**THE SEVENTH SEAL IS OPENED**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 8**

We’re looking at the Tribulation period in our study of Revelation. One by one Jesus broke open the seals and as each seal was opened terrible judgments came upon the earth – the antichrist, war, death, famine, pestilence and cosmic disturbances. I was thinking – why do we not sing any songs in church about God’s judgments? We sing about a lot of other actions of God, His love, mercy, power, goodness – but not of His judgment often expressed by His wrath and anger. Why not?

Rich Mullins, Awesome God – “Judgement and wrath He poured out on Sodom; Mercy and grace He gave us at the cross. I hope that you have not too quickly forgotten that our God is an awesome God!”

Battle Hymn of the Republic – “He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on.”

John Newton, Day of Judgment Day of Wonders – “At His call the dead awaken, rise to life from earth and sea; all the powers of nature shaken by His look, prepares to flee. Careless sinner, what will then become of thee?”

That line by John Newton is at the heart of today’s lesson and I believe is the primary message of Revelation – sinner, what will become of thee?

Well, as we saw last week in Ch 7, before the seventh seal was opened, there was an interlude of peace, a period of God’s grace. A great revival broke out, first among the Jews, and then all nations. Many thousands were saved, and many were martyred. It was a great revival to be sure, but it was the last revival. Now as we come to Ch 8 we observe Jesus (described as “the Lamb”) breaking open the seventh and final seal…

1. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

There is silence in heaven. Why? Because all heaven knows the horrible doom about to be unleashed upon the earth. Despite the great revival, the fact is that most people reject God’s Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. So overwhelming is the thought of God’s terrible wrath that the perpetual praise and worship of billions that we observed earlier filling heaven stops. And there is complete silence in heaven for 30 minutes. It’s the calm before the storm.

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

Who are these seven angels? We really don’t know for sure. Perhaps one of them is Gabriel who we know from Luke 1:19 when he introduces himself to Zacharias. He is also mentioned in the book of Daniel. Perhaps Michael the archangel (Jude 9) is one of them. We can’t be sure. The fact is that the identities of these seven angels are not revealed.

The breaking of the seventh seal introduces the next series of God’s judgments – the trumpet judgments. Each angel is handed a trumpet, which he will blow on God’s command. There is a definite pattern I want to call your attention to here in the Book of Revelation. First there were the seven seals. As each was opened God’s judgment was displayed. Between the opening of the sixth and seventh seal there was an interlude. Then as the seventh seal was opened, seven trumpets are revealed. As each trumpet is sounded more of God’s judgment comes down upon the earth. Between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpet there is another interlude. When the seventh trumpet sounds there will be seven more of God’s judgments – the bowl judgments. There will be how many bowl judgments? You guessed it, seven. And after that God says, “Enough!” and Jesus returns with the saints of heaven.

One view is that this is a long sequence of separate judgments – seals, trumpet then bowl judgments. Another view is that there are series of 7 judgments looked at from various perspectives. We don’t really know.

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne,

4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

The intercessory prayers of the saints on earth, those saved during the tribulation, are released. Like billows of smoke they rise upward to God. These prayers are released “from the hand of the angel.” Any idea who this angel is? Here are a couple of hints…

First, the angel is holding a censer (a fire pan) and filling it with burning coals from the altar and adding incense to it. This is an exact description of what the high priest did in Leviticus 16:12: “And he [Aaron the high priest] shall take a fire pan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil [of the Holy of Holies where God’s presence dwelt].” Hebrews 4:14 says, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”

Second, the angel acts as the intercessor for the saints by holding and then releasing the prayers of the saints to God. First Timothy 2:5 tells us, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Scholars are split on the opinion of whether this angel is a heavenly messenger, possibly one of the seven angels mentioned in verse 1, or Jesus Himself. I believe that, based on the role of angels as we observe them in Scripture, and, based on the Scriptural support of the doctrine of Jesus as our mediator and great high priest, that this angel is, in fact, Jesus Christ Himself! Jesus acts as the intercessor for the saints to God the Father right before all hell breaks loose.

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

In the Old Testament the priest used the censer to transfer the fire from the altar to the Holy of Holies where incense was added. In this verse the angel takes the censer and casts it into the earth. So here the censer is seen as a symbol of judgment in response to the intercession and prayers of suffering saints in the middle of the tribulation. The time for mankind to respond to God’s grace is gone and now comes the time for God’s wrath to be unleashed upon all of those who have yet again rejected His Son.

6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

7 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.

The first trumpet is sounded, and the earth is literally demolished by fire. Yes, this is a literal judgment, not merely symbolic as some might suggest. When Aaron struck the waters of Egypt with his rod, they literally turned to blood (Exodus 7:19-21). God literally rained down fire and brimstone (burning sulfur) on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24). Here in Revelation Chapter 8 we literally observe one-third of the all the forests and vegetation wiped out.

8 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.

We do not know for sure what this thing referred to as “a great mountain, burning with fire” is. One commentary I read theorized this to be an island lifted up and tossed into the sea as a result of a nuclear explosion. Another surmised this to be a volcanic eruption. Perhaps this is a very large meteor striking the earth. Whatever this thing is, it strikes the ocean and is so cataclysmic that it heats up the waters of the sea enough to throw the eco-system in total disarray. One third of all the fish, whales, sharks, dolphins and other aquatic life are killed. In addition, the surging tidal waves caused by this giant burning mountain destroy one third of all the ships. It is estimated that today there are 1.5 million sailors and passengers aboard the ships on all the seas worldwide at any one time. If one-third is destroyed, that would mean that 500,000 people lose their lives!

10 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.

This could be a literal star, maybe a meteor. Perhaps it could be something man-made that is propelled toward a target and explodes. Remember the events of September 11, 2001? Whatever it is, it contains poisonous chemicals that effectively contaminate one third of the earth’s water supply, infiltrating streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs. The name Wormwood is a reference to bitterness. Wormwood is a plant indigenous to the region around modern day Israel and has a strong bitter juice. The water supply when poisoned will have a bitter taste. The result of tainted water is that many will die.

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.

There were two other times in the Bible when God sent unusual darkness upon the earth. One of those was the ninth plague on Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23) and the other was when Jesus Christ died (Luke 23:44). This will be like a total eclipse except bigger. It will cover one-third of the earth for 8 hours in addition to the normal daily 8 hours of darkness – a total of 16 hours of darkness! I believe this refers to literal darkness, but it most certainly indicates a time of spiritual blackout.

Jesus prophesied about what the Tribulation period would be like. In Luke 21:25-26, He said, “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” That’s a pretty good summary of the judgments here in Chapter 8. There is yet one final warning that is shouted…

13 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!"

A talking eagle! Is that so far-fetched? Not really. If a serpent can talk (Gen 3) and if God can make a donkey talk (Numbers 22), I think He can make an eagle talk as well. Here we have the three woes of the Book of Revelation, one for each of the three remaining trumpet judgments. As horrible as the first four might have been they are nothing compares to the three that remain. The worst is yet to come. There will be an increase in the destructive power unleashed on mankind.

The earth of Revelation 8 is not the kind of place I want to be. Yes, we know about the dear saints of God converted in Chapter 7, but the world is still very much godless and pagan. A world that rejects Jesus Christ is doomed to a separation from Him. Most of us are very familiar with John 3:16, a great verse about how much God loved us, so much so that He sent His Son to die for us so that we could have eternal life. But I want to draw your attention to the two verses that follow that one. Jesus said, “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God… men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.” (John 3:17-19)

If by the end of Chapter 8 you are a person who still rejects God after all that has taken place, guess what? You are going to be destroyed. It will be too late. For those who reject Christ the window of opportunity has slipped away. Only God’s judgment awaits them. By the way this lends some validity to the view that there are only 7 judgments and then Jesus comes back. There is no more reason to drag this thing out any longer!

If you get nothing else out of this study, I hope it is this:

If you are not saved, GET SAVED NOW! Today, right now is the time to get right with God. While there is still time, repent and accept Christ as Savior. Do not delay. God has handed you the key to your spiritual freedom, which is His Son Jesus Christ. Your choice is clear…

Peace, Life, Light, Joy, Living water, Hope OR

Chaos, Death, Darkness, Woe, Poisoned water, Fear!

If you are saved, I have good news for you. You’ll be spared from the wrath of God. That is a pattern commonly seen in scripture and I firmly believe it applies here in Revelation for those in the church age. We will either go to be with the Lord or He will remove us before all of these terrible events take place.