

WELCOME 15th May 2022 – 5 Easter '22 C

Revelation 6:1-11 & 7:9-17

Welcome! It's great to be together again...*Bible Study Qs* are provided to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word & work in your life, then you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-up**. We're still doing things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. Masks optional but certainly your choice. Thanks set-up & clean-up folks!

As we move into this week... It's the **stuff** of fairy tale legends, blockbuster movies & novels galore: A knight in shining armour or mysterious stranger rides into town, demolishes the bad guys & saves the day. Deep down we're all "holding out for a hero" like that to take away the suffering of life. We long for someone who will deliver us from distress. We'll go to extraordinary lengths to maximize pleasure & minimize pain in our lives, at whatever cost or compromise.

But God opens our eyes **to** reality. In life; pain is a given, suffering to be expected & hurt happens. Wherever there is sin, there will be struggle & suffering. That's the unavoidable reality we face & no knight in shining armour/mysterious stranger can prevent that; no matter what they promise. But wherever there is faith there is hope. The one who was slain, raised & opens the seals on eternity is the one who leads you through suffering w/ hope, to victory w/ more joy than you can ever imagine.

"These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. That is why they stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his Temple.
And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter..."

In Christ risen/ruling over all, the Father is Redeeming Suffering for his purposes in this world & for his glory to be seen in us. In times of great suffering, there is an even greater salvation for the church is sealed w/ grace to suffer w/ certain hope!

We'll explore & experience that together...

Let's pray...then hear God's Word...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Psalm 42:1-3, 8

*As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God.
I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?
Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me, saying, "Where is this God of yours?" ...
But each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me;
through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life.*

Heavenly Father, you sent your Son Jesus Christ into this world that by his suffering the world would be reconciled to you. Strengthen our faith, so that united with him we bear the fruit of his love. When we experience trial & suffering give us persistent hope that your glory might be seen through our tears. We ask this in the name of the Lamb who is our Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Revelation 6

FAITH CHAT:

1. Every scar tells a story. Share a "scar story" with your neighbour.
2. When you think of the last promises in Rev 7:15-17 where God provides shelter, satisfaction, protection, provision, and relief...What immediately comes to mind?
3. "While other worldviews lead people to sit in the midst of life's joys, foreseeing the coming sorrow; Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world's sorrows, tasting the coming joy." Comment?

What do you think?

5 EASTER '22 C – IN CHRIST'S HANDS: UNVEILING THE NEW REALITY – REDEEMING SUFFERING

One of the dirtiest tricks we play on ourselves as followers of Jesus...& allow others to play too...is to carry on the myth that our earliest disciple ancestors...the 1st cent saints... were always "saintly." We kid ourselves into believing they always wore a sort of "holy smile," never had a cross word or raised voice or hair out of place until they were martyred singing *A Mighty Fortress*...

Think about it...Paul/Silas sang the prison doors open. James says "consider it joy" when you have trials. "Nothing can separate us...!" Paul shouts...but ^{b/4} **THOSE** words were written Paul told the Corinthians: "We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers & sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. We were so utterly, unbearably crushed we despaired of life itself. In fact, we expected to die..." – 2 Cor 1:8-9a I am not alone in this room being able to know seasons in life where life demanded more of me than I had...when I was near paralyzed by grief or anger or fear...the elephant I was facing could not be eaten 1 bite at a time no matter how many bites you gave me. Even Paul says, "My soul hit rock bottom...then the bottom fell out. Dying woulda been an improvement." There is no triumphal chest thumpin' phony "name it & claim it" here...just the reality of pain in the apostle's life/circumstances. Every scar tells a story...yours, mine, Paul's **AND** those we see in John's Revelation of Jesus to the church...

The heavenly praise of the previous chapter gives way in Rev 6 & 7 to ominous threatening scenes emerging from the heavenly realm. Like I say every week...do **NOT** try to dissect & tease out allegorical this-means-that w/ every image or sentence of Revelation...stay in the big picture...John writes to real people facing real danger & real threats to their lives & their faith...compromise, complacency, apathy, boredom, frustration fear antagonism...JUST. LIKE. US. & persecution we can't fathom...So...what's going on?

The 4 horsemen initiate threats of conquest, violence, economic insecurity, & death. Sound familiar? The horsemen reveal real threats. Real for people in the 1st cent & real right now. What Jesus shows John is intended to strip away all earthly pretensions of security & expose the deep uncertainties in every human heart. Throughout the chapter itself, the threats intensify until in **6:15ff** - *Then everyone—the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the wealthy, the powerful, & every slave & free person—all hid themselves in the caves & among the rocks of the mountains. They cried to the mountains & the rocks, "Fall on us & hide us...For the great day of their wrath has come, & who is able to stand?"* Sometimes fear just makes you stay in bed.

But how are the horsemen/wrath unleashed? As the Lamb opens the seals on the scroll he has received from the Father's right hand. Wait...the Lamb/Jesus permits evil a place in God's good world? What? That can't be...can it?

Remember what we noted when we started Rev - 2 themes uphold all John records: **1)** God is still on his throne. God's sovereignty has not, does not, will not waiver. All things exist & have their being under God's dominion...even evil. Evil is not unrestrained in this world. It may feel like it look like it...it is not. Even here there are clear limits on what is allowed of the horsemen. They are not permitted free rein. The gospels show Jesus' ultimate rule over the forces of evil...he casts out demons...rebukes chaos...stands over those who would destroy him & refuses to even answer their charges all the while declaring if it were God's plan "more than 12 legions of angels" would lay waste to them. In his vision John sees the horsemen as the winnowing disciplining work of the Father released on the evil present & raging in this world. Evil will perish...destroyed in part by being used against itself. And the very worst that evil can accomplish...the slaughter of God's One & Only Son has already been undone – overthrown once for all forever by the resurrection.

2) The love & work of Jesus Christ endures for you for God's purpose here. Nothing can take that gift from you...All God's promises are "yes" for you in Christ. Every blessing in heaven is yours because you are united by baptism into Jesus Christ. Those are the 2 rock-solid pillars reaffirmed throughout John's vision. Every chapter.

And as the 5th seal opens the faithful "martyred for the word of God & for being faithful in their testimony" stand before the Father to **ask**... "How long?" How long before you right all the wrongs carried out against your good creation & your faithful people? How long before you balance the scales that have tipped against all who are called by your name? I'm going out on a limb & assume you've asked that question...? But rather than the back of God's hand like you might have given your child the 5th time they asked "are we there yet?" God provides garments of righteousness & rest...like in Jesus' parable the robe was wedding attire. While they wait in rest & repose, free from the struggles & strife of this world they're being prepared for the coming feast – dressed for the wedding supper of the Lamb to his bride the church.

We might expect the final threatening vision to occur at this point, but it doesn't. Instead, the threats are halted so a promise can be given in Rev 7. John sees who can stand: those who have been redeemed by the Lamb. *After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation & tribe & people & language, standing in front of the throne & before the Lamb. "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb & made them white. That is why they stand in front of God's throne & serve him day & night in his Temple. He who sits on the throne will give them shelter. They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes."*

Being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb does not make the threats go away, insulate you from trouble & turmoil, but it assures us of the promise of life that allows us to stand in the face of the threats, in the midst of this world's sorrows, when everyone else is just convinced we're doomed, we remain confident that God's purposes are, for those who are washed & robed, ultimately for life w/ him forever. Cared for in divine tenderness & love. From the hand of the Father given shelter, satisfaction, protection, provision, & relief. Everything earthly rulers gods powers can't give.

We shared our "scar" stories. Every one of that multitude has one...some > than 1. These were the persecuted, sick, forgotten, abandoned, mistreated, bereaved of children, lived through divorce, suffered physically or emotionally for years. Every saint comes out of a different kind of "tribulation" but all come only by way of the cross & the blood of the Lamb. Jesus' friend Peter would write to Xns under intense persecution: **1 Pt 4:12** - *Dear friends, **don't be surprised** at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.* In a world broken & twisted by sin & death: pain - tragedy - distress – tears are part & parcel of everyday living. In a world where humans rebelled & chose self-rule over submission & obedience to the Father who created us for himself, there is & will be more pain than we can imagine or possibly predict. Pain is a given, suffering to be expected & hurt happens.

Wherever there is sin, there will be struggle & suffering. That's the unavoidable reality we face & no knight in shining armour/mysterious stranger can prevent that; no matter what they promise. But wherever there is faith there is hope. The one who was slain, raised & opens the seals on eternity is the one who leads you through suffering w/ hope, to victory w/ more joy than you can ever imagine.

Earlier we saw Paul describing his soul hitting rock bottom...then the bottom fell out. Here's how he concludes that thought...**In** *fact we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves & learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did deliver us from mortal danger, & he will rescue us again. We have set our hope on him, & he will continue to deliver us. – 2 Cor 1:9-10*

Through it all, the Lamb bears the scars for you. He continues to bless you & is present w/ you to lead you to life & victory forever...a victory he has already won by the wounds he already carries. Our pain is forever joined to his so that his victory can be forever joined to our pain. In Christ risen/ruling over all, the Father is Redeeming Suffering for his purposes in this world & for his glory to be seen in us. In times of great suffering, there is an even greater salvation for the church is sealed w/ grace to suffer w/ certain hope!

TAKE IT HOME:

What promises of God will you lean on in times when you experience suffering or hardship?

Please be specific...Scripture reference if you can to note **this** promise.

Let's close with this assurance...let's read together

**He who sits on the throne will give us shelter.
We will never again be hungry or thirsty;
we will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.
The Lamb on the throne will be our Shepherd.
He will lead us to springs of life-giving water.
And God will wipe every tear from our eyes.**

Amen