

Trumpets of warning

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[0:00] ...of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths.! The very final trumpet, number 7, is in the next chapter, 11, verse 15.

And that's the end of everything. So there's no proportionality about that at all. That's everything, that's the final day of judgment. And everything is finished with that trumpet.

So what do the trumpets do? That's what we're trying to get at. And I'm saying that they announce a comprehensive set of plagues and troubles for our Earth.

They affect the ecosystem, vegetation, fresh water, salt water, sky. They affect people. Some of the suffering they bring is non-lethal, and some of it is deadly.

But the six trumpets don't bring the final end. They sort of ramp up. They're proportional. In this case, it says a third.

[1:32] And there are active agents in this. God is active in it. It's a little bit complex, the combination of agencies.

But God is in it because these things come down from heaven. And those, I would say, spiritual powers from hell are in it because the abyss is opened.

I think we're to understand that's where Satan is at work. And some of this comes from him. Various non-human agencies.

I don't know whether we're meant to interpret these horses and cavalry as non-human. So a whole realm of disasters, troubles of all sorts.

And I think I would like to put this in the same category as the disaster that Jesus was asked to comment on. For example, they asked Jesus to comment on a disaster, actually a civil engineering disaster, when a tower fell on somebody.

[2:37] He said, what about those people on whom the Tower of Siloam fell? I don't know how big the tower was. I don't know what it was made of. But it fell on some people, squashed them. And Jesus actually said a very interesting thing.

He said, please don't think that the people hurt in that disaster were any more sinful than anybody else. But unless you repent, you will likewise perish.

Which was an interesting thing to say, wasn't it? Jesus drew from that, not a specific targeting on particularly sinful people, but a warning in general to repent.

Well, let me try and redeem this. It's not going to work, is it? I don't know technology.

I don't really want to reboot the whole thing. What sort of things could we include that this is referring to?

[3:43] So I said it was like the tower that fell down that Jesus was asked about. I think we could look out in the world and see all sorts of things that fit into this category. We see things like addictions, which really make people's lives unbearable, but don't kill them.

We could think of sexually transmitted diseases, which have been through history like a plague across different societies. We could think of wars, which decimate populations and come and produce destruction.

We could think of diseases. We could think of all sorts of things as a part of the human condition. That this is what this part of the Bible is referring to.

That this is the way life is in our world. And so, Mr. Humphreys, you said that because you saw these things, you stopped believing in God.

But Mr. Humphreys, the Bible says these things come from God. The Bible says God is in charge of these things and he has a particular reason for them.

[4:59] So, please don't let these things actually stop you believing in God. But let these things call you to seek more about God.

The Bible is not embarrassed about the suffering and the disasters that go on in the world. It says these things will happen and it gives a reason for them.

So, that's the next question. And incidentally, sometimes into this discussion comes innocent suffering. So, that's something we need to think about.

But let's follow our main line first. So, why did the trumpets do this? Why do the trumpets sound out for this multiplicity of disasters and troubles that we see across the world?

So, there's one answer which would say all this happens without God's knowledge or without his input and these things happen despite him. And that's a completely inadequate answer.

[5:59] Because the picture is given that the angels are given the trumpets, that the fire and all this nasty stuff comes from heaven.

And it isn't without God's knowledge or input. The angels come from God's throne. So, we need a better answer than that.

And I think we can find that answer in verse 20 and 21. Chapter 9, verse 20 and 21. Where the comment is, this is before the seventh trumpet but after the sixth trumpet.

The comment says, the rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands, etc, etc.

They did not repent. Notice that wording. The people who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent. Repent. Repent meaning to turn around in your life 180 degrees.

[7:06] The implication being that these trumpets, as they sound out, are saying, repent. Repent. Repent. And you get to the sixth trumpet and they still did not repent.

Repent. And there's a list of things that they're to repent of. Worshipping demons, idols. And we'll look at those in a little bit more detail in a moment.

But the implication, the clear implication is that these trumpets are sounding out. Repent. Turn. They're like you shouting to your friend in the sea when the shark comes.

Get out of the water. It's God shouting to our human race. Turn back. They still did not repent.

Let's just take that paragraph to pieces for a moment or two. The disasters described are so awful and so severe, so terrible.

[8:15] You think that, well, why are they so terrible? And I think we're to understand it this way, that God has tried all sorts of ways to get through to people.

Less severe methods of communication. But people don't listen. And if I'm put it in this rather anthropological way, he's tried so many methods, he's forced to try this really, really tough method. And the comment says, but they still don't repent. Do you get the thought behind that? C.S. Lewis, the writer C.S. Lewis, who wrote the Narnia books.

I think there's a... Actually, there's Tolkien, isn't there? There's a Tolkien film on at the moment. One of C.S. Lewis' buddies. No, I'm getting ahead of myself. It's not C.S. Lewis. This is the Apostle Paul. He talks about other methods that God uses. And this is Paul talking to, I believe, a rural community back in the first century.

[9:25] And he says to these rural people with their sort of reasonably happy lives, God has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness to you by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons.

He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. And he says, because of this, turn to God. Repent. Turn from worthless idols. So God uses that method.

So every lovely meal you've had is God saying, look, turn to me. I give you lovely meals. And every good joke you've enjoyed, which has filled your hearts with joy, is God saying, look at how good and rich a God I am that I can make a world that's full of jokes and fun.

Turn to me, why don't you? And he tries these methods. And people, well, some people listen, but people generally don't. And in the end, God has to try a really hard method.

Hence the trumpets. Have I got C.S. Lewis? Yes. C.S. Lewis, this is actually not so much about disaster, but as pain. And he has a book on this. And this is what he says about pain, which I think is very helpful.

[10:37] He says, pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains.

It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. It is his megaphone to say to people, why don't you turn back to me?

Repent. But what don't they repent of? Now, I suppose one of the things that gets involved in this is the innocence, the supposed innocence of the world that is affected.

Now, I know we can fine-tune this, and I'm going to speak sort of in a broader way. And I don't want to be insensitive about it, because God cares about people.

And I know in individual lives and individual pain, there's much more to be said than in this sort of rather broad-brush way. But let's just take it as it's depicted to us in this text.

[11:53] The text doesn't depict an innocent world. The text depicts a deeply perverse world. Let me just pick out some of the things it says here.

The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands. And you say, well, that's fairly innocent, isn't it? People make stuff. What's wrong with that? But God says that there's a sense in which people should repent of the work of their hands. And what does he mean? He means when the stuff that people make becomes so important to them, it becomes their God.

It becomes the reason that they live. It becomes the motivation of their lives. It becomes the glory of their achievement. And he says, that's not supposed to be the stuff that you make.

That's supposed to be me. They change the glory of the creator for the glory of creation.

[12:56] There's an exchange going on here. And as God sees it, this is deeply, deeply perverse. There is a worship of human construction, whether it is metal construction or mental construction.

It's still human-made stuff, which is elevated to the position of divinity. You can almost see this with contemporary atheism, can't you?

That the construct of a universe which makes itself and guides itself and makes its own plans and sees forward in a sort of mega-evolutionary sort of God.

This construct assumes the place of God, doesn't it? They worship the work of their hands. And he also talks about they worship demons.

And I suppose in a Western rationalistic society, we're going to say, well, this is miles from us. Just try going to India or China, Sri Lanka, where I've gone, and the worship of non-divine, non-creator deities is certainly alive and well.

[14:15] All this is to take the devotion that we owe to the God who made us and give that devotion to some lesser being or lesser idea or lesser thing.

And it's a deeply, deeply perverse thing to do. If you find that hard to get our heads round, because it comes so naturally to us, that God says, look, I'm the creator.

I give you life and breath, every single breath, every single moment, every single atom in your body, I hold in being. Every quantum event that's going on, I hold in being.

And you don't even bother to thank me for any of it. It's a huge insult to the creator. What else does it say they don't repent of? Well, it actually goes into a little detail of lifestyle.

It talks about murders and magic and immorality. Murders, well, I guess in any given congregation, the large percentage of people in any congregation are going to say, actually, I've never been convicted of murder because I've never committed a murder.

[15:24] I'm not going to dispute that. But what I am going to say is that Jesus said there's actually a deeper insight into murder because the source of murder, what goes on in the heart of a murderer is the same thing that goes on in the heart of somebody who insults their fellow human being or belittles their fellow human being, slags them off.

Violence and hatred of a fellow human being, fellow human beings are made in the image of God. And as such, deserve respect in and of themselves.

And I think how many people in a given congregation are going to say, I've never had a cruel thought or said a cruel word about anybody. I don't think there's many people going to say that.

Jesus would say that the insight is that an insult is the same quality of wrongness as murder,

actually.

Perhaps not the same amount, but the same quality. Magic. And he would say, well, we don't do magic. I would say magic is an impersonal relationship to the power of God, trying to relate to God's power without making a relationship which is of a personal asking, thank you, listening type of relationship, making it an impersonal relationship to God's power.

So I think we should include here magic spells, superstitions. Ah! See, a lot of religion has superstition, doesn't it? People sometimes wear St. Christopher's, don't they?

[17:05] Or have little statues in their houses thinking they'll bring them good luck. I think we're well into magic with that. Lucky numbers. Some cultures go in a great deal for lucky numbers.

Rituals and relics abound in various parts of the world. Kissing icons, as if you get the power of St. Anthony by kissing a statue of St. Anthony.

I think we're well into the realm of magic, which is, as I'm saying, a way of trying to get God's power without actually relating personally to him. Horoscopes.

Yeah. And then it mentions immorality. And in this one, it particularly mentions sexual immorality. Sexual relationships are supposed to model the love of Jesus Christ for his church.

And that relationship is of two unlike beings. The Savior and his church are unlike beings. And the relationship is based on a sacrificial self-giving.

[18:14] It's not just selfish pleasure. It's not impersonal. It's not without commitment. And so when he says they didn't repent of this, I mean, that's a whole area of ways of relating that you get into very deep water in our society if you begin to offer any sort of critique of that.

But this is saying, the trumpet sounded, the idea was to call people to repent. So, these are the questions.

What do the trumpets do? Answer. They fill our world with the sound of pain. Our world is never far from the sound of pain. Why do they do it? They do it because God so loves people and wants them to turn wholeheartedly to him that he will even inflict pain to call them to do so.

John Humphreys, there's a reason here not to disbelieve, but to believe. There's a God here who is calling you not to drive you away, but to say, I've tried every other method and you didn't listen, but I still want you to come to me.

And of course he says the same to us. And if I've got one more click, there's a story that Jesus told about a young man who went off, left his father in gratitude and selfishness, and then he repented.

[19:52] He thought, do you know, I've really messed up this relationship. I will go back to my father and I will say to him, I am not worthy to be called your son.

Make me as one of your hired servants. And the young man makes his way back with this humble heart. And as Jesus tells the story, he says, and while he was still a long way off, his father ran to meet him.

Let me just tell you, in Oriental civilizations, old people do not run. It's undignified. But this man so loved his son, he'd been watching for him to come back.

And as he sees him come back, he runs to greet him. He kisses him. He flings his arms around him and welcomes him back. And that's the heart of God to each of us who repents.

We're going to sing a song together. Let's go.