

Who will Stand?

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. As Andrew said, we're covering two chapters today. There's a lot, and there are so many intricate details with a lot of hidden meanings.
- So we won't have time to cover every single verse, but we'll cover enough to get the big idea. What is our hope in this life?
- On Friday, as I was preparing for this sermon, I looked at the news, several news channels, and these things came up. War, murder, and deceit, scams everywhere, inflation, and natural disasters.
- Oh, sorry. And famine, right? Hunger in Haiti. Illnesses. And natural disasters. And lastly, Christian persecution.
- The world can be pretty bleak, can't it? What is our hope? Well, in the past two weeks, we saw that God is still sitting on His throne in heaven, and that Jesus has won and is now ruling.
- [1 : 3 5] But maybe it's just me. Sometimes it doesn't feel like it's true. So even if we still believe that God is still sitting on His throne, we still know here, it's still hard to persevere in our faith, isn't it?
- Especially, especially when we are in the middle of a tribulation ourselves. Like when we have economic difficulties or illnesses, or even persecution and rejection.
- So how can we help ourselves persevere in our faith in the midst of a tribulation? Well, the answer is, we often can't help ourselves persevere in our faith.
- But the good news is that God can. Our hope is knowing that we belong to Jesus. We have been bought, and He will keep us.
- And we will see that as we dig deep into the text. So last week, we saw how Jesus was the only one worthy to receive the scroll containing God's plan for the world.
- [2 : 5 4] The scroll has seven seals. And here in chapter 6, the first six seals are opened one by one to reveal six parts of God's plan.
- So in verse 1 to 8, the first four seals are opened to reveal that God has in His plan all the bad things that are currently happening in this world.
- The first four seals are opened, and four horsemen, the four horsemen of Apocalypse, are summoned. So the first one is a rider of a white horse, who is bent on conquest and brings war.
- The second one, a red horse, a fiery red one, who makes people kill each other. And the third one, a black horse, who causes economic imbalance and rising food prices.
- And lastly, a pale horse, who brings death by sword, famine, plague and wild beasts.
- [4 : 0 8] Now these things that the horsemen bring are familiar to us, aren't they? These are the things that we hear about regularly these days on the news. Things that both Christians and non-Christians have to endure.

So these things did not only happen during John's time, during the writing of the book, but have been repeated over and over and over again throughout history. So who are these horsemen who bring these calamities?

They might just be personifications of calamities. Like when we say, my bed is inviting me. Personification. Or they might be spiritual agents who bring calamities.

So our Old Testament passage from Zechariah talks about four chariots with the same colored horses. And they are called four spirits of heaven.

So these might be God's agents who bring calamities to this world. But whether they are real spiritual beings or just personifications of calamities, the point is the same.

[5 : 22] It's God who allows these calamities to happen. And he has written them in his scroll of plans. In fact, the text highlights that.

The four horsemen have to be summoned. Every single time they come, they come because they are summoned. Come. And it says they were given authorities by God.

The first horseman was given a crown. The second was given a sword. The third was given a mandate from the voice among the four living creatures.

That's God's voice. And the fourth was given power. In other words, these spiritual beings don't have any authority to wreak havoc in this world except by God's permission.

And we read elsewhere in Romans 1, for example, that as a part of God's judgment, God allows people to be caught up in their sin as they kill each other or conquer, cause famine.

[6 : 43] And Christians are caught up in all that. So God hasn't left his throne. And all the bad things happening are not because he has lost control.

He allows them. He has them in his plan. And the things that we see here today on the news have been allowed by God even 2,000 years ago.

So what's the implication? Well, because God is still in control, then we can trust him. But that's easier said than done, isn't it?

A couple of times when I felt that my personal faith was weakened was when I didn't have a job, was struggling financially, struggling to land a job, and was worried about providing for the family.

And I was wondering what God was doing all the time I was praying day in and day out. Did I know that God was in control? Yes. Did I believe that God was sitting on his throne?

[7 : 53] Yes. Was it still hard? Definitely. Did I trust him at that moment? Probably not as much. I could not help myself to trust God in the middle of a tribulation.

And perhaps you find the same feeling. Now, I wasn't even starving. My life wasn't in danger. My religious freedom wasn't at risk.

Imagine how hard it is for those people whose lives are in danger because of their faith. Like John's original audience. And that's the fifth seal in verse 9 to 11.

When the fifth seal is opened, it's revealed that even Christian persecution is according to God's plan. Here, Christian martyrs are crying out for justice in verse 10.

How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? And God answers this cry by telling them to wait in verse 11.

[9 : 13] Then each of them was given a white robe, which is a sign of victory, but also a sign of purity that their sins have been washed by Jesus. 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.

In other words, in response to their cry, God assures them of their victory and salvation in Jesus. And then he asks them to wait a little longer.

What's a little longer? It's been 2,000 years. Because according to God's plan, more Christians will be killed for their faith.

And that might include them, the readers. Does that show God's sovereignty over their suffering and martyrdom?

Certainly. But is that still hard to hear? Most definitely. Imagine being one of those Christians in the first two centuries of the church.

[10 : 27] For example, during the reign of Emperor Nero. Nero was known for his great gardens, which he would light up at night with burning torches.

Now, according to some accounts, Nero would have Christians. It's quite dark, but you can see on the right-hand side there are Christians on stakes, tied to stakes and covered in tar or pitch.

And then he would set them alight. The burning bodies would then be used to light up the gardens to be watched by Nero's guests.

And that's only one example. Christians were crucified. They were thrown into a stadium to be eaten alive by wild animals while being watched.

Christians were left outside in the cold without clothes to freeze to death. Now, imagine being Christians during that time.

[11 : 34] Crying out to God in prayers, Help us, God! How long is it going to be? And then hearing God's answer through this book that they are told to wait because more persecution has been planned.

It's not easy to keep their trust and faith strong in that circumstance. They can't do it themselves.

But God doesn't leave them alone. What does God do? Well, first he answers that cry with a promise, promise of judgment in verse 12 to 17.

When the sixth seal is opened, God reveals that part of his plan is to punish the wicked. Now, the picture of what happens in these verses is so scary because it reflects of what happens at the last judgment.

The sun turns black. The moon turns red. The stars fall. The sky is rolled up like a scroll. And mountains and islands are removed.

[12 : 54] This is a total undoing of creation. And this is reserved for those who don't follow Jesus or even fight Jesus and his followers.

This is a judgment so scary that those who suffer it will beg to die. In verse 16, They cry to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us!

The irony is that even when the judgment is so scary, they'd rather die than ask for mercy from God. They're hiding.

Hide us from God. Now, this is what God has in his plan. Justice. The judgment of those who persecute his people.

Vindication. And for Christians who were and are, in some places in this world, being persecuted because of their faith, knowing that justice will eventually be served, is good news.

[14 : 02] It's like watching a movie and seeing the hero killed and knowing that the villain walks away free and then suddenly flip, blank screens.

We might think, hang on, that can't be the end, right? We want to know that the villain will be defeated. Surely the hero doesn't die.

Here, too, having a promise of justice, judgment for the wicked, is good news. But, that can't be the only thing that helps.

Because even knowing that their persecutors will be punished in the distant future might not help them persevere in their faith in the present as they wait.

And indeed, there is a second thing that God does for his people. And this is our only hope in life and death.

[15 : 09] Right before the seventh seal is opened in chapter 8, we are given a whole chapter, chapter 7, an interlude. And in this interlude, we are promised that ultimately, it's not us who keep our faith.

Yes, our faith is weak. It's God himself who will keep us as his treasured possession. Chapter 7, verse 1 to 4.

After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.

Then I saw another angel coming up from the east having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea.

Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the forehead of the servants of our God.

[16 : 21] Then I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. So what's going on here?

Four angels hold back the four winds. What are these four winds? Well, they might be interpreted as winds of calamities like in Daniel 7.

There's the four winds of heaven. turning up the great sea and these are the four great beasts who represent threats to God's people and they're given the power to attack and rule and kill.

Or these four winds might actually refer to the four horsemen in the previous chapter because in our Old Testament text in Zechariah 6 the four chariots are called four spirits in Hebrew but in the Greek translation which John would likely to use they are called winds of heaven.

But either way I think the idea is the same. These winds represent threats attacks or potential calamities and tribulations. and we see here that the winds are held back so they don't harm anything until 144,000 of God's servants are sealed on their foreheads.

[17 : 52] who are these 144,000? Well these are God's people from both the Old Testament and the New. Those who are faithful Christians.

144,000 is a symbolic number just like a lot of things in the book of Revelation. It's 12,000 times 12. 12 is a number of completion 12 tribes of Israel 12 disciples of Jesus and so it represents a complete many thousand number of people standing on the shoulders of the 12 tribes of the Old Testament people of God.

How do we know that? How do we know that this is not literal? Well because after hearing the number of the people 144,000 John saw an uncountable number of people in verse 9 after this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count not 144,000 from every nation tribe people and language not just the 12 tribes of Israel standing before the throne and before the Lamb they were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands so they're not just 144,000 literally they're uncountable and they're not just Jews but from every nation tribe people and languages these are followers of Jesus us included and while in the previous chapter the wicked scream who can stand the wrath of God and of the Lamb here the Christians are pictured standing before God and the Lamb so what's the point here what's the point the point is that before these calamities or threats or attacks or tribulations can harm them they are sealed by God meaning they are His we are

God's we belong to God and He's the one who keeps us because we are His treasured possession and although we have to face and endure and sometimes be hurt by tribulation be physically hurt by tribulation or even persecution we will not be spiritually harmed because we are sealed we will endure our faith will be intact God will keep our faith because we have been bought by the precious blood of the Lamb God has died for us that's a great cost God will not lose His treasured possession salvation it's ultimately not us or the strength of our faith or our own ability to endure that keep us faithful during tribulations it's God who owns us

He's gonna keep us that's such a great promise isn't it and so this is our first application through all these hardships in this world as we are caught up in the hardships of the world we can't trust ourselves to keep our faith strong all the time but our hope is that we belong to Jesus and He's the one who's gonna keep us we are sealed we trust not ourselves but Him one of my favorite songs is He Will Hold Me Fast I don't know if you know the song but it says when I fear my faith will fail Christ will hold me fast when the tempter would prevail He will hold me fast

[22 : 19] I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path for my love is often called He must hold me fast those He saves are His delight Christ will hold me precious in His holy sight He will hold me fast He'll not let my soul be lost His promises shall last bought by Him at such a cost He will hold me fast that's our only hope that we belong to God in Jesus we've been bought by His precious blood and He will hold on to us through life's tribulations and through persecutions we're facing illnesses or we're facing economic difficulties and we find ourselves unable to have a strong faith in God we still keep our faith in

God because we know that it's not our faith that saves us it's Him the object of our faith He is the sovereign one we are not He is in control even over the tribulations and sufferings we are not He is strong and we are not and so He's the only one who must hold on to us and so second application but flowing out of it when we are in the middle of a tribulation it's good to remind ourselves of that truth that God will keep us how do we remind ourselves of that truth a few days ago when I was putting Kai to bed he was talking about how he was scared he's three now so he's scared of many things and his fear was quite apparent in his face he didn't want to go to bed because he was scared so

I remembered that in the previous weeks we had been talking about God and Jesus and prayer and so I started a series of questions to refresh his memory Kai it's okay to be scared but what can you do when you're scared I thought about it and he said I can pray and who's going to listen to you when you pray Jesus because he's here even though I can't see him and what's he going to do when you're scared he said he can protect me he's super strong stronger than Batman and he can protect me like this and then he hugged me and then he went to bed calmly we too need to refresh our memory from time to time we too need to remind ourselves of the truth that in tribulations we belong to

Jesus and he will protect us because we are his treasured possession how do we do that perhaps by singing songs like he will hold me fast or by asking ourselves questions like what I did with Kai the Heidelberg Catechism for example which is a set of doctrinal questions and answers starts like this question one what is your only comfort in life and in death answer that I am not my own but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful savior Jesus Christ that's easy to remember and that's easy to recite when we are in tribulation so perhaps we can ask ourselves the same question over and over and over again when we are facing hardship as the book of revelation tells us our only hope in life and in death is that we belong to

Jesus we are sealed by his name so let's pray we thank you God for giving us Jesus and by his blood we are sealed and we belong to you so help us to persevere keep our faith as we go through the tribulations of the world in the name of Jesus we pray