**Rapture and Wrath**

Good evening everyone, thank you for joining us again tonight as we continue with our study through the book of Revelation. Last time we started with Revelation chapter 8, **The Seventh Seal & Saintly Supplications**. I gave quite an extensive recap and overview of the first 8 chapters of Revelation in the last sermon so for this sermon I’ll only be doing a brief recap as we progress. If you haven’t listened to last week’s sermon, please do so when get the opportunity. You don’t need to confuse yourself as we progress throughout this book by missing important sections of it, but if you haven’t listened to the last sermon don’t tune out, this will still be beneficial to you.

Last time we mentioned while in Revelation 8:1-5 that the breaking of the 7th and last seal ushers in the beginning of the terrifying judgements of God on the earth. After the last seal was opened a strange and uncharacteristic silence started in heaven and 7-trumpets were given to *the seven angels* who stand before God. We were reminded that our prayers are precious and beautiful to God, and it is our prayers mixed with fire from the alter of God in heaven that are thrown out unto the earth to start the terrifying judgements of God.

So tonight, we will continue with the rest of chapter 8 and Lord willing finish it. Let’s start by reading the whole chapter, and we’ll be doing a bit of reading tonight:

*When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 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, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 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.*

*Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. 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 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. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. 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. 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. 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. 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!”*

This is a terrifying and spectacular chapter in the Bible. Up until now, we have seen judgements of God on earth. We’ve seen the judgements of God brought about by the four horsemen, we’ve seen unbelievers stand in terror before the Lamb and we’ve seen how the breaking of the seals impact creation in chapter 6, but those events were not the true judgements of God. Those events were merely side effects of Jesus opening the scroll seal by seal. The scroll containing the last will and testament of God for all creation and all creatures contains within itself the true and terrifying judgements of God and the opening of the seals that contain the scroll are merely reverberations of God’s magnificent power and judgement. In Revelation 8:1-5 the last seal was broken, and the scroll is now open and what happened to the earth in chapter 6 is, but mere child’s play compared to what is coming. The judgements we’ve read about in the last few chapters are the calm before the storm. They are nothing in comparison to the judgements of God that will now be poured out on the earth. This judgement of God has been foretold by many prophets and apostles in both the Old and the New Testament, and now, in this chapter, we will see from John’s perspective how it will one day eventually be fulfilled. This is what the rest of chapter 8 and 9 is about. But before we jump into the text, allow me to take a little detour.

Up until now, I’ve only made mention and assumptions about the doctrine and teaching that we call, **the rapture**. I’ve mentioned it a few times as we progressed through the book, but never really looked at it. Tonight, that changes. I’ve postponed the discussion on the rapture up till we reached chapter 8 because I didn’t want to spend too much time looking at all the different theological schools and methods of interpretation while not making any progress in Revelation, and also, since Revelation chapter 8 and going forward is all about God’s wrath being poured out unto the earth I think it would be appropriate to ask the question at this time, “What about us?” What about the church? It’s all nice and well hearing me say that the church will not be present on earth during this time, but unless I’m able to defend that statement from the Bible it really doesn’t mean anything. Right? I hope you all agree.

So, when we use the word “rapture”, we are referring to the taking of God’s people, the church, by Jesus Christ off from the earth and to heaven. The word ‘rapture’ does not appear anywhere in the Bible but that doesn’t subtract or contribute to our discussion. The word *Trinity* is also never mentioned in the Bible, yet if you deny the doctrine of the Trinity, you are unsaved and a heretic. These words and definitions are just placeholders that contain within themselves sentences to books of teaching and doctrine.

[PAUSE]

It is important to understand that the rapture is not the second coming of Christ, at least not everyone agrees on that. There are those who disagree on this, but I’ll show you from the Scripture that this is not the case. The rapture is the event in which Jesus will snatch away the living saints on earth before the start of The Great Tribulation period that we have already begun to read about starting in Revelation 6 going forward. There are disagreements among those who believe in a rapture as to when the rapture will take place with regards to The Great Tribulation. There are some who believe that the church and her saints will be present on earth during the whole length of The Great Tribulation and will only be raptured after that period, we call this view post-Tribulation. Then there are those who believe that the church will only be present during the first half of The Great Tribulation. This view we call mid-Tribulation and then there are those who hold to the view that the church will be raptured before the start of The Great Tribulation. We call ourselves, pre-tribulation.

The Great Tribulation is that period predicted by Old Testament prophets like Daniel and Isaiah and was also mentioned by Jesus in passages like Matthew 24 and Paul in 1 Thessalonians. The Great Tribulation will be a time on earth that is best described as, “Hell on earth”. Not to the full extent, but to a large extent. During this time God will judge the world for their unbelief and refusal to repent of their sins. This event, The Great Tribulation, will take place shortly before the second coming of Jesus Christ and before he will make everything new. I’m of the opinion that the Scripture teaches that the saints who live on earth will be raptured by Jesus into heaven right before this period of The Great Tribulation starts.

Like usual, I won’t be able to exhaustively cover this topic in one sermon, but I’ll be sharing some resources attached to this sermon on the website that you can go and work through on your own time, or feel free to arrange a chat with me. If your theology is based on fictional books like “Left Behind” my hope is to help you right.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 4, 2 Thessalonians 1 and in Matthew 24 that the coming of Jesus will be a sudden event. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye. This we all agree on, but how can we be sure about the time of the rapture with regards to The Great Tribulation? Well, turn to Revelation chapter 3. Let’s read Revelation chapter 3 verse 7 to 13:

***To the Church in Philadelphia***

*7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.*

*8 “‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance,* ***I will keep you from******the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world****,* ***to try those who dwell on the earth****. 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’*

There are very few explicit passages such as this that state that the church will be taken before the hour of trial. Some might object, stating that Jesus was only specifically speaking to this church not to all Christians. If that was true, what is the point of the book of Revelation, since those 7-local churches have ceased to exist for a couple of thousand of years now. Also, Jesus ends the letter to the church of Philadelphia by writing in verse 13: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’* This implies that Jesus meant for Christians other than these in Philadelphia to read and understand the contents of this letter to this local church. What is true of Jesus statements to any of these 7-churches is true to us as well.

Others then object by saying that the passage is not explicitly talking about the great tribulation, only about the specific trials that the church of Philadelphia was facing. The problem with this objection again lies within the text. Jesus speaks of an hour of trial that is coming, not just for this church, but an hour of trial that is coming on the whole world and those who dwell on the earth. Along with that, it isn’t difficult to see how this passage then fits into the larger context of Revelation, as the rest of the book of Revelation is about a time on earth that has never been seen before and never will be seen again as God pours out his judgements on the earth in what must be considered to be the day of the Lord or the hour of trial.

Others then say that the word *from* in the sentence, ***I will keep you from******the hour of trial*** can be interpreted as keeping us safe during our time on earth as the hour of trial commences. Now there are many Greek grammatical arguments I can give to refute this claim, but we don’t even have to leave the English text to refute it. Jesus isn’t telling this church that he will keep them safe from the trials in the hour that is coming, he is saying that he will keep them from the hour of trials that is coming. Let me repeat that, Jesus isn’t telling this church that he will keep them safe from the trials in the hour that is coming, he is saying that he will keep them from the hour of trials that is coming. Jesus won’t protect his church during The Great Tribulation, he will protect his Church from it.

And so, because the church is then never again mentioned in Revelation chapter 4 up until Revelation chapter 19 while all the judgements of God is being poured out on the earth, we can safely be assured that the church will not be present on earth during the hour of trial, during The Great Tribulation. In fact, the next time the church is seen is in Revelation chapter 19, in heaven just before Jesus is about to come back to earth to end the hour of trial and to establish his kingdom on earth.

Well then, what about the passages in the Bible that speak about the servants of God being persecuted by the Anti-Christ during the time of the great tribulation? Well, that’s a good question, thank you for asking. We already dealt with that. Remember chapter 7? Who gets saved and receives the mark of protection? The nation of Israel. When Jesus takes the church from earth to heaven, the nation of Israel will come to repentance. The hardening of their hearts that God has caused as mentioned by Paul in Romans 9 to 11 will be lifted and the nation will see that Jesus was in fact their long-awaited Messiah. They will then function as the greatest missionary force in the history of the world, and it is these ones that Satan and his Anti-Christ will persecute.

So, in summary, the church will not experience the judgements of God during the last days. They will not be persecuted by the Anti-Christ because they will not be on earth. Jesus will snatch them away into heaven, leaving only the nation of Israel here on earth. So don’t be afraid that you can accidentally take the mark of the beast or any of these silly conspiracy theories that are making the rounds. The nation of Israel will come to repentance after the rapture and accept Christ as their Messiah and act as God’s servants on earth during The Great Tribulation as will be seen in Revelation 9, 12 and 14.

And so, with that brief overview on the doctrine of the rapture, let’s see if we can finish what remains of Revelation chapter 8.

The first thing that we need to observe as we progress through these verses is how similar these judgements are compared to God’s judgements on Egypt through Moses in the 10-plagues. Verse 7 mentions hail and fire, verse 8 mentions the waters of the earth turning to blood, verse 12 mentions the darkening of the sun and then in chapter 9 there is mention of insect like creatures causing pain and destruction to the inhabitants of the earth. What happened to Egypt was a practice run, a foreshadowing of what God will eventually do to the whole world. Another observation we mentioned last time was that all these judgements brought about by the blowing of the trumpets of the angels before the throne of God come from above or from heaven. Verse 7 mentions hail and fire from above, verse 8 and 10 describe some sort of meteoric event, in verse 12 the heavenly hosts, the sun, moon and stars are darkened, chapter 9 then again describes the falling of a star with the blowing of the fifth trumpet and the six trumpet initiates a voice coming from heaven, from the alter of God that brings about even more severe judgement on the earth.

Another observation about the passage is the noisiness of the passage. Notice the constant use of words that imply noise, like trumpet, sound, blasts, blow or loud voice etc. Also, pay attention to the constant use of the words “angel” and the words “thrown”, or “hurled”. The emphasis in the passage is that the things that are happing on earth are not by accident. These events come from heaven, they come because of the instruction of God. This is all God’s handiwork through his servants, the angels. The word “thrown” or “hurled” depending on your translation carries the idea of an object being picked up and forcefully thrown onto something else. Imagine God or the angels on command from God pick up these events, these catastrophic calamities and throwing them forcefully and aggressively onto the earth.

So, let’s read this passage again and if you mark in your Bible make a mark every time you see the words angel, sound, blast, blow, noise, trumpet, hurled, thrown or the word *third*:

*Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. 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 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. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. 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. 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. 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. 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!”*

At this point I want to warn us not to become speculative. Many people today try to read too much into these symbols and passages and try to figure out what modern day weapons or technology could be responsible for these events that John saw. We should be careful to not go beyond what is written. We do not know the exact details of what will cause these events, God has not ordained us to know. We only get to know about the event and the result of the event. So, let’s take a closer look at the first 4-trumpets. These four trumpets all target the environment or creation. We see the land, sea, rivers, and sky all being affected. The last 3-trumpets all target mankind, but we will look at them next time.

**The first trumpet** is a paraphrase of Ezekiel 38:22. Here fire and hail mixed with blood is thrown unto the earth. The destruction to the earth’s landmass is unlike anything ever seen before. A third of all vegetation is burned up and lost. Think about the repercussions of the earth having to lose a third of all its vegetation. Fruit trees, vegetables, fertile land, everything gone. It is estimated that our whole planet only has 28% arable land. Land that is suitable to grow crops on. Imagine now having to lose a third of that. The famine and starvation that would follow would be unlike anything that can be imagined. The loss of a third of all trees would also dramatically impact global oxygen levels and ground stability. Oxygen depravation and landslides would become normal everyday events.

**The second trumpet** is described as some sort of meteor. John sees it as a mountain on fire. So, a huge object of mass coming from heaven burning with fire. The first trumpet damaged a third of all land, the second trumpet will damage a third of all the oceans. A third of all living creatures in the oceans will die and a third of all ships on the seas will be destroyed. It is estimated that the global food supply from our oceans will within the next few decades be anywhere between 21 and 44-milion tons per year. What that means is that if this event, this second trumpet, is to take place anywhere after the next 10-years or so, that something like 20-million tons of food from the oceans per year will be lost. This will especially be catastrophic since the first trumpet already caused a massive scarcity of food that will come from land, forcing the world to be more dependant on the oceans for food. The death of a third of all ocean life will have further ramifications apart from the food supply. The ocean consists of carefully maintained ecosystems that are already in danger from human activity. If any of these ecosystems are to collapse completely it could literally alter global ocean temperatures, oceans currents and global weather. Not only will a third of all living creatures in the oceans be killed, but a third of all ships will be destroyed. Currently there is an estimated 90 000 commercial trading ships in the world. This networks carries trillions of dollars’ worth of food and commodities. A loss of a third of these vessels would result in an economic crash that will put the human civilization back 3-thousand years. **[Explain Mercer Cargo Vessels and how they travel with food not yet ready]**

**The third trumpet** again causes something that may be a meteor or may be supernatural, we can’t be sure. This event, this falling object causes a third of all fresh water to be contaminated. Not only is the world arable land and limited food supply disrupted and destroyed, even our most precious resource, fresh drinking water is no made even more rare by a loss of a third of it. This object that is described as a star is called wormwood, which is an Old Testament plant that causes water to be bitter. This plant is mentioned in Jeremiah 9:15, Proverbs 5:4 and Lamentations 3:15.

So now God has removed the majority of everything that he has graciously created to sustain life on earth. He has devastated land, sea and rivers. This is a far cry from where we started in the garden of Eden.

Lastly, **the fourth trumpet** affects the sky. Light on the earth is reduced to a fraction of what it was and a fraction of what we need to survive. The remaining arable land that can be used to grow crops, will now not be able to grow anything due to the lack of sunlight. It will be like an eternal darkness here on earth. Some have speculated that this could be caused by a volcano, since some eruptions have caused darkness to fall on massive geographical locations for weeks to months.

At this stage, the world and those who live on it will be living in utter misery and pain as they struggle to get food and fight through their hunger pains and dry itching throats in a world consumed by darkness and destructions. [PAUSE] But this is not the end. The worst is yet to come. There are three more trumpets left and they will be worse than the first.

*Verse 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!”*

I’m confident that I speak for us all when I say that none of us want to live through this, but do you know what is really terrifying. That all of this pales in comparison to what awaits those in hell who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who live through these events on earth will see them as heaven the moment they are cast into the lake of fire.

You who are listening have the privilege to avoid both hell on earth and the lake of fire. We deserve that, we deserve the everlasting, eternal, fiery wrath of God for our sins. We will never fully know how much our sin offends God, we will never have a complete understanding of how separate God is, how different of a being he is compared to us. His judgements in these passages are mercy compared to what we actually deserve.

This and so much more was poured out on Jesus while he was on the cross for our sins. The wrath and judgement of God that we read about in these verses and the coming chapters have all been absorbed by Jesus Christ for all those who place their faith in him. If you look to Jesus and only to Jesus, he has exhausted an eternity of wrath on your behalf! Look to Jesus and escape the wrath that is to come! LOOK! LOOK! LOOK TO CHRIST! AMEN!