

Revelation 8-9

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Preacher: Phil Hair

[0:00] Well, I would invite you to keep your Bible opened at this passage which we've just read together! Here in the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 8 and verse 1 through to chapter 9 and verse 21! As we continue in this series of studies in this book. And as you do this, let me draw your attention to the title which I've given to this study. The Sound of Silence. And if you're of my generation, then you'll immediately be thinking that I've taken this title from the 1964 hit single. This shows how old I really am. But the hit single of that same title by Simon and Garfunkel. If you know who they were. And I could sing it to you. Hello darkness, my old friend. I've come to talk to you again. But you'll be relieved that

I'm not going to do this. Actually, the title comes from an article I read a while back about what's known as the Chamber of Silence. Which is a room in Microsoft's research facility in Redmond, Washington State in the USA. And it's been described as the quietest place on earth. I won't try to explain how the room is built, the technology of it. But if you were standing in it and you were to clap your hands, you wouldn't hear the sound of that clap. Because all of the sound would have been completely absorbed. Indeed, and I quote, the room is so terrifyingly quiet that no visitor or worker has been able to stay inside it has been able to stay inside it for longer than 45 minutes.

Chapter 8 and verse 1. When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Now, what's this all about? This silence in heaven for 30 minutes or so. And if it's God calling for the silence, then you can be absolutely sure that it would be a complete silence. Not a sound. A pin-dropping silence. Well, we need to take a moment or two to put this verse and to put these two chapters in context.

You see, in finishing chapter 7 last week with that wonderful, with that comfortingly assuring picture of heaven. With the Lamb at the center of heaven. With the Lamb at the center of the throne and God wiping away every tear. What would you then expect to read at the beginning of chapter 8 as the seventh seal is opened? Well, of course, just this. The end. Fini. The end.

[3:50] But this isn't the end of Revelation. Oh, no. What does John then see? Verse 2. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

First seven seals, and now seven trumpets. And with the blowing of these seven trumpets, we come to another. To a second overview of history.

And how God's sovereign plans and purposes for the world, and for the church, and for you and me, are being worked out. The words of an old hymn come to mind here. And in essence, it's really the great message of Revelation. And what comfort and reassurance this is.

God is working His purpose out. As year succeeds to year, God is working His purpose out. And the time is drawing near. Nearer and nearer draws the time. The time that shall surely be.

When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God. As the waters cover the sea. Now, at the very outset here, we need to ask, by way of introduction, why the symbolism of these trumpets?

[5:38] Well, you read about trumpets all the way through the Bible. Not just in Revelation. And by and large, trumpets were blown for two reasons.

Firstly, to sound a welcome. That is, to announce the arrival of someone important. Usually a king. And it still happens today. With our own king.

And so, for example, when he arrives at the Palace of Westminster, for the state opening of Parliament, as he steps out of his coach and enters the building, there's a great fanfare of trumpets, which echoes throughout the whole of the building. Everyone hearing it. You see, the sovereign has come.

The king has arrived. And when Jesus comes again, on the last day, what we were thinking about last time, this is how His arrival will be announced to the world.

1 Thessalonians 4 and verse 16. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, and with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.

[7:11] But not just to sound a welcome. Secondly, to sound a warning. A warning alarm.

And so, for example, in the book of Nehemiah, which we are studying together, on these Sunday evenings, when the ongoing work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem was threatened by armed opposition, Nehemiah told the people that, chapter 4 and verse 20, whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there.

Our God will fight for us. They were, I suppose, the equivalent of the air raid sirens, which were heard during the Second World War, warning of the coming of German bombers.

And again and again and again and again, particularly in the Old Testament prophets, it was the blowing of trumpets, which sounded the warning of impending judgment.

The judgment of God. And so in Joel 2 and verse 1, blow the trumpet in Zion.

[8:40] Sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble. For the day of the Lord is coming.

It's close at hand. A day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and blackness. And this is exactly the warning that we have here.

In the blowing of these seven trumpets, it's the warning of impending judgment.

And sweeping through these two chapters, what we're going to do this morning, there are a number of things that can be said about this. And as we look at, as we consider this together, we do need the help of the Holy Spirit.

Because this is anything but a pleasant subject and theme to take up. But take it up we must. Let me give you these four headings to try and shape and mold our thinking.

[10:02] First of all, the origin of this judgment. Secondly, the nature of this judgment. Thirdly, the purpose of this judgment.

And then we'll conclude by saying something fourthly and briefly about the instrument of this judgment and the answer to it.

First of all, the origin of this judgment. And it's clear, of course, that this judgment is God's judgment. It comes from Him.

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

It's God who gives these angels these trumpets so that they might sound this warning alarm. And what I want to point out to you is what it is that prompts this.

[11:16] What it is that prompts this. In other words, what is it that moves God to come in judgment?

And the answer is this. It's the prayers of God's people. The prayers of God's people.

And this is the significance, you see, of the way in which this chapter begins. With this silence in heaven.

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Now, what is this silence?

What's the picture we're being given here? Well, most of the Bible commentators suggest that following on from what we read about last time in chapters 6 and 7, it's the silence of awe.

[12:20] Awe and wonder before the presence of God. And the verse that's often quoted is Habakkuk 2 and verse 20. The Lord is in His holy temple.

Let all the earth be silent before Him. But it can't be that. Because the silence here isn't silence on earth.

It's silence in heaven. What then is this silence? Well, we're told, aren't we? What are these opening verses all about?

They're all about prayer. Look at verse 3. Another angel who had a golden censer came and stood at the altar.

He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne.

[13:26] And so what's the picture regarding this silence in heaven? Well, actually, it's a very familiar one. And it's one that's acted out all the time.

In many a family home. You know, the phone goes. Mum, dad answers it. And it's a really important call.

And as the phone is answered, the television's blaring in the background. And the children are doing with their pals what they always do, not talking to each other, but shouting at each other. And added to this, the dog in the background is going crazy, barking its head off. There's a cacophony of noise.

What do mum and dad shout out? Be quiet. Be quiet. I can't hear what's being said.

[14 : 35] I'm trying to listen. Have you got the picture? There's all this noise of the busyness of heaven.

Heaven's a noisy place. Not least with all the music. And all of a sudden, God cries out, be quiet. Be quiet. Trying to listen. My people are praying. And I want to hear what they're saying.

Isn't that something? One writer comments, God calls for silence.

He turns down the volume of the cosmic din in order to listen to the prayers of his people. Now, my friends, what an encouragement to pray.

[15 : 42] And we need to apply this personally. You see, here is this poor, weak, struggling believer who's going through times of trial and trouble and tribulation, finding it so hard to pray, wondering whether it's going to be worthwhile.

You see, would God ever give ear to his prayer, to her prayer? And that's maybe you this morning.

And even as he, she gets down on their knees to pray, God is crying out in heaven, be quiet.

Be quiet, everyone. My child is praying to me. Now, if this is the picture, then here's the crucial question.

There's this silence in heaven as God's people pray. What happens? What happens? Well, there are two things.

[17 : 03] Do you notice them? First of all, incense goes up. Verse 4, the smoke of the incense together with the prayers of the saints went up before God from the angel's hand.

Now, the symbolism of the incense going up, whenever we're in India, there's one particular hotel in Delhi that we love to go to for coffee.

It's called the Imperial Hotel. And we go there, actually, not for the coffee, we go there for the smell. For the smell.

Because the marble floors are washed daily with water into which there's been poured mandarin oil. And the smell when you walk into the place, it's almost intoxicating.

Now, have you got the picture? In that our prayers rise up to God and like, like, like incense are accepted by Him as being altogether sweet and altogether pleasing.

[18 : 23] but then even as the incense goes up, do you notice secondly that fire comes down?

Verse 5, then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and hurled it on the earth.

And there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. That is, and this was the answer to their prayers.

The alarm. The alarm announcing impending judgment is sounded. Now, does that surprise you?

Does that surprise you? It does me, actually. That in answer to my prayers that God come down in grace with His glorious salvation, God's answer is to come down in wrath with His terrible judgment.

[19 : 51] It's quite a thought, isn't it? Praying for salvation and judgment comes down. Now, why this should be, I'll explain to you in a moment.

But let's move on from the origin of this judgment to secondly, the nature of this judgment. In other words, how does this judgment of God manifest itself?

Well, in a threefold way. And here, what we're going to do is to sweep through these two chapters, taking, as it were, a bird's eye view of them.

And when you're dealing with chapters like this in the book of Revelation, to get the understanding that you need, this is what you need to do. You need to take this bird's eye view of the chapters.

Three things. Firstly, we see God's judgment in the awesome forces of nature. Verse 7, the first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth.

[21 : 13] A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. And then with the second trumpet, the sea becomes blood.

With the third trumpet, the waters become bitter. And with the fourth trumpet, the sky turns black. Now, remembering that so much of the imagery in Revelation comes from the Old Testament, what do these judgments remind you of?

What do they remind you of? Don't they remind you of God's judgment poured out in the plagues, which came down upon Egypt during the days of the Exodus?

Remember? The fire and the hail? The river Nile turning to blood? The sky turning black?

And what were these plagues? Well, they were God's repeated warnings to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. You see, remember what Egypt was in these days.

[22 : 27] It was the richest, self-sufficient in every way. It was the richest and the most powerful country in all the world. And my, how it gloried in it.

And what was God doing? He was bringing it to its knees. materially prosperous through the help of the multitude of the gods they bowed down to.

And the living God was bringing it to its knees. peace. You know, in thinking of our own nation in these days, I do find this so very solemnizing.

Don't you? As a nation, we've turned our backs on God, ignoring His word, flouting His laws. peace. And in answer to our prayers, is God bringing us to our knees? And then you come to verse 13.

[23 : 39] As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair, call out in a loud voice, woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth.

Now, this threefold woe is the Bible's way of saying, you really need to listen to this. Pay attention. Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels.

In other words, God is saying, you need to listen to this. Because if you think things are bad, they're about to get a whole lot worse.

And a whole lot worse in that secondly, we see God's judgment in the destructive power of Satan. Into chapter 9, verse 1.

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the abyss.

[24 : 57] When he opened the abyss, now can you picture all this? Smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the abyss and out of the smoke, locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.

Now, what are these locusts? These locusts that sting like scorpions. Well, can I just pause as it were and say just a word here about the interpretation of such images as these in the book of Revelation?

In that I remember once hearing someone speaking on this chapter and speaking about these locusts and when it came to these locusts with the sting of scorpions, he began to speak about Russian helicopter gunships invading the west.

And he said it with such certainty, such certainty. Now, the point is, it's a great lesson to learn here about how you interpret Revelation.

The point is, what would that have meant to Christians living in the first century? And of course, absolutely nothing. What utter nonsense.

[26 : 31] And anyway, we're told what they represent, aren't we? Look, look at verse 11. They had as a king over them. the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon, the destroyer.

It's the devil, isn't it? In other words, these are the devil's angels. These are the devil's demons. One writer describes them as they pour out of the abyss as the reserve troops of hell.

What's their mission? Well, it's quite simple, you see. It's through temptation to lead men and women into sin.

A life of sin which can only bring unhappiness and despair and a life of sin which ultimately leads to eternal death and destruction.

And this life of sin, it's terrible, it's so miserable that people want to die. Look at verse 6. During those days, men will seek death but will not find it.

[27 : 53] They will long to die, but death will elude them. And do you notice how these devils present themselves?

Now isn't this interesting? With a human face. Look at verse 7. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle.

On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold and their faces resembled human faces.

And then this, their hair was like woman's hair.

Now what's this about woman's hair? I need to say something about this. You know? It's actually very simple. I take about 15 seconds to do my hair in the morning.

My wife? She washes it. And then she puts all this gooey stuff on it. And then it has to be blow dried and finally brushed.

[29 : 11] Takes about half an hour. Yeah, I'm in big trouble. But you get the point that's being made in that a woman's hair is integral to her attractiveness.

And that's these devils not just with a human face, but attractive with it. But, but, what gives them away?

Well, look at what we're told. Their hair was like woman's hair. hair. And their teeth were little lion's teeth.

Do you know what picture came into my mind when I read that? Do you remember the old Dracula films? With Vincent Price? Dracula has his female vampires.

And they are these gorgeous looking creatures with beautiful golden hair. and they go out to seduce their victims who are easily seduced by these gorgeous beauties.

[30 : 25] But then as they bend down to kiss their victims, they open their mouths. And that's when you see their teeth. You see they're outwardly attractive, but they're out to kill.

They're out to kill, slaughter. Like a lion with a wildebeest or whatever, bringing it down to rip it apart, kill it and devour it.

You see my friends, and this is the point here, the devil always beguiles by making sin to be so wonderfully attractive. Wonderfully attractive.

But a word of comfort, in case you're worrying, who can these devils not kill? Look at verse 4, they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Remember what Callum was saying last week about God's seal. people. And when God's people are sealed with the Holy Spirit, it's God's way of saying, don't touch, don't touch.

[31 : 57] They're mine, they belong to me, don't touch. the awesome forces of nature, the destructive power of Satan, and then thirdly, we see God's judgment in the intensifying inhumanity of man.

Verse 13, the six angels sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming down from the horns of the golden altar that is before God.

It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, release the four angels who are bound by the great river Euphrates, and the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.

The number of the mounted troops were 200 million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looks like this, and you have this terrible description of these horses and riders riding into battle.

It's the picture of war, isn't it? It's the picture of unimaginable slaughter, with unspeakable injuries being inflicted.

[33 : 20] need I say more? Switch on your TV, watch the news, whether it's present day Gaza, Ukraine, and we could give almost number examples of this from down through the centuries.

man's increasing inhumanity to man. So the origin of this judgment and the nature of this judgment.

But then thirdly, what about the purpose of this judgment? Why is God pouring out this judgment?

Well, we have it here, we're told.

Verse 20, the rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent.

It's to bring men and women to repentance. The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands.

[34 : 41] They did not stop worshipping demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, idols that cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders, their magic hearts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

to go back to what we were saying about God's judgment poured out on the plagues that came upon Egypt. What was the problem with Pharaoh?

What was the problem with Pharaoh? As plague after plague came down and he refused to repent, it was just this.

he refused to take God seriously. He refused to take God seriously. And isn't this the problem with people today?

It's not that they're necessarily against God, it's that they just don't take Him seriously. And what does God say?

[36:00] Remember the eagle in verse 13 of chapter 8? Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels.

What's God saying? He's saying, what's it going to take? What's it going to take?

I'll always remember in my church in Edinburgh sitting and talking with a Christian lady who was burdened for her loved ones.

It was actually her two grandchildren. And they got into the drug culture. their lives were being destroyed.

Their lives were being ruined by what they had thought was the attractiveness of sin. And with tears pouring down her face, she said to me, Phil, what's it going to take?

[37:12] take? What's it going to take? Well, fourthly, the instrument of this judgment and the answer to it.

And I simply want to take you back into chapter 6 and at verse 15. then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave, and every free man hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

They called to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne. I switched on my TV the week before last to look at the news.

And it was the cardinals processing into the Sistine Chapel to begin casting their votes for a new pope. And as they did so, the commentator said this.

Now I know what she was getting at, but the commentator said this, the cardinals will cast their votes before Michelangelo's beautiful last judgment.

[38:36] Beautiful? No, terrible, terrible. And who will actually pour out this judgment?

They called to the mountains and the rocks, fallen us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand? Jesus will. It's Jesus who will pour out this judgment.

Isn't that solemnizing? But, it's a gospel but, in how he's described here, we have the answer to this judgment.

Because he's the Lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin that brings down this judgment. And was there ever anything more terrible?

[39:51] Was there ever anything more terrible as the judgment that fell upon Jesus? The terrible wrath as he hung there on the darkness of the cross bearing our sins.

You see, this is the gospel, isn't it? It's the gospel. God's terrible judgment coming down upon him so that God's wonderful mercy and grace and salvation might come down upon us.

Let me finish by leaving you with a text to take away. Reminds me of a great preacher way back from the 17th century.

He ministered in the town of Taunton, southwest England. His name was Joseph Alleyne. And pressing this upon his people, he was to write a book about it.

And the book's title was An Alarm to the Unconverted. Now here's the alarm. Romans 2 and verse 3.

[41:26] Do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you towards repentance, but because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, your storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Be warned. This is what these two chapters are telling us. Be warned. Come to Christ Christ now. Now. Before it's too late. Let's pray together. Lord, your word is altogether solemnizing.

And yet we thank you for the glorious light shining through the darkness. But we have a Savior in Jesus, the Lamb of God, who bore the terrible judgment so that we might be set free from our sins and know you as our God and as our Heavenly Father.

Amen. O God, help us to take you seriously today. Help us to take your word seriously.

[43 : 32] And draw us to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We pray this in Jesus' name.

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