

'The Rumble begins'

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- . Biblical text at the end of sermon.
- . Previous sermons in this series available on the website
- . See: www.jewsforjesus.org.au/sermons.html
- .

Introduction

The fireworks displays on New Year's Eve make for excellent shows, don't they? No mention should be made of the utter waste and folly of spending gazillion dollars each year worldwide. And often the finale is accompanied by the famous overture by Tchaikovsky. I love that piece. Do you know how the composition was written? Let me give you its history.

(From Wikipedia Encyclopedia) The 1812 Overture is an orchestral work that commemorates the victory of Russia in the Napoleonic Wars in 1812. The overture debuted in Moscow in 1882.

The overture opens with the somber tones of a Russian Church chant, recalling the declaration of war announced at church services in Russia, and is then immediately followed by a solemn chant for Russian success in the war.

A theme of marching armies follows, carried out by the horns. Then the French national anthem *La Marseillaise*, reflects the advancement of the French and the French victories in the war even the capture of Moscow in September 1812. Then the music quiets again.

The Russian folk dance theme focuses us back on the Russian people and what they might do to win the war. The dance commemorates the battle beating back Napoleon. The retreat from Moscow late in October 1812 is reflected by a long diminuendo. The French anthem is subdued. The firing of cannons reflects the military advances toward the French borders. With the end of the conflict over, we return to the peal of bells and fireworks for the victory and the liberation of Russia from French occupation. Below the cannon and the horns, we hear the then-Russian national anthem, *God Save the Tsar*.

That's it.

In Soviet times, Tchaikovsky's work had to be edited for performances: the *God Save The Tsar* anthem tune in the overture had to be replaced with something else, such as *Glory* from Glinka's opera Ivan Susanin. 1917 changed a lot of things in the world, including Tchaikovsky's overture. Ah, revisionism.

Even as late as the mid-1960s, Igor Buketoff wrote a transcription of the "1812 Overture" with chorus. He changed the themes by increasing the early parts, with the opening segment sung by voices instead of being played by cellos and violas, the children's chorus was added to the flute and English horn, and the full chorus was mixed into the winds--the entire orchestra, in fact--in the closing segment.

Now apart from the interest you know I have in musicology and the beauty that is found in the 1812 Overture, I want to use this particular piece as a modern image found in Revelation chapter 6. For in today's chapter we see the composition of another writer, the apostle John, writing from prison in Patmos, an island in the Mediterranean that would have been covered and awash with a tsunami anywhere in that sea. John is not only physically precarious, he is also spiritually so. He has been exiled due to his

stance for Y'shua. He is a Jew for Jesus and as such, labelled a civic trouble-maker. Thus his removal to the island away from coastal Turkey.

So far, John has described much in the 5 previous chapters of this final biblical book. He has shown us the sure conquest of the divine over the mundane, and he is describing it again and again, each time ending in praise to the Lord who has conquered and will conquer in the end.

This week he uses the four horsemen of the apocalypse to drumbeat us into the teaching yet again. And he uses a musical style that reminded me of the 1812 Overture as I re-read it this week. Listen to the rhythm of the 'come' of verse 1 and verse 3 and verse 6 and verse 7. It is a cadence to keep our rhythm to be sure. And listen as each horseman adds a bit to the sounds of the orchestra. That's why I don't like the additions of the moderns to Tchaikovsky's overture. They have changed the growth, the crescendo of the piece.



John introduces this new section of the 7 seals (actually he started it last time with the One who could open them). It's a section of tyranny. Listen to the Bible in verses one and two. The first seal, the first living creature from the last chapter, and a simple horseman, a single rider, and single word of welcome. The horseman was a conqueror. One word that tells the whole story. He is a power-hungry world leader, similar to the introduction of the first such human personage, Nimrod in the opening chapters of Genesis. The beginning of troubles, the rumble of the opening of the overture of the war between God and Ha-nachash in the final stages of human history.

The second seal is opened and the second 'come' is sung by the 2nd living creature. The red horse is the bloodshed horse with the blood-thirsty warrior upon him. People enter into war and learn war as the normal course. Peace is removed. There is no apparent stopping it either.

The black horse, the 3rd hears the *come* call as well by the 3rd living creature. Listen to the increased vocabulary and increased troubles in the world from the 3rd

horse known as famine. It's as if the orchestra and the troubles are in crescendo. The balance mentioned in verse 5 is not one of justice as you might expect, but rather an economic one. It's the one used in the grocery store to this day. You know how much you have to pay for a kilo of bananas because of the weights and measures. By the way, a new department was created just last July in Australia. "The National Measurement Institute (NMI) commenced on 1 July 2004 as part of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. NMI is responsible for establishing and maintaining Australia's units and standards of measurement and for coordinating Australia's national measurement system. NMI was formed from the National Measurement Laboratory (CSIRO), the National Standards Commission and the Australian Government Analytical Laboratories." (<http://www.measurement.gov.au>)

The Western Australia website of Consumer and Employment Protection says it this way, "Weights and Measures is a central element of trade throughout history. The competitive nature of traders has ensured that from earliest times a system existed to deliver correct measure to consumers and traders alike. There are also numerous references to weights and measures in the Bible, one of which is as relevant today as it was in those times:-

"Do not cheat anyone by using false measures of length, weight or quality. Use honest weights and honest measures". (Leviticus) " [19.36, Pr 16.11, Ezk 45.10, Hos 12.7, Am. 8.5, Mic 6.11)

Nice that someone in our government is informed by biblical realities, amen? And I'm sure someone in the government of New South Wales would say this is not multi-cultural or tolerant, but I'm proud of WA for this, aren't you?

And in the 3rd horse, the 3rd seal is opened and black is the horse. This is the colour of famine and dearth. The cost for a quart of wheat should be much less than a day's wage and three quarts of barley should be significantly less, but here with economic insecurity in view and without international scrutiny, the owners of the industry can charge whatever they want because there is so little grain available and supply-and-demand allows the owners/sellers to sell agricultural products for a ridiculous amount of money. Let's hope the market bearing higher prices won't affect the tsunami victims, but I'm afraid that people will try to get whatever they can, even in times of distress. I think we should combine the sin of greed with the 3rd horse, but that's my shtick and not the point of the lesson by John.

The 4th seal is broken and the 4th living creature invites the horseman onto the scene. The Greek word for the colour is *chloros*, like the green-ash of chlorine, the colour of death. It's an ashen horse, pale describing the colour of death, or of a person in a state of extreme fear. Look we now have two riders as the scene multiplies in intensity and fervour. The volume is increasing in the orchestra.

Note the phrase "authority was given to them." We see this passive voice used other times in this chapter. (.2, 4, .8) This is a huge theological point that John understands in prison. It's one that we must grasp if we are to succeed in this world of the 21st century. God is ultimately in control, but there are seasons when it appears that things are out of control, certainly out of his control. Friends, John wants you to know; I want you to know; God wants you to know.... There is never any time when God is out of control. He is Lord of all those who think they are Lord. He is the King of all those who rule for a bit of time.

The phrase 'a fourth of the earth' indicates not an exact amount of 25% of the populace or of the land mass, but rather an expression of the limitation of his apparent power. Even in the human realm, nothing is universal. The Third Reich only reached a bit of Europe. Japan's Imperial forces in WW2 reached into the Pacific and did dominate a fair bit, but had limits. Even in the Iraqi conflict we see going on now, unbeknownst to President Bush and his Cabinet, the domination of the US is limited. The biblical phrase is 'one fourth' to help us understand this human limitation.

Another comment on the four afflictions, if I might. The four are repeats from Ezekiel and other biblical texts. (chapter 14.12, .21, 4.17, 23..27, 34.25, Lev 26.25, Dt. 32.24, Jer. 21,6) The four are sword and famine, pestilence and wild beasts of the earth.

Then the fifth seal is broken by the Lamb. Note the length of the conversation and the amplified cries of the people involved in this 5th seal. The souls of the martyrs find an altar. They have a testimony that they had and continue to have. The souls cry out from the altar and cry the Older Testament cry of 'how long?' And each of those martyrs is given a white robe, and each is instructed in patience.

The Bohemian reformer John Hus was a man who believed the Scriptures to be the infallible and supreme authority in all matters. He died at the stake for that belief in Constance, Germany, on his forty-second birthday. As he refused a final plea to renounce his faith, Hus's last words were, "What I taught with my lips, I seal with my blood."

Leighton Ford tells one of his favorite stories about the forty martyrs of Sabaste. These forty soldiers, all Christians, were members of the famed Twelfth Legion of Rome's imperial army. One day their captain told them Emperor Licinius had sent out an edict that all soldiers were to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. These Christians replied, "You can have our armour and even our bodies, but our hearts' allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ."

It was midwinter of 320 C.E., and the captain had them marched onto a nearby frozen lake. He stripped them of their clothes and said they would either die or renounce Christ. Throughout the night these men huddled together singing their song, "Forty martyrs for Christ." One by one the temperature took its toll and they fell to the ice.

At last there was only one man left. He lost courage and stumbled to the shore, where he renounced Y'shua. The officer of the guards had been watching all this. Unknown to the others, the officer had secretly come to believe in Messiah. When he saw this last man break rank, he walked out onto the ice, threw off his clothes, and confessed that he also was a Christian. When the sun rose the next morning, there were forty bodies of soldiers who had fought to the death for Y'shua. [Leighton Ford, *Good News is for Sharing*, 1977, David C. Cook Publishing Co., p. 16.]

The sixth seal is the final one in this chapter. It has the ultimate number of words, and the longest teaching. Here we have the great earthquake and physical changes. The sun turns black, the moon turns red, stars fall like shooting stars and the sky splits apart as a Torah scroll unfurls. Mountains and islands are shaken to their foundations. (Joel 2.30ff, 2 Sam 22.8, Hag 2.6, Heb. 12.26)

This imagery would have been commonly understood since about 15 years before John wrote this, just south of Naples, Mt Vesuvius erupted and buried Pompeii and Herculaneum. Pliny described this burial in similar terminology. (Book 6, Epistles 16,20)

In other words, things that are permanent are made impermanent. The figs that grew in the winter easily fall as the fig trees are not going to produce edible fruit. (Day of the Lord warnings: Isaiah 34.1-4, Jer 4.23, Na 1.5) Stars should stay in their place and islands as well. Now with the imminent judgment of the Almighty, there is frailty in the structures of the world.

Not only is there trouble geo-physically, but also among the peoples of the earth. Politicians and military men, men of physical prowess and rich men, even the slaves begin to cry out along with the earth for a bit of protection. Verse 16 says they cry "fall on us and hide us from the presence" of God, and they acknowledge, albeit too late, that God's justice is coming and no one can stand up to Him. They like the Pompeiians hide in caves for protection. This theme of 'who can stand?' is typical in the prophets (Heb 9.27, 10.27, 31, Ezr 9.15, Jb 41.10, Psa 1.5, 76.7, 130.3, Mal 3.2).

What is the answer in the “day of the Lord?” Who can stand before God? It sounds hopeless if even the sun and moon, the mountains and islands are awash with impermanence.

The answer is found in Jeremiah 15. Turn with me to read verse 19. “If you return, then I will restore you — Before Me you will stand”

אִם-תָּשׁוּב וְאָשִׁיבְךָ לִפְנֵי תַעֲזָב

The tragedy of the judgment that John describes is a result of the failure of people to respond to the love and mercy of the Lamb who holds the scroll. God is offering mercy to all who seek him. Will you stand? Will you come with him? Or will you cry out for rocks to bury you, as an easier punishment than the sure devastation and tyranny of Imperial Rome and its henchmen.

Tchaikovsky’s overture pales in comparison to John’s Revelation of the Son of Man. But both describe victories of nearly defeated heroes. The war raged on and the ‘good guys’ of the story have an eternal destiny. God save the King, not the tsar, but the King of Kings who loves us and gives us eternal life. Choose now, he declares. Which God will you follow?

Summary

So: What should you learn/hear today as a result of reading this text? Or what lessons do we learn from today's teaching?

- 1) Be blessed by reading this book regularly
- 2) Martyrs will have their reward in due course
- 3) All power is limited in human history, both to the conquered and to the conqueror
- 4) Y’shua always offers us choice to follow Him

Invitation

We want to give a choice to you. Maybe you have been an opponent of the Messiah. Maybe you have worshipped wrong. Maybe you have rejected what God said, but today you want to turn and agree with God about Y’shua. If you would like to be delivered from your sin by the blood of Y’shua, then pray this prayer and receive His love and grace. Father, forgive me in the name of Y’shua for all my sins. He was the Saviour and the fulfilment of all prophecies about Messiah. He is the one and the only one who can save me from my selfishness, from my sin. I acknowledge Y’shua as that one who wants to free me, and who alone can free me. I repent of my sin and accept Y’shua as my deliverer. By faith I am now born again by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, please talk to me after the service is over, [\[or email me if you are reading this online\]](#) so we can talk about growing in this knowledge and this relationship with God.

Actual text

Rev. 6.1 ¶ And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.”

Rev. 6.2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer.

Rev. 6.3 ¶ And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.”

Rev. 6.4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

Rev. 6.5 ¶ And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

Rev. 6.6 And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”

Rev. 6.7 ¶ And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.”

Rev. 6.8 And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Rev. 6.9 ¶ And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

Rev. 6.10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Rev. 6.11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.

Rev. 6.12 ¶ And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;

Rev. 6.13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.

Rev. 6.14 And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Rev. 6.15 And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;

Rev. 6.16 and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;

Rev. 6.17 for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?”

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