



KIAMA ANGLICAN  
CHURCHES

***The Seventh Seal***  
***Sermon – Greg Holmes***  
***Rev 8:1-5***  
***7 November 2021***



# *Revelation 8:1-6*

## The Seventh Seal

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

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

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 God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. <sup>4</sup> The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. <sup>5</sup> 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.

6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

## Introduction

There was a skit on one of the satirical television shows a little while back that showed people unpacking boxes and redirecting them to various destinations. The boxes were labelled 'thoughts and prayers' and they were being sorted to be delivered to the appropriate place. I think the point was that we often hear people say that others are in their thoughts and prayers without any real thought as to what that might mean.

Today's passage, in the midst of the visions of Revelation, turns our thoughts to our prayers.

What prompts you to pray?

Personal need?

Personal wants?

God glory?

Jesus' command?

The evening news?

Last week's sermon?

Family situations?

Personal challenges?

Your Spiritual discipline?

How do you visualise your prayers coming before God? The television skit showed them as contained in cardboard boxes. I have always visualised that when I pray, I am given access to the throne room of God. I can stand there and bring my case. Today's passage offers a different image /metaphor.

How and when do you understand that your prayers are answered?

We can of course see positive answers to prayer... We pray for someone who is sick – they get better. We pray for provision for this or that – we see God provide. We pray for good weather for this or that event and it is a brilliant sunny day (sometimes miserable and rainy!)

We have prayed for God to be merciful to our three dear sister saints that have passed away in the last week – and he is.

Here in our church, many prayed several years ago that God might provide us with new facilities for our worship services – God not only provided the means for the building but then, through the gift of a faithful servant, provided the financial means for the building to be debt free.

We, and lots of other Australians prayed, almost against hope after 18 days, that Cleo Smith would be found safe – and Wednesday morning she was rescued.

But what of the other prayers - the ones that don't seem to be answered, ones that call for broader action.

In the Anglican liturgy for centuries, in our churches and privately, we have prayed for peace in our world. How is that going? What do we make of this?

Today's brief passage gives us, as much as Revelation does, a tantalising glimpse behind the scenes of what goes on with our prayers and how they are answered. We are in Revelation chapter 8, just the first 5 (6ish) verses.

But first let's remind ourselves of what has gone before. The Apostle John, in exile on Patmos, has, at the outset, a vision of the risen Jesus who commands him to write this letter

*1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*

Then, as instructed, John writes his seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor (Turkey) with their observations, commendations, condemnations and encouragements.

Then in chapters 4 and 5 John is ushered, in a vision, into the heavenly throne room - the throne room of Yahweh, the centre of power for the entire universe. There John sees the Lion of Judah...a Lamb as if slain...Jesus - given praise as the only one worthy to open the seals of the scroll with seven seals...which he proceeds to do.

Body

### **Revelation 8:1-6**

Last week we saw that glorious picture of the Lamb at the centre of God's throne room and his purposes...of tears wiped away...of springs of living water. But that is tinged with a sense of hesitant, unknowing, expectancy – for we have only had six seals opened.

And weren't there seven?

*Revelation 5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.*

So we come to Chapter 8:

*1 When he opened the seventh seal,*

...and to it seal number seven.

We have seen the result of six seals: four Horsemen, the sealing of the martyrs, extraordinary natural upheaval, the revelation of the great gathering in heaven...

And now the seventh. We are expecting something even more spectacular...

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

[PAUSE – silently for 30 seconds]

That was a mere half a minute! The effect must have been stunning!

Wright: *This is the spirit in which we should hear what John has to say, that when the lamb opened the seventh seal ‘there was silence in **heaven**, lasting about half an hour’. A sense of awe, expectation and anticipation. The otherwise ceaseless praise of the four living creatures dies away. The song of the elders, the angels and the huge, countless crowd falls quiet. Everyone seems to be holding their breath. This, we sense, is the moment they’ve all been waiting for. We watch, hardly daring to breathe ourselves.*

And this is what is revealed

2 *And I saw the seven angels who stand before God...*

Could be these are the seven angels of the churches in Chapters 1-3. But in the end they are God’s messengers – their message to be revealed, as the trumpets are sounded later. (For us next week and then beyond of course)

*...and seven trumpets were given to them.*

3 *Another angel...*

But, John’s attention and our attention is diverted from these seven to one more angel/messenger. And he is acting, at first in the very centre of the throne room.

*...who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar.*

He is holding a golden censer, a sort of covered bowl containing hot coals over which the incense is poured.

He stands at the altar in heaven.

*He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne.*

The incense he has to offer is the prayers of all God's people. Ever wondered where your prayers go? In terms of this vision, they are in the censer.

We have seen this idea before. Note Revelation 5:8

*...the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.*

And Revelation 6:9-11 tells us of the prayers of the martyrs...

*9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.*

There is an emphasis in here on the worshipful nature of prayer - giving God his WORTH. The prayers are offered...

On the Golden Altar

In front of the Throne

Prayers are there in the throne room – in the CENTRE of the throne room of the Almighty God and in the presence of Jesus, Christ, risen and reigning.

*4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of*

*God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand.*

The pleasing aroma of the incense takes with it the prayers of God's people (ALL God's people) up before God, from this messenger's hand.

But there is more to happen ...

*5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar...*

This same angel takes the censer (I take representing the prayers of God's people) and fills it with fire from the altar in God's presence. Fire is significant ...

*Morris: The fire came from the very altar on which the prayers of the saints have been offered. ... 'What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny? Here is the astonishing answer: the prayer of the saints and the fire of God.*

*5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and hurled it on the earth;*

The censer (and/or its contents) are thrown on the earth.

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

The consequences of this are spectacular and troubling. Judgement is to be wrought on the earth.

And then...

*6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.*

We turn our eyes back to the angels with the trumpets as the sequence begins again. Remember John is here recording the sequence of his visions not necessarily the sequence of the

events depicted. The seventh seal brings on the vision of the seven trumpets.

## Conclusion

### The Silence

*Wright: Such moments are precious and rare, and remind us, in our noise-soaked world, that silence can be not simply the absence of noise, a temporary and unwelcome piece of boredom, but a profound, still, deep experience in which one can sense aspects of reality which are normally drowned out by chatter and babble. That is the spirit in which we should hear what John has to say.*

It is good, sometimes, to hear in the silence what God has to say. Remember Elijah's still small voice in 1 Kings 19:11-12

*After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

### The Prayers

Eugene Peterson – 'Reversed Thunder':

*Out of the silence of heaven, actions are prepared. The prayers are not simply stored on the altar, they are mixed with the fire of God's spirit and return to the earth.*

*Prayer is as much outer as it is inner. It is the most practical thing anyone can do. It is not mystical escape; it is historical engagement. Prayer participates in God's action. God gathers our cries and our praises, our petitions and intercessions, and uses them. The prayers that ascended to God now descend to earth. God uses our prayers in his work.*

So how should we pray?

We pray in relationship with the Sovereign Lord. Bringing our praise, our confession, our thanks, our requests before him knowing that he hears.

We ought not to neglect praying for justice, for those who face persecution for their allegiance to Jesus, for those in our world who this day will die for their faith.

We should pray for God's Kingdom to come, as Jesus taught us – for his true just and loving rule to be shown, which in the end is what all these visions are about.

We should be bold in our prayers knowing that our God will act.

### **The God who Acts**

God will act with justice, compassion and judgement – he is biding his time.

*Tim Chester: What is clear is that God's sovereign purposes for history are shaped by our prayers. It can be hard to pray for situations of conflict, famine or persecution.*

*If we pray for a sick friend, we readily find out how our prayer is answered. We can trace the cause and effect.*

*But when we pray for the suffering church, it can feel like our prayers simply disappear. Perhaps they make a difference; perhaps they don't. How can we know? Do my little prayers really change world events? Or what about when we pray for peace and no peace comes? Or when we pray for imprisoned Christians and they're martyred. This is what we see with our eyes. Our prayers just seem to disappear.*

*But John takes us through the open door of heaven. It may be that your unanswered prayers are in one of those bowls. God is waiting until the time is right. And one day your*

*prayers will be poured before the throne and will unleash the renewal of all things.*

*When you pray for justice, the ultimate answer may be the final judgment.*

*When you pray for peace, the ultimate answer may be the reign of the Lamb.*

*When you pray for healing, the ultimate answer may be a resurrected body.*

*When you pray for joy, the ultimate answer may be the wedding feast of the Lamb.*

Peter at the end of his second letter reminds us:

*2 Peter 3:8-11 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.*

*13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*