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REVELATION

Kingdoms in Conflict

Revelation 7

Rev 7:1-17 1 After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: 5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; 6 of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; 7 of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; 8 of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed. 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 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 dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

I. Interlude

- a. Chapter 7 is a brief interlude between the 6th and 7th seal – and the judgments associated with each
 - i. We call them judgments, but they are the result of men being left to their own devices – free to do whatever is right in their own eyes
 - ii. **Proverbs 14:12** *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death* – repeated in Proverbs 16:25
- b. That's exactly what we have seen with the first 6 seals – Mankind at war
 - i. The first seal released the first of four horsemen – a rider on a white horse who went out with the sole purpose of conquering

1. It would be a mistake to associate this rider with Christ simply because of the color of his horse – because of the company he keeps
- ii. Conflict – nation rises against nation, neighbor rises against neighbor
- iii. With this conflict comes famine, disease, and death – ¼ of the world's population
- c. That is the unfortunate story of human history – constant conflict
 - i. Why?
 - ii. ***James 4:1 CSB What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from your passions that wage war within you? 2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.***
 1. See this in toddlers – I want what is mine and I want what is yours
 2. Fear and Jealousy
- d. Rooted in a greater conflict
 - i. The sixth seal brought a great earthquake followed by the stars falling from the sky and all of mankind hides underground and cries out “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”
 - ii. hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne
 1. Similar to Adam and Eve after they were deceived into disobeying God
 2. They were not tricked into worshiping the beast in the garden – they were encouraged to worship themselves – to be their own god – to become masters of their own kingdom
 - a. ***James 1:13 CSB No one undergoing a trial should say, “I am being tempted by God,” since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. 14 But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. 15 Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.***
 - iii. It was then that Adam and Eve hid themselves from the face of Him who sits on throne

II. Resisting the Kingdom of God

- a. The conflict of man against man is rooted in the spiritual conflict – Man against God
 - i. The conflict between two kingdoms – one in which we sit on throne and one in which God sits on throne
 - ii. That is story of scripture – after Adam and Eve rejected the rule and reign of God, we see mankind in conflict – Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, Pharaoh and the children of Israel, the Canaanites and the children of Israel, Jezebel and Elijah, Saul and David, and the list goes on and on
 - iii. On the service it is man against man, but we know ultimately it is man vs God
 1. Cain murdered Abel because of jealousy, same reason Joseph was almost murdered but instead threw in a pit, Pharaoh was afraid of the Israelites, as were the Canaanites, Jezebel was afraid of losing her position of power as was David
 2. Just like a toddler – I will fight to keep what is mine and fight to get what is yours
 - a. Fear and Envy – The fear of losing their own position of power or “kingdom,” while at the same time secretly knowing their kingdom

is nothing compared the unmatched glory and righteousness of God's Kingdom – and wanting that

- b. Their afraid of losing their kingdom while at the same time envious of a better Kingdom
- b. Closer God's Kingdom comes to earth – the more the conflict intensifies
 - i. During King Herod's reign, guided by a star, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn "King of the Jews"
 1. King Herod, who was known for being paranoid and ruthless, knew the what the prophecies said about a Messiah, so he asked the wise men when the star appeared and sent them to Bethlehem to find the child, pretending he wanted to worship the child too.
 2. The wise men followed the star to where Jesus was, were filled with joy when they found Him, they worshiped Him, and offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they went home by another route.
 - ii. ***Matt 2:16 CSB Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men.***
 1. Was he demon possessed or acting out of his own fears and jealousy? James tells us he acted out of his own sinful desires – He saw God's Kingdom was a threat to his
 2. That opposition continued as Jesus grew and fulfilled His ministry
- c. Jesus' teachings
 - i. ***Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."***
 - ii. ***Luke 17: 20 When he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; 21 no one will say, 'See here!' or 'There!' For you see, the kingdom of God is in your midst."***
 1. ***Matt 12:28 - But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. (signs/miracles of His Kingdom)***
 - iii. How did the world receive Him and His Kingdom? *John 11 the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. - Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.*
 1. That's exactly what they did – why? Pilate knew – ***Matt 27:18 For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.***
 2. The Pharisees admitted it themselves – ***John 11:48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."***
 3. Wasn't just the Pharisees – the crowds cried crucify Him – the cried out for the murdered Barabas – what had Jesus done?
 - a. He brought the Kingdom of Heaven near—a perfect, eternal Kingdom.
 - b. A Kingdom that we rejected but He offered us a way back in through His death and resurrection

- c. The message - Repent – military term – turn and go another direction – march under the rule of a new King – new allegiance

III. The Suffering Saints

- a. That opposition didn't end with the death and resurrection of Christ – Jesus had trained his disciples to continue His work here on earth
 - i. ***Mission of the 70 - Luke 10:8 Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. 9 And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' 12 But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.***
 - ii. That work continued through the apostles and the church as they fulfilled the great commission – calling an unbelieving world to repent, believe, and receive
 - iii. Remember the natural posture of an unbelieving world is jealousy and envy – some would believe but others would hear about this Kingdom and see it as a threat – and reject it, sometimes violently
 - 1. Jesus said in ***Matt 10: 34 Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.,***
 - 2. Many of the disciples were imprisoned, beaten, and killed for professing the truth of the gospel and the coming Kingdom of God
- b. And that opposition continues to this day
 - i. An estimated 380 million Christians experiencing persecution and discrimination as a result of their faith, according to a new report from Open Doors US
 - ii. Most recently in the news – Christians in Benue State, Nigeria are being targeted - 218 Christians killed in villages and displacement camps between June 8–14
 - 1. Militants are targeting Christian-dominated communities which has led to over 6000 displaced believers
- c. As God's Kingdom continues to draw near, the opposition will intensify and the fear of losing power and the envy of a better Kingdom will only grow stronger
 - i. As the 5th seal is opened, and John sees under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held – crying out for justice
 - ii. They are told to rest for just a little while longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed
 - 1. Just wait until more of you are killed – what kind of encouragement is that
 - iii. That finally brings us to Rev 7

IV. The Angels and the Seal of God

- a. Chapter 7 begins with four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the winds of the earth (wind often represents God's judgement)
 - i. Another angel arrives from the east
 - ii. Often the direction of blessing and salvation – light originates from the east, Eden was in the east, the glory of God came to His temple from the east, the wise men came from the east sharing news that the Savior was born – this angel is definitely coming with blessing because he is carrying the seal of the living God

1. In the midst of this terrible tribulation God still brings blessing – the ongoing message of scripture
- b. Angel calls out to the others - ***“Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”***
 - i. So far seals have been used for documents and scrolls – but now this angel, by the authority of the living God, is going to seal a select group people
 - ii. We’ve discussed the use of a signet ring for contracts and important documents but there was another use for seals in the time of John
 1. When a builder was beginning construction he obviously needed lumber – there wasn’t a local Home Depot – often times the lumber needed to be shipped from hundreds if not thousands of miles away – a wealthy builder would often send a representative with his signet ring to the location where the trees were being chopped down – he would purchase his lumber onsite and mark it with his signet ring – then the lumber would be put on a ship with all the other purchased lumber and when it would arrive months later to the master builder’s port he would know exactly which bundles were his
 - iii. That is exactly what Jesus – our master builder has done with us – ***NIV Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.***
 1. We see an Old Testament picture of this in ***Ezekiel 9:3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer’s inkhorn at his side; 4 and the Lord said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.”***
 2. As well as in Exodus 12 – The children of Israel were instructed to mark their doorposts with the blood of goats and lambs to seal them from the angel of death as it passed over
- c. Now, with the church gone, who is God sealing? Who is God claiming for His own?
 - i. First, it is 144,000 of all the tribes of the children Israel – and just so we don’t miss it God shows His work – 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes
 1. They are literal Jewish believers who become evangelists during the Tribulation.
 2. They represent a restored witness to the nations, distinct from the Church.
- d. The Great Multitude
 - i. After these things – a great multitude of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, far too many for any man to count, stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen!”
 1. Who are these? An Elder asks John this question before John can ask it. John says, “You know.” The elder tells him “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

2. Even though God's wrath is being poured out and the opposition is reaching a deafening crescendo – His Kingdom is still breaking through

V. A Message to the Church

a. As God's Kingdom draws near

- i. ***Luke 21:12 CSB But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you. They will hand you over to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13 This will give you an opportunity to bear witness. 14 Therefore make up your minds not to prepare your defense ahead of time, 15 for I will give you such words and a wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. 16 You will even be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. They will kill some of you. 17 You will be hated by everyone because of my name, 18 but not a hair of your head will be lost. 19 By your endurance, gain your lives.***
- ii. ***John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.***
- iii. ***John 16:1 CSB "I have told you these things to keep you from stumbling. 2 They will ban you from the synagogues. In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 They will do these things because they haven't known the Father or me. 4 But I have told you these things so that when their time comes you will remember I told them to you. I didn't tell you these things from the beginning, because I was with you.***
 1. ***John 16: 20 CSB Truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. 21 When a woman is in labor, she has pain because her time has come. But when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the suffering because of the joy that a person has been born into the world. 22 So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you.***

b. The more your citizenship in the Kingdom of God shines through – the greater the opposition, the greater the resistance

- i. Disorienting – the more you look like Jesus and love like Jesus – the harder things will be
- ii. Do not grow weary in doing good – your reward is at hand