

"Answered Prayers, Natural Disasters, Strong Warnings"

I was once counseling a man who had a lot of dysfunctional and self-destructive behavior patterns in his life. I remember the regret in his voice at one point as he said, *"I feel like an alcoholic who finally has a moment of clarity. He realizes he has a problem but it's only after he's already killed two people because he was driving drunk."* Sometimes human pride is tenaciously stubborn to resist correction. Sometimes it is only after there have been catastrophic consequences that we are willing to face the truth. In Revelation you see that dynamic at work on a global scale and all through human history. In Revelation you see all of humanity throughout all of history drunk on and addicted to the pride that resists God and refuses to submit to him and worship him as God. It's like a cancer that infects human culture. This pride drives all the great enemies of God in revelation: Satan, the Antichrist, Babylon the great. It's a big part of the ultimate battle between God and Satan and it's a big part of your battles in all of life. It's also what's behind the drama of Revelation. **Revelation 8** is about God turning up the heat in order to reveal the truth to a proud people that won't listen.

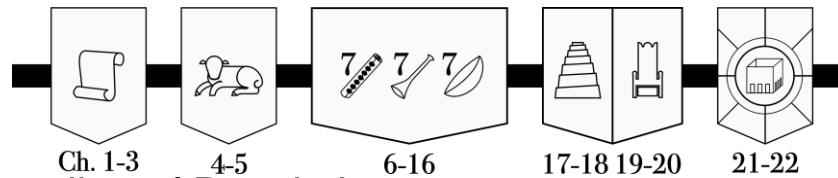
The first thing it teaches us is that...

I. GOD IS THE TRUE GOD OF HISTORY

This chapter begins with a vision of seven angels who stand before God and are given seven trumpets. There is incense that represents the prayers of God's people rising before the throne of God and then later as the angels begin to blow the trumpets the results are powerful natural disasters that shape history. It is all taking place from before the throne of God. He is the one to whom the saints pray. He is the one the angels serve. He is the one who is in sovereign control of all that happens. Knowing that gives us confidence and calls us to humility.

A. That God is the true God of history is part of the larger message of Revelation.

It doesn't always feel like this but this is one of the truths Revelation unveils and reveals. *Look at the chart and five major sections...*



This is the story line of Revelation:

- 1.) Jesus loves the church. That's the theme of **Revelation 1-3**
- 2.) God is on the throne. That's **Revelation 4-5**
- 3.) There will be tribulation. In **Revelation 6-16** there are three sets of seven. The seven seals give the broad story of history, with the growth of Christianity but also wars and famines and persecution and then the final judgment. Then out of the seventh seal there comes seven angels blowing seven trumpets. These are judgments of God that grow in intensity. When the seventh trumpet is sounded out of it come seven bowls of wrath. These are the final judgments of God.
- 4.) Jesus will return as conquering King. **Revelation 17-20**. This takes place in two parts. The destruction of Babylon the ultimate symbol of human pride and the exaltation of Jesus the one who humbled himself to save us and is exalted by God and enthroned forever.
- 5.) All things will be made new. In **Revelation 21-22** there is a new creation. Every tear is wiped away and all things are made beautiful on the renewed earth with the city of God at the heart of it all.

The word Revelation literally means an unveiling. One of the truths being unveiled is that God is the true God of history and he is in control and all powerful and this is his story and he is working out his plans.

B. This revelation of God's awesome power and authority calls us to respond in humility.

One thing scholars of Revelation agree on is that there is a clear connection between the trumpet judgments of Revelation and the plagues that God brought against Egypt when he led his chosen people out of bondage. The trumpet judgments come in a different order and on a larger scale but they are like the plagues on Egypt. In the plagues on Egypt you have the hail and fire and the destruction of the ecology and the water turned to blood and undrinkable and the darkening of the heavens. Scholars point out that there are too many parallels for it to be coincidence. There is a clue in the story of the plagues as to the meaning of the trumpet judgments. When the story in

Exodus begins in **Exodus 5:2** Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, the LORD says, let my people go". And Pharaoh asks a question. He asks: "*Who is the LORD that I should obey him?*"

Pharaoh's response is the same that people have today. Think about pretty much any issue where God reveals himself and speaks to people in our culture today and the response is basically: "*Who is the LORD that I should obey him?*". Think about the issues debated today in the areas of sex, sexuality, gender identity, abortion, care for the poor, racial equality, marital fidelity, politics, social justice, and faith in Jesus, in so many areas the response of humanity as a whole is "Who is the LORD that I should obey him?"

How does God answer that question, whether it comes from the throne of Pharaoh or it rises from collective heart of a whole human culture? The Bible tells us that throughout history God has revealed himself in the majesty of creation and shows his grace through his goodness and patience but as in Egypt long ago the day will come when God will answer that question with dramatic judgments. In **Exodus 9:14** right before the plague of hail that is repeated here in Revelation God says, *For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.* What Exodus tells us happened in Egypt long ago is what Revelation tells us is going to happen in the end for all the earth. In **Exodus 10:3** there's a moment when Moses and Aaron go in before pharaoh and say: Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "*How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?*" That is the question God ask of all of us individually and it is the question he will ask of all of humanity at the end of history.

The first lesson here is that God is the true God of history. But it is not just that – the second lesson is that...

II. GOD JUDGES HUMAN PRIDE PROGRESSIVELY.

There are two things to learn from the first four trumpet judgments. First...

A. There are judgments coming that are worse than anything the world has ever experienced.

1. The first trumpet affects the dry land. Verse 7 says, *The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.* If you Google "blood rain" you will find lots of

articles on line from reputable sources like National Geographic. It is a known phenomena often connected to air pollution.

This first trumpet brings not only some form of “blood rain” but also the hail and the fire and the destruction of a third of the earth’s plant life and all the grass.

One thing to remember is that what John sees in Revelation is not the future itself, as if he just travelled through time, but inspired visions filled with symbols that flash before him and picture things to come. The vision in chapter 8 begins with an angel throwing a censer of incense to the earth and causing earthquakes. It ends with a talking eagle flying overhead. There is a lot in this vision that is symbolic and that’s not just okay it is helpful. It tells us up front that if our focus in reading this is to try to figure out the details of what it pictures, the science of it all, we miss the point. The point is that there is a judgment to come that will devastate the earth’s eco-system. It will be worse than anything the world has ever experienced.

2. The second trumpet affects the sea. Verses 8-9 say, *The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.* Powerful volcanoes and even futuristic weapons have been suggested as possibilities for this judgment on the sea. Ultimately we don’t know what this will be and it doesn’t matter.

The earth is struck, the sea is struck, third the....

3. The third trumpet affects the fresh water. Verses 10-11: *The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing 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 people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.*

On Tuesday of last week (April 5th) NASA released a report that said eight new asteroids that could pose a threat to Earth were spotted by NASA’s asteroid-hunter in the last two years. (Near-Earth Object Wide-field Survey Explorer NEOWISE) telescope). The official NASA web site says: *“We believe anything larger than one to two kilometers (one kilometer is a little more than one-half mile) could have worldwide effects.”* (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/asteroids/overview/fastfacts.html) An asteroid that stretched from Christ Community Church to

International Speedway Boulevard would have devastating *worldwide* effects. Scientists say we shouldn't worry but it does show how vulnerable we are and the kind of thing that could happen.

The earth, the sea, the fresh water, and then...

4. The fourth trumpet affects the sky. Verse 12 *The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*

Revelation 8 shows us the true God of history judging the world progressively. In **Revelation 6** you have the idea of tribulation occurring throughout history but now with the trumpets there is an increased intensity. God is turning up the volume. In Revelation 6 with the seven seals the tribulations are at least in part caused by man-made activity: wars, famines, and persecution. But here in **Revelation 8** these are more dramatically and undeniably acts of God. In **Revelation 6** the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse was given authority over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth but now the judgment falls on $\frac{1}{3}$ of all creation. Later when the seventh trumpet sounds the result is that seven bowls of further judgment are revealed and the *whole world* is affected. So there is a growing intensity to these judgments from God.

And so secondly, what that means is that ...

B. Those judgments, as devastating as they will be, are warnings of even worse to come.

Right after the fourth trumpet is sounded, **verse 13**, says, *Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"*

What this is telling us is that these tremendous natural disasters are warnings of worse judgments to come.

In my research this week I came across a website for a company that offers a plan to get you through a time like this. There is a company called Vivos. Their website says, *"Whether we want to believe it or not ... we are on the cusp of an increase in number and magnitude of events that may...change the world, as we know it."* They list a range of possible cataclysmic disasters, including Armageddon, plagues, a solar kill shot, a super volcanic eruption, killer asteroids and comets, mega tsunamis, an economic meltdown—not to mention manmade threats, including nuclear explosions, a reactor meltdown, biological or

chemical disasters, terrorism, and widespread anarchy. But for a mere \$35,000 per person, you can co-own an underground Vivos shelter in one of their airtight, fully self-contained, impervious complexes designed to survive any catastrophe. Their website advertises: “*Our [complexes are] stocked for a minimum of 1 year of autonomous survival to ride out the potential events. Every detail has been considered and planned for. Members need to only arrive before their facility is ... secured from the chaos above.*” They say “every detail” has been considered so that you can “ride out” these events. What about this detail: the events you’re hoping to ride out are not the end they’re just the beginning of the end. They are the warnings that announce that there is even worse to come.

God is the true God of history who will judge human pride progressively. Once we see that we also need to know that....

III. GOD GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

In this chapter the judgments are obvious but grace is here also. The reason God turns up the volume as he brings these progressive judgments, the reason he reveals that they are coming in the book of Revelation, is because he offers and gives grace to humble.

One of the major lessons that runs through the book of Revelation is expressed throughout the Bible as an absolutely reliable law of life.

A. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

In **Matthew 23:12** Jesus said, *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* **James 4:6 & 10** says, *“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

B. It’s through humility that we are saved.

1. Jesus humbled himself to be the lamb of God for us. *That’s why* Jesus in Revelation is not only the lion but the lamb. Throughout Revelation those who are saved and sealed by God for God’s protection and God’s promises are those who have *“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.”* That is highly symbolic language that simply means they have turned to Jesus and trusted him as Lord and Savior. The same God who will bring judgment at the conclusion of history humbled himself to bear our judgment for us on the cross. God raised him and saves all who trust

him.

2. We humble ourselves to receive him. At the end of this chapter the woes are pronounced for “those who dwell on the earth” but at the beginning of the chapter there is another group singled out, they are called “the saints”, which means the ones set apart. Their prayers are like incense to God. They belong to him and he seals them and sustains them through every trial and test. What causes them to be “set apart” is not that they are better than others but that they are trusting in Jesus. Receiving Jesus and salvation means admitting you are guilty and you need to be forgiven, you are sick and you need to be healed, you are weak and you need his strength. It’s humbly accepting the kindness of God by faith in Jesus. In **Matthew 18:3-4** Jesus said, *“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

3. We humble ourselves to follow him. One of the most important, appropriate and helpful lessons we can take away from a passage that shows God’s judgment on sinful pride is a strong reminder to live in humility. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Where does that principle apply in your life right now? Where is God you, maybe even pushing, pressuring you to humble yourself before Him?

A conversation with one of our church member early this week reminded me of a classic little book by Andrew Murray simply titled: *Humility*. Here are just a couple of quotes I want to leave you with.

“Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil.”

He says, don’t think of pride as just one more annoying or ugly character quality or humility as one more of the decent virtues. Pride is death and humility is life, Pride is hell and humility is heaven. To the degree that you have pride within you - you have that much of the fallen angel alive in you, as much as you have true humility, so much you have the Lamb of God within you. ” Humility is not a small or weak thing. Humility is huge and strong.

God is the true God of human history, God will judge human pride progressively but God gives His grace to the humble.

Amen.