

Christmas in Revelation: Sovereign Over the Tribulation

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Preacher: Edward Kang

[0 : 00] All right, it's good to worship with you guys all this fine Advent season. If you have your Bibles, let's open them up to Revelation chapter 6.

We are continuing on in the series. We're doing a mini-series right now as we preach through the book of Revelation. But right now for the Advent season, for the month of December, we're doing this mini-series called *Between the Advents*.

And I think although our passage may not be, quote-unquote, a very Christmassy passage, we think that it's going to be very relevant for us to turn our eyes to God and wait for him for the second Advent of Christ.

If you don't have a Bible, please, you could just raise your hand and we would be happy to gift one to you. That's our Christmas gift to you, so you could keep it and use it for this time and read it for yourself as well.

Let's pray for the reading and preaching of God's word before we read Revelation chapter 6. Oh, Holy Father, we come before you knowing that we are empty-handed, we are poor, we are naked, we are exposed, but it's only your grace that covers us so that we can stand on that final day.

[1 : 18] God, I pray that you would speak through your word, address us through your word, so that we would have a bigger vision of you and your glory. God, that we would be transformed to see all that you are, that you are completely, wholly sovereign over our entire lives, and that we would trust you.

We would trust you with all of it, God. So I pray you would show us the things that we don't see, to the things that we don't see, show us.

To the things that we don't know, teach us. To the things that we have yet to believe, make us, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Let's stand, if you are able, for the reading of God's word. I'm going to read the whole chapter together. 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. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come.

[2 : 47] And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come. And 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 Daenerys, and three quarts of barley for a Daenerys, and do not harm the oil and the wine.

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 Hades followed him.

And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

They cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

[4 : 10] Then they were each given a white robe and told to 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.

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.

The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the 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 their wrath has come, and who can stand?

This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. In his early 20s, famous author John Green, before he went on to write the young adult novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, I'm sure many of you guys have heard of it, which would go on to sell over 20 million copies, have multiple movie adaptations, he was preparing for himself to devote his life to ministry.

Did you guys know that? I didn't know that. He was prepping for seminaries, prepping to go into full-time ministry, so he worked as a student chaplain in a children's hospital.

[6 : 00] And in one of the hardest nights of his life, on a night shift, he suddenly had a three-year-old boy who was shuttled into the emergency room with severe third-degree burns.

He recounts the smell, the sights, the screams, the sobbing. He later recalls that the doctor who was tasked with help saving that boy's life, he remembered meeting her in the employee break room, and she was throwing up into the trash, saying, that boy is gonna die, and I know his last words.

John would never forget that night. He would never forget how absent God felt to him that night. So he not only left the track to ministry, but he abandoned his faith altogether.

But that curiosity of the boy never left him. It bothered him, nagged after him, day after day after day. He always thought of him. And so one day, 20 years later, he actually Googled him and see what he could find.

And he actually found that this boy, he was alive. And his name is Nick. And so on a podcast that I listened to, he ends up on a video chat with this same three-year-old boy just 20 years later.

[7 : 27] He finds out that he's an MBA student. He just finished his undergrad degree. He's doing a live, he's alive and well, as much as someone could be with severe third-degree burns as that young of an age.

But the amazing thing is that he found out that Nick was a faithful Christian. Despite being in chronic pain from the accident, Nick explains to John the awesome truth of Romans 8, 28, how God used this absolutely horrific incident to drive him and his nominally Christian family finally to devote their entire lives to Christ.

I think this story is such a powerful example of the importance of interpreting the suffering that we have in our lives through the lens of Scripture. Because the reality is, suffering will either drive us away or to God.

It's very polarizing. It's hard to stay neutral about God when you're experiencing suffering. Both John and Nick saw and experienced the exact same incident of tragedy, but in the end, they came to very different conclusions.

Nick was able to see that God was completely sovereign over his life, which didn't take away the experience of his chronic pain altogether, of course, but assured him that his pain is neither indiscriminate or just by chance.

[8 : 52] Instead, it's all, he had hope, he had faith that it was all part of a greater plan for good. And we need to learn to do the same, brothers and sisters, because Scripture teaches us, it makes us very clear that suffering is part and parcel of the Christian life as we identify with Christ, the slain lamb.

without remembering the one who is in control over it all, then suffering and pain, that's gonna swallow us up. Our text in Revelation 6, however, shows us the God who was, the God who is, and the God who is to come is sovereign.

So that's the main point of my sermon today. We can, we must endure the suffering of the tribulation because God is sovereign over it all. We'll see how God is sovereign over the current woes of the world in the first to the fourth seals, how he's sovereign in giving rest to the resolute in

the fifth seal, and he's sovereign over the future judgment of the wicked, the future wrath of the wicked.

That's the sixth seal. As we remember last week, Sean powerfully preached on how the slain lamb of Jesus Christ, he alone is worthy of opening up these seals.

So he begins to do what only he has the authority to do. Each time the risen lamb opens up one of these first four seals, there's a repeating pattern. First, one of the four living creatures cries out with a booming thunderous voice, come.

[10:31] And immediately, a horse with a color that's related to its tribulation, like blood, red, and war, and its rider, so the horse and its rider, they come out and afflict the earth.

So by opening these first four seals, Jesus unleashes onto the world the four horsemen of the apocalypse, who are God's spiritual instruments to unleash onto the earth conquest, war, famine, and death in that particular order.

And in that order, you can see just the natural clear progression, right? You can see that conquest leads to war, war, and conquest, they can lead to famine, and then all these ultimately culminate in death.

And while you might be excited or scared to hear all about the four horsemen of the apocalypse, as if this is something new in scripture, this is some kind of new doctrine to comfort you and maybe to burst your bubble a little bit, this is not anything new in scripture.

Because first, any Hebrew familiar with their Old Testament would recognize the influence of the four horsemen from Zechariah 1 and 6. And on top of that, more clearly, Jesus, when he was asked about the end times, signs of the end times, he remarkably spoke very similarly about war, famine, and death as things to expect.

[11:54] That's Matthew 24, and I encourage you to read that on your own because it's remarkable how close that chapter is, that discourse is with Revelation 6. Therefore, these four horsemen are just a recapitulation of Jesus' end time predictions.

And it's helpful to see this connection to Matthew 24 as well because both Jesus and John, they give us clues that we're in the end times already. So how do we know that?

So in Matthew 24, 14, Jesus clues us in that these signs of famine, of death, of war, of persecution, they come alongside with the evangelization of the entire world.

That's the fulfillment of the Great Commission, right? And we know that that's happening today. The church, it's on its mission and we're evangelizing the entire world. So that means we're in the end times now.

And as Sean explained last week too, the opening of these first six seals in our passage, they've been inaugurated by the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ.

[12:59] So that means that these four horsemen, they're roaming the four corners of the earth today. And we've seen evidence of their work for centuries upon centuries. And as we see in the fifth seal and as we observe in our world today, the church of Christ is not immune to the tribulation of these four.

Later in the chapter, we find a comparison, a juxtaposition between two groups of people in the fifth seal and in the sixth seal. In the fifth seal, we encounter dead Christian martyrs.

But in the sixth seal, we witness the living earth dwellers. The Christian is dead, the wicked alive. Jesus himself predicts this too in Matthew 24 and 9.

They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you, meaning his disciples, put you to death. And you will be hated by all the nations for my name's sake. While the general world is plagued and judged because the world is evil by these four, God is using them.

Let us not forget the church is also not exempt from the suffering of the tribulation for better purposes. And we're gonna talk about that. A week before Christmas, I'm sure you didn't expect to hear a sermon like this, but I assure you that this isn't just gonna be doom and gloom, so let's turn to our text to find out.

[14:24] So in verses 1 to 2, a white horse with its rider equipped with a bow and crown is given temporary authority to conquer the world through spiritual deception and physical persecution.

Now there are some who identify the rider, the identity of this rider to be Christ, mostly because he's riding on a white horse. And this is a strong allusion to Revelation 19.

And Revelation 19, it's very clear, for this is Jesus who is called faithful and true. The word of God equipped with a sharp sword from his mouth comes out from heaven and conquers his enemies on

what?

On a white horse. While that allusion to the white horse is strong, the rider in our text today I believe isn't Christ, but is a satanic rider used by God for his purposes.

There are a lot of different clues in our text, but I think the most convincing reason is that these four horsemen are clearly grouped together. There are clear literary parallels that we've already talked about between all four that are consistent, but it's also the grouping of the four living creatures that are calling the grouping of the four horsemen.

[15 : 43] And how demeaning it would be to group Christ with three other satanic horsemen. So this sheds light, I think, just on how crafty Satan is by the very fact that Christians can be confused by who this person is.

Back to Matthew 24 in Jesus' discourse, he warns us, see that nobody leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying, I am the Christ, and they will lead many astray.

I don't think it's a coincidence that one of these horses is white for that exact reason. Therefore, I think this horseman is representative of messianic pretenders.

There have been many heroes, world leaders engaged in conquest, promised utopia, at least a glorious kingdom, like Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Genghis Khan, Cyrus the Great, the list goes on and on.

But these so-called great conquerors, they're just mere pawns. They're mere pawns. They're mere pawns in the hands of our sovereign Lord. So we need to hear the words of the Lord and see that nobody leads us astray.

[16 : 53] No matter how much power or influence or wealth they may have, there's only one sovereign Lord. That also means that we need not to be anxious about the current state of our worlds, and we don't have to take things into our own control.

If rumors of wars and pandemics of nuclear weapons or terrorist attacks are swirling all around us, we need not to be anxious, brothers and sisters, because nothing falls out of the scope of our sovereign Lord.

Next is a second seal with the blood red horse and its rider. Authority was given to him to take away peace from the earth, given his release onto the world and his theft of peace since Jesus' ascension.

It's no wonder that there have been just war after war, upheaval after upheaval, genocide after genocide throughout history. Keeping peace is the most important task for the United Nations. And they reported just one year ago that globally we're facing the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945, which is World War II. and at least a quarter of the entire global population, that's two billion people, live in conflict-afflicted areas like Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, or Myanmar.

[18 : 19] And global military expenditures, it rose up to two trillion dollars in 2020. You see, war, conflict, death, these come with the times.

And we need not to be surprised by the world around us. Even with the wars in Ukraine and in Palestine today, that's evidence of this horseman galloping around.

We've seen him for centuries now. But all the while, brothers and sisters, I encourage you, don't forget the words of Paul in Ephesians 6, 12.

He says this, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We are bombarded daily with news of conflict and war. And it's easy to lose sight of who our true enemy is. Our text today makes it clear that we fight each other because, because spiritual forces have stolen the peace.

[19 : 23] Our text says its rider was permitted to take peace so that, so that people should slay one another. So we mustn't forget our primary fight as Christians.

It's not against our fellow man, even along ideological or partisan lines, but against a greater evil. And I ask you, if you are in conflict in your life with someone else today, there's no peace between you two.

Who is your true enemy? Next, from the summons of the third living creature comes the rider on the black horse. He comes with a pair of scales in his hand.

And I used to think that this was the prototypical scale of justice held high by Lady Justice. You guys are all familiar. But, actually, this scale is a symbol of scarcity and famine because when you're in famine, a scale is used to carefully measure out the ration portions of food.

So that's exactly what the rider brings. It's a famine so severe it nearly breaks the economic system. And I'm definitely no expert in macroeconomics, but I know enough that the less supply that you have, the price of stuff just drives up, right?

[20 : 40] Because of the famine, a voice in the midst of the four living creature cries out a quart of wheat for a Daenerys and three quarts of barley for a Daenerys. Now, to make that a little bit more digestible, a Daenerys was around the price of one day's wage for a common laborer.

And a quart of wheat is enough food to sustain one man for one day. So if you do the math, talk about living hand to mouth.

If you had a family, then you likely had to turn to the cheaper stuff, the barley, which would then feed a couple mouths for one day, but still talk about living paycheck to paycheck.

Historians say that this was about 10 to 12 times the cost of normal food. That's like our dozen eggs costing 50 bucks. 50 bucks.

If you know anything about me, if you know anything about, you know, our brother Josh Henderson over there, if you know how frugal we are, we would never touch an egg again.

[21 : 44] Yet still a voice from the midst of the four living creatures, who is Jesus? He's calling out, do not harm the oil and the wine.

This honestly is a tough phrase to decipher, but I think the best interpretation is that agriculturally, the grapevine and the olive tree, they're more resistant to famine than barley or wheat.

But I think the main point, the main idea is that Jesus is establishing a limitation on this famine. This horseman could do no more than the exact limitations that Jesus placed on him.

Just as God says to the seas in Job 38, thus far you shall come and no further and here shall your proud ways be stayed. The apostle John, he tends to be cyclical in his writing and the book of Revelation is a really good example of that.

First, we have the seven seals that steadily ramp up in the intensity and severity until the sixth seal which is the apex. It's the culmination. It's the judgment day.

[22 : 53] But later on, this same pattern is just recapitulated. It's repeated with the seven bulls and then the seven, or the seven trumpets and then the seven bulls. So, I think this pattern is much like a recurring intensifying theme, a musical theme in a movie soundtrack.

Each time it's played, you recognize it. But as you progress on in the movie, it becomes more and more intense. Maybe it speeds up a little. Maybe more instruments are being added until it reaches its final climax.

As we go on in Revelation, tune your ear just to hear how this theme is repeated but intensified because, frankly, this is just the first go-around. This is the tamest. There are limitations placed. Finally, we get to the fourth seal where a personified death, inseparable from his grim companion, Hades, mounts a pale green horse as a fitting color for death, I think, as the CSB translation rightly has it.

And in the OT, in the Old Testament, Hades would be most closely aligned with Sheol, the idea of Sheol, the Hebrew understanding of the realm of the dead.

[24 : 08] The Lord then bestows upon these two the horrifying power to afflict the whole earth with sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts, summarizing, I think, all these first four seals.

So these first four horsemen, they're meant to be taken together as a holistic unit, representing the suffering of the entire world of the times.

just as the four living creatures, as we heard about in Revelation 4 and 5, they symbolize the praise of all redeemed creation. But while these four horsemen are given authority over the entire earth, their power, again, is constrained to put to death only one-fourth.

This isn't meant to be an exact number, it's not meant to be a precise, particular group of people, but this is just a qualitative measure of understanding how much power has been given to them.

If there are, I don't know, 60 of us here today, that's 15 people. That's not little power. That's, I'd consider that a decimation.

[25 : 23] This, frankly, is a frightening passage. It's a hard passage, especially keeping in mind that many faithful Christians would be the target of these afflictions.

Just imagine what the seven churches in Asia Minor would have felt reading this letter. Because remember, Revelation, it's a letter, it's not an end-time encyclopedia.

But, I think there's a big but here, the line of hope is that while we see evidence of these four horsemen galloping around, terrorizing the earth, the text makes it clear that these belong to God.

God is the one who's called them to action. God is the one who's put chains around the necks of death and Hades, limiting how far they can go. I want you to look down with me, because I want you to see all these divine passives in the scriptures for yourselves.

A divine passive is a common literary feature where a verb is written in the passive form with the implied doer of said action as God. So see, a crown was given to him in verse 2.

[26 : 33] A rider was permitted to take peace, and he was given a sword in verse 4, and they were given authority over a fourth of the earth in verse 8. Even for the third seal, you hear not the voice of just a living creature, but this is the voice of Jesus who stands in the midst of the four living creatures, calling out the limitations of that famine.

And we know, we know that scripture is absolutely clear. God cannot commit any evil. He is never responsible for any evil. He tempts no one, and he is light without any darkness.

But John makes it clear that this evil still is under his sovereignty and control. But why? Why would God authorize such suffering upon the world, and especially upon his children whom he loves?

Why do bad things happen to good people? These are hard questions, but we can find our answers in scripture. Well, first, I think, I think it's really important to establish this.

The Bible does affirm that bad things happen to good people. people. And thank God it does. That sounds odd and sounds hard, but hear me out.

[27 : 57] You're all familiar with the story of Job, right? Rich and righteous Job, he has everything that he wants, but because Satan was permitted, right, hear that sound familiar, he was permitted to afflict Job and take away everything from him in a short span of time.

Job is mourning, he's lamenting, and pretty much the rest of the book is Job going back and forth with his three friends. And while they're arguing about Job's circumstances, they're actually agreeing upon base presuppositions that a just God should treat people with what they deserve. So therefore, his friends, they come to this conclusion that Job must have done absolutely something horrifically wrong to be able to deserve this. Whereas Job, his response, he maintains his innocence and demands a fair trial before a judge who should be fair.

But then, at the end of the book, a fourth friend, Elihu, he kind of pops out really out of nowhere, but he gives this profound answer that I think is so important for us to understand, that he says that God can bring hard things, not as a direct result of someone's actions, but to ultimately save them from sin.

This conclusion is extremely important to understand, because if we don't, then we end up with a theological system no different than karma or even the prosperity gospel.

[29 : 29] Every time we suffer, it's because we would have deserved it. Every time we aren't healthy or wealthy, it's because we didn't name it or claim it or we didn't give enough money to our church. How painful is that truth instead, when you suffer loss, death, tragedy, it's because the only right theological conclusion is that you deserved it.

The book of Job flips all of that on its head. Good things can happen to good people, or bad things can happen to good people for good reasons.

And that's good news, because God can and does wield the tool of suffering for good. In the hands of our good God, suffering is the blaring microphone for those who are slumbering in contented worldliness, for them to wake up.

Suffering is the glassy mirror that reflects our true spiritual makeup, warts and all, leading us to repentance. Suffering is the surgeon's scalpel, cutting out heart diseases of idolatry and sin.

Suffering is the great pride crusher, the loving rod of discipline, steering us back onto the right path of humility and righteousness. Suffering is God's gymnasium, his classroom, where we learn probably more about God in that setting than in any other in our lives.

[30 : 55] And there's one last good that comes with suffering. We can experience just a taste, just a taste of how much Jesus, our Lord and Savior, suffered for our sin on the cross.

This Advent season, we remember that the infinite, the infinite God, he became an infant for our sake. He became the one not to be served.

He didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And for as much as we suffer, we will never know how much it cost for Jesus to bear all our sin, bear all the wrath of the Father on him.

And while terrible things can happen to righteous Christians, we can trust that we are not alone. Jesus can empathize with us. That's why the late pastor Tim Keller explains God takes our misery,

our suffering, so seriously that he is willing to take it on himself.

And for those who suffer in this life and they pattern their lives after Christ, the sovereign Lord bestows upon them rest in the next life as we encounter the fifth seal.

[32 : 15] So moving on to the fifth seal, when in verses 9 to 11, we get a break in the pattern. So no more evil horses, thank God. But instead, we are transported back to the heavenly realm.

And here we see the souls who have been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. Because Christians don't play by the rules of the world, because we refuse to scheme and bribe and cheat and battle our way to victory, because we turn the other cheek, because we trust that God will uphold justice so that we don't have to.

Because we have conformed our lives to the slain lamb in life and death, we have suffered between the two advents of Christ. And their blood was spilt upon the heavenly altar of God.

Even the great apostle Paul saw his own death similarly, like a drink offering to be poured out. And while they are in the Sabbath rest of God, this rest is not fully consummated.

I think it's clear in our text, but John hints that he uses a specific word, souls. He says souls, they're not, they're still waiting for their final glorified body. But even more clearly, they're still waiting for God to judge and avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth.

[33 : 36] But again, notice God's awesome response to their plea. He's not a military general that's freaking out in his camp, wondering, am I losing too many men?

Am I going to lose this battle? But his answer shows that he is in complete control of the situation. He is, after all, what they call and know him to be.

He is the sovereign Lord, holy and true. So he gives them white robes, symbolizing purity and blessedness, and he tells them to rest a little longer.

Rest a little longer because their number is still yet completed. Under the reign of Nero, Domitian, Shapur II, Adolf Hitler, Stalin, Kim Irsung, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, Boko Haram, God is sovereign over the millions and millions of saints' lives throughout history that are to be added to their number.

More and more are joining in this choir, even to this very own day. How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those dwelling on the earth? When you hear this, I understand if you might feel a little uneasy about this prayer because it sounds like something a Christian shouldn't say.

[35 : 02] After all, this seems like the polar opposite of Jesus and Stephen's request before they were martyred. Forgive them for they know not what they do. But as faithful students of Scripture, as we all are in this church, we must be careful not to absolute ties, either response of forgiveness only or justice only when we experience injustice.

We find both responses in Scripture and both can be appropriate means of glorifying God. Now, this isn't the case for everyone, but I wonder if our main objection to this, please, it's ultimately because we have a small view of God and his glory and we have a large view of people, even those who hate God.

We uphold the value of our fellow man, which is a good Christian impulse, but it should never be done at the expense of God's glory. Our world, we've lost our nose.

We've lost the ability to smell how foul sin is because we've just gotten so accustomed to living in it. That's why David rhetorically asks in Psalm 138, do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And to an appropriate degree, do we have righteous anger to preserve the glory of our Lord? And moreover, in defense of these saints, the reality is that the majority, the vast majority of martyrs to this day are voiceless and their murders are done in secret.

[36 : 44] So many, millions upon these killings don't make the headlines. We don't know anything about them. And that's precisely the reason why Richard Wurmbrandt, a Lutheran priest in the 1940s, he would go on to find the organization, The Voice of the Martyrs.

I'm sure you've heard of it. It's an organization that lives up to its name and gives a voice to the voiceless. In his book, Tortured for Christ, he goes on to write this.

I tremble because of the sufferings of those persecuted in different lands. I tremble thinking about the eternal destiny of their torturers. I tremble for Western Christians who don't help their persecuted brethren.

In the depth of my heart, I would like to keep the beauty of my own vineyard and not to be involved in such a huge fight. I would like to so much to be somewhere in quietness and rest, but it is not

possible.

The quietness and rest for which I long would be an escape from reality and dangerous for my soul. The West sleeps and must be awakened to see the plight of the captive nations.

[38 : 02] So church, we shouldn't stifle the questions of how long, oh Lord, but we should join in on this pleading with righteous anger, an anger that's not primarily motivated by personal revenge, but an anger defending God's glory.

So we must ask how long, oh Lord, will our brothers and sisters in this world suffer? We can't bear. We can't bear to see it anymore.

We want you to come. We want you to come, oh Lord, and make all that is wrong right. This Advent season, as we remember the first coming of Christ, we must also remember to wait for his coming. When his name will finally stop being besmirched. His glory will fully be known. His enemies crushed under his feet and the slain will rise to reign.

And when we pray like that, we don't pray as if we don't know what's going to happen. We know what's going to happen. God is, but God is going to answer. This suffering and these deaths are never meaningless because they are, they're gas, they're gasoline to spark the advancement of God's kingdom, just like Christ's suffering was.

[39 : 15] And these deaths are victories. They're never losses. And that's why we can and we must endure the suffering of this tribulation because God is sovereignly using all of it to launch into the sixth seal to bring about his kingdom, the consummation of his kingdom.

Finally, the lamb opens up the sixth seal. And you could tell that things are really ramping up here. Once the seal is opened, there is a great earthquake.

Sun turns black, moon turns red, falls, the stars fall to the earth when overripe, like overripe figs when shaken. And these signs are all taken from a smattering of different places in scripture, but really all of them are signaling to you something on the cosmic, on the earth shattering, sky splitting level is about to happen.

These are all clear signs in the Bible that the foretold day of the Lord has come. An answer to, this is an answer to the martyr's prayer.

Those who killed and abused Christians will await their final judgment that day. And while John does include everyone, including the poor, the majority of these descriptors in our text, they're the high and the mighty.

[40 : 40] He says they're kings, great ones, generals, rich and powerful, yet they will find out that final day that they are poor, they're weak, and they're naked.

When I was a kid in high school, in my idolatry to try to prove myself by my grades, there was a situation that I decided that I needed to cheat on one of my exams.

It was a history exam. And so what I decided to do, and thought this was a really smart plan at that point, but I wrote all the information on a little cheat sheet.

It was like a little cheat sheet this big, but I quickly found out that there was a lot of information on the test, and so I had to write it super, super small, probably like font size two or three.

And so I realized I could only read it when I was like holding it up like this, but I didn't take that into account when I was actually taking my exam. I needed a place to hide it, right?

[41 : 39] So I was just sitting there, and I decided to put this little cheat sheet in between my legs. And so at that distance, I couldn't read a single thing that I wrote.

And so it was for, I don't know, a good 10 minutes. I was just staring in between my legs, not writing anything. And so I decided to abandon that plan, ditch plan A, go to plan B, which I whipped out my iPod Touch, which maybe you guys remember those.

And I thought that I could furiously type it into Google, all the information that I needed. So I also decided to put that in between my legs. So I was just sitting there, looking in between my legs, trying to furiously type and look up things.

Anyone could tell that I was acting super strangely. And so it didn't take long for my professor to ask me, Ed, what are you doing? What are you doing?

And I looked up after looking in between my legs for like a good 20 minutes, and I saw everybody in the classroom staring at me.

[42 : 45] Every single person was looking at me, and he confiscated my device, my little cheat sheet, and he told me to meet me after class. And I felt, that's probably the most, the moment in my life where I felt the most exposed, the most naked I've ever felt.

I wanted to hide. I wanted to run. But I just had to sit there waiting for these kids to finish their exam. But that was just a high school exam. That's just a high school exam.

How can you imagine just how naked and exposed these people feel on that day of the Lord? I want you to hear the absolute fear in their voices when they cry, fall on us, hide us.

What do we do? Where can we run? Who can stand on this day? But the earth dwellers in verse 17, they're right. Who can stand?

For we were all part of this adulterous and sinful generation. No one can stand before God that day, not from their own obedience. When we have suffered, we have all turned to our own ways to cope. [43 : 59] We have turned to substances, sexual sin, food, self-reliance, relationships, money, and a plethora of other idols just to cope with the suffering of this world.

We did not submit nor trust the sovereignty of our God. We have even accused God of evil and blamed him and hated him. But there is one.

There is one who did submit perfectly. There is one who submitted to his father's plan, even when it cost him everything. And it's only by Jesus' perfect submission to death on a cross that we could stand on that day.

Only because of Jesus' obedience do we observe the great reversal of fate between those two groups that I mentioned earlier, between the Christian martyr and the earth dweller. Before, we noticed that the Christian martyr was dead, but the earth dweller was alive.

But now it's all upside down. It's the faithful martyr at rest. But the earth dweller in complete panic and fear. The wicked plead for the mountains to cover them, but the Christian rests secure that they are covered by the perfect righteousness of Christ.

[45 : 12] The Christian is justified. The wicked receive wrath. The wrath of the Lamb for eternal punishment in hell.

And on that final day, what we knew of the power and the sovereignty of the Lord, only by faith and not by sight, it'll all be fully revealed for the whole world to see and tremble.

Therefore, today, with the four horsemen wreaking havoc on this world and discouraging Christians, brothers and sisters, I urge you, I plead with you, hold the line.

Keep the faith. Fight the good fight. Trust in the good plan of our Lord by remembering that God is sovereign over the totality of our lives now, and he is sovereign over the rest that you will receive in the next.

Richard Wurmbrandt and his wife Sabina, they're faithful examples of this. Again, in his book, Richard writes back in 1945, when the Soviet Union was still around. It took over Romania.

[46 : 20] This is Richard's country. And the leaders of the Union forced Christian leaders to all gather together. And they forced them to hail the atheistic state and pledge their allegiance to the Soviet Union.

And Richard and Sabina, his wife, they attended and they witnessed one church leader after another compromise their faith. So, Sabina, being the faithful helper that she is, she whispered to her husband, Richard, stand up.

Wash away the shame from the face of Christ. They're spitting in his face. And he replied, if I do so, you lose your husband.

And she faithfully and boldly said, I don't wish to have a coward for a husband. Now, with a wife like Sabina, no wonder he obeyed God.

But it's also because he trusted, Richard trusted, that God is in control of everything. God would never leave him.

[47 : 26] So he bravely stood up in front of 4,000 delegates and declared that the church must glorify God in Christ alone. And he would go on to pay the price for that.

He was kidnapped by the secret police. He was thrown into a sensory deprived jail for three years. That means no light, no sound. The prisoner guards, they even wore felt on the bottom of their boots so that they wouldn't make any sounds.

But he lived to tell the tale. He survived the jail time and he claimed that it was worth it. Richard and Sabina are faithful examples of those who trusted in God with their lives and that spurred them on to obedience, even through suffering.

While not all of us are going to be martyrs and suffer physical persecution, we are all called to have the same spirit of endurance, of perseverance, and self-sacrifice.

Again, we can only do this by trusting that God is with us now and will give us rest for the future. Remember, when you feel like you're losing in life because of your faith, you are not.

[48 : 39] But your devotion to Christ is a humble investment that explodes, that'll explode on its return. There's no better investment in your life more than a graduate degree, more than a relationship, more than a house, more than your own health.

If you think that you're losing because your friends think you're weird because of your faith, because you tithe so you can't save up money as quickly, because you faithfully support your family and give up opportunities to launch into a lucrative and successful career, because you speak up to defend Christ and the Christian faith, because you give up your own life.

Fear not. Because God has promised that the last will be first. He never reneges on his promises. When we go through tragedy and suffering, and I know that some of you guys are going through really hard things right now.

We wrestle with God by learning the language of lamentation as these saints had done and which we learned not too long ago from this very pulpit. We invite brothers and sisters into our lives, into our pain, and we pray and we weep with them.

And we do ultimately what Nick did by interpreting our suffering through the lens and the truths of scripture, seeing that God is still sovereign for our good.

[50 : 12] Finally, let me close with a plea. This tension of waiting for God's deliverance can be extremely long. And I know that it feels long for a lot of you. So why is he seeming to wait so long?

If you turn to 2 Peter 3, he tells us, Peter tells us in verse 9, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Now, if you are here today and you haven't put your faith in Christ, the message is clear. God is waiting for you. The Lord's patience endures because of amazing grace, even when his glorious name is temporarily defiled, which, by the way, he hates far more than any of us could, but he wants all sinners to come and find life in him.

The reality is the opportunity to repent will not always be here. We do not know when this day will come. Today is the day to come and put your faith in him.

God is waiting for you. Let's pray. God, we thank you. We thank you. We thank you for the grace of our Lord Jesus because we know that we do not deserve to stand on that day.

[51 : 44] Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the perfect obedience that you endured temptations from Satan for the joy that was set before you, despising the shame.

You died a death you did not deserve. Thank you, God, in that you display your sovereignty and using all the bad in our lives to use it for good.

Help us to see that. Whatever is going on in our lives, each one of us, speak to us and help us to see that this is truly for your glory and for our good.

Help us to see this, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.