

Rev 26-01-25b

We're in Revelation at the threshold of chapter nine, looking at the unfolding judgments of God that are either initiated or released. There are things that have been held in abeyance and restrained and God removes his restraint. We have seen this depicted in other portions of scripture as there being a hedge about God's people or a wall of fire.

In this case, the general population, those who dwell on the earth and have been recipients of what is often called the general grace or the universal grace that makes an environment for God's people. And there's blessing by association. And in the broad sense, with the removal of a huge number of God's people at the rapture of the church, and then the diminishment of those who come to faith through martyrdom and oppression and persecution, that is a factor in the unleashing of these judgments.

The remaining remnant are sealed and we saw this back in chapter seven. And now the restraint and the suppression is removed. So I wanna just quickly note that this began with silence at the opening of the seventh seal at the beginning of our eighth chapter.

And when the first six seals were opened, every time John either saw something or heard something or both. When the seventh seal is opened, he sees nothing and he hears nothing for about half an hour. Doesn't seem like a long time until you try to sit and absolutely see and hear nothing for half an hour.

There's people that can't live without the stream of information that comes over a phone for anywhere near that length of time. I remember when I worked at KWPR in Claremore, what a fun job. I couldn't believe they paid me to do that.

The bane of your existence as a disc jockey is inadvertently having dead air. You think you've switched to a different source of music or commercial or whatever, and you didn't. And what people have been hearing over the radio is dead air.

And that happened to me once or twice. And I would always use the feeble comeback, this moment of silence has been brought to you by the Claremore Public Library, but you don't want that to happen. Dead air is a quick way to lose your listeners.

But for those who are attentive and who are sensitive, silence can be an opportunity to focus attention. And there are silences that are pregnant with meaning. And the one commentary I read, I thought made a good point.

To get some idea of the effect, imagine that a church youth group is doing a dramatic reading of the book of Revelation. And when it comes to Revelation 8.1, they take the verse literally and all speech and all action stops for 30 minutes. Everybody sitting in the auditorium, everybody up on the stage, everything ceases for 30 minutes.

While the congregation fidgets and squirms and probably exits. But this is total silence and it is said to be in heaven. And why does it say silence in heaven? This is where John has been taken in chapter four, verse one and where he has seen and heard all that has preceded this point.

And why this silence? We find out that this is the time during which the prayers that will fill the censer and be mixed with incense, holy smoke, if you will, are being processed. God is in his holy temple. The Old Testament says, let all the earth keep silence before him.

There is a time and a place for making a joyful noise to the Lord, all ye lands. Psalm 100, verse one. There is another time to keep silence before him.

There has been a lot to see and hear in the heavens that John bears record to, but then there is this silence. And this silence is in the immediate context of the prayers of God's people. And it is as though God shuts down all other activity to focus.

He's omnipotent, he's omniscient, he's omnipresent. He doesn't need to do this, but for our benefit, just as when Jesus says to his disciples, what you have seen and heard isn't for me, it's for you. When God speaks from heaven, there is thunder and so on.

So here, the silence speaks to us of the priority, the attention that God pays to the prayers of his people. And we want to take that privilege very seriously and exploit it and avail ourselves of it. Pray without ceasing, even as we rejoice evermore.

So the prayers of all the saints are not mentioned until that half hour is over, right? And during that half hour, there is no prayer that has fallen to the ground. Every sparrow God is aware of, every prayer, when it is properly launched, will be heard by God in heaven. And this is dramatic, it's exceptional.

It's hard to enjoy a half hour of total silence, but this is preceded by a great deal of noise and tribulation, and it is going to be followed by a great deal of noise. There's peals of thunder, there are rumblings, and an earthquake in verse five, an earthquake, a singular earthquake, and seven trumpets sounding in contrast to this silence and actually as a response and a follow-on to this silence. So as you would expect, after the half hour of silence, as with the preceding judgments, John sees something in verse two.

And the seventh seal isn't over, it is beginning. And what we have seen that follows is the content. And it reminds us of what we saw in the sixth chapter with the sixth seal.

First, there's a group of angels. There were four angels in chapter six. Now there are seven.

We saw in verse three of this chapter, you can compare it to verse two of chapter seven. In verse two of chapter seven, I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. He cries with a loud voice to four angels, to whom it is granted to harm the earth and the sea.

Here, another angel having a golden censer comes and stands at the altar, and he is going to eventually launch the action of these seven angels. And so one angel, the another angel, it reminds me of one another love. And here we have another angel who appears and other angels are then launched into action by them.

So this tells us that when the Lord Jesus cracks that seal, it doesn't bring the consequences of the seals to an end, it launches what follows. And it is still unfolding. So as we've seen, this angel functions as sort of a high priest ministering at an altar.

And you can see in the priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus, this was first mentioned in Revelation in chapter one, verse five, when he says grace from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler over the kings of the earth to him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. There is an aspect of our salvation where the Lord Jesus washes us in his blood. And there's an aspect where we wash our robes and make them white in his blood.

So that is the difference between the high priest and the priestly function that we fulfill on our own behalf. Then we saw again in chapter five, verse 10, in the song that the 24 elders sing that says that the Lord Jesus has made them kings and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. Always says we in the, if you don't mark it out.

And in chapter seven, verse 15, those who are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple, serving in the temple, this is a priestly function. So why are we presented this? Why are we reviewing it and somewhat belaboring it? Priestly function is all about holiness. It is about what is right, what separates from defilement and removes defilement and corruption.

And the blowing of these trumpets as horrendous as the effect is, begins with priesthood. It preserves the holiness of God. It expresses the holiness of God.

And our particular application of this is whom the Lord loves, he chastens, he scourges. A previous pastor of mine used to say he skins alive with a whip every son whom he receives. I think that's a bit graphic, but it is certainly a scourging.

It is a very targeted reminder and an attention getter that God's love is sometimes expressed by that which we find painful, but it is restorative pain. If you're going to heal a broken bone, you have to go through the pain of having it set. If you're going to bring a new life into the world as a woman, you go through the pain of childbirth.

And there is pain that is beneficial, that is productive. There's other pain that is simply destructive and is suffering that doesn't serve a useful and positive end. So these who stand at the altar in heaven are representing and respecting the holiness of God.

So the prayers of the saints are processed and the altar, which is usually where we find mercy in the Old Testament, Joab and others would go and seize the horns of the altar. It was a place

of mercy. I want to appeal to grace and avoid judgment.

But ironically here, it is the source of divine judgment. This is where it's going to come from. And this tells us something.

The mercy of God and the judgment of God are not contrasting sides of God's character. They are united. They are two sides of the same coin.

So this censor angel that brings prayers to God for God to answer and to respond to is the same angel that pours fire on the earth. And there are peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. This was the scene in heaven before the lamb appeared.

If you look back at chapter four, verse five, remember that? From the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings and voices, seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. So what John first saw in heaven is now cast down onto the earth. They will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray. And this sequence of seven trumpets is going to end in much the same way. When we get to chapter 11, verse nine, 19 rather, 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. This is non-verbal communication. It is a descent back into basic forms of transfer of ideas.

You've seen pet animals, dogs especially, and when there's thunder, especially your smaller dogs will shake and quake and get very fearful and want to jump up in your lap or in your bed or wherever they can. They are made fearful at a non-verbal level by this noise. God has already communicated verbally.

He has communicated in the positive side of creation. He has, as you read in Hebrews chapter one, in diverse manners, various parts and ways, spoken in times past. And in the New Testament day, in the day of the gospels, he has spoken to us by his son.

He has spoken to us. Those who do not respond to the communicated word, whether it is the incarnate word or the transmitted word of scripture are now going to receive messages from God that are at the very most basic level. We want to respond.

We want to benefit. We want to avail ourselves of God's grace at the verbal level, at the sentient, intelligent level. Let's talk.

And you have verses of scripture that talk about this. Let us reason together, says the Lord. Let's search the scriptures and see if these things are so.

Let's work at the level of communication of complex ideas, not at thunder and lightning. And when we find that our thoughts, our actions, our words are motivated by more basic forces, I remember learning as a kid that the difference between thought and emotion, and emotion

doesn't reason. Emotions are visceral.

They are feelings that can arise. And sometimes we don't even know where they come from. They don't partake of a prothesis and apothesis of logic, of reason, of progress of understanding.

They're just from the guts. And words for guts are used in scripture. The reins, the kidneys, the viscera are the seat of emotions.

And now God is operating at that level with these judgments. That's what you find with these trumpet judgments. We don't want to find ourselves impelled by these forces beyond our control that engender in us feelings instead of thoughts.

We want to avail ourselves of the conceptual truth that God has revealed to us. So the giving of the 10 commandments, this is content from God. This is a lot of words, a lot of regulations, a lot of ordinances and statutes.

And if you go back to the book of Exodus in chapter 19, verse 17, Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they're standing at the foot of the mountain. The people come to the mountain. Here, when the trumpets sound, the mountain comes to the people, right? In a pretty much unavoidable way.

And in Exodus 19, 11, God told Moses, "Let the people be ready for the third day, for on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people." And we've seen how many times the third day recurs as a theme in scripture. Jesus told his disciples to be ready for his coming. In Matthew 24, 44, Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore you also be ready." Being ready is preparation.

Do you notice in the realm, I think God gave us animals and made some of them available as pets so that we can learn lessons. One of the things about cats and dogs, there's very little preparation. If they're gonna lay down, they might turn a couple of circles and then plop down.

The cat might use its claws and scratch something up and then lay on it. But they don't plan ahead like an hour from now or a half hour from now, I think I will do this. They are creatures of response.

We are different. We are given the opportunity to prepare, to look ahead, to think ahead. "You also be ready."

The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." So you can't be lackadaisical and indifferent and say, well, when he comes, I will then get ready. We have to be in a constant state of readiness because we don't know when, but we anticipate that whenever it comes, we should be ready. So Moses told the people of God to prepare themselves by abstaining from normal functions of life.

Paul urged this standard in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 7, I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I am to condition their ideas about marriage or about family or about future plans and purposes on spiritual realities. There were specific cases in Corinth. People tend to try to take that literally and well, we should be celibate or whatever.

The idea is that even the most basic expectations of life for believers should be predicated on and conditioned on the expectation of God's plan and purpose being fulfilled in our life and in our lifetime. So 1 Corinthians 7, 29 and following, Paul says, this I say, brethren, the time is short. From now on, even those who have wives should be as though they had none.

Those who weep as though they did not weep. Those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice. Those who buy as though they did not possess.

Those who use this world as not misusing it, for the form of this world is passing away. Paul said that nearly 2000 years ago, but it has been true in every generation. And what is he saying? Not that, well, if you're married, ignore your wife, but spiritual truth needs to be our foundation.

A spiritual perspective should undergird all of our plans so that we are not like the world where our fulfillment is from these things. I'm going to make progress in the world. I'm going to find happiness in my marriage.

I'm going to rejoice in accomplishments and in the fulfillment of expectations. We should not be those people. We should be those who look ahead because the time is short.

We want to redeem the time. We want to be good stewards of the time. And so this is the idea that we see here.

Paul tells us that we are going to meet the Lord in the air in 1 Thessalonians 4. So as these trumpets reveal in a metaphorical fashion, what is going to happen after we leave, we can take the message from it now, just as when we study the Old Testament, we learn lessons from the experience of God's people in the wilderness, of the patriarchs, of those in the monarch days, in the days of captivity, in the days of discipline and judgment. So three of these four judgments that unfold here echo the plagues in Egypt, and you can't help but think of them. And this preceded the giving of God's law on the mountain.

So you think about hail with the first trumpet, this in Exodus chapter nine, verse 23 and following, when Moses stretches out his rod toward heaven, the Lord sent thunder and hail and fire darted to the ground. Just almost identical description. The Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt.

Hail and fire mingled with the hail. So very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And Egypt's been there a long time.

Hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt. All that was in the field, man and beast, the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. That's the first trumpet.

In the second trumpet, this mountain burned with fire is thrown into the sea and a third of the sea becomes blood. And you remember in Exodus chapter seven, verses 20 and 21, when he lifts up the rod and strikes the waters that are in the river in the sight of Pharaoh and the sight of his servants, all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stunk, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river, which of course was freshwater.

There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. And when you get to the fourth trumpet, darkness ensues. A third of the sun, a third of the moon, a third of the stars are darkened.

And in Exodus chapter 10, verses 21 through 23, "'Stretch out your hand,' God says to Moses, 'toward heaven.'" Once again, heaven as the source of these plagues. And it's emphasized here, angels who dwell in heaven are the agents by which these trumpet judgments are executed. "'Stretch out your hand toward heaven,' the Lord said to Moses, 'that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, 'darkness which may even be felt.'" So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven.

And notice again, Moses is the agent. It doesn't just, Moses doesn't tell Pharaoh, "'Well, darkness is going to come.'" "And behold, there was great darkness." It is at the stretching out of the hand. The blood judgment that we just reviewed was at the stretching out of the rod.

Agency, intermediate agency. And many times God is going to act via intermediate agency when he communicates with us, not just verbally in a Bible class, but also circumstantially. We remain balanced.

We don't take this too far. We don't look for a sign. We don't think that God is telling us something when a certain specific event does or does not take place circumstantially.

At the same time, we are not oblivious to the fact that God uses agency to communicate with us and to activate what we know from the word of God, God will send circumstances that will bring that portion of his word to our mind. So we don't look for a sign. We don't put out a fleece.

This is not the Old Testament day where Gideon didn't have any scriptures to go by. This is the age in which the Holy Spirit is available constantly. The word of God in the scriptures is available constantly.

God will guide us to that, nudging us with circumstances. The circumstance is not the message. The circumstance creates the occasion to go and partake of that particular communication.

So agency is involved in drawing attention to God's plan and purpose. It's very graphic in the Old Testament. It's more subtle for us.

It's going to be graphic again in the last seven years of the Old Testament age. So this authority of God over creation and sort of unmaking creation dominates this whole scene. But instead of the people coming to the mountain and receiving instruction and communication, that is withdrawn and the mountain comes to the people.

The thunder and the fire damages the earth and the trees and the grass. So in verse seven, when we see hail and fire burning up a third of the trees and the green grass being burned up. And we saw this in Exodus nine with what the hail did.

A third of the fresh waters are turned bitter here in verse 11, not bloody. This reminds us of the later experience of Israel, Israel, God's people in Exodus chapter 15. They came to Marah and they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter.

And so they called the name of the place Marah. And you'll recall Naomi taking this name to herself when she returns from Moab minus her husband and minus her two sons and minus one of her two daughters-in-law. She says, don't call me Naomi, call me Marah, bitter.

And boy, what a wonderful foreshadowing set of truths you find in the story of Ruth relative to Israel represented by Naomi and the church represented by Ruth. And Ruth becomes the means by which Naomi is blessed by Boaz, who is the kinsman redeemer. But that doesn't happen without the presence of the Gentile woman.

It's fascinating, I never get tired of looking at Ruth. I learn new things every time I investigate it. But the waters of Marah in Exodus 15 are harked back to here, if you will.

And the dimming of the sun and moon and stars reflect that darkness that can be felt from Exodus chapter 10, but it's not total. In Egypt, the darkness was total, here it's partial. And it tells us that this is an opportunity to turn before worse things happen.

If it was total, if the destruction and devastation was complete, this would simply be judgment. This is measured judgment, these fractions mean something. One quarter in the seals, one third in the trumpets.

And the star that falls from the sky in connection with this third trumpet is an agent. And this fourth trumpet sounds, there is no agent. Nothing falls from the sky.

The dimming of the day and the night tells us that something else is coming. So now we're at chapter nine. And in chapter nine, the fifth angel sounded.

They each have trumpets, but it is the angel. I can't emphasize that enough. God is communicating via sentient agency here.

The fifth angel sounds, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. The bottomless pit cannot be escaped.

It can only be entered or exited through a doorway, a gate. And that gate is both locked and

unlocked with a key. So this fallen star is a person, to him is given a key.

And only people, only angels know how to operate keys. So he opened the bottomless pit and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. This is the third time now that another angel appears and does something.

And then a greater number of angels are involved in perpetrating judgment. So another angel appears and you have the four angels. Another angel appears and you have the seven angels with the trumpets.

Now this fallen angel, he doesn't descend, he doesn't alight. He doesn't step down the ladder that Jacob saw. He falls from heaven.

Falling from heaven is not a good thing. This is Satan and a third of the angels. I saw Satan fall like lightning, Jesus says, when his disciples returned with the report of their ministry activities.

But this angel opens the bottomless pit because he is given the key. Can't do it until God grants him the ability to do it. The Lord Jesus cannot be taken and crucified until that power is granted to his enemies.

The two witnesses that we will see in the future of Revelation are not permitted to be taken and killed until God allows it. Nothing happens that God does not permit. But these are now permitted judgments.

This is not coming from heaven. This is coming from the earth. Do you see the difference between the first four trumpet judgments? All of this stuff descends from heaven.

Now, when the fifth angel sounds, this is going to come from the abyss. The bottomless pit. So the fallen star takes the key and opens the bottomless pit.

Smoke arises out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace. This is dense, hot, black smoke. And the sun and the air are darkened because of the smoke of the pit.

Once again, I don't think these sevenfold judgments are strictly chronological. I think sometimes they step back and take a picture, a snapshot from a different angle. I think this may well be the same darkening that we just saw under the fourth angel.

But now we find agency for the darkening. The darkness was not explained. It just says a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon was struck, and a third of the stars.

Now we find out that the agency by which this darkness occurs is the opening of the bottomless pit. Smoke arises and it darkens the sun because of the smoke of the pit and the air. This is where moonlight and starlight come through.

Then out of the smoke, locusts came upon the earth and to them is given power as the scorpions of the earth have power. This reverses another aspect of God's power in His

interaction with creation. We have seen that this is the unmaking of creation depicted for us here in metaphorical terms.

Do you remember that the Lord Jesus told His disciples, He saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Now we have this star that falls. And darkness instead of light is perpetrated.

And what did Jesus tell His disciples in Luke 10, verse 19? Be sure you put this in the margin beside chapter nine, verse three. Power as the scorpions of the earth have power. They are commanded not to harm the grass of the earth or green things or trees, only those men who do not have the seal of God on their forehead.

In Luke 10, 19, the Lord Jesus gave His disciples authority to trample on serpents and scorpions. And over all the power of the enemy, nothing shall by any means hurt you. Don't miss that cross-reference.

Here, they are not given authority to kill men, but to hurt them, to torment them for five months. Now beyond the basic provision that comes from creation that is reversed in the first four trumpets, now the opportunity to be protected from demonic activity is taken away. Luke 10, 19, behold, Jesus says, I give you the power, the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, serpents and scorpions.

Here are the scorpions. Over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means harm you. This doesn't mean that we will never be hurt, that we will never be harmed, but not by the power of the enemy.

When we use what God gives us, when we reside in the hollow of his hand, when we're in the secret place of the most high and the shadow of the almighty, we are sheltered and we have supernatural protection. That here is actively removed. They're not given authority to kill, but to torment, to hurt for five months.

Their torment is like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. Are we getting the drumstick on the football helmet here that we need to think about what scripture says about scorpions? And you can do a wonderful study here on scorpions if you wanna take the time. Go back and look at what scripture says about them.

Get a concordance or get a new treasury of scripture knowledge and look at the cross references of when scorpions appear and what they signify. And they strike at the heel, they're on the ground. In those days, men will seek death and will not find it.

They will desire to die and death will flee from them. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. And we seek for life and light and immortality through the good news of the gospel.

John 1, life and light and immortality. Here, people are seeking the opposite, seeking death, looking for death, and it will flee from them. Verse seven, the shape of the locus is like horses

prepared for battle.

On their heads are crowns of something like gold and their faces are like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair and their teeth were like lion's teeth. We'll look at these details next time.

I just wanna close with this observation. Verse nine, they have breastplates like breastplates of iron and the sound of their wings is like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. People always visualize helicopters now with missiles and such.

I don't think this is helicopters, here's why. Look at verse 10, they have tails like scorpions. This is the third time they are compared to scorpions.

Jesus specifically gave his disciples authority to trample on serpents and scorpions. Serpents and scorpions are demonic entities. That serpent, the old serpent, the antique ancient serpent, the original serpent from the garden is their leader.

And serpents and scorpions are his minions. They are the fallen angels. These things are launched by a fallen angel.

They are released by a fallen angel who has granted the key to turn this loose. They have been kept in the abyss and they are released. Satan is gonna be kept in that same abyss during the millennial kingdom.

And then at the end, he will be released and will be enabled to be active again for a short time. They had tails like scorpions and there were stings in their tails. Their power is to hurt men.

Five months. They had as a king over them, the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name is Abaddon. And in Greek, it's Apollyon.

And these tails are like serpents that can strike. A scorpion's tail is like a striking serpent. So this injury and harm is limited.

It is survivable. So these are strange demonic locusts. This is what happens when God's gracious provision and protection for us is removed.

This is what happens when that which restrains is taken out of the way. This is what happens when there is not response to God's gracious offer of life. It doesn't say men began seeking life or began seeking deliverance or began seeking God or changed their mind and turned to repent.

And we're going to see when we get to the sixth trumpet, verse 20 and 21, "The rest of mankind who were not killed by the plagues did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons and idols of gold and silver and brass and stone and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk." Emphasis on sentience, on thoughtfulness to see and hear. "They did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immoralities

or their thefts. They did not repent.

Turn ye at my reproof. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. He reproves and corrects and instructs us in righteousness through His word." We want to be responsive.

We want to be leaning forward. We want to be actively seizing and laying hold of that grace. Here is a graphic depiction of what happens when we don't.

"Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God,' scripture says, "that He may exalt you in due time." It takes humility to confess our sins, to acknowledge our errors, to recognize our failures and to bring them before God and in prayer, to ask that God will forgive and cleanse in accordance with His promise so that we are qualified to dwell with the saints in the light and not be subject to this kind of response from the throne via the agency of creation, of those who superintend, manage and restrain creation and those who are active opponents and enemies that are kept in check by God's power. When God removes His covering hand, literally all hell breaks loose. That doesn't need to be us.

And thankfully it won't be us. Paul says, "I am convinced of better things of you, brethren, "things that accompany salvation." And I like being accompanied by those things. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for your grace. There is nothing so effective in sparking our gratitude than seeing the alternative and what would happen to us if it were not for the Lord Jesus and His saving work, His atoning sacrifice and the ultimate expression of His love and your love for us. We pray that as we reflect on these truths that the Holy Spirit will help us to make application in our hearts, in our thoughts, in our lives, in our actions and attitudes, that we can grow in grace and knowledge, that we can present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable in your sight, which is our reasonable service.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.