

# The heavenly throne

As I write this lesson, our national elections are a week away. The hateful political ads, news reports of carnage in the world and political debates rage on. I am as concerned about the aftermath of this election as I am about the election. I have friends on both sides and I realize any real hope will only result if we can sit down together and build a future together instead of tearing everything apart. My preferences are not the answer: God's grace is! But this world does not understand God's grace, even though its meaning is powerfully displayed in the cross of Christ. Thank God for his strange book called Revelation, that is so much more than a timetable or another "Da Vinci Code" novel. We are reading "the last chapter" and it is hope – not wishful thinking – but God's answer that defeats evil forever!



**Michael Olmsted**

Every morning the news reports tell me about the evils we face. I have just read three novels set in 15th–16th century England and Europe when church and state were one, injustice in the name of God was the norm and common people had little hope or future. Those who worked to give the common people a Bible in their own language and break the power of a tyrannical church were tortured and killed in the name of God. (Yes, our world could be worse!) Our privilege as free citizens is to read the Bible, freely express our ideas, and practice our faith without fear of death. So we can turn to Revelation, debate its details, and ... know the outcome when the elections are over, the Lord returns, and all God's people celebrate "before the throne and the Lamb" (v. 9).

But the celebration of Revelation 7 is preceded by the dark images of chapter 6. John records the opening of the six seals of the book in God's hand, each one a world catastrophe:

- The first seal (v. 2) revealed a rider on a white horse, representing military conquest, savaging the world with wars.
- The second seal (v. 4) revealed a red horse of strife and unrest, fostering conflict and death among the nations.
- The third seal (v. 5) revealed a rider on a black horse, symbolizing famine and agricultural collapse which leads to financial collapse.
- The fourth seal (v. 8) revealed

pestilence and death riding on a pale green horse.

- The fifth seal (v. 9) showed the multitudes martyred for the sake of the gospel, a record of religious violence through the ages.
- The sixth seal (v. 12) showed the total chaos and devastation of our planet. This last is marked by the sun turned black, the moon red as blood, the stars fallen, mountains and islands moved from their places and the sky torn asunder.

Here is a catalog of catastrophe when the day of judgment has come.

John's vision changed drastically as God places his seal of protection on those who truly serve him, numbered as 144,000 people, a numerical symbol of completeness or wholeness. The twelve tribes of Israel are mentioned as well as "a great crowd that no one could number ... from every nation, tribe, people, and language ... standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (v. 9). Beyond the six seals of anguish there is a celebration in heaven, there is the victory of God, there is ultimate hope. The saints in white robes wave their palm branches and shout: "Victory belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (v. 10). The angels and elders join in this celebration of unequalled joy.

In Revelation 7 is the symbolic number representing perfection, and the throng celebrating before God, singing seven attributes of God Almighty: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power and might (v. 12). They see God clearly in all his glory.

In 1 John 3:2 the apostle had written earlier: "Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet that we shall be. We know that, if He should appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (NASV). We are meant to worship God in all God's fullness and glory; this passage is our hope come true.

Do we delude ourselves thinking we can build a country, elect a government, wage a military campaign or fashion a society that is God's kingdom on earth? Do we really think our church, denomination or programs can transform this world? For all our self-designated measurements of success, we surely understand the kingdom is God's and we are the witnesses, ambassadors and daily evidence of God's love. Every day we live

## Formations

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in this world, we are charged to live by the example and teachings of Jesus.

We are not so different from the first readers of Revelation. In spite of the injustices and evils of this world, we understand God is still sovereign and his kingdom will come. There comes a day when we will be in that heavenly throne room, where there will be no hunger or thirst, where the scorching heat of the sun and evil will not beat us down, where sickness and death will not be in our vocabulary, where all will be as God designs. The Lamb of God will give us the water of life that springs up forever to satisfy our thirst. God will wipe away every tear and we will celebrate joyfully as never before possible.

At one point one of the elders worshiping God turns from the beautiful celebration and asks John, "Who are these people wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" (v. 13). The elder answered his own question, reminding us that the center of our faith is God: "These people have come out of great hardship. They have washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb's blood. This is the reason they are before God's throne" (vv. 14-15). The cross, the blood of Christ, is Jesus' sacrifice for all time, the ultimate gift of God to a people who can never earn, deserve, organize, or reason their way to God. Paul says it so well in Romans 8:37: "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NASV).

Get hold of hope. God is God no matter what. Jesus is both Savior and Lord. No matter our questions, doubts, difficulties or fears...one glorious day the labors of creation will be over, the gates of eternity will swing wide and the children of God from every time and place will fall down in adoration before the throne of God who loves us and saves us forever! Come quickly Lord Jesus!

*Retired after more than 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.*