



The Trumpets

Sermon – Aiden Sibrava

Revelation 8-9 14 November 2021

Hi reader, thanks for taking the time to dig into what God is saying to us in Revelation 8-9. I'd love to hear what you got out of this, if you have time to drop me a line at aiden.sibrava@kiamaanglican.org.au, or mail: 2 Terralong St., or phone 0437 903 986.

This is a massive section and, as much as I'd love to, we won't work through it in detail, because we'd be here for three hours! When we were originally sectioning this Revelation series, I'm the one who talked Greg into having this massive section; and the promise I made was that it'd be a long reading but a short sermon. So don't despair; if you've done the reading, you're halfway there already.

But what did you notice? On the way through? I'm going to point some things out, but I'd love to hear your thoughts as well.

You might have noticed that the action in this section (the seven trumpets) is initiated by the Seventh Seal having been opened. It happens because of the prayers of God's people (see 6:10 and 8:3-7).

Now although there's seven trumpets, in this section there's only six...and, like the seven seals, there'll be an interlude. The

last trumpet will sound in Revelation 11:15, when it's declared that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of God. The sermons in weeks to come happen while we hold our breath between here and there.

But what's happening in *this* passage? Did you notice? Who is affected? Earth. The Cosmos. Creation. Humanity. How much of it? One third.

This is part of how Revelation, at length, describes God's day of justice—'The Day of the Lord.' Of course it's not just one day. The time period described by Revelation, the end of human evil and the coming of the reign of God, describes days, months, and years; and if this is a book for the church through the ages then I believe that, in some sense, it describes our lives too. But despite that, the way the Bible speaks of this divine reckoning is as 'the day of the Lord.'

In a sense, there's been more than one 'day of the Lord.' The Old Testament prophecies that look forward to God's justice were fulfilled in some sense at the Cross. Other prophecies about the Day (e.g. Mark 13) are fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem around 70AD. Still, there is a sense in which we look forward to a great, final Day.

Now I want to suggest that the The Day of the Lord is about vindicating God's **rule**, his **rules** and his **ruler**. That is, it's a day (or a time) when God's rule is asserted. There are things people will say about the faith that drive you crazy. And one

of the things that people will say is that “hell is God giving people what they want.” That’s a fabrication. The whole mess that humanity is in is *because* we were allowed to run rampant, living our own way. ‘Getting what we want’ is the origin of our problems. But God’s day of justice is the day he says, “No. No more.” His rule is asserted over our *self-rule* and justice is imposed upon the creature by its creator. God’s *rule* is vindicated.

But not only that. The day of justice is a day when God’s *rules* are vindicated - the instructions, the precepts, the edicts; the things God says are *right* and bring *life*...they bring life! And defying them brings death. And what’s the most important, life bringing rule? Mark 6:28—that we trust in Christ, our saviour!

And finally, it is a day when God’s *ruler* is vindicated. The lamb that was slain, God’s chosen King, the Lord Jesus, the Christ. The one who was put to death in place of the guilty. He is vindicated. God *will* reign in all the earth.

In Acts 17:31, Paul warns that God has...

“set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

You see God’s day of justice is a day for vindicating his rule, his rules and his ruler - the Lord Jesus.

You know—I wonder (as preachers are wont to do) if that might explain why one *third* is struck down in this passage? I mean, who is God? We know that God is Father, Son and Spirit. And yet at the crucifixion, the Spirit was not struck. The Father did not die upon the Cross. It was the Son who died for sinful men. Our God is triune - *three-and-one*. Christ died by human hands. And on the day of justice envisioned in Revelation 9, one third of humanity is struck. Do you see, there's a symmetry there? And so I wonder, is this *an eye for an eye? A tooth for a tooth?* God vindicated against rebel humanity? (It is certainly that, if nothing else.) We struck the Son...and now those who do not bow before the risen Lord are struck again.

One third...

But, what a toll! Think about the Covid emergency. It's had somewhere between a one and seven percent case fatality ratio, and yet you know what it has done to our country, politics, policy, economy, culture, language... But here in Revelation we're given a picture of something far more significant. One third is struck. 33%! Although in the language of the apocalyptic, the number might just mean '*a lot*'.

And yet...they're struck for what they've done, for what they do... But what is the outcome? How do they respond? Will they start 'social distancing'? What mark will this make on human society?

That's the question I want you to think about.

As one third is struck...in creation, those first four trumpet blasts see terrible destruction rain down on *earth, trees, grass, sea, rivers, waters, sun, moon and stars...* This is the whole Hebrew cosmos; that's their *everything*! They didn't have this conception of sending a Voyager space probe out beyond the bounds of gravity; this is the universe to them. Everything that *has* life or *supports* life in nature is impacted in this judgement; the water that gives life, the sun that brings photosynthesis and growth, the moon that brings the tides and marks the seasons... They didn't think in modern scientific categories but this is their natural world... The whole thing is impacted harshly. *How do they respond?*

And then the fifth and sixth trumpets sound, and unleash locusts and horses into the sky, and upon the earth; but these aren't your normal locusts and horses: they're like the Hieronymous Bosch version: with stinging tails and biting mouths...and they're unleashed on mankind.

What are they? Best guess - demons and demonic armies. See, demons fly (at least, in Hebrew thinking). So one of the ways they're depicted is as flies - these swarming, unclean flying insects. That's why when the Pharisees called Jesus 'Beelzebub' ('Lord of the Flies') in Mark 3, it's so offensive...they're saying he's the prince of demons. That's why he warns them about 'blasphemy against the spirit'. Flies,

and the lord of the flies, Beelzebub, are identified with demons. But here in Revelation 9, they get an upgrade. They're still flying creatures but, this time, locusts...with crowns and stinging tails and lions' teeth and armour.

And while Jesus was the opposite of Beelzebub, here in Revelation 9 the real Lord of the Flies or, rather, the Lord of the locusts, is let loose with his legions. Verse 11, their king is 'the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).'

His name is Destroyer. And his dominion is let loose upon the earth. It's not good.

So what's the outcome? How will people react?

Well, wait and see. With the sixth trumpet, armies are let loose. The vision here is *thick*: John says that four angels are released to slay and then he numbers a vast army of mounted troops; with leonine heads that slay *one third* with dragon's breath; and on the horses - tails that tear and maim.

With where they're from, they seem like Parthians—but they're unlike any Parthian (Persian / Iranian) I've ever met!

So what's the outcome? How will people react?

Well that's the question of the day. And verse 20 answers it. And I find it harrowing.

Revelation 9:20 The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their

hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

I find that sickening. Do you? I mean it's one thing to not believe, when faith sees not with eyes. Jesus lived, died and rose again, and we know him through the ministry of the Spirit and the testimony of the church. Non-believers aren't persuaded by that. Or by the testimony of creation, the stars that proclaim his handiwork... That saddens me, but I understand it.

But the idea that in a day where God's wrath is poured out and the divine doomsday clock for sinful humanity is sitting at 11:59:59.999—like, you are seeing God's anger poured out and you are one-one-thousandth of a second away from doom... they're still reading tea leaves, playing with crystals, holding seances and orgies and killing on a whim...

I mean, obviously sin breaks your brain. But...does this feel right to you?

I want to be able to say it doesn't, and that people wouldn't do this; but the Bible believes that there are people who are, in the end, *wicked*. And they harm and destroy, not because they don't know better, but because that's who they are...and what they love. And we should pray that so many of them will

be transformed...and saved...in the love of God and as we make his love known in our lives...

Because for those who will not learn to love the good, one day, the world will be made good, and they will be unmade. That's the warning of the book of Revelation.

But don't forget, the Maker came to save. He died so we could die to death, and to its power. He rose so we could live renewed, in a world renewed. And though the day of justice looms, it need not loom for *any* who will trust in him.

So trust in him! And go and teach someone else to trust in him!

Because that is how we know,

No matter what the last day looks like,

We will not fear to see his face; we'll sing.

Amen? Hallelujah.