

The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. The book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 6. Revelation chapter 6 I'm going to read from the beginning.

Where 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 so on. In 1887 this painting as you can see on the screen it was produced by Russian artist Victor Vasnetsov. Victor Vasnetsov and it's a painting that would have an impact and an influence upon the already discussed and debated topic of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

And as you can see from Victor Vasnetsov's painting you can see there that there's a white horse, a red horse, a black horse and a pale horse and below their feet is a scene of chaos and confusion. And as you know throughout the years many have fantasized and fanaticized about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in order to try and make it a scene of terror. But the truth is and I want us to see that this evening. I want us to see that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse they are not a scene of terror but a scene of triumph. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are not a scene of terror but a scene of triumph. And that's because the message of the book of Revelation, the whole message, the whole thrust of this entire book is very simply stop looking in words and start looking upwards. Stop looking in words and start looking upwards. Because as you know when we look in words which we are so prone to doing, especially at a communion season, when we look in words all we see is someone who is unfit, someone who is unworthy, someone who is undeserving of the least of God's mercy. But when we look upwards, when we look upwards as Victor

Vasnetsov painting exhorts us and encourages us to do, when we look upwards and heavenwards, we not only see the myriads and myriads of angels surrounding the throne of heaven, what do we see at the very top? We see a lamb in the midst of the throne slain for his people. And that's why the book of Revelation, that's why the message of the book of Revelation is stop looking in words, start looking upwards, stop looking in words, start looking upwards. Because the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they're not a scene of terror. They're a scene of triumph. And this evening, I want us to consider these four horses and their horsemen. And some of you who know me very well, you'll know that I love alliteration, but I don't have alliteration for you tonight. Only color.

Four colors of four horses. And so the first color of the first horse is the white horse. We see there the white horse. That's revealed to us here in verses one and two. Just keep the picture on the screen. Verses one and two. John says, 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. The book of Revelation. In many ways, it's a closed book for many people.

[4 : 23] But the book of Revelation is one long revelation. And it's a revelation from Jesus Christ about Jesus Christ for the church of Jesus Christ. Because at the time the church in the first century, it was being persecuted. By this point, all the apostles had been executed. They had been executed for their faith, except for the writer, the apostle John. John had been exiled to the Greek island of Patmos. And while praying on the Lord's day, John receives this revelation, this apocalypse, an apocalypse, where the Lord, you could say the Lord lifts the veil, and he pulls back the curtain, and he removes the lid as it were in order to reveal Jesus. He reveals Jesus Christ as the risen ruling and reigning king who is going to return. And you know, this revelation here, it was important to the church because the church needed to be reminded, just like we do, the church needed to be reminded and reassured that in the midst of all the opposition and all the obstacles to the gospel, they were to remain focused. They were to remain faithful. They were to remain fixated with Jesus Christ. They were ultimately to stop looking inwards and start looking upwards. They were to lift their eyes heavenward so that they live every day of their lives with an eternal perspective. And you know, as you go through the book of Revelation, that's what you see being gradually and gloriously revealed in this revelation. Because in chapters one to three, those well-known chapters where you have the seven letters of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia. But then you come to chapter four. And chapter four, they are the scene shifts, and it all shifts heavenward, where John sees a door standing open in heaven. And John says, at once I was in the spirit and behold a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne.

And you go through the narrative, you go through what John is seeing, and he says that around the throne there were 24 elders, and they're all clothed in white robes, and they all have golden crowns upon their heads. And before the throne are four living creatures. And these creatures were told, they cry day and night, they say, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty who was and is, and is to come. And then you come to chapter five, which we read earlier, the scene shifts again.

And the scene focuses upon a scroll. And the scroll is in the right hand of him who is seated on the throne. And this scroll is described as a sovereign scroll, because it contains the complete and comprehensive plan of God's eternal decrees for this entire world. Everything is in that scroll.

Nothing is missed out, nothing is left out, there's no amendments or addenda to this scroll. It's all there. It's a complete and comprehensive plan. But we're told that this scroll is sealed. It's sealed with not one, not two, not even three, but seven seals, because seven is the number of perfection.

Therefore, the only one worthy to break the seven seals and to open this comprehensive scroll is the one who is perfect, which leads to an angel asking the question, who is worthy? Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? And you read in chapter five that while John wept, the whole of heaven worshiped, because Jesus Christ is revealed, he's revealed as the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. And heaven rejoices in this revelation. They sing a new song there in verse nine, worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for your slain and by your blood you ransom people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth. And all around this scene in heaven, all around the throne, there was this picture of praise with the voice of 24 elders and the four living creatures and the thousands and thousands and myriads and myriads of angels. And they're all singing. They're all worshiping the Lamb who was slain. And they're all saying there as we read it, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. It's a wonderful revelation. And as this revelation continues to be gradually and gloriously revealed to the

[9 : 12] Lord's people, we read in this chapter, chapter six, that the first four seals and this sovereign scroll reveal the four horsemen of the apocalypse. But these four horsemen, they are not a scene of terror. They are a scene of triumph. And they're a scene of triumph because at the center of this scene is the one who is seated upon the throne. He is the focus. He is the focus of this scene.

During his commentary, Joel Beaky, he writes, life can be frightening. 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, psychological forces. But he says, when we feel paralyzed by worldly forces, we must remind ourselves that the powerful horses that are unleashed in human history, they are saddled and bridled by Jesus Christ. When we feel paralyzed by worldly forces, we must remind ourselves that the powerful horses that we see, they are all saddled and bridled by Jesus Christ. And with that, John tells us that when the Lamb of heaven opens the first seal, he heard one of the four living creatures issue that gospel imperative. Come, come, come.

That's the gospel imperative. Come. It's what Isaiah pronounced, is it not? When he said in Isaiah 55, who everyone who thirsts, come. Come to the waters. Come by wine and milk without money and without price. It's the same imperative Jesus preached. Come unto me and I will give you rest. And it's what the church proclaims down throughout the centuries. The Spirit and the bride say, come. And you know, it's this gospel imperative which ought to emphasize and explain that the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they are not a scene of terror. They are a scene of triumph. Because these four horsemen, these four horses, they have a gospel purpose. They have a gospel purpose where the gospel is going to triumph in the world because the gospel imperative is come. And we see the triumph of the gospel in the first. Where John writes in verse two, 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. Now over the years there have been many, and maybe you've read about them, all these weird and wonderful interpretations as to what the white horse represents and who the white horseman is. Some say he's the Antichrist, some say he's the Roman emperor, some says he was

Hitler or even the devil. But you know, as always, the best commentary of scripture is scripture itself. In fact, that's our confessional position. Our Westminster confession states that the infallible rule for interpreting scripture is scripture itself. And when we compare scripture with scripture, we're given the identity of the rider of this white horse later on in this revelation in Revelation chapter 19, where John writes, then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. The one sitting on it is called faithful and through. 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 and Lord of Lords.

Therefore the horseman on the white horse, he's not the Antichrist, he's not the Roman emperor, he's not Hitler, he's not the devil. No, it's Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The horseman on the white horse is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But you know, there's more because when we continue to compare scripture with scripture, that's amazing how you see the whole Bible fitting together and holding together because we saw the same imagery when we were singing in Psalm 45.

[13 : 58] As we said, Psalm 45 is a love song. It's a love song about from God the Father describing his beloved son as this king with a crown upon his head and a bow in his hand. And he's riding forth in majesty.

He's riding in power and in triumph. He's riding forth in victory. And that's what we were singing about in Psalm 45. We sang about Jesus. And how the Father said, 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. Almighty one, take up your sword and bind it on your thigh with glorious splendor. Clothe yourself and with your majesty. Ride forth and state victoriously for make-ness, truth and right.

Let your right hand display your deeds of awesome power and might. And then he says those words I love, let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of those who hate the king and all the nations of the earth into subjection bring. And you know, my friend, this apocalypse, it's a beautiful revelation of who Jesus is. It's a beautiful revelation of who our Savior really is. But it's not a revelation of what might happen in the future for the Church of Jesus Christ. It's a revelation for the here and now. It's a revelation of what is happening in the Church of Jesus Christ today. And it has been happening since its very birth. When Jesus said he was going to build his church. This has been happening because the white horse shows us and symbolizes to us that the gospel will triumph.

And the gospel will advance to the four corners of the world. And as this white horse as it gallops with the gospel throughout the world, it has gone as the Apostles saw it go. He galloped from Jerusalem out into Judea, out into Samaria. And he's continually going to the uttermost parts of the earth. And we're described here that he will ride forth victoriously. And as he rides forth victoriously, his arrows will pierce hearts. And he will bring sinners to salvation, where they come to that point that they confess Jesus Christ as Lord. And you know, when you consider this white horse galloping with the gospel, you can see him riding throughout history. You read your history books, you read about church history, and you see this white horse galloping through the preaching of the apostles and galloping through the preaching of the early church and gathering galloping through the preaching of the reformers and the Puritans and the Covenanters and the great awakenings and all the revivals. He was galloping and galloping and even there in the mission missionary movements throughout China and Africa and Latin America, this white horse has been galloping with the gospel to the four corners of our world. But you know, what's even more wonderful is that this horse passed through our villages in our island and in our nation. And he came to our home. And he came to our family. And he has been riding forth victoriously, firing arrows into hearts that have been hardened for many years and piercing them and bringing them to salvation, to the point that they were brought to their knees, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. Is that not how he brought you, my friend? That not how he brought you? Because it's certainly how he brought me. When you were far away from the Lord, wandering in the world, seeking after all the pleasures of this life, and yet this mighty one, this white horse, he rode into your life, galloping with the gospel. And he rode in as a victorious king. And when he spoke to you in the gospel, he spoke to you with grace from his lips. And when he fired his arrow from his bow, he pierced your heart. He pierced your heart with his word and he brought you to your knees when you came before this King, confessing, God be merciful to me, a sinner. God be merciful to me, a sinner. Is that not what he did in your life? Is that not what he's still doing in your life? And you know, the wonderful, glorious thing about this revelation is that there are still people to come.

[19 : 08] There are still more who must submit and surrender their life to King Jesus, which is why he will continue to gallop with the gospel. And nothing will hamper him. Nothing will hinder him from the advancement of his kingdom in this world, because Jesus says he is building his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So my friend hears the message, stop looking inwards, and start looking upwards. Keep your eye upon him who is seated upon the throne. Stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards. And you know, it's when we look upwards, we see that there's another one following the white horse. We see the red horse. He's following closely behind. And we read about him in verse three. 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 men would slay one another. And he was given a great sword. As we said earlier, our confessional position is that scripture interprets scripture. And remarkably, there's another red horse mentioned elsewhere in scripture. It's mentioned in the book of the prophet Zechariah. And like this book

Revelation, the book of Zechariah, it was written as a word of encouragement. It was written as a word of exhortation to encourage the Lord's people, especially during a time where there was obstacles, there was opposition to them. At the time in the Old Testament, they were trying to rebuild the temple and restore the city of Jerusalem. And like the apostle John Zechariah receives a revelation where Zechariah says, I saw in the night a man riding on a red horse.

I saw a man riding on a red horse. And of course, the color of the red horse symbolizes bloodshed. The red horse symbolizes bloodshed. Not the bloodshed of Christ, not the bloodshed of war, but the bloodshed of persecution, which actually makes sense of this image and illustration of the red horse, where it says it's taking peace from the earth and carrying a great sword, because throughout history, the red horse of persecution and bloodshed was always followed by the white horse of the gospel. Because wherever the gospel is preached and proclaimed, persecution follows. Wherever the gospel is preached and proclaimed, persecution follows.

It's not why the early church father, Tertullian, he said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. And you know, for the church in the first century would have been such an encouragement for them to read this and to know that their suffering for the sake of the gospel was not in vain. But the red horse of persecution would not only have been an encouragement to those in the first century, it's also an encouragement to the church in the 21st century. I got a book recently, I love getting new books. I'm sure you all love getting new books too, but I was given this book for free, because we had the man from Asia link with us. Maybe you had him in your congregation. And the book was called The Grand Tour, 90 Days of Prayer Across Asia. If you don't have the book, get the book. It's really fascinating, because it gives a description of different countries throughout Asia at present. And it talks about them, it gives them gives you a flavor of what they're like and what it's like to be a Christian in that country. And about the country of Iran, it says, despite its fierce opposition to the gospel,

Iran is currently home to the fastest growing church in the world. Despite its fierce opposition to the gospel, Iran is currently home to the fastest growing church in the world. The red horse of persecution is following the white horse of victory. The red horse is following the white horse. And so the Christians greatest assurance is that despite the bloodshed, despite the persecution, despite the opposition, despite the obstacles to the gospel, Christ's kingdom will triumph. And the gospel will continue to advance. And you know, even as a Christian, even as a Christian, you might not experience bloodshed. We don't experience bloodshed here, thankfully. But we experience opposition. We experience obstacles to the gospel. And this vision, this revelation of the red horse following the white horse, it should remind us that Christ's kingdom will triumph. The gospel will continue to advance, even though we are ridiculed for our faith, even though we are opposed for our faith in the workplace, or in our homes, or in our family. Because you know, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they're not a scene of terror. They are there for us as a scene of triumph. So stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards, which brings us hardly to the black horse. March five, when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, come. And

[24 : 57] 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 the wine. When the third seal on the scroll is opened, the gospel imperative immediately appears. Come. And it's quickly followed by the black horse. And the black horse symbolizes poverty. Because the scales which are in the hand of the black horse are not scales of judgment, but scales of poverty. And we're familiar with scales of poverty from many other countries in the world where there is famine, and there is drought, as well as greed and there's corruption. We're familiar with all these scenes and the idea of poverty. But you know, this poverty that's spoken of here, it's much closer to home, because it's poverty caused by inflation. It's poverty caused by inflation because we read there in verse six, a quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius. Now a quart was about 16 ounces. So 16 ounces of wheat for a denarius. A denarius was a day's wage, or three quarts of wheat, or three quarts of barley, which is 48 ounces for a denarius, a day's wage. And the emphasis is this food wouldn't get you very far. Price of wheat and barley is four times or five times higher than what it would usually be. And so it's not a picture of starvation. It's not a picture of judgment. It's a picture of inflation, where people can barely make enough money to buy food. And you know, it's something, this isn't something that's going to happen in the future.

This is something we're seeing now. Our economy, as you know, it's in crisis. Cost of living is crazy. The price of food is astronomical. And food banks are now the norm. I'm on the Barbus Food Bank Committee, we get more requests each and every week. Inflation keeps on rising. And yet all of it, and you know, this is the beautiful thing. All of it is in the powerful hand of the one who is seated upon the throne. He's in control. He has the scroll in his hand. And you know, what it ought to remind us is that the Lord will use every means possible to bring us to our knees and to turn sinners to himself, even an economic crisis leading to poverty. The Lord is speaking to us through everything, every providence, even poverty. Because through it all, the white horses leading the way, he is galloping with the gospel and Christ's kingdom will triumph. My friend, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they're not a scene of terror, they're a scene of triumph. So stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards. Keep your eyes upon Jesus. Keep your eyes upon him, which brings us to the fourth and final seal. This fourth seal, we were told there, and the fourth horse, we're told there in verse seven, 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 hell followed him. And they were given authority over a quarter of the earth to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. You know, when the fourth seal of this scroll was opened, and the gospel imperative was issued, John sees a pale horse. Literally, it was a pale green color, a sickly color, the color of death, the color of decay. But we're not only given the color of the horse, we're also given the name of its rider. We're told that his name was death, and hell followed him. His name was death, and hell followed 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, which means that as you know, death doesn't discriminate. Death doesn't differentiate. Death comes to all of us, either by war, famine, illness, or accident. And regardless of how it comes to us, death will continue to gallop across our entire world. And it will continue to gallop, as we know until Jesus Christ, the risen, ruling, and reigning king, finally returns.

But you know, as we see this scene, we look at it, and we see that, well, we may escape the red horse of persecution. We may escape the black horse of poverty. But none of us, unless Jesus comes, none of us can escape the pale horse of death. None of us can evade the separation and sorrow that death brings. But here Jesus is at work. And that's what we need to be seeing.

Because is it not in those moments when we are confronted with the reality and the finality of death that Jesus speaks to us with grace, and the gospel arrows come in, and they pierce our heart. Do you know how often you see families when they're broken, as death breaks in, that the heart softens, and the gospel is presented, and Jesus is there speaking. And he doesn't speak harshly.

[31 : 20] He speaks graciously. He speaks gently. He speaks full of grace. And that's why we always need to remember Jesus is on the white horse. Jesus is out in front. Jesus is leading all these horsemen, and he's using all these horsemen for his own glory. He's using the red horse of persecution.

He's using the black horse of poverty. He's using the pale horse of death, and he's using them all for his own glory. Because they are the means. They are the means by which the gospel will gallop into our homes and into our families. They are the means by which Christ's kingdom will extend, and Christ will ultimately triumph. They are the means by which the arrows of the king will come in and pierce Harden's hearts and bring sinners to submit and surrender their lives to Jesus Christ.

They are the means in which Jesus uses in our lives to bring us to himself. I find the full horsemen of the apocalypse, they're not a scene of terror. They're a scene of triumph. Absolute triumph. Therefore, what's the message? Stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards. Stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards. Because when we look inwards, as we said, all we see is an unfit sinner, an unworthy sinner, an undeserving sinner. Is that know why McShane said, you remember what Robert Murray McShane died at the age of 29? That's what he said, for one look at self, take 10 looks at Christ. For one look at self, take 10 looks at Christ. And that's why as you gather together over this communion season, remember one thing, the message of the book of Revelation is stop looking inwards. Because ultimately, it's not about you. It's about what Jesus has done for you. So stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards. Look upwards to the lamb who is in the midst of the throne. That's where he is tonight, in the midst of the throne, the lamb who was slain for us, the lamb who loved us and gave himself for us, the lamb who laid down his life for us. My friends, stop looking inwards. Far too many people look inwards. And that's what keeps him from the

Lord's table. But the call of the church has stopped looking inwards. Start looking upwards and come to the Lord's table and rejoice in the triumph of this King. Because he's a great King. He's a great King. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.