



Sunday, February 11, 2024
Revelation 8-10

As we step into the next section in our study of the book of Revelation, we are going to be taking a look at Chapters 8 to 10 today, as each of these chapters displays in detail this next cataclysmic event. As we mentioned, last week, chapter 8 will unveil the seventh and final seal, but in doing so, it will also open up the next event which is the sounding of the seven trumpets. This will take us well into the middle of Chapter 11 but there seems to be a natural break at the end of Chapter 10 so that is where we will conclude for today. I was tempted to give you a summary of chapter 8, 9 and 10, but I was reminded of John's words at the very beginning of his letter that encourage these verses to be read aloud so I think there is great value to us reading all three of these chapters in one sitting. It will only take six minutes, but it will give us a fuller picture of what is happening then just a brief summary.

Before we jump into it, though, I will say this. Closer to the end of our reading in Chapter 10, we read of a little book that John is given to eat, and when he eats it, he makes the comment that it tastes sweet as honey, but makes his stomach bitter. The symbolism being that the book represents the truth of the message of God and the sweetness of the book represents the joy and fulfillment that comes from understanding God's will and the knowledge of God's plan for redemption.

However, the bitterness of the book symbolizes the challenges and hardships that come with that message. It represents the harsh realities of judgment, suffering, and the consequences of sin. The bitterness reflects the sorrow and anguish that accompany the knowledge of God's impending judgment upon the unrepentant and the suffering that will befall humanity. And through it all, the message to John is to continue to preach the hard stuff. And so, in many ways, stepping into this next

section, I can relate to John's experience here that the word of God is sweet, but there are portions of it that are hard to wrestle with such as what we will read today. And so, my hope and prayer is that we will be able to see the sweetness of the grace of Almighty God extended towards humanity amidst the difficult and challenging words we are about to read.

Revelation 8 (NKJV)

'When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

6 So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

7 The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the [a] earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

8 Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9 And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

10 Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

12 Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day [b]did not shine, and likewise the night.

13 And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

Revelation 9

'Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the [a]bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. 3 Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And [b]they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.

7 The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. 10 They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. 11 And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is [c]Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.

12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. 19 For [e]their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 10

‘I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3 and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. 4 Now when the seven thunders [a] uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying [b]to me, “Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.”

5 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, 7 but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.

8 Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, “Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.”

9 So I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book.”

And he said to me, “Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.”

10 Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. 11 And [d]he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.”

Chapter 8 opens up with the opening of the 7th and final seal of the Scroll and with it comes the introduction of the 7 trumpets but not before the whole of Heaven embraces a moment of silence. We’re not entirely sure what this moment symbolizes specifically, and there are a number of different thoughts that suggest it might be a time of prayerful preparation for the next coming scene, it has also been suggested that this might be a time of anticipation for what’s about to come, but what seems to be most congruent with the rest of the book is that this is a moment of solemn reverence as this moment of silence may underscore the gravity of the judgments that are about to be unleashed upon the earth, emphasizing their seriousness and importance. It’s almost like a heavenly gasp of sorts.

What happens next as the seven trumpets start being opened is significant as we see another angel take its place - this time right beside the altar of God. In his hand is a censer and the instruction to add incense to the altar mixed with the prayers of the saints is given. The smoke of the incense mixed with the prayers of the saints fills the throne room and ascends before God Almighty as the angel seemingly knowingly now takes the censer, fills it with fire from the altar and thrusts it upon the earth.

This action releases the events of the seven trumpets and it's important that we understand the nature of this action before we get into the judgments that follow. Notice the position of the angel with the censer here. Where is he? He's beside the altar gathering the incense and the prayers of the saints as an offering to the Lord. Now, the term 'prayers of the saints' is a generic term that is used throughout biblical literature, but because of the nature of the context of the angel and the altar in this section, this suggests to us that this is more specific than it might first seem. If you go back to Revelation 6 where we are first introduced to the Altar, we see that there is a multitude of Martyrs that are positioned underneath the altar crying out and beseeching the Lord Almighty - asking how long will He permit sin and evil to run its course and do what it wants in the world without retribution. These are the prayers and cries that the angel now mixes with the incense to offer to the Lord. And so the action then of the fire from the altar being thrust to the earth is best viewed as God's wrath and judgment as a direct response now to the cries of the martyr's from chapter 6. That He hears their cries and He recognizes their faithfulness to stand against evil and is now responding to their cries by pronouncing judgment upon evil. We see the first four trumpets released as various calamities befall the earth: hail and fire mingled with blood, a burning mountain cast into the sea, a star called Wormwood poisoning the waters, and darkness covering a third of the world. Chapter 9 continues with the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets, unleashing terrifying demonic locusts and an army of horsemen, bringing torment, plagues and destruction upon humanity by wiping out 1/3 of them.

However, if you've been following along and paying attention, then the natural question that comes out of this is, if the cries came out in chapter 6 and the response is now in chapter 8, how is this next set of judgments viewed as a response if the response has already taken place with the seals in that same chapter?

Ok so.....I'm going to try and explain this the best way I know how. But basically, the answer lies in the fact that this book is not meant to be read necessarily linearly like any other book, but as a story with bits and pieces that are introduced that can actually affect later events. That, although John might see a specific section next, it doesn't necessarily mean that that is what is actually tak-

ing place next. We have also seen that John shows us various perspectives of the same scenes on occasion as well. For example: chapter 6 and 7 can be viewed as the same scene but one scene is taken from the perspective of the wicked and the other is from the perspective of the godly. As I said last week, we see this in the Gospels as well with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all writing and recording the same scene of the life of Jesus - but all with differing perspectives. These respective perspectives all combine together to help give us a well-rounded view of the scene that is being witnessed.

And so the scene that we are looking at today is a part of a much bigger scene of the wrath and judgement of God, as portrayed in the book of the revelation, by three sets of seven events. The first one being the seven seals that we talked about over the last few weeks; the second one is the seven trumpets and the third one is the seven bowls. It's not that three separate judgement events are necessarily needed, but more so that each one is used to showcase the various elements of the wrath of God.

For example, the seven seals is an example of the permissive wrath of God as they show us what happens when humanity decides to reject Almighty God and tries to be its own god. Wars, bloodshed, famine and even death ensue. God is not actively pronouncing these on humanity, but humanity in their rejection of God brings this upon itself which ultimately leads to its own demise. This is the point of the 7 seals. It shows what will happen to humanity if left to its own devices - complete and utter destruction.

As we have just read, the next set of seven events is called the trumpets. And this now shows us the active judgement of God as the angel now takes fire from the altar, and thrusts it towards the Earth. 1/3 of creation is destroyed through this event.

The seven bowls which takes place in chapters 15-16 showcases the final judgement of God where evil and wickedness are completely eradicated in order that a new earth can be created.

The point being that before the final judgment comes, in His grace and mercy and love, God always gives humanity opportunity to repent.

In the permissive wrath of God, the hope is that as humanity continues to self-destruct in their attempt to live as their own god's, that they would be brought to their knees in hopes of finally surrendering to the salvation and redemption of Almighty God.

And in the active wrath, yes 1/3 of creation is destroyed, but it's imperative to note that God is all-powerful and instead destroying everything, God actually spares 2/3 of creation thus giving opportunity to repent to those that were spared. Which is why trumpets are now used to display this next set of judgments.

Because in the Old Testament, trumpets were sounded to warn people of impending danger. We see two clear examples of this in both the books of Joel and Ezekiel, where the instruction was given to blow the trumpets to warn the people of the coming danger. And the instruction was also clear, that if the people did not heed the sound of the trumpet but chose to disregard or ignore it, then their blood would be on their own head.

The heart is the same in all of these. They remind us that God is just. And God is Love. I know, it can be hard to see the Love of God in the wrath that we have just talked about but it's there. You see, in His great love for humanity He doesn't force us to love Him but rather allows us to choose to love Him back or to deny Him which in that case will lead us to destruction as we can see through the seven seals. And God is just. That sin requires justice and He is the Only one with the authority to pronounce justice over sin but in His great power and might his justice is meant to be viewed as corrective so that our behaviour changes. The Lord disciplines those He loves. But ultimately, embracing sin and the flesh and rejecting God means that you view yourself as your own god and you cannot save yourself so final judgment must be exercised towards sin if it is not being repented for.

Interestingly all three of these forms of God's judgment don't have to happen separately but can also operate simultaneously. We see an example of this in the Exodus where the Egyptians were given full freedom and opportunity to choose to follow Almighty God. Instead, they chose to embrace idolatry and to worship images of stone, wood and metal. God's response to their sin was partial active judgment - the plagues - meant to draw them to the realization that they were in fact wrong and needed to repent. But they wouldn't and kept on rejecting God and embracing themselves literally as their own gods. And we see that in the tenth and final plague, the final judgement of death was pronounced.

And so, even in this one story, we see each one of the three judgements of God as portrayed in revelation, all taking place. And so, examples like this seem to suggest that the three sets of 7 judgments may not necessarily be chronological judgments, where each one follows the other in succession, but more-so that they are three overlapping expressions of the eradication and elimination of evil that are meant to display the progressive nature from permissive to partial and then to full. And so to answer the original question, I would say that all three sets of seven judgements exist as

a response to the question of justice towards sin from the martyrs under the altar because all three elements of God's wrath have been answering that same exact question since the beginning of time when that apple was eaten in Garden by Adam and Eve. This cry for justice has been a cry that has rung loud and true ever since the first sinful step was taken. And so until every last bit of sin and evil has been fully eradicated, the wrath and judgement of God will continue to make its way throughout every generation - as it has, so it will continue.

Now the descriptions and imagery depicted in this section of the wrath of God are horrific and many suggest that it is not necessary literal but figurative. That actual demon locusts aren't going to torment the world, but that they simply serve to represent the nature of the demonic that is permitted to pester humanity at that time. The same with the 6th trumpet for the 2 million army of horsemen with heads of lions breathing smoke and sulphur. It has also been suggested that this could be of a spiritual nature that John is now seeing but humanity in the physical sense cannot/ will not be able to see as he sees. And then, they could very-well be literal. Now, whether these events that John writes of are literal or figurative; past, present or future tense, they all speak to the fact that ultimately, God is the only One who has the authority to pronounce wrath and judgment toward sin and will continue to operate as such until sin and those who embrace it, Satan and the demonic forces are completely eradicated. And again, even in this section, we see the redemptive nature of the wrath of God in the simple fact that these demon locusts are only permitted to pester, not to kill. And they are only permitted to do so for a short period of time. Why?

Because ultimately, God's wrath and judgment in this section needs to be viewed as corrective and not punitive. He won't allow the demonic forces to take their lives in this stage because this is meant to warn them of the finality of the next stage. To remind them that they need God. So even in pronouncing His wrath and judgment, He is clearly displaying His ultimate love for humanity by extending Grace upon Grace - through His permissive wrath and the sound of the trumpets warning them of impending doom - that they would respond before it's too late and their sin swallows them up in death. The Bible says in:

John 3:36 that:

'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.'

It must be understood that the wrath of God then is not this act of revenge upon humanity that God pronounces in anger or hate. His wrath is positioned towards sin. God hates sin and has hated sin since the beginning and has been working towards the final eradication of sin since that time. The

time for justice has come. Sin can no longer have its way. The curse of sin and death and all those that choose to embrace and follow it must be fully eradicated.

Humanity has been given the choice to choose to accept or deny the blood of Christ to be applied as the antidote for their sin, and if they choose to reject the antidote of Jesus, then John says that God's wrath pronounced towards sin, will unfortunately be applied to them, because you can't separate the two without the blood of Jesus.

Now, we've already used ancient Egypt as a parallel to give us a visual of the progressive nature of God's wrath and judgment progressing from permissive to partial to final but ultimately we see a picture of John 3:36 with the 10th and final plague.

In that final plague, we see the wrath of God being poured out towards sin and ultimately those who embraced it. God offered a protection of sorts against this action though by instructing the blood of a lamb to be applied to the doorposts. Regardless of who it was, if the lamb's blood was applied to the doorpost, then the angel of death would pass by. But if the blood wasn't there, then the first-born would die. The blood of the Lamb was no respecter of person. If that Symbol was there, then all those inside would be spared. If it wasn't there then death would be pronounced. And it's the same with the salvation that He offers us today and tomorrow. The only way to spare humanity from the wrath of God towards the full eradication of sin is to take the blood of the Lamb and apply it to the doorposts of our heart so that the wrath of God will no longer be upon us. That is the antidote - Jesus is the answer.

Yet - even after witnessing all of the carnage, destruction and even death of the plagues, the Egyptians would not turn to God but chose to live as their own gods, thus sealing their sad and eventual fate. Which is the same exact thing we read in Revelation. And for me, verse 20 and 21 of chapter 9 have been the hardest verses to read.

Revelation 9:20-21

'But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their [f]sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.'

These two verses show the incredible power and hold of sin when it is embraced. That, upon witnessing the judgement of God, a humanity that was steeped in sin, would not repent. Think about it.

After witnessing everything that you had just witnessed how in the world would they not be brought to repentance? Put yourself in that position as well and try to ask yourself that same question. How in the world would they not repent?

There are many thoughts on this one but two main reasons arise and the first one has to do with pride. The root of all sin. Saying that you don't need God - that you in essence are your own god. Pride refuses to submit to God's authority and instead leads to rebellion against His judgments. The second reason is that the love of sin has such a hold on the individual that it takes over and brings about a delusion of control. After all, the nature of sin is ultimately deception. And for someone to witness, all of this destruction and judgement of God, and not turn back to God, would signify that their hearts are deluded and deceived.

Ultimately though, I think there is a connection with this section and the end of chapter 10 where John is instructed to keep preaching even though it's a bitter pill to swallow. While the judgments unleashed by the trumpets serve as a wake-up call and a warning of God's impending judgment, they may not in and of themselves be sufficient to bring about repentance in every heart. This suggests that the message of repentance and salvation must continue to be proclaimed especially in the midst of judgment and hardship. John is reminded that the ongoing preaching and prophesying of God's word serves as a vital complement to the judgments, offering people the opportunity to hear the message of salvation, repentance, and forgiveness. And despite the severity of the judgments, God's desire is for people to turn to Him in genuine repentance and faith.

That we are to declare the truth of God in the midst of all that is happening. The truth is this: there is a God, a living God. This is His world. It works God's way, or it does not work. If we violate God's will and his way, it will turn back on us. But there is a way through all of this. Jesus has made that way possible. He is the Lamb, slain for our sin. He alone can lead us back on track. The way back is to run toward God. Yes, run toward the one who has the right to judge, and you will find a Lamb ready to receive you. Then to follow him. The way to life is the way of costly obedience, to follow Jesus, come what may. So how then are we to respond to the events that we just read about of God's wrath in judgment?

First, we need to repent of anything, and everything contrary to God's will and way. We need to repent of our idolatry, basically anything we have put before obedience to Jesus Christ. Repent and keep repenting. This is not a one and done kind of action. We are to live lives of repentance, continually going back to the Lord, with humble hearts, recognizing the heir of our ways, and excepting the strength and fortitude that he offers us to live holy lives for him.

Second, we need to be people of prayer. The book of revelation on numerous occasions talks about the prayers of the Saints. Friends, there is power in prayer. As they were praying for justice, we also can pray for justice. However, while there is still time on this earth, our prayer needs to be a prayer of intercession for those who do not know the living God to receive Him as their Lord and Saviour.

And third, we need to commit to speaking the love of God and the truth of His Word and to live accordingly. We need now - more than ever - to be a city on a hill. To be a beacon of light in the darkness.

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