

Foundations

OPEN THE CONVERSATION

Take some time to build relationships with the students:

- Ask for each student's high and low from the week.
- Today's RBQ (Relationship Building Question): If you're going on a vacation, would you rather plan the whole thing yourself or have someone else take care of all the details and surprise you once you're there?

INTRODUCTION

Most of us like to know what's coming up next so we can prepare. When there's a big test coming up, it's helpful when the teacher provides an overview of what the test will cover so we can study. Scouting an upcoming opponent in football helps a team prepare and anticipate what they may see. If you're like me, you may even pull up Google Maps or Apple Maps when you already know where you're going, just to see what traffic is up ahead.

It can be comforting to feel like we are in control and can plan ahead. Life, however, doesn't always work that way. We get sick or injured, friendships change, or something may happen with our families that we don't anticipate. We also live in a world where war, hunger, natural disasters, and persecution are outside of our control and can feel much bigger than us.

When we as Christians say that God is sovereign, we mean that He is Lord over everything, even those things that are outside of our control and the things that are difficult to understand. That doesn't mean suffering is good or that we can explain every hard thing that happens by saying God caused it. It means that even in a broken world full of hardship, nothing can push God from His place or make Him stop being God.

In Revelation 6, John writes about some of the hardest parts of living in a broken world: war, hunger, death, persecution, and judgment. He sees people who were killed because of their faith and people asking God how long they will have to wait for justice.

John reminds us that God has not forgotten His people. Despite a world full of suffering, Jesus is still the Lamb opening the seals. God is still sovereign, and Christ remains with His people even when life is difficult.

READ REVELATION 6:1-8

1. Which of the realities represented by the horsemen, like war, hunger, violence, or death, feels most noticeable in the world today?

2. In this passage, Jesus is still the One opening the seals while all of this is going on. When so much in life can feel outside of our control, how can it help to remember that God is still sovereign?

READ REVELATION 6:9-11

3. The followers of Christ in Revelation remained faithful to Jesus even when it cost them their lives. While most of us aren't facing that type of persecution, what can make following Jesus difficult in your own life? What is helpful to you as you try to remain faithful to Christ?
4. The believers in this passage ask God, "How long?" What do you think their prayer shows us about how we can talk to God when something is wrong or feels unfair, or when we're waiting for things to get better?

READ REVELATION 6:12-17

5. John includes all types of people in these verses. Why do status and power not matter before God, and what does every person ultimately need before God?

WRAP UP

This week, when something happens that you don't understand or that is hard, remember that God is in control and that Jesus is with you.

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray together.

EXTENDED CUT

Before chapter 6, John sees the throne room and a scroll that no one is worthy to open until Jesus appears as the Lamb. Jesus is the one who is worthy to take the scroll and open the seals. As chapter 6 begins, He is still the one opening them, even as John starts to see war, famine, death, and other forms of suffering.

The first four seals bring the four horsemen. The image is similar to the horsemen in Zechariah 1, although some of the details are different. Christians have also understood some of the riders differently, especially the rider on the white horse. Taken together though, the riders give us a picture of conquest, war, famine, and death. The black horse gives us a picture of famine. John describes food costing far more than it normally would, to the point that someone could spend an entire day's wages on enough food for that day. The fourth rider is named Death, and Hades follows behind him. These are not only ideas connected to the future. War, hunger, violence, sickness, and death are realities people have experienced throughout history and still experience today. Jesus also warned His followers that they would hear of wars and famines and experience suffering in this world.

Jesus is still the one opening the seals throughout this part of the chapter. Even with everything John is seeing, God has not lost control of what is happening. That does not mean we have to

look at every war, illness, death, or disaster and try to explain exactly why God allowed it. There are things we simply will not understand. We can still believe that God is sovereign while grieving what is wrong and bringing our questions to Him.

The fifth seal moves away from the horsemen. John sees people who had been killed because of “the word of God and the testimony they had given.” They had remained faithful to Jesus even when following Him cost them their lives. The reason they were killed is similar to the reason John gives for being on Patmos earlier in Revelation. They ask God, “How long?” These are faithful believers who trust that God is just, and they still want to know when He is going to do something about the wrong that was done to them. Scripture gives us other examples of people praying this way, especially in the Psalms. People ask God why something is happening, how long it will continue, and when He is going to act.

We can be honest with God in the same way. We do not have to pretend that we are not angry, confused, or hurting. We can bring those things to God while still trusting Him. The believers in this passage are asking because they believe God hears them and that He will eventually make things right. They are given white robes and told to rest a little while longer. White clothing in Revelation is connected with victory and belonging to Christ. God has not forgotten what happened to them, even though they are still waiting for the justice they asked for.

Christians still face persecution in different parts of the world today. Some lose their homes or freedom, and some are killed because they follow Jesus. Most of us may never experience anything close to that, but this passage gives us a reason to remember Christians whose experience of following Jesus is very different from ours and to pray for them.

The sixth seal gives John another picture of judgment. He sees an earthquake, the sun becoming dark, the moon like blood, stars falling, and mountains and islands being moved. Some of that language is similar to Joel 2 and other Old Testament passages about the day of the Lord. John then names people from all different parts of society. Kings are there, along with military leaders, wealthy people, powerful people, slaves, and free people. Whatever status or power someone had before does not help them here. They all end up facing the same question: “Who is able to stand?”

Chapter 7 helps answer that question. John sees God’s people and then a large crowd from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne. They are not standing because of their status, money, influence, or anything they were able to do for themselves. They belong to God. Revelation 6 is a hard chapter because it deals directly with suffering, persecution, death, and judgment. Some of the people who suffer most in the chapter are people who were faithful to Jesus. Following Christ does not mean we will never go through something painful or have questions about what God is doing. God is still sovereign, Christ has not forgotten His people, and suffering and death will not have the final word.

1. Which of the realities represented by the horsemen, like war, hunger, violence, or death, feels most noticeable in the world today?

Read the news and you’ll see stories about war, people in need of food, poverty, violence, and suffering. Some of it is happening across the world, and some of it is happening much closer to home here in Tennessee. Answers may be different depending on what you’ve seen or experienced, but all of these are still realities in the world we live in.

2. In this passage, Jesus is still the One opening the seals while all of this is going on. When so much in life can feel outside of our control, how can it help to remember that God is still sovereign?

It can help to remember that Jesus is with us in the middle of pain and suffering, and we can ask Him for the peace and strength we need. Because we live in a broken world, we will experience hardship and death, and there may be things that happen that we don't understand. But God is still sovereign, Christ has already won, and death and suffering will not have the final word.

3. The followers of Christ in Revelation remained faithful to Jesus even when it cost them their lives. While most of us aren't facing that type of persecution, what can make following Jesus difficult in your own life? What is helpful to you as you try to remain faithful to Christ?

It can be hard to follow Jesus when you're not sure how people will respond when they find out you're a Christian, or when honoring God means making a different choice from your friends. It can help to have other followers of Jesus walking alongside you, whether that's friends, parents, church leaders, mentors, or someone else you trust. Spending time in Scripture and prayer can also help remind us who we're following and why we want to remain faithful to Him.

4. The believers in this passage ask God, "How long?" What do you think their prayer shows us about how we can talk to God when something is wrong or feels unfair, or when we're waiting for things to get better?

When we're struggling or confused, we can be honest with God about what we're feeling. We can tell Him that we're angry or confused instead of pretending that we aren't. We can ask why something is happening, pray for someone who is sick, or ask God for justice when someone has been treated unfairly. The believers in this passage trusted God and still asked Him, "How long?" We can continue to pray even when we don't have an answer yet and trust that God hears us while we wait.

5. John includes all types of people in these verses. Why do status and power not matter before God, and what does every person ultimately need before God?

It doesn't matter how much money, influence, success, or power someone has. None of those things can make us right with God or save us. Every one of us has to be honest about our sin and our need for a Savior. Ultimately, every person needs Jesus.