

Waiting For Our Blessed Hope Revelation 8:13-9:12

In the Apostle Paul's letter to his pastoral protege Titus, he makes this famous statement: *"The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*

The word "appear" – to become visible – is used twice. First, the grace of God became visible at the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. And second, Christ will become visible again. He will return on the Last Day.

Paul calls this second appearance "our blessed hope." Literally, our happy expectation. A Christian can have an expectation of the return of Christ that produces joy, peace, comfort, even happiness and excitement.

Wouldn't you like to have more of those in your life? We must wait for that day, but it's not easy to live for God with so much evil in the world. Even believers may doubt God's sovereignty and question His control over all things. There's a natural hopelessness that comes over us as we look at the world. But in Christ, God has given us a "blessed hope."

How present is that expectation in your thoughts and decisions? I would propose to you today that without anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ – with all it means according to what Scripture tells us – you will have a nagging hopelessness that results in pessimism or worldly living or grieving as if there is no hope or suffering with no sense of purpose. The results are different for different people.

The world is not hopeless. God is at work, accomplishing His plan in "the present age." And these verses in Revelation highlight two aspects of the present age that are critical for us to remain hopeful and enjoy the fruit of hope. You see them listed on page 6 in the WG. Those sealed in Christ will be protected in the last days (8:13-9:4), but those not sealed in Christ will be preyed upon in the last days (9:5-12).

The last days are not easy for anyone. But those without Christ suffer differently. Let's look at this together.

In verse [13], John says, *"Then I looked, and I heard an eagle."* "Eagle" is also translated as "vulture" in the NT. Jesus used the word as "vulture" during His earthly ministry. For me, a buzzard comes to mind. They circle their prey and feast on dead things.

Many times in the OT an eagle is a symbol of God's judgment, pictured as a predator attacking its prey. Now, this is an apocalyptic vision. It's filled with symbolism. And this eagle speaks, you see, *"crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, 'Woe, woe, woe.'"* "Woe" is an archaic

word for unhappiness or trouble. Repeated 3x for emphasis here, this is a public condemnation. It's symbolic of coming judgment. Not the Final Judgment, but events and circumstances before the Last Day. So, the sense here is, "Pay attention!" Trouble, trouble, trouble.

And look who the eagle's words are directed toward: *"to those who dwell on the earth."* In the book of Revelation, this is a phrase used multiple times to refer to unbelievers. This is directed to those who are without Christ. They should take notice. They should heed these warnings – warnings signified *"at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"*

The first four trumpets (which we saw last week) were types of natural disasters. These events in the world warn people to turn to God. Those four trumpets included some references to mighty kingdoms falling. For example, Babylon is described in the OT as a great mountain. When you see the power of a tornado or a volcano, or when you see the failures of these great empires of history, you should humble yourself before the Creator of the world. That was the first four trumpets.

But these next trumpets or types of warnings and judgments are different. And every indication here is that they will be far, far worse. Verse [1] *"And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth."* John doesn't see the star fall; he sees a star that had fallen. *"and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit."* So, this star is personified – "He."

Isaiah 14 in the OT describes a star in the same way. Isaiah writes, *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star...[13] You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high...I will make myself like the Most High.'" Who might that be referring to?*

The prophet Ezekiel makes a similar description of an individual. He writes, *"You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. [13] You were in Eden, the garden of God...[15] You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. [16] In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God."*

In both prophecies, the initial references are to wicked earthly kings, but the prophets seem to go further back in history, before the life of the human kings, and so we understand them to be revealing the evil behind the evil. These are descriptions of Satan.

In his vision, John doesn't witness the fall of Satan. But Jesus witnessed this. In Luke 10, Christ says, *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* And notice that in John's vision, Satan *"was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit."* The word there is "abyss." This is Satan's dwelling place – the place to which he was banished. This is hell. And yet Satan is not in ultimate control. He fell from what he once was. And the key to hell – this power – is given to him by the Owner.

Hell does not belong to Satan. It is the ultimate demonstration of God's wrath toward sin. Scottish minister R.A. Finlayson wrote, *"Hell is eternity in the presence of God. Heaven is eternity in the presence of God with a mediator."* What did he mean? 1 Timothy 2 says, *"There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

With Christ, you will be welcomed into heaven. But without Christ, you will be welcomed only in hell because you will have no mediator between you and God. You will come before God still in your sins.

God remains in control of the abyss, but Satan is granted ability by the one true God. And look at what John sees Satan do, verse [2] *He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. [3] Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth."* John sees a vision of hell opening up, smoke billowing out, and then these locusts emerge.

Swarms of locusts are seen in many places in the Bible. They were one of the plagues God sent on Egypt. But these are different. They don't do what normal locusts do. Notice verse [4] *"They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."* They don't go after plant life. They go after the humans.

But they can only affect certain ones. *"only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."* We saw in a previous chapter that those who are born again in Christ are sealed by God, and thus made secure with God in Christ. It is as if we have been stamped on the forehead for all to see – including Satan and these locusts – that we belong to Jesus.

What becomes clearer as we go through this chapter is that these locusts symbolize the work of demonic forces in the world. Biblically, there is no question of "if" demons are at work in our world. The question is "where" and "when."

But before we go any further in this explanation of what we are seeing in the present age – before we think anymore about what Satan is doing in these end times – there is something you must understand. In Ephesians 6, Paul tells the church to, *"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

Satan attempts many attacks against the people of God. And yet Paul assures us in Colossians 1 that God *"has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* God has delivered His people from the authority of darkness. He has saved us from the governance of Satan.

And so these demonic forces do not have the same power in the life of a believer. And this should strengthen our hope as we live this life.

Now, Christ was adamant that we would have tribulation in the world, we would suffer and struggle, we would be rejected and despised, some even to the point of death. But He was also clear that He had overcome the world.

If you are a Christian, Satan has no authority in your life. He will still attempt his schemes, appealing to your sinful nature and pitting non-believers against you. He will tempt you and tempt others who may fall into sin and hurt you on the way. But through it all, this is God's promise: those sealed in Christ will be protected in the last days.

Whatever you have endured or you are currently going through, your suffering does not indicate that God is not with you. God was with Jesus Christ, and Christ suffered in this world. It was the will of the triune God that Jesus suffer and die, and also that He rise again for those He came to save. And those who are saved are sealed, secured, and protected.

And Christ will sustain you and uphold you. Zephaniah 3 in the OT says, *"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love."* If you are sealed in Christ, God will protect you.

Life is not the same, however, for those who are not sealed – not born again. Look at the next verse. John says that in the vision given to him, these locusts, verse [5], *"were allowed to torment them (that is, those not sealed in Christ) for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone."*

Now, first of all, why "five months?" Five months may have been the lifespan of a locust. The main idea here is that this is temporary and God is in ultimate control of it. As with other numbers in Revelation, we should interpret this figuratively, not literally. Scorpions cause great pain, even sickness, but they rarely cause death.

However, notice verse [6] *And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them."* This means that the nature of the torment will be such that people who experience no longer want to go on living, and yet they won't necessarily die right away.

Joel Beeke, one of the Revelation scholars who I read, makes an excellent observation about this. He writes, *"What a description of life without God! People will beg to die. Yet death will flee from them...When you shut God out, the sun is obscured by clouds from hell, the smoke from the pit, the lies and errors of Satan...You go from one day to the next and see no purpose in it. Life becomes a burden. In one sense, you may want to die, yet you are afraid to die."*

Look closer at this symbolic description, verse [7] *In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle."* John is trying to explain what he saw, comparing them to things he knows.

They are like an army, as it were. *“on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces.”* So, they have a personal nature. And they have crowns, perhaps intended to mock the King of Kings.

Verse [8] *their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth.*” So in one sense they are attractive, but at the same time they are ferocious. Verse [9] *they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.*” These are not your typical grasshoppers.

John understands that these are Satan’s minions. They deliver God’s temporary judgment, which is also a warning and a chance to repent. The OT prophet Joel described a swarm of locusts bringing God’s judgment. But always, with those judgments in the physical realm, there was the opportunity for spiritual restoration to God. There is a spiritual realm that is just as real as what we see.

The biblical writers were very aware of this spiritual realm and the demonic forces at work. For example, Peter says *“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”* And Jude writes, *“the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, [God] has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.”*

Now look at verse [10] *They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.* Again, they inflict pain. They torture. G.K. Beale, another scholar I read, notes that *“the ‘torment’ is primarily spiritual and psychological.”* That is the connotation of this language later on in the book of Revelation. It’s emotional pain, mental anguish, destructive physical desires and urges devoid of help from God’s Spirit and His Word. Some people cover this up well; some can’t cover it up at all. Some act out; others suffering quietly.

But this is very indicative of the age in which we live, isn’t it?

Now notice these final statements. Verse [11] *They have as king over them.*” This is more evidence of the symbolic nature of the vision. Locusts don’t have a king. But these demons do have an authority. It is, *“the angel of the bottomless pit.”* The word “the” is present in the manuscripts. This is not just any old angel. He has a name. *“His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.”*

Why is both a Hebrew and a Greek reference used? Because the same being is present in both OT and NT times. Both mean “destroyer.” He is the author of evil destruction.

John then wraps up this vision, verse [12] *The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.*” It must have been exhausting to see these things and write them down. Obviously, Christ gave these visions to John piecemeal, not all at once. And I said this last week – this does not mean that always, in human history, one of these things must end and then another begins. These warnings and judgments are often happening at the same time. The “woe” or

warning passed as far as Christ showing it to John, but it's one category of many things happening simultaneously in the world today. What should we make of it? Those not sealed in Christ will be preyed upon in the last days. They will be manipulated by evil in all sorts of ways.

It's difficult to live in a world where God is actively judging unbelievers. It requires faith. There will be much grief that we endure. But we do not grieve as others do who have no hope. On the contrary, we have a "blessed hope" – the return of Christ the Lord who saved us.

We have the expectation of Jesus our Savior who cares for us. We have the confidence of Christ our King who protects us. How has He protected you? You could name many ways, but there are many more of which you aren't even aware.

Are you being protected, or preyed upon? Put your trust in Jesus Christ, believe in Him and follow Him. Reject your sinful ways and cling to Jesus. Put your hope in Him.

Let's bow in prayer.