

**Series: REVELATION**

**Sermon: The Four Horsemen**

**Revelation 6:1-14**

I watched 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!” 2 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.

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” 4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. 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.

5 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. 6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, “Two pounds of wheat for a day’s wages, and six pounds of barley for a day’s wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!”

7 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” 8 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 fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

9 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. 10 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?” 11 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.

12 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 blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

**Sermon**

Do you know what was going on in Europe 100 years ago? The War to end all Wars? If you saw Wonder Woman this summer, you saw a little bit of the war. You might remember from your history class that World War I started when a Serbian terrorist shot and killed Austro-Hungarian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Bosnia, in 1914, 103 years ago. It's true but much more complicated than that. He wasn't even the ruler of the kingdom, but this assassination started a series of events that would eventually claim 20 million lives - and maybe 20+ million more because of the Spanish Flu pandemic right after the war. It spiraled out of control because of treaties and treaties and more treaties.

If you like details and history, you're going to love this: If not, tune out for the next two minutes, and catch up to us later. Austria-Hungary's reaction to the death of their heir (who was in any case not greatly beloved by the Emperor, Franz Josef, or his government) was three weeks in coming. It did so by issuing an ultimatum to Serbia which, in the extent of its demand that the assassins be brought to justice effectively nullified Serbia's

sovereignty. Austria-Hungary's expectation was that Serbia would reject the remarkably severe terms of the ultimatum, thereby giving her a pretext for launching a limited war against Serbia. Just a little-tiny war. However, Serbia had long had Slavic ties with Russia, an altogether different proposition for Austria-Hungary. While not really expecting that Russia would be drawn into the dispute to any great extent other than through words of diplomatic protest, the Austro-Hungarian government sought assurances from her ally, Germany, that she would come to her aid should the unthinkable happen and Russia declared war on Austria-Hungary. Germany readily agreed, even encouraged Austria-Hungary's warlike stance. So then, we have the following remarkable sequence of events that led inexorably to the 'Great War'. The War to end all wars.

Austria-Hungary, unsatisfied with Serbia's response to her ultimatum (as planned) declared war on Serbia. Russia, bound by treaty to Serbia, announced mobilization of its vast army in her defense. Germany, allied to Austria-Hungary by treaty, viewed the Russian mobilization as an act of war against Austria-Hungary, and declared war on Russia. France, bound by treaty to Russia, found itself at war against Germany and, by extension, on Austria-Hungary. Germany invaded France, after invading neutral Belgium so as to reach Paris by the shortest possible route. Britain, allied to France by a more loosely worded treaty which placed a "moral obligation" upon her to defend France, declared war against Germany. Her reason for entering the conflict lay in another direction: she was obligated to defend neutral Belgium by the terms of a 75-year old treaty. Like France, she was by extension also at war with Austria-Hungary. With Britain's entry into the war, her colonies and dominions abroad variously offered military and financial assistance, and included Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa. United States President Woodrow Wilson declared a U.S. policy of absolute neutrality, an official stance that would last until 1917 when Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare - which seriously threatened America's commercial shipping, brought the US into the fight. Japan, honoring a military agreement with Britain, also declared war on Germany. Two days later Austria-Hungary responded by declaring war on Japan. Got that? Land locked Austria Hungary is off to fight the island nation of Japan. Italy, although allied to both Germany and Austria-Hungary, was able to avoid entering the fray by citing a clause enabling it to evade its obligations to both. In short, Italy was committed to defend Germany and Austria-Hungary only in the event of a 'defensive' war; arguing that their actions were 'offensive' she declared instead a policy of neutrality. The following year, in May 1915, she finally joined the conflict by siding with the Allies against her two former allies. 20 million people died, not because of an assassination of an archduke in a little tiny province, but because of the interconnections and agreements that the that nations had with each other. This is the worst case scenario of "One thing led to another". You can forgive them if they thought they had seen the apocalypse, the four horsemen marching thru no man's land.

This morning, we are continuing our look at the book of Revelations. We get some imagery from this book of scripture that is familiar with the average person on the street. We stay away from the number 666 whenever possible. I was at the store a while back and the total of my purchase was \$6.66. The clerk looked at me and asked if I wanted to buy something else. She said that most people do. New Mexico recently got rid of a highway called numbered 666. No one wanted to get killed on a road labeled 666. We get end of the world imagery from this particular chapter of Revelations, such as the moon turns to blood, the sun turns black, earthquakes, stars falling, Oceans boiling and of course, the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Any sermon series on Revelation has to address the four horsemen sometime, because it is an image that many people have of these last days. This is in chapter 6 of Revelations. The Lamb, Jesus, has the power and authority to open seven scrolls, and upon those scrolls are judgements upon the earth. You might remember the scrolls from last week. The first scroll is opened, and we get a rider on a white horse. The conqueror. The second scroll is opened, and we get a rider on a red horse, the rider is war. The third seal is opened, and we get a rider on a black horse. A horseman that represents famine. And we get the fourth scroll, and we get the rider of death upon a pale horse. If that wasn't bad enough, we have some more scrolls to get to, the fifth scroll shows the martyrs who have already died but clamoring for justice, the sixth scroll gives catastrophes to earth, the earthquakes, the moon and sun, etc. After the sixth, but before the seventh scroll, the godly people of earth are taken away to their reward in heaven. At the opening of the seventh scroll, all hell breaks loose on earth. I

don't say that in a swearing sense, I truly mean, all hell breaks loose. And the battle commences between good and evil, and the good guys win. But the four horsemen are precursors to that cosmic battle. And I want to focus on them today, and see if there is anything we can learn from them for our own daily battles.

The horsemen are another case of "One thing leads to another." Let's look at the white horse. The conqueror. He gets a crown. A bow. And he went down to earth to conquer. Interpretations abound about the identity of this guy. Is it Jesus going down to kick some evil behind? Is it the anti-Christ, sent forth to destroy? Or is it the Spirit of conquest and pride and unchained arrogance? I find it interesting that before almost any war we get nationalistic pride and patriotic. Not just in America, but anywhere. Bands play, speeches spoken, anyone who gives voice to opposing the war is branded a traitor. Before WWI, many towns in my native Nebraska still spoke German. Once we hit the world war, English became the language of the schools by decree of the Legislature. Towns even changed their name due to the political climate. Down the road from my house was the tiny town of Garland. It used to be Germantown. The first casualty from Germantown in the war was Private Raymond Garland. The town changed it's name. Granted, he was killed by a runaway horse in training, but so be it. The first horse is conquest. The horseman of arrogance and force.

But these horsemen lead into each other. It's not a random order. What do you get from a horseman of conquest, from a horseman of arrogance and fear? The second horseman is what comes from the first. What do you get from pride? What do you get from arrogance? You get a fight. The second horseman comes and you get a war on your hands. Bloodshed is spilled. There is no peace.

What do you get after a horseman of war? From war comes the next natural consequence. Famine. We don't follow this a lot in our country, for we haven't had to deal with it on our soil since the Civil War. But after a war comes famine. The crops have been destroyed. Or there were no workers in the field for they were in the battlefield. After both world wars, we had to feed Europe. Grain prices went through the roof. Famine carries with it a scale. Quart of wheat for a day's wages, three quarts of barley for a day's wages. Food is expensive. Even today, when you say four dollars a gallon, I think milk. When food is scarce, someone doesn't get any. Look at it this way: I'm not saying I'm for the war or against the war we are currently in, but we were told that this war wasn't going to cost us much. The US always wins, right? But here we are, spending trillions on our conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's a T. Some even believe that once we get into veterans benefits, replenishing our forces and the hidden costs, it could equal several more trillion. In case you're curious, that's about \$20,000 per person in our country. Sometime, the government will take an extra 20 grand per person from your family to cover this. It's up to you to decide if it is worth it. My family of five is already in for 100 grand. The scales are there, ready for an answer. Even if you put the amount spent on the civil war in today's dollars, Iraq and Afghanistan would still top that. In World War I, 20 million died. Only 8 of that was military fighting. The other 12 million were civilian deaths, most of it caused by hunger and starvation. And of course, after famine comes the natural consequence of death. Arrogance leads to fighting which leads to scarcity which leads to death. This is what the horsemen bring.

How does this play out in our daily lives? What could this mean for us today? The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, represent calamities that we face throughout history, again and again. John encourages us to hang in there and keep the faith, even in difficult times. It could happen in your marriage! An arrogant spouse who doesn't listen leads to fighting, which leads to lack of love, which leads to the death of the marriage. It could happen at work! The arrogant conqueror goes out and burns bridges along the way, leads to fighting, leads to lack of trust and assignments which leads to the death of a job. This is a time tested progression. And even the sixth seal could be a progression from the others as well. When you have destruction of a city or nation, the sky does turn darker. Remember the skies when the gorge was burning? The sun was ashen. The moon was stark red. The stars were blotted out. We didn't have an earthquake, but the hills were being laid to waste. The seals are all progressions that come one after the other.

At the beginning of WWI, the nations didn't realize what they were getting into. They never questioned. They

didn't reevaluate their priorities. What was Japan doing fighting Austria-Hungary in the first place? A friend of mine is mad at a friend of yours so I guess we'll fight it out. Some fights are worth fighting, even with all of the cost. Of lives, of money, of a future. But too many times we get ourselves into trouble without seeing how it all plays out. Someone who has an affair doesn't see how it could end a marriage, although that's the path. That's the progression. Someone who doesn't think that they need anybody soon discovers that no one is there to help them. You get an adjustable rate mortgage but you didn't think it would ever adjust. You fool around enough, someone's gonna end up pregnant. I'm still amazed when I hear people say, "The kiddo on the way was a surprise." No, it shouldn't be a surprise. It might be accidental, but if you do whatcha do to get a kiddo, don't be surprised if there's a kiddo. Now, if you haven't done whatcha gotta do to get a kiddo, then you can be surprised. And let us know about it, because it'd be only you and Mary, Mary and you.

What positive things, if any, can you get from this section of Revelations? We think of the four horsemen as the bringers of the Apocalypse. This is what I get. If anything, as we look at the four horsemen, we understand that God is still there. After the seals were broken, the faithful were saved from wrath and vengeance. The Bible put the number at 144,000; but that is a symbolic number that means everybody who is faithful. Whether or not you believe in these visions or not, please know that the faithful are always safe from divine judgement. We might still suffer in this world, but we never have to fear retribution from above. At the end of World War I, everyone went back to their own countries, the borders roughly the same. Enough is enough. The Ottoman's didn't fare out so well, and we drew new lines for the Middle East, which apparently haven't gone too well. But on the 11<sup>th</sup> month, the 11<sup>th</sup> day, at 11 a.m. 98 years ago this year, everyone put down their weapons. Enough fighting. Next week, we'll end our look at Revelation, with the promise of a city on a Hill. God's reign forever and ever. We'll also honor the saints who have gone before us - and light candles in their memory. I hope you'll join us. And the family of God said, AMEN.