've never been caused off track.

This conqueror is winning. And he has won. Not one single promise of God has fallen to the ground. That's the first thing.

The second thing is every single one of his people is known.

[29 : 10] And they are sealed with the Spirit of God. If you are his, you are known by him. You are not just simply a number. He has marked you. You are his.

And he knows you personally. The second perspective of verses 9 to 18 is a perspective from our side of things.

If you like John's vision, the human perspective. It's you look at this crowd of people that have been gathered throughout history and it's innumerable. It's huge. It's too great to number.

It's a diverse crowd from every nation and tribe and people and language. It is a transcultural gathering. It is multi-ethnic, socially diverse from every generation.

These are the ones who have survived the great tribulation, as verse 14 says. These are the ones who have overcome. The great tribulation are those who have, from the first coming of Jesus to his second coming.

[30 : 17] That is the reference. It calls the time that we are involved in now the great tribulation, the trial, the hardship. And these ones have overcome. They have been conquered by Jesus and they remain true to Jesus and be kept by Jesus.

They stand before the throne as victors because they sought refuge in the Lamb. And they are given white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. They're being purified. They've been vindicated.

There is no sin against them. Well, that's six and seven, the broad, realistic brushstroke of history that gives the disciple of Jesus hope, perspective and clarity as we fight the fight of faith.

In his book, *Don't Waste Your Life*, American author John Piper urges Christians to have a wartime mindset and live a wartime lifestyle as we wait for the final day.

And he writes this. I need to hear this.

[31 : 46] And he says, Also, John Piper's book, *Don't Waste Your Life*.

We have made progress. There is much to celebrate. And I am grateful for those who have been sharing what God has been doing, especially and has done in their lives.

But let's be clear. Progress has been hard. We ought to expect it to be hard. Our experience ought to be mixed. There has been hurt. There has been hurt.

There has been disappointment. And there has been loss. Some, at great grief, have turned their back on Christ. And there are some others still amongst us with great grief who have yet to turn to Christ, who are still refusing to be conquered by him.

And I say, as a pastor, with all of my heart, some of you have known me for 11 years and heard my preaching for 11 years. And you still stay stubbornly where you are as inhabitants of the earth.

[33 : 17] Today, today is the day to find refuge in the Lamb. Today's the day. Today, I have cried tears of pain and I have cried tears of joy.

That should be the expectation of the Christian life. The one question that matters the most here, though, has Jesus conquered you more in the last 10 years or are you still the same?

That's the question. Has Jesus conquered you more or are you still the same? Is your vision just of loss?

Your reflection just loss? Or is it gain? Well, we have not yet reached our final destiny, our final triumph.

Vision 2020 is mere 11-year journey towards that final triumph and it's done. And as we look to the future, our task is effectively still the same.

[34 : 32] Proclaim Jesus as the conquering King of kings and intentionally make disciples of him who overcome. And to keep surrendering, sacrificing, to see Jesus conquer more and more our lives.

And lives of people from every nation, tribe, people, generation, language. In all of our spheres of influence. And to do so as a diverse group of people.

Treasuring Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all. Let's pray. Our gracious God.

What a journey you've taken us on. And we are thankful. We thank you all that you have sustained us. We are thankful that you have helped us to see Christ with more clarity.

And his glory and his majesty. We thank you that through the pain, despite the pain, you have shaped us more.

[35 : 44] You have called us to endure. And Lord, I am thankful that I, amongst others, are still here and still walking with you.

We would ask as we move forward from this day, that we would align ourselves behind the conquering King of kings. And that you would save many from the inhabitants of the earth.

We are thankful for the younger generation amongst us. And we pray that you would save many of those. As you have done throughout the history of this church, generation by generation.

We ask, Lord, that you would instill in us and you would instill in parents a Christ-captured focus of life and history.

And that they would pass that on to their children. Shape us, we pray, for our future together. And this day, we pray that you would graciously win some to yourself.

[36 : 53] Amen. Amen.