

Revelation 8-11 Trumpets of Judgment

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We're going to cover a lot of ground this morning – four whole chapters – about a fifth of the book of Revelation. And you might ask – why so much, why so fast?

Well, actually it's not really that much Scripture – it's only 64 verses total – that's like a single chapter in the Gospel of Luke, or one of the longer Psalms. But it seems like a lot because there's a lot of data crammed in there. So how do we approach it all? Well, we could zoom in on every tiny detail, or we could pull back and take a look at the big picture.

The downside of zooming in on each new symbol or creature or event is there's a lot of disagreement over what these things mean and represent. John uses the word 'like,' as in, it was 'like this' 17 times in these 64 verses. And it's not because he's uneducated, it's because it's so hard for him to explain exactly what he's seeing in human terms.

So, instead of taking the time to work through all the different ideas and interpretations, we're going to take in the big picture and try to get the general sense of what is going on. Along the way we're going to ask: how does any of this affect my understanding of God today? I want you to walk out of here confident, knowing something about God and your life and this world, not just full of ideas about how these things *might* be fulfilled. That's our goal this morning – and I hope you'll keep me to it.

But first, let's back up and catch the context of it all.

So far, in chapter 1, we've seen a vision of Jesus in all His resurrection glory, and then, in chapters 2 and 3, we read seven letters He wrote to seven churches to give a performance evaluation – pointing out areas where they needed to grow, things they were doing well, and making promises to them for the future.

And then we read chapters 4 and 5 where we got a view of the throne room of God and the angels and elders and others worshipping there. We saw in God's right hand a scroll sealed seven times and the question was asked, "Who is worthy to take the scroll and open it's seals?" Who could actually walk up to God, say, "I'll take that," and then have the authority to open it?

And if you were here, you remember the answer to that question is: only Jesus who appeared before God's throne like a lamb that had been slain. And all of Heaven was filled with worship as they sang:

(Rev 5:9-10) "You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open it's seals;

For you were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”

And now that He has the scroll, last week we saw as He began to open it in chapters 6 and 7. We watched as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were released and brought conquering, conflict, famine and death to the earth. We heard the cries of the martyrs – people who had been murdered for simply believing God and His Word, and we saw the sun, moon and stars shaken and people crying out for the mountains to fall on them as they tried to hide from God and His judgment.

When we jump in this morning, there’s still one more seal to go.

Revelation 8:1 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

We’ve seen a lot of noise in heaven so far – thunderings, lightning, worship, movement, but now, suddenly, everything goes quiet – you could hear a pin drop. All eyes are focused on God and every mind is thinking about what was happening and why.

2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

Trumpets are used in the Bible to call people together or to sound the alarm to prepare for war. These angels are going to be sounding God’s battle cry in just a minute. But first,

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.

You’ve probably seen a censer before somewhere. It’s like a little bowl on a chain and you put the incense inside it and swing it around. Here the incense is offered with the prayer of the saints.

Which reminds us once again that our cries and prayers on earth really do make it to heaven. When you pray, it makes a difference, maybe not immediately, but your prayers are not pointless or useless. They really go somewhere. It’s not like putting a message in a bottle and sending it adrift on the sea or writing a letter to Santa Claus addressed to the North Pole, there’s something real about prayer even if you don’t see the outcome you desire right now.

Many of our prayers include a request for God’s help, for Him to make wrong things right: things in us, or around us, or things happening to us or to people we love. What we see in

Revelation is that God hears and He's taking care of everything that has gone wrong by wiping it all out and eventually, as we'll see in the end of the book, He's going to make everything right again. All our prayers will be answered, sin will be wiped out, and God will be glorified.

But first, everything that opposes God has to be dealt with. And that's what we see now:

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.

The seventh seal actually leads to the seven trumpets – and the seven trumpets actually lead to the seven bowls we'll see in Revelation 16 – in other words, what we find is suffering upon suffering upon suffering being poured out on the earth.

Some people believe these things are sequential, that is, the events described in the seals happen and then the things in the trumpets, and then the bowls which we come to later. Others see them as poetic repetitions, with each re-telling showing you a new side of the story. The Jews were very fond of circular story telling and poetry – you find it all over the Bible – a thought is introduced and developed and then everything circles back around and takes the idea to the next level – like a spiral. So, that is possible, remember, John was a Jewish Christian.

But what's most important to understand is that despite all the poetic imagery and the things that are difficult to understand and imagine, these things are all real – there will be real suffering and real destruction as sin and God's judgment against it collide with massive force.

7 The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the 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 did not shine, and likewise the night.

This sounds like it fits with what we saw back in Chapter six with the sixth seal when “the sun became black...and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to earth.” So again, maybe it’s an expansion or a reiterating of that event, or maybe it’s a new event.

13 And I looked, and I heard an angel (some of your translations may have an ‘eagle’ here – the words are very, very similar in Greek) flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe (NLT: trouble, trouble, trouble) to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”

Woe, woe, woe – we’ve already seen four trumpet blasts, so three remain and each of them is described as a woe. Which sounds kind of ominous, doesn’t it? Everything we’ve already seen sounds kind of rough, but none of it was called a woe. It helps you know what’s coming next can’t be good.

9:1 Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the 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 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.

Think about that – “they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.” It’s like those in Chapter Six running into the caves and crying out for the rocks to fall on them. They’re trying to escape the judgment of God. But what happens when they die? They just enter an eternity of suffering.

Most people have this one-sided view of eternity – they believe in Heaven, but not hell. They think you either just cease to exist – that you’re just wiped out, or they assume pretty much everyone has a right to get into Heaven, that God understands, and He’ll let you in. But you don’t get that idea from the Bible - you get it from the movies and the opinions of your friends. The Bible says that without Christ people will suffer for all of eternity being separated from God. These people on earth are trying to escape their temporary suffering, but they don’t realize, there’s nowhere else to go – death will bring them no comfort.

Only the Christian can boldly say, “O death where is your victory, O grave, where is you sting?” (1 Cor 15:55) and that’s because Christ has suffered for us and have given us peace with God for eternity. These men refuse to receive that grace and so they face the locusts:

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* Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon (Literally: Destroyer).
12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

So, all these locusts come up out of the earth because they're let out of a pit. That's interesting.

The gospels also tell us about a man Jesus met who was possessed by "legion" or, a thousand demons. And when Jesus cast the demons out you remember they "begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss" (Luke 8:31) and asked to be allowed to enter a nearby herd of pigs instead.

2 Peter 2:4 tells us that "God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment"

Jude 6 tells us about fallen angels who are "...reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day"

In Revelation 20, Satan himself is going to be bound with chains and cast down into the pit for 1000 years.

So, there may be something about this idea of a place of judgment inside the earth. Again, it's hard to say – but for those who love God this isn't something you need to be a specialist in, because this isn't your fate. This is only the destiny of those of resist Him. You who have been saved by Christ are headed up, into the presence of God forever.

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.

In the book of Isaiah (37:36) one angel kills 186,000 Assyrians overnight – here we have four powerful beings and they will kill a third of the people on earth who are not Christians. That's a massive death toll. But there's more – there's an army coming with them.

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 their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails *are* like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

That's a lot of details, I know, and it's hard to develop the picture in your mind – but watch what happens next because this is pretty easy to understand:

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.

It's so easy to get caught up in the imagery and the numbers and the colors described here, but I'd like us to notice and remember why all this stuff is happening. It's because people did not repent. Now what does that mean? It means to come to God and say, what I'm doing is wrong, please forgive me, and then to seek, with His strength and by His grace to live differently. The book of Revelation is one long description of what happens when God finally says, "Enough!" and deals with all those who have refused to worship Him.

These people, and many people on earth today, refuse to repent. They sin and don't care. I caught something this week about what's going on down in Florida during Spring Break at the beaches. It's complete hedonism – anything goes, and it's all happening in public because they don't care. They have no desire to repent, no desire to stop – in fact, they want more.

Left to our own devices none of us trends toward holiness – we all drift toward anger, lust, and selfishness. You and I deserve the kind of judgment we see poured out here. And yet, God offers us a way not only to be forgiven, but to stop doing all the things that are so worthy of judgment in our lives – through forgiveness in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can stop doing the things that bring us judgment. We can, and must, repent.

We'll talk more about that before we close, but first we shift gears for a minute and we have this little interlude where John interacts with an angel who brings down a scroll.

Revelation 10:1 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 uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them."

For as much as you learn here about the end times, there will still be some surprises when they come – one day we'll actually learn what the thunders uttered.

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 he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

All of this apparently takes place on the coast of Israel – the angel has one foot on the Mediterranean Sea and one foot on the land, with one hand up toward Heaven symbolizing complete authority over everything. He gives John a message that is both sweet and bitter – that's a good picture of Revelation, isn't it? Sweet to see and know the things we learn about God in Heaven, but bitter when you realize all the suffering that will occur on earth as people resist God.

We find more of that resistance here in Chapter 11 as John and the angel go to Jerusalem to see the Temple mount and two strange prophets.

11:1 Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. 2 But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

That's three and a half years.

You probably know this, but the Jews do not have a Temple today. The last Temple was destroyed in 70 AD by the Roman Empire. All that is left is what is thought to be the Western, or the Wailing Wall of the foundation, which you've seen so many times in the media. But one day the Temple will be rebuilt – there's actually a group that exists today that is openly and aggressively preparing for it. At some point it will be rebuilt and God will send two prophets to speak to the people on earth while all this judgment is being poured out. People will know God is causing all of this, and they won't like it.

3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. 6 These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.

We'll meet him in Chapter 13, but notice, he too comes out of the pit and he comes to silence these men who are speaking for God. No one on earth wants to hear what God has to say. So when they're killed – everyone rejoices.

8 And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. 9 Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. 10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

All of our advances in technology have made it pretty easy for the whole earth to know about the death of these prophets in moments. Twitter and other social media allow us to share news globally, instantly. Of course, they won't celebrate for long...

11 Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. 13 In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

But before it comes, we jump back to the throne room of Heaven again – there is suffering on earth, but there is worship occurring at the throne.

15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Those in heaven realize that through all of this God is purifying and reclaiming what is rightfully His. God created everything that is, everything we use selfishly, everything we enjoy, everything we think is 'ours' is really His and now in Revelation, He's repossessing it. Even our own lives, our very breath, belongs to Him. We either accept that, and give it back to Him joyfully and willingly, or He takes it back, which is His right.

16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

“We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
The One who is and who was and who is to come,
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.
18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

We’ve covered a lot of ground this morning – lots of things to try and grasp – and now here’s the final point I want to leave you with. They’re praising God in heaven because He has taken His great power, He’s reigning and pouring out His judgment and wrath. I want you to understand that what we’re seeing in this book is God’s wrath against sinners and sin. This is what it looks like when God judges rebellion.

Therefore, and here’s the big point: this helps us understand what Jesus suffered for us. Have you thought about that? Friends, we deserve to be going through all of this – the only reason we’re not is because we’ve been saved. But what does that mean? It means Jesus absorbed this for us. God doesn’t just wipe away our debt, He pays it. He doesn’t just say, oh, it’s OK, you’re not in trouble any more, He actually stands in our place and takes our punishment.

Which means, when He gave Himself up as a sacrifice for us, and took on the guilt of our sin, He felt something. I don’t know exactly what that it was like – the Bible doesn’t tell us exactly what happened when the Father turned His back on Jesus. But it has to be worse than the bite of the locusts, the bitterness of the water, the fire, and the strange horses. It was worse than wanting to die for five months and being unable. It was worse than what made everyone cry out for the mountains to fall on them. What Jesus went through to save our souls was worse than everything we’ve see so far in Revelation.

That’s something for us to chew on this Palm Sunday. As we think about the upcoming crucifixion of our Lord, and all that He suffered – look at it through the lens of Revelation – this is what the wrath of God looks like. This is what could be poured out on you, but was poured out on Him instead, for you. This is only part of what He has saved you from by going through it Himself. Let your mind ponder some of the crazy stuff you’ve seen and heard here in this book, remember that it is all judgment against sin, and let that fill you with awe and wonder and propel you to praise your Savior – the one who saved you from it all. Let the things of Revelation be fuel for your worship.