

Revelation 6:1-7:17 // The Seals are Opened!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 February 2024

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] So the first part of our reading tonight is in Revelation chapter 6. You'll find it on page 1237 of the church Bible.

Revelation chapter 6.

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a loud voice like thunder, Come.

I looked, and there before me was a white horse. Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

When the Lamb opened the second scroll, I heard the second living creature say, Come. Then another horse came out, a fiery red one.

[1 : 07] Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword. When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come.

I looked, and there before me was a black horse. Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures say, A kilogram of wheat for a day's wages and three kilograms of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil in the wine.

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the living creature say, Come. I looked, and there before me was a pale horse.

Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a quarter of the earth to kill by sword, famine, and plague, 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 because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

[2 : 24] They called out in a loud voice, How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? Then each of them was given a white robe, 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.

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair. The whole moon turned red, turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth as figs dropped from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.

The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

They called to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?

We'll continue our reading in Revelation chapter 7. So that's on page 1, 2, 3, 8. Revelation 7.

[3 : 58] 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 in the sea or in any tree.

Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the loving 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 foreheads of the servants of our God. Then I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

From the tribe of Judah, 12,000 were sealed. From the tribe of Ruben, 12,000. From the tribe of Gad, 12,000. From the tribe of Asher, 12,000. From the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000.

From the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000. From the tribe of Simeon, 12,000. From the tribe of Levi, 12,000. from the tribe of Ishikah, 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin, 12,000. After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, and people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. All the angels were standing round the throne, and round the elders and the four living creatures, they fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen, praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.

[5 : 57] Amen. Then one of the elders asked me, These in white robes, who are they and where did they come from? I answered, Sir, you know. He said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple, and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Thanks a lot, David, for reading that. And if we've not met before, I'm Martin, the lead pastor here. Great to see you. We always have guests here, but there's a good number of people here I don't recognise, so if you're here as a guest, we hope you find it helpful as we continue our series in Revelation. It's great to have you with us. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, just on the right-hand side of the inside of the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, as we come to these two chapters of Revelation. It'd be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open. If they've fallen closed, it's page one, two, three, seven, that Revelation 6 starts on. And we're just going to look together at what the text says, what God's saying to us in his word.

And let's ask for his help as we do that. Let's say a prayer to God. Almighty God, we praise you for this revelation that you gave to your son, the Lord Jesus, and he gave to an angel to give to the Apostle John. We praise you for the Lord Jesus, the worthy lamb who was slain, and we ask that you would send your spirit now to speak to us, open our ears to hear, open our minds to understand, and open our hearts that we might respond rightly to you. For we ask these things in Jesus' name and for your glory. Amen. So I don't know if you've seen the TV series Good Omens. I think it's an Amazon Prime thing. And David Tennant is in it, plays Crowley, a demon from hell living on the earth.

And Michael Sheen plays Arizaphel, who is an angel from heaven. And they've become mates on earth, kind of to their surprise, even though one is like an evil angel and one is a good angel. [8 : 36] And they've grown to quite like the earth over the years. And then the news hits them, they get the message that Armageddon is about to happen and they need to prepare for it. And it becomes their mission to try and stop it because they don't really want the world to end, they like it. And they've lost the Antichrist and they're trying to stop the four horsemen of the apocalypse from wreaking havoc. In the show, the four horsemen of the apocalypse actually arrive on motorbikes and they're waiting at an airfield near Oxford for their instructions on how to bring about the carnage of the end of the world. Now, it's a comedy. And whatever you think about the comedy in Good Omens, which was originally a novel by Terry Pratchett, the theology is completely all over the shop, right? It's totally bonkers. But it's striking really that these images of this great future battle that will bring the end of the world, the idea of Armageddon, of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, that we encounter tonight in this book, Revelation, it's such a powerful image that these images have become part of folklore around us, even for people who really have no familiarity with the Bible. At the same time, what the show Good Omens shows us is that these prophecies that we're engaging with here as claiming to be from God about the future, the idea of a kind of coming great spiritual conflict that will be needed as God establishes his righteous reign and brings heaven to earth, they're basically, for people around us, something that we feel we can joke about.

Between the kind of clever writing of Terry Pratchett and the acting of Tennant and Sheen, the idea of a kind of catastrophic end of the world is something to sort of reach for your ice cream for out the freezer and just relax on the sofa and laugh about, be entertained by. In other words, when it comes

to the end of the world, people around us tend to feel we've got nothing to worry about. Well, what does God say?

Well, it's striking that this book, Revelation, is a set of prophecies, God revealing to us, uncovering for us the reality about the heaven now, spiritualities now, and the future. And why would we trust it?

Well, God could have given any one of us this revelation, but he gave it to his apostle John. And John was one of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. He writes at the beginning of 1 John, another book in the Bible, a letter that he wrote to churches in the first century, that when he speaks about Jesus, he's talking about things that he, they weren't myths or legends. This was the man he had seen with his own eyes and he had touched. And he says to them, we proclaim to you what we'd seen and heard so that you might have fellowship with us and with our God. And he is one of the three disciples of Jesus who followed Jesus up the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. He was made dazzling white. So this was an eyewitness of the glory of Jesus, someone who was able to be credible in the vision they'd been given about the future from this angel. And this portion of revelation has had a big trailer in recent weeks. So we saw that in revelation four, John was shown an open door by the angel into heaven. And he went through the door at the angel's command. And in heaven on the throne, he saw God himself with a scroll in his right hand sealed up. And this scroll is kind of God's plan for the future. And then he sees that there is one worthy to open the scroll. And it's, he hears of a lion, the lion of Judah, and he sees a lamb, Jesus, the lamb who'd been slain, standing on the throne. And he reaches out, the slain lamb standing, and he takes hold of the scroll and he breaks it open. And that's where we are tonight. Just even as I describe it like that in the recap, we just need to remember as we look at revelation together that we're dealing with a very special kind of writing. We're not to take these images literally. It's much more like a sort of abstract painting or an impressionistic painting than it is a photograph for us to sort of piece together. And the aim is because John, in this kind of writing, apocalyptic writing, apocalyptic just means uncovering. And he's describing the indescribable. So he gives us vivid image after image. And it's like he's throwing them up on a big screen for us to kind of get the impression of each one. We're not to sort of piece them all together so much as just be left with this big impression of the picture as it builds up. So the lamb takes the scroll from God's right hand, then he breaks the seal and he unrolls the scroll. And our first point is four horsemen bring about a great tribulation. So let's pick things up again in verse one. I watched, he says, as the lamb opened the first of the seven seals, then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, come. And it's as though this mighty warrior angel before the throne has kind of whistled for a horse.

[14:00] And this horse and rider bolt through galloping into battle. Verse two, I looked and there before me was a white horse. Its rider held a bow and he was given a crown and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. Now if you just look down at the verses, look at verse three and verse five and verse seven, we have a repeated pattern in the chapter. Each time the lamb opens a seal, one of these four living creatures in turn before the throne of God shouts, come and summons a horseman. And all four horses cause havoc. And they're a picture of the turmoil that we find in our world viewed from above with this kind of vivid image of four riders on horses. In the next chapter, it's called the great tribulation, these events. So when is this happening? I think this is about today, about our times, which the Bible calls the last days, the time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension and his return to judge the world. The first horse in verse two is the conqueror bent on conquest. So this is a picture, a symbol for us of power-hungry men, empire building. And that is a reality that marks every age of human history. Whether it's the Roman Empire, as John was writing, or Russia today advancing in Ukraine and threatening the Baltic states. Or we might think of China threatening Taiwan. Or in ages gone by, not so long ago, the European countries going off to build empires. And the message of this chapter is that whenever powerful people are greedy and they seek conquest, what you get in their slipstream is misery, is pain and death. So the second horse is the fiery red one of war, who takes peace from the earth so that people kill each other. And then the third horse is black with measuring scales, because the war has brought with it scarcity. And that's brought hyperinflation. That was the reference to the prices there in the chapter. And so the price of food becomes impossibly high in these places where there's war, and there's famine as a result. And then the fourth horse is pale. It's rider named death, as people die untimely death in four different ways described by the sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts. And I think we can tell that, for my money, these horses are pictures of what goes on in our times. Because in verse 9, the scene shifts with the next seal to heaven, where the souls of people who died for being Christians,

who are martyrs, are crying out to God, how long will it be, sovereign Lord, until the end? Until there's justice. And that is the cry that Christians cry out all around the world today, as they are suffering. It's actually the cry that we cried when we said the prayer Jesus taught us earlier in this service. As we say, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

We're asking God, how long, oh Lord, before you make things right in your world? And this view of world history, though it's a very horrible image to deal with, a very horrible image, it gives us better expectations of what life is going to be like until God makes things right. And we need that, because if we're naively optimistic about how the world's going to play out, if we believe that somehow this arc of human history is naturally moving, towards an era of world peace, when like the UN will be in charge and there'll be no one will harm each other anymore, then when we see horrible things happen in the world, we get destabilized by that, because we're so kind of gut-wrenchingly shocked that things aren't going as we expected, as optimists, it can be crushing. So these horsemen remind us that even though it's terrible, this is what people are going to be like in the world, terrorists are going to bomb buses and fly aeroplanes into office tower blocks, and bullies are going to shell civilian homes and kill hostages and bomb dams and cause famines, all kinds of unspeakably dreadful things are going to happen in our world. At the same time, what we see in Revelation 6 is that crucially, nothing will happen in this world that is outside the sovereign will, the sovereign control of the Lamb. Notice he is the one breaking the seals and giving permission for these things to happen in a limited way.

It's Christ and not chaos that governs world history. He's the one with the scroll in his hand in verses 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9. That is not to say he's responsible for any of this. He is not responsible for evil. Other people bear the responsibility for the moral choices they make, but he is sovereignly allowing it to take place for a limited time in a limited way. And knowing that means we can have confidence that nothing will ultimately thwart his good plan where he wins in the end. Of course, sometimes we will be perplexed and wonder, how on earth could this have a good purpose? A bit like if you look at a tapestry on the wrong side. So what you see on the back side of a tapestry is just broken threads and mess. But on the other side, there's a beautiful picture that's been kind of sewn on. And for us, on the earth below, the view from below of the world, it may look chaotic. But Christ sees the other side, the view from above, and he is governing history.

And that's why the question of verse 10 is an appropriate question to ask. In verse 9, it says it's the martyrs who are asking it, the people who've been killed for trusting Jesus, which happens every year around our world. But every follower of Jesus could be asking the same for them. If you look at verse 10, at their prayer, how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? Now, they're told to wait a little longer until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters come in, are killed just as they have been. So we might ask, as we see horrible things going on, why doesn't God just bring an end to the world? And the answer that Revelation gives us is that he will do that, and he's going to do it soon. But another answer these chapters give us is that he is patient, and he doesn't want people to perish. So he is waiting.

The reason why this prayer was not answered in the first century and has not been answered yet for Jesus to return and bring justice is that he is waiting for more people to turn to him so that they don't face his wrath. But then by the sixth seal, the wait is over. So this is our second point. The sixth seal brings about a great earthquake. Have a look with me at verse 12.

[21 : 53] I watched as he opened the sixth seal, there was a great earthquake. And you can see now that what's being described is the end coming, judgment day, because we get cosmic meltdown. The sun is turned black, the moon turned blood red. Verse 13, the stars in the sky fall to earth like figs drop from a fig tree when it's shaken by a strong wind. So it's like a picture, look, verse 14, the heavens recede like a scroll being rolled up. Every mountain island removed from its place. There's this kind of cosmic meltdown.

If you imagine the world as like a comic book or a magazine, it's like God has picked it up and has scrumpled it up and thrown it into a wastebasket. There's this kind of chaotic end, but under his control. And we're told why it looks like that in verse 17. It's because the great day of the wrath of God has come. Now we'll come back to this idea next week and in the weeks to come. Revelation has a lot to say about this idea of a coming day in which God's wrath is displayed in his judgment. And it will be good to process that in the coming weeks. Stay with us for that. Because I think a lot of us find it hard to hold together the idea that God is love. And when we see how Jesus lived his

life in the world, he was incomparably loving. And yet he has a day of wrath. The Bible, though, sees no contradiction between those two things, the love of God and his wrath against evil. But it's not that his anger is like human rage. It's not God flying off the handle in anger. God's wrath is his settled, controlled, controlled hostility against everything that is evil and wrong in our world. If we just take the example we're giving in this chapter, the prayers of the martyrs, people killed for being Christians around the world. When God, in his throne room, hears the cries of his people in North Korea or northern Nigeria being murdered because they won't renounce Jesus. His wrath is the appropriate response in his goodness to what is happening. For him not to have a day of justice would be that he doesn't care. What we see here is that he does care and he will answer the cries of people in our world and through all the ages for justice to come. But when that day comes, we must make sure that we are depending on nothing else in ourselves to get through it. So just notice in verse 15 how the people of the world react to this day coming. Verse 15, the kings of the earth, so the most powerful, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hidden caves and among the rocks of the mountains. So nothing that they trusted in and built their lives on will be of any value on that day. And then we get our second key question tonight. We had the question from the martyrs, how long, O Lord? And now we get a question from all people in verse 17. The great day of their wrath has come and who can withstand it? Who can stand on the day of God's judgment? The answer we should be giving in this moment is no one. No one can stand on that day on our own merit. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. We've not lived our lives giving thanks to God to God and glorifying Him. And on the day He comes back to His world, none of us can stand.

So the end of Revelation 6 is to leave us kind of on the edge of a precipice with a sense of helplessness, knowing that this coming day will leave us with no hope. And then we get this sudden interlude, a stay of proceedings at the start of chapter 7. And that's that this angel counts off the 144 thousand in verses 1 to 12. So in verse 1, he sees four angels, John sees 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. Now this is a new picture of the same thing we've just seen.

[26 : 40] This kind of day of God's wrath coming is being depicted here by these winds about to break on our world and angels holding them back. And then we're not to think that this is chronologically after chapter 6. It's kind of on a different timeline to what happened there. He's showing us a different reality going on at the same time where what's happening is John sees a new angel in verse 2 appear from the east with a seal in his hand from the living gods. This is a different seal, not the seals on the scroll. This is a bit like the kind of royal seal you might see if you watch a historic drama or something and you see a ruler or an aristocrat and they're writing letters and they seal the letters with a kind of wax from a seal that kind of marks these things as their own, as belonging to them. And that's what this angel comes with, the seal of the living God.

And this fifth angel calls out to the four angels who are holding back the judgment of God in verse 3 and says, do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God. And then he goes through humanity placing his seal, the seal of the living God, on everyone who belongs to God, everyone who is trusting him. He gives us the number in verse 4, 144,000 and it says from all the tribes of Israel. So it's like a restored Israel. Israel was Old Testament language for the people of God and this is the kind of people of God of all time. They get listed in verses 5 to 8. It's a list of 12 tribes of Israel and 12,000 people in each tribe.

And here's the key, numbers in Revelation are highly symbolic. So we're not talking here about a literal 144,000 people. It's 12 times 12 times 1,000. 12 standing for the 12 tribes of Israel, the Old Testament people of God before Jesus came, trusting God's promises. Times 12 marking the 12 apostles whom Jesus appointed to lead the New Testament people of God, the people who trust Jesus after he came, including everyone here tonight who trusts him. Times 1,000 because 1,000 is a really big number.

So this is just symbolic for all the people of God for all time. Why do we get this list of them tribe by tribe? Well the key point in verses 3 to 8 is every one of God's people is counted. They're all counted in.

They're all individually sealed. God will not miss anybody out who has trusted him when he seals them to be protected from judgment day. No one is missing. In chapter 6 we saw that nobody will escape the day of the wrath of the Lamb.

[29 : 48] Here in chapter 7 we see every single one of God's people will be safe on that day. We have nothing to fear if we've taken refuge in the Lamb. So this is the only dividing line in humanity that counts.

Do you have the seal that marks you as belonging to the people of God? If the seal stands for something specific, I'm not sure whether it does, but if it does it would be the Holy Spirit because in the New Testament it's the Holy Spirit who is described elsewhere as the seal on every believer in Jesus that marks us and guarantees our future inheritance with God.

And for any of us, Jesus makes his offer to us. You can be sealed by God. When he said in Revelation 3.20 to a church that was forgetting him, here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them and them with me. So any of us can turn to Jesus and ask him to seal us for the future and he has paid that cost in dying for us and he will mark us and we will have fellowship with him and hope for the future. How many people will it be? Because today there are 7 billion people in the world, so 144,000 does not actually sound like very many.

It makes the new creation sound a bit quiet. So John then gets a new vision, like a second view of this same people. And it's a second answer to that question from the end of chapter 6 of on the day of God's wrath. Who can stand? Our fourth point, the Lamb delivers a great multitude. Have a look with me at verse 9. After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

So you see how important both these pictures are. On one level, of course, they can be counted because God will individually mark every one of his people. On another level, there is so many. Who could possibly count all these people? Because God has saved so many. And it's the same group of people.

[32 : 12] Where are they from? They're from every possible ethnic group, every nation, tribe, people and language. And what are they up to? Well, their souls are in heaven, full of joy. At the end of verse 9, it says that they're holding palm branches in their hands and they're wearing white robes. So they're praising God's saving King with joy. They're singing together in worship. Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. In other words, the party in heaven is the greatest. It's not happening in a like half-empty stadium with people saying, you know, I'm really enjoying this, but it's a pity that there aren't more people. If only more people had sort of turned up for it. We won't be thinking about who is missing when we're with God. It's going to be packed out with this great multitude from every nation. And time-wise, it's hard to locate. My take on the chapter as I read it is that verses 11 and 12 may be set in heaven now because they're very similar to what we read about going on in heaven now in chapter 5. That people are, the angels are praising God and people who have died in

Christ and their souls have gone to be with God while they wait are praising God in heaven. They're praying for restoration and justice in chapter 6, how long, O Lord? But they're also praising God with joy around the throne. And heaven is already this place of complete worship, praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength offered to God in verse 12 by the angels and by Christians who have gone to be with the Lord. Then in verses 15 to 17, the timescale seems to move forward to the future for God's people. It's kind of a mix of the reality now for people who are with God now, but also the future that we'll all enjoy forever because there is language there that's pulled forward from later in the book about the new creation. And in between, we get our third big question of the evening. While the four horsemen were causing tribulation, there's this cry for justice, how long, O Lord? And the answer was, the day of the Lord will come, and when it comes, who can stand? And now, John sees all these people standing around the throne, and then the elder with him asks a question, verse 13, these in white robes, who are they, and where did they come from? And John wants to know, so he says, sir, you know. And then we get the answer in verse 14.

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They're thrilled serving God in the presence of God. In verse 15, they are before the throne of God and serve him night and day in his temple. How did they get there?

It's all thanks to the Lamb. He's amazing. That's a key message in Revelation so far. Jesus is amazing. He is sheer, unadulterated goodness, so judgment day will be his day and a good day. And moved by love, he went to the cross, led like a lamb to the slaughter, and he bled out and died

to pay the ransom and purchase this great multitude for God. And thanks to him, what does the future hold for that great multitude? Verse 15, it says, he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. So at the end of chapter 6, we saw people from every kind of background hiding from the presence of God in caves because of God's goodness and their sin. And yet here are Christians, God's people, given white robes of righteousness to wear so that God shelters them with his presence forever. And in verse 16, we're promised provision and satisfaction. It says, never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst, and safety. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. So how will we have that assurance forever? Verse 17, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. That's that picture of satisfaction. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. So all the sadness is gone. So we had blood in this chapter that washes white the clothes of the people. And now we have a lamb who is a shepherd. And he has been behind everything going on in these two chapters. It's him and only him that can open the seals of the scroll, reminding us it's Christ and not chaos who governs human history. It's his wrath being poured out on the great day of the Lord when judgment comes on our world. But it's his blood that washes the multitude clean so that they can spend forever in his presence. And he becomes our shepherd.

And it means that we'll be satisfied, full of joy. We'll never thirst again. And he'll wipe every tear from our eyes. So we end the chapter back where we started in chapter 5, before the throne of heaven. [37 : 51] And it's as though Jesus is revealing to John a new kingdom, the future kingdom for the world. What kind of kingdom is it? Well, in the first century, the big kingdom was Rome, the Roman Empire. And Rome itself as a city had a fire service that was like a military fire service with seven cohorts. And we know from archaeology that these firefighters came from all over the empire. So looking at the names where we can see plaques with their names of the 1,000 firefighters in Rome of the fifth cohort, there were centurions listed and where they were from. And it shows that they brought people to Rome from all over the empire.

There were firefighters from Venice, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia. Why did Rome have people from all over the Roman empire to fight fires? Well, it was because in Rome, the death rate was higher than the birth rate.

So Rome as a city depended on taking slaves and captives from all over the world and bringing them to serve the city. There's a TV documentary about the Romans where historian Mary Beard describes Rome like this. She says, Rome is swallowing people. It's a city which consumes people and spews them out dead. Well, here for Christians living at that time in Revelation 7, John shows us another empire which also draws people from every nation. But around the throne of the Lamb, he gives them life.

Life with him that will last forever. Do we want to be there is the message of Revelation 7. Well, hold on to what we have from Jesus. Keep nurturing a love for him. Live courageously for him because we trust what's coming. Let's pray together.

We praise you, Lord Jesus, the Lion of Judah, that you alone are worthy to open the seals, that you are in control of history today, and you have secured our future by dying for us.

[40 : 10] You call us earlier in this book. Hold on to what you have until I come. So by your spirit, we pray that you will sustain us. You will keep us patiently enduring difficult times.

You will move us to live confident lives for you because of this wonderful future where you will be our shepherd forever. And we ask this for your name's sake. Amen.

We're going to sing in response to God's word. Lots of singing in our passage tonight. It's the reality going on around the throne. And we can join in that song this evening. So Andrew and the band will lead us as we sing.

Thank you.