



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 8:1-13

Revelation

“Silence then Trumpets”

TRANSCRIPT

Our text this morning is Revelation chapter 8, and we're going to look at the entire chapter, verses 1 through 13. This begins the trumpet judgments, chapter 8 of the Book of Revelation does, which is the second series of judgments that are poured out upon the Earth. This is the section of the book that we normally think of when we think of the Book of Revelation, the apocalyptic section. When I say apocalyptic, we normally use that word in the sense of catastrophic. Actually the word apocalyptic comes from apocalypsis, which means revelation or unveiling. We think of apocalyptic in a sense of judgments because they are so common in the Book of Revelation. But the book is an unfolding of truth. It's a revelation of truth. It's making clear of things of the future and so I'll bring that out in our lesson because I think it helps us to understand what exactly is happening in these events that we'll read about in a moment. They're dramatic and they're fascinating, but to many people they're a big confusing and I think they're confusing because they try to see something in them that's not there. We can take them at face value for the most part, I think. This is judgment on the world in the future.

Let's begin reading it with verse 1: “When the Lamb broke the seventh seal there was silence in Heaven for about half an hour. I saw the seven angels who stand before God and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar holding a golden censer and much incense was given to him so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand. The angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightening and an earthquake. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. The first sounded and there came hail and fire mixed with blood and they were thrown to the earth and a third of the earth was burned up and a third of the trees were burned up and all of the green grass was burned up.

“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 and a third of the creatures, which were in the sea and had life, died and a third of the ships were destroyed. 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. The name of the star is called Wormwood and a third of the water became wormwood and many men died from the waters because they were made bitter. The fourth angel sounded and a third of the sun, a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it and the night in the same way. Then I

looked and I heard an eagle flying in mid-Heaven.” Now if you were reading the King James Version you would have an angel there, but the Greek text is very clear. It’s the word eagle, which can mean eagle or vulture. I’ll mention that in our lesson, but angel makes sense because you don’t think of eagles doing what this eagle would do. Angels speak, but there is no real credible reason for taking it as an angel. It would just be an interpretation that was given. But we’ll read this as eagle or vulture “flying in mid-Heaven saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the Earth because of the remaining blasts of the trumpets of the three angels who are about to sound.’” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this time together and this opportunity to read the text of scripture that we have read and spend some time considering its meaning. We pray your blessings upon us as we do that. We pray that you would guide us in our thinking, give us a perspective on life and on the future that we should have from this text and may it have its proper effect upon us. May it sanctify us and conform us to the image of Christ and give us the mind of Christ and help us to have the perspective that you would have us to have. Thank you for the privilege we have of reading and studying the scriptures together and for the privilege of doing what we’re doing at this moment, coming before the Throne of Grace. We’re reminded in our text of the value of prayer, the importance of prayer, the effectiveness of prayer. We tend to neglect that. We tend to ignore that great exercise that you’ve given us, that spiritual exercise that is so important to our Christian life and to the blessings of other people.

So teach us these things, Father. Strengthen us spiritually. Bless us materially as well. We pray for those who are sick. We have many in the hospital. We pray for them and pray that you give healing mercy to them. We pray for those that are struggling in a variety of ways; some not even known to us but you know all of our needs. You know the details of our lives. You know what we need from You, and I pray, Father, that You would bless. Give a sense of your presence, give wisdom where it’s necessary, give encouragement, build up Your people. Bless our time now together. Prepare our hearts for time to study and worship together. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Some years ago, it was a little over 20 years ago, my wife and I were in Grand Central Station in New York City. A generation ago it was a very busy place. You’ve probably seen films of it in its heyday. It was said that all the rail lines in the continental United States eventually converge at Grand Central Station, so a generation ago Bible teachers would often call the Book of Revelation the Grand Central Station of prophecy because eventually, ultimately, biblical prophecy finds its expression in this book. Well when I was there, there were very few people in it but one person that was there was a trumpet player. I never saw him, but I heard him. He was standing somewhere up above the lobby playing some jazz. He put out a very nice sound. The acoustics are interesting there. It just echoed through this great, marble building. And that came back to me when I was reading Revelation 8 because it tells us that the day is coming when seven trumpeters – angelic trumpeters – would play their horns. They will stand high up and their notes will echo throughout the earth, but it won’t be jazz it will be judgment.

They will begin the second round of divine judgments. That’s what chapter eight is about, the first four of the seven trumpet judgments. John describes the first series of judgments in chapter six – the seal judgments. They were general judgments that brought war and famine, death and plague to the Earth. Six seals were broken. The seventh remained sealed. In chapter seven there was an interlude. There is a pause in the action. We find these interludes throughout the Book of Revelation. They give us some sense of what’s going on. They give us some insight or some

further information of what’s taking place during this period of revelation. What’s taking place on the Earth, what’s taking place in Heaven, and there in chapter seven is one of these pauses in the action when John was given a vision of two multitudes – one gathered from the nation of Israel, the other gathered from all of the nations of the Earth.

The first multitude numbered 144,000. They are described as bond servants of God. They are on the Earth serving God, perhaps as witnesses during these dark days of tribulation that are coming. The other is an innumerable multitude in Heaven, people who came out of the great tribulation, which suggests that they are martyrs for the faith. Their robes are described as white because they washed them in the blood of the Lamb, and we commented on this last week – what unusual blood that is that doesn’t stain. It bleaches and cleans. It’s a good picture of justification. It’s a picture of what these people had done and what had happened to them. They had believed in Jesus Christ, perhaps through the witness of the 144,000 and at faith they had been justified, declared righteous – clothed, as it were, in the righteousness of Christ. The scene that is given to us there is one of happiness in Heaven, of saints and angels singing to God’s glory, rejoicing in His salvation which had been obtained by Him for them. They give Him the praise and they know the joy of it, and it gives us a glimpse of what Heaven is like.

I was listening to a sermon by Dr. Johnson not long ago and he made an interesting statement, a statement which he found interest in that he said that it’s always puzzled him that the Bible says more about Hell than it does about Heaven. I never thought of that and I hadn’t traced that out. I trust his reading of the scripture and his statement, but it is interesting. We’ll come to Hell later on in this book and a lot is said about it, but here we have some statements about Heaven. It is a place of peace. It is a place of joy. It is a place of complete satisfaction. It is a place where there is no sadness. In fact, chapter seven ends with that great promise, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” And then in chapter 21 that promise will be repeated. That’s Heaven. “God wipes every tear from their eyes.” But all of that is an interlude and it is a pause in the action. Chapter eight, John leaves the heights of Heaven and he goes back down to Earth where the tears still flow.

The seventh seal has not yet been broken. Four angels are holding back the four winds from destroying the Earth. Judgment is impending. In chapter eight it comes. It begins with the lamb breaking the seventh seal. With that we expect the four winds to be released and all Hell to break loose on Earth. Instead we read there was silence in Heaven about half an hour. Why is that? What is this silence? We’re not told. And so the commentators have given a number of suggestions. That’s why we have commentators, because there’s silence on these things and we’re not given the reasons, so lots of reasons are given. Some have called this a dramatic pause to heighten the suspense – I suppose to heighten the suspense in reading it or perhaps it’s to express a heightened sense of suspense of the hosts in Heaven as they’re waiting and anticipating what’s to follow. That’s a possibility, but the theme that follows in this silence in this chapter is the theme of prayer and the picture given is of all Heaven going silent so the saints prayers, the prayers of the believers – and when we read the word saints here we shouldn’t think of some elite group, but this is all believers, all Christians. Everyone who’s trusted in Christ and has been washed in the blood of Christ is a saint, is a set-apart one, is a sanctified one. All of their prayers are being heard and so they’re silent so they can solemnly be heard by God. I think that’s as good an explanation as any, probably better than most.

God, of course, doesn’t need silence in order to hear our prayers, but this, remember, is a book that is figurative in its language, symbolic in its language and the idea that is presented here, the picture that’s given here, is to show the great attention that God gives to our prayers, just as we

would need complete silence to really concentrate on something. That’s, I think, the point that John is making. That’s the meaning of this image of silence in Heaven. God is giving great attention to the prayers of the saints. During this time of silence John sees seven angels who stand before the throne of God and seven trumpets were given to them. No purpose is stated for the trumpets, but often in the Old Testament trumpets were blown to assemble the people for war or to sound an alarm. And here, they are for the purpose of assembling the powers of God to unleash the next series of plagues and disasters, assembling all of these powers to make war on the Earth. But before the trumpets are blown, the prayers of the saints are offered, and during this half hour of silence, great attention is given to those prayers, which demonstrates the importance of prayer.

In fact, we’re probably to understand that the judgments that follow are answers to these prayers. In a sense, the prayers of the saints set in motion the judgments. Prayer is effective and it is valuable to God. That’s what’s signified in what follows when John sees another angel – not one of the seven – in verse three. “Another angel came and stood at the altar holding a golden censer and much incense was given to him so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar, which was before the throne.” Incense was prominent in the worship of the Old Testament. You read the worship of the Old Testament, all the details of it, the worship of Israel was a very sensual religion, and what I mean by sensual is it appealed to the senses – to sight and to one’s hearing and sense of smell. The beauty of it was great. The tabernacle with all of its colors and all of its details were designed to teach people the plan of redemption and do that through the vivid colors that were part of it. But also it appealed to the sense of smell, and we have that with incense. It was a fragrant reminder that the prayers of God’s people are like perfume to the Lord. They are acceptable to Him. The addition of the angels incense with the prayers of the saints signifies that to show that our prayers are sweet to God and very sweet because the angel added much incense.

That is also the significance of the golden censer and the golden altar from which the prayers go up. The gold of them indicates that our prayers are valuable. They are important to God and they are part of His work as signified by the angels' involvement with the saints' prayers. I don’t really think the blessing we’re to gain from this that angels in some way help our prayers along and bring them to the Throne of Grace in some way, but this is simply to show that our prayers are part of what happens in Heaven. They’re not incidental; they’re very important to the events of Heaven. When the angel throws incense on the coals of the altar, the smoke rises up before God, which pictures our prayers going up to Him and being received by Him. The fact that these prayers are connected with the altar again signifies the importance of them and signifies, I think, the nature of them. It suggests that they are a sacrifice and that God considers them to be an act of worship on our part and they are exceedingly valuable to Him. “They went up before God,” John says, “Up before His throne.” The place of power, the place from where the events of Earth are planned and determined and executed and there at the throne of God they are heard and they are answered.

The picture we’re given is of a vast and awesome throne room of God filled with the smoke of incense, filled with the prayers of the saints. These prayers play a part in the events that followed. So often we neglect prayer. I say we neglect prayer, maybe I shouldn’t say that about all of us. I say it about myself because I’m very guilty of that daily. You wonder why that is. Some people ask me why prayer is so hard and I have to confess it’s hard for me. I’m not sure of the reason why other than maybe we just don’t take it that seriously. We’ve got other things to do. You know, you’ve got to study, you’ve got to put things together, you’ve got to get the sermon ready. The prayer sort of interferes with that. But if we really realized the real value of prayer and that as James tells us, it accomplishes much, we would not be so neglectful. It accomplishes much

here. That’s indicated in verse five when the angel takes the censer used for the saints’ prayers, fills it with coals from the altar and then throws it onto the earth. With that, the prayers of the saints return to the Earth in wrath, because we read, “There followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightening and an earthquake.”

This is the answer to the prayer the Lord instructed us to make in Matthew 6:10, “Thy Kingdom come.” I think people interpret that prayer in what we call *The Lord’s Prayer*, which is probably better to call *The Model Prayer*, they interpret that particular prayer as something rather general and benign – make people better, bring happiness to the Earth, whatever. But that’s a prayer for justice to come. It is a prayer that Christ would come and establish His Kingdom on the Earth. But we know from Revelation 19 – and if you’re not familiar with it turn to it after the lesson and read it – that that appearing of Christ, that coming will be one that is in judgment. Christ returns on a horse, which is a symbol of war, and he comes with a sword, and that’s what we are praying for when we pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” and that is what we are to be praying for – that God’s justice, that His rule – His righteous rule – would be brought to the Earth through the return of His son. And that should be a great desire of our heart. In fact at the end of the book, after John has unveiled all of these judgments that will come and then the Kingdom that will come and then the new Heavens and the new Earth and all of that – he’s so full of awe and excitement at what is coming that he says in chapter 22, verse 20, one of the last statements of the book, he says, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

The saints had been praying that down through the centuries. John prayed it 2,000 years ago, but it has been prayed in every generation and will be in the future. Those prayers will be answered. We see that here in verse five with the peals of thunder, lightening and the earthquake that warn of the end. We wonder sometimes if our prayers are heard because we don’t get immediate answers to them. I’ve had that sense of something burdening my heart and I’ve been on my knees and looked up and I’ve wondered to myself, do these prayers go beyond that ceiling? Are they really being heard? Is there any point to this? And we get discouraged very easily because we don’t get immediate answers. I think the answer to that question that we have, that frustration, is found right here in this text, in this chapter. They are heard. They’re all heard by God and He answers all of them in His way, which is always the right way. It may not be a yes answer. It may be a no answer. That sounds glib, I know, but it’s true. God doesn’t give us things that are second best. He gives us what we need and that may be a no because He’s got something better for us and He has the best time to do that.

He answers our prayers at the best time in the best way, but this brings us to a doctrinal difficulty – that of prayer and the plan of God, the mystery of prayer and providence. God’s plan is what it is. We don’t bend God’s will to fit our will. God has ordained everything from all eternity. He has a perfect plan. He’s far wiser than any of us. He knows much better than we know and so we’re not going to add anything to His plan and by our prayers we’re not going to change the course of history. But our prayers are a part of His plan. They are valuable and God has willed that they be a means to the end of the process of bringing about the Kingdom of God on the Earth. I received great help from Charles Hodge years ago when I was reading his *Systematic Theology*. Hodge wrote 100-150 years ago. He was a great Princeton theologian. But he answered this question that always comes up, particularly a question that Arminians like to throw at Calvinists, “Well, if predestination is true or if unconditional election is true, why pray? It’s all been set out, hasn’t it? Why give the gospel if election is true?”

Well, you could answer that because the Bible commands it, right, because we’re told to pray. We give the gospel because we’re told to give the gospel, but there is a rational explanation

for that as well. That, I think, is a valid answer, by the way, but to explain it – why we’re told to pray and why we’re told to evangelize – is because the God, as Hodge put it, who ordained the end has also ordained the means to that end and He will carry out His end – His goal – through various processes and means and methods. He’ll bring in His elect through the preaching of the gospel. You’ll gain the blessings of God through the prayers you offer. The church will be built up in the faith with the preaching and the teaching and the study of the Word of God. These are the means to the end and prayers have a very vital role in that. So they are important, our prayers. They do affect things. And so we are to be a people of prayer. Here we see God answering those prayers as the seventh seal sets off the second series of judgments – the seven trumpets – verse six. “And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.”

Picture maybe that of the angels positioning themselves up in the heavens and raising their horns. These trumpets will now bring us closer to the end. In fact, the way we should understand the relationship with these judgments is that the seven trumpets are the contents of, or they are the judgments of the seventh seal. The seventh seal is different from the previous six seals. There are no plagues or destructions in the seventh seal. When it is broken, there’s silence and then the seven angels are given their trumpets. It’s the same with the seventh trumpet when it is sounded. There are no plagues. Instead the bowl judgments begin, which suggests that the content of the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls. And so if we can diagram this – in fact if I had a piece of paper or a chalkboard we could draw this out very easily. But if you could use your mind’s eye in this, if this is the seven years of tribulation, when the first seal is broken that’s what begins the tribulation. These seals, seven of them, are broken throughout the seven-year period. But when we come to the seventh seal, that’s when the trumpet judgments begin and so about the middle of the tribulation period they begin and we have seven trumpets and toward the end of the tribulation period the seventh trumpet is sounded and that marks the bowl judgments that take us to the very end of the tribulation period.

So the sequence of events with these three series of judgments – the seals, the trumpets, the bowls – it’s chronological and concentrated. They become increasingly intense. The seal judgments affect a fourth of the Earth. The trumpet judgments affect a third of the Earth – a broader expanse of the Earth – and the bowl judgments complete the wrath of God. They cover the Earth. Judgment gets increasingly wide and severe, so with the breaking of the seventh seal and the end of silence, the trumpet judgments begin and the first trumpet sounds probably in the middle of the seven-year tribulation period. The first four trumpets will each trigger the forces of nature to produce their destructive effects. Nature has great power bound up within it and these release that power. It says though the trumpeters assemble the forces of nature for war, so we read in verse seven, “The first sounded and there came hail and fire mixed with blood and they were thrown to the Earth and a third of the Earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

As you read this and the other plagues that occur, it’s difficult to visualize and maybe even a little difficult to believe. Hail and fire mixed with blood? Then a great burning mountain thrown into the sea followed by a star called Wormwood falling from Heaven? Are these real events or figurative representations? Many take it as purely symbolical and that’s possible because as you see from the very first verse of this book – chapter one, verse one – these things were signified to John. That’s the sense of the word. This is revelation given to him symbolically. So there is symbol here; we certainly recognize that. And so when John describes the hail and fire destroying trees and grass, some interpret the trees as princes or great men and the green grass as young men or weak men. The burning mountain of the second trumpet that is thrown into the sea has been

identified as a great kingdom that falls. The Bible sometimes likens kingdoms to mountains and sometimes likens people to trees and to grass. But as one commentator put it, this approach leads to an endless sea of sheer conjecture and turns the Book of Revelation into an incomprehensible riddle.

Maybe John is not so subtle or inscrutable as many seem to think. Maybe, in fact, the meaning is hiding in plain site and John means what he says. One of the older commentators, a Lutheran, Joseph Seiss, made what I think is an insightful comment. He wrote, “I take the language as it stands. This book does not give things veiled, but unveiled. It is the apocalypse, the uncovering.” And that’s true. John’s not writing to obscure things, he’s writing to reveal things – to make them clear, to tell us how things are going to conclude. The fact that the Book of Revelation is written in symbols doesn’t mean that nothing is literal. The plain meaning is that these are descriptions – figurative descriptions to some extent, that’s true – but descriptions of physical phenomena of cosmic signs and wonders. And in the context of this book, that really shouldn’t be at all surprising. These are events about the end of history. These events describe what will take place at the end of the world. Wouldn’t we expect things of this kind, wonders of this kind, to herald the end? The plagues of Egypt were spectacular and supernatural, but we don’t question that they were real, that they were physical events – that is, if we believe the Bible we believe it to be true. We take those events to be events that really happened as written. And God could certainly repeat those events on a larger scale, and in fact the first four trumpets follow the pattern of those plagues of Egypt.

The first trumpet resembles the seventh plague on Egypt in which hail and fire fell on the Earth and destroyed all the plants and the trees of the field. That really happened. That was an historical event. It happened as described. Here, the hail and fire are mixed with blood. That’s a big different from what’s described in Exodus, but very similar. Again, that’s hard to imagine but it’s not all together unprecedented. One of the older commentaries, Henry Barclay Swete, states that in the spring of 1901 newspapers reported accounts of blood-red rain falling in Italy and southern Europe, the result of the air being mixed with the fine red sand of the Sahara Desert of North Africa. Other commentators mention other events like blood-red snow in the Pyrenees and in Norway. Cicero reported that word was once brought to the Roman Senate that it had rained blood. That doesn’t mean that what John describes here will be like those events. They may be natural, they may be supernatural, but he is describing, at least in my view, he is describing cataclysmic storms of some kind.

The first trumpet caused a plague that burned up a third of all the trees on the Earth and destroyed all the green grass. When the second trumpet was blown, something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea and a third of the sea became blood. You’ll notice he says “something like a great mountain.” He doesn’t say it is a great mountain. He’s using a simile here. This is a figure of speech that he’s using. He’s making a comparison. He likens this to a mountain. He may be thinking of volcanic action like Vesuvius that erupted less than 20 years before John was writing these things and it destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum. Those events would have been very vivid on the minds of the readers of this book in John’s day. There were other events like that. In 1500 B.C., the Island of Thera exploded and exploded with such terrific force that it shook the Mediterranean world – boulders the size of houses shot into the air. It caused a catastrophe that wiped out the Minoan civilization on the Island of Crete. Something like that – not exactly that – but something like it may be what John is describing. Widespread pollution from the event will affect the sea so that it becomes blood, figuratively or literally, as happened to the Nile River in the first plague on Egypt.

According to verse nine, a third of the creatures which were in the sea died and a third of the ships were destroyed, which goes beyond any natural explanation. That certainly seems to be supernatural. It seems to be an act of God. The third trumpet also recalls that plague on the waters of Egypt when this third trumpet plague affects the fresh water supply of the world – a third of it. It was a great star that fell from Heaven burning like a torch and its name was Wormwood. It polluted the waters and we’re told that many men died from the waters. They became bitter. Some of the interpretations given of this falling star are that it represents a false religious leader, Arius or Pelagius. It represents some deluding influence, deceiving influence like a heresy. Others have interpreted it to be a military figure like Attila the Hun. That kind of speculation goes on and on. It’s hard to control that. The most natural way to take it is of a heavenly body like a meteor – in fact the Greek word that’s used here for torch, *lampas*, we get our word lamp from that – it was used of meteors that were shooting through the sky.

Wormwood was a plant with a bitter taste. Normally it was not fatal to take wormwood, but in the Bible that is used like poison and that is what this plague brings to the fresh waters of the world – a third of them, at least. It poisons them. It results in death. In verse 12 we read that when a fourth angel sounded his trumpet, a third of the world was plunged into total darkness, a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it and the night in the same way. Again, that recalls one of the plagues of Egypt. It recalls the ninth plague when darkness covered the land. It’s recorded in Exodus 10. It was unusual darkness. It was darkness that covered the land of Egypt and is described as a thick darkness – a darkness that the text says could be felt. It was darkness so deep and oppressive that the Egyptians could not see one another, their lamps wouldn’t function in it and they couldn’t rise from their beds. They were physically affected by that while the Israelites were not affected by it at all.

This future darkness would be something like that. It will be unusual. It will be terrifying, but it will affect only a third of the world. I wonder how that could be, and perhaps we don’t have a scientific answer for it. It will be a supernatural event like the darkness over Jerusalem and Judea during the crucifixion. This had affected Egypt but didn’t affect the surrounding countries. It was a localized kind of darkness. Now there’s a teaching purpose in all of this in the 10 plagues of Egypt. They were polemical in nature. That is they were a polemic – a dispute with the gods of Egypt, an argument against the Gods of Egypt. God said that to Moses in Exodus 12:12. He said that he was executing judgment on the gods of Egypt and Egypt had a lot of Gods and so water to blood was judgment on the river god. They worshipped the Nile River. The Nile River was the source of life. Egypt is a desert country, but the Nile makes the ground around that river – near the banks of it – fertile. In fact, I have stood with one foot on the grass and one foot on the desert. It’s that much of a demarcation.

And so they realized this river gives life to them and they didn’t appreciate God for giving them that river. They thought the river was the source of life and they worshipped the river. So God turned it to blood to show that it’s nothing. It doesn’t give life. It’s not the source of life. The plague of the locusts was an attack on Seth, the god of crops. The darkness was against the sun god Ra. The tenth plague, the death of the firstborn was against Pharaoh, Egypt’s god incarnate. All of these to demonstrate that these gods are nothing; they’re no gods at all. The sun is not what needs to be worshipped. God gives light to the sun and He can take it away. He makes the Nile useful. He can destroy it as well. Well there may be something of that in these plagues as well, in fact I think there is. In unbelief men have turned their backs on God and worshipped the creation. Maybe they don’t worship it as God as such. You probably won’t find too many people that say yes, I

believe that the Earth is God. There are some people who talk like that about Mother Earth, and there are Pantheists today – all kinds of views today – but I think most people probably don’t actually think that the Earth and the sky is God, but they live as though it is. They live as though they worship it. They live for the things that this world or they live for themselves as autonomous, as self-directed as a law unto themselves, as self-sufficient beings and in doing so they worship themselves.

I say they worship themselves or they worship the world and they worship the money that they make because we worship what we value the most and what we give our lives to is what we consider to be our God, whether we know that intellectually, cognitively or not, that is the case. But the world is God’s creation. It’s not to be worshipped. So in the first four trumpet judgments the elements and the powers of the natural world are turned against man and in all of this, man is made to see his complete dependency upon God. It’s in good times. It’s when we’re healthy. It’s when we’re prosperous that we really think we’re something and we’ve done it all, not realizing, as Paul told the Athenians, we live and move and have our existence in Him. Your health is a gift from Him. The things that make you think you’re self-sufficient are all a gift from God. And so he takes all of that away and he shows man here how totally dependent he really is. These men – these people – are utterly helpless under these judgments. Man is not self-sufficient at all, and certainly in this fourth judgment there is a reminder of man’s natural condition – a reminder of man’s sin. He walks in darkness – spiritual darkness. And here these people would be placed in literal darkness to remind them of the condition of their – or to remind them of their sin and darkness also pictures judgment. It’s a reminder that those who walk in darkness live in and under the ever-present judgment of God that someday will fall and take them.

That’s the main purpose of these plagues – judgment. And that purpose is indicated by a great bird flying through the mid-heavens in verse 13. John sees an eagle flying through the skies saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe those who dwell on the Earth because the remaining blasts of the trumpets of the three angels are about to sound.” In other words, the last three will be worse than the first four. The first four trumpets are basically against nature. The next three will be directly against men and they will be released from the abyss. That’s what the eagle said, which is highly unusual – a talking bird – but then remember this is the Book of Revelation. It’s not all to be taken literal. I object that people take it completely figuratively. There’s much that’s literal in it, but again we need to remember it’s a figurative book and it expresses truth symbolically. In fact, both the Greek and the Hebrew word for eagle is the same as vulture, and perhaps that’s how we should interpret this. It’s not an eagle, but it’s a vulture. I think that fits better with the context. Vultures circle corpses. They signify death to us and death was in the air. That’s the warning that was given to those who swell upon the Earth to unbelievers.

Really, all of these plagues were warnings and opportunities to repent. God doesn’t destroy all of the Earth. He doesn’t sweep it all away at once. This happens incrementally. He destroys a third of the trees and the grass and the waters. It was to alert men to their peril, the peril of their souls, and many repented through the preaching of the Lord’s bond servants. And I don’t doubt that the plagues that came upon the Earth did alert them, awakened them. They saw their need, they heard the message, they believed. That seems to be what chapter seven suggests with that great multitude that comes out of the nations. Many believe, but many do not. In chapter nine, verse 20, we read of mankind largely refusing to repent. Men will have all of these reasons to repent – this great judgment – and yet they refuse. In fact they will gnaw their tongues in rebellion against God.

Men, by nature, are adamant in their ways, determined to go their own way, so much so that they choose death over life. That is the insanity of sin. Jeremiah asked King Zedekiah, “Why

would you die, you and your people?” He’s calling upon that kind to repent, but Zedekiah would not and the people would not repent so they died by the sword. But that’s the question that’s inherent in the gospel. Here’s life and it is free. Life that is eternal for all who believe. Why would you die with such a magnificent offer – the offer of free grace? Why would you choose death over life? But men do. You see that throughout the Book of Revelation, we see it in our own experience. We see it in people close to us. They choose death over life. That is the folly of sin, the folly of unbelief, the folly of worshipping the gods of this age. They blind our minds. If you’re here without Christ we invite you to turn to him. He offers all who believe in him life. Judgment is coming. It’s coming for this world, but it may come for you long before it comes for this world.

Trumpets may be sounding for you right now. But in him, in Christ, there is escape because he bore the penalty of sin on the cross and that applies to everyone who trusts in him. His punishment becomes ours. We, who believe in him, have suffered already through our substitute and we’re free. In fact once we believe in him we have, as it were, washed our garments in the blood of the lamb and we are white and snow and we are fully accepted to him. So believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. May God help you to do that, help all of us to rejoice in His grace that saves. Let’s bow in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace and we’re reminded of judgment here. We’re reminded of what we have escaped through your grace and through the substitute of the Lamb. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, his death for us and the life that’s in him and it’s in his name we pray. Amen.