

# Revelation 8:1–5

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[ 0 : 00 ] Revelation chapter 8, verses 1 through 5. 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, 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good afternoon.

It's good to be here. We have sung about what happened a little bit this morning when the wind blew through the south side here.

We're going to sing about the clouds of God's judgment at the end of our service here. Our God is a consuming fire.

[ 1 : 27 ] Oftentimes we do not consider him in that vein. But in reality, he is. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for this opportunity to worship, to serve you, to minister.

Lord, and I pray that the censers of our lives, Lord, would be filled with acceptable offerings unto you.

Lord, and that our lives would be an aroma, Lord, before you, not only as individuals, but even as a faith family. I pray that our time here this afternoon in your presence and in the presence of one another would contribute to the advancing of your kingdom here in our neighborhood, Chicagoland, yea, even the world at large for your glory.

So let it be as our prayer in Christ's name. Amen. As David mentioned, today marks the end of this particular phase of our trek through the book of Revelation.

New series on next week, and we trust that we all will be refreshed through our singing as we go this summer. In view of the realities before us, the ending of this series, the moving into another series on next week, there are a couple of things that are in order.

[ 3 : 05 ] I think that we need to look back over our shoulder a little bit at where we have come from in the book of Revelation, but also the text before us demands our prayerful attention.

I pray that the Lord would speak through that text to us today. Let me just highlight a few things as we have gone on this ride, as it were, through Revelation.

And we certainly have been learning, and I trust growing, even as we go. But a couple of things I believe that the Lord really wants to stick to our ribs.

I remember one time when I was at Brother and Sister Justice's house. This was years ago. And Brother Justice was not a man who would talk very much.

But when he did talk, or when he would pray, there were words with weight. And I think that's the first time I heard the expression, because they had this nice sweet potato casserole on the table.

[ 4 : 14 ] And he may have mentioned, now, that's something that will stick to your ribs. Well, my prayer is that there have been certain things that would stick to our ribs as we have gone.

Look at Revelation chapter 1. One of the things that we need to understand as we go is that there are several kinds of literature, several genres that we confront when we come into the book of Revelation.

Three kinds of genres in one book. It's like a three-stranded kind of braid. We have prophecy. Look at chapter 1 and verse 3.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. Revelation is a book that both foretells, speaking forth God's word, but it also foretells some events that will be in the future.

Not only that, it is an epistle. Look at chapter 1, verse 4. John, to the seven churches that are in Asia. Look at this contemporary epistolary greeting.

[ 5 : 28 ] Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. And finally, it is apocalypse.

That strange kind of literature that deals with the sights and sounds and symbols and angels. Okay? Look at chapter 1 and verse 10.

I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, John says, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and to Sardis, and Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

And he turns over his shoulder and he looks and he sees these very strange, somewhat phenomena, symbols, as we see the Lord even walking in the midst of his church.

So Revelation is a prophetic letter and it's dressed in apocalyptic garb. When we see, come to this letter, we have to think in those terms, we got three different kinds of literature in one book.

[ 6 : 37 ] And thus, Revelation, friends, is not a book to be ignored. It is to be read and heard and heeded. There is a blessing promise to those who do so.

Look at chapter 1 and verse 3. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

There's a blessing promise to those who will hear and read and heed this. Three kinds of literature in one book.

The main character of the book is the main character of the Bible, none other than Jesus himself.

Look at chapter 1, verse 1. The revelation of whom?

It's his revelation, Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant, John.

[ 7 : 42 ] We notice that our Savior died for his church. Chapter 1, verses 5 and 6. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins in his blood.

Revelation is about him. He dwells in the midst of his church. Chapter 1 and verse 13. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

He dwells in the midst of his church and expects her to be a powerful, light-bearing entity in this world. There are seven golden lampstands.

You are the light of the world, city that's set on the hill that cannot be hidden. And in view of this, Jesus calls his church then and now to purity and courage in the world.

We saw in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, he commends the obedient witness and work of the church in the world. But also he challenges and corrects her that she might be all that she should be in this world for the glory and honor of God.

[ 9 : 08 ] Did you know that he still calls the church to repentance today, even as he called his churches back then to repentance? He calls the church to repentance when her work and witness in this world are lacking.

Believers through the ages have been called to hear and heed what the Spirit of God says to the churches, even as we see here in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

The main character of the book is Jesus Christ himself. The true command center, we see that in chapters 4 and 5. It cannot be found in the power centers of this world.

The 195 countries in this world and their capital cities, it's not in Washington, D.C. That's not the power center.

It's not in London or Tokyo or Moscow or Rome or Beijing or Paris or even in Jerusalem. These capital cities of the nations of the world, these are not where the true power lies.

[ 10 : 21 ] The one who occupies the throne in heaven, he rules over all. We see that. And from that powerful command center that we see in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 come forth the judgments on this particular world.

The one who rules is in charge of the universe. And in John's day against the prevailing political climate and dominance of Roman power, God speaks as the one who is ultimately in control, the sovereign God that rules over the nations.

Daniel chapter 4 and verse 17 reminds us of this. Isn't that good to know as we march toward November?

Oh, boy, I tell you, the storm clouds are rolling, aren't they? And it's going to be a new day.

Whoever gets in the White House.

New day on one hand, but God will remain the sovereign ruler over all. All things find their origin in the one who sits on the throne.

[ 11 : 49 ] Look at chapter 4 and verse 11. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things.

And by your will they existed and were created. He is the creator. And unto him is all power and glory and honor is due to him.

Colossians chapter 1 verse 16 says similarly, For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

By reason of that, he controls and he orders history in a direction that will fulfill his perfect will.

In chapter 5 we see in the right hand of this sovereign one was the seven-sealed scroll that contained the plan for the destiny and the end of the world.

[ 13 : 05 ] A plan that will defeat the God-rejecting ruling powers of the ages, whether they be in the first century or in the 21st century. Whether human or demonic, through a series of judgments that would be released upon this world, God will redeem the one who has redeemed man will also reclaim this world for his glory.

That is the trajectory that this world is on. And oftentimes these things that Revelation speaks of, often they're not at the forefront of our minds.

Oh, brothers and sisters, but these things need to be a part of our Christian consciousness and that we may govern our lives in a way that consider these marvelous and wonderful things.

Yes, he is Savior, but also he is Judge. This Lamb of God, who is the Redeemer of lost humanity, is to be the executor of God's plan.

He is going to be the one who reclaims this rebellious world. He is going to banish rebellious world powers, whether we're talking about human or superhuman.

[ 14 : 23 ] And we'll see that in other parts of Revelation, whether there be political powers, whether there be economic powers, whether there be religious powers. Through the Lamb, he will cleanse the earth and prepare it for a place where the dwelling of God will be with men.

And he alone, Christ alone, the one slain from the foundation of the world, was the worthy one to open up the seals that released the judgment of God upon this world in various cycles and series. And John has written about that. The Lord has sent that to unveil it, that we may learn from it and govern our lives accordingly. And chapters 6 through 20 in Revelation show just how it is that the Lamb will achieve his ultimate victory.

And so we come to Revelation chapter 8 this afternoon. Not very many verses, but power-packed verses.

And I believe that speak to you and me. Notice there in chapter 8, when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, that these were divine judgments from God, these seal openings that we've seen from the God of heaven is revealed and that there are Old Testament, parallel Old Testament scriptures that include images and symbols and language, the language of judgment.

[ 16 : 05 ] We saw that when we looked at Revelation chapter 6. We saw these horses, these horsemen being released and chariots and all these things, similar language in Old Testament scripture that speaks of the judgment of God being released.

And we've noticed earlier that one of the rules for reading Revelation is that to accurately interpret and apply Revelation, we must read with an ear to hear the voices of the Old Testament writers, even in Revelation.

The roots of the book will go deep into the soil of the Old Testament. And we see John's masterful use of the Old Testament. It's crucial, as we look at that, to the correct interpretation of the book. And though you don't see any direct quotations of the Old Testament there, there are more than 250 allusions to Old Testament scripture in the book of Revelation.

And you will, when you read Revelation and then go back and read the Old Testament, there are some things, some aha moments that you have when you see how John wonderfully uses that.

[ 17 : 16 ] So thus in Revelation chapter 6, we saw four kinds of earthly calamities, conquest and war and famine and death, released by reason of the Lamb's opening of the first four seals.

Turn back over to chapter 6, and we see that there was the fifth seal revealed that on earth there was going to be Christian casualties.

Look at that, chapter 6, and verse 9, and when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been, notice, slain for the word of God and for the witness, for their Christian witness that they had borne.

And notice their cries before the altar or under the altar. they crowd out with a loud voice. Oh, sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before, notice here, you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth.

Then they were given a white robe and told to rest a while, longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

[ 18 : 45 ] These were Christian casualties. And God's people are not exempt from the ugly things of this world to include persecution because of their Christian witness.

Like Pharaoh of old who asked, who is the Lord that I should obey his voice and let Israel go. I do not know the Lord and moreover, I will not let Israel go.

Such persons and forces show their disdain and disregard for God by disrespecting his people.

That's the way it works.

They disrespect God and disrespect for God will be reflected in disrespect for people in general but Christian people in particular.

have you ever been suffered because of your Christian witness or your Christian stand? Or have we blended so much into the woodwork of this world that people can hardly tell the difference between us and those who know not the Lord.

[ 20 : 00 ] So appropriately in view of the disdain of the world and the persecution for their Christian witness we hear the cry oh sovereign Lord holy and true how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth.

Did you know brothers and sisters that there have been more Christians have been killed for their faith in the last 100 years than in the previous 19 centuries combined.

God's kingdom is marching on and there are some cultures and countries that are more friendly to Christians there are some who are quite antagonistic to those who name the name of Christ.

What John saw with the breaking of the six seal paralleled the day of the Lord spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. This day of judgment on the enemies of God but blessing on the righteous.

The devastations that we see in Revelation chapter 6 verses 12 through 17 these were critical crucial kinds of judgments.

[ 21 : 13 ] They would touch all the inhabitants of the earth without distinction. The all consuming wrath of the Lamb was revealed and we end up with the question that we see in chapter 6 verse 17 who can stand?

That was the natural question when you saw the end of the age devastations where there would be a cosmic chaos that ushered in the very day of the Lord.

And in chapter 7 as David preached on last week the question was answered there would be spiritual protection for those who had been redeemed and those who had that seal chapter 7 early verses on their forehead.

That was the answer. Who would stand? The redeemed were going to stand. The full number would make it. And on in the chapter you get a sneak preview of the lot of the redeemed loved and comforted cared for by the Lamb and the Lord.

Fuller picture of that you see in Revelation chapter 22. But here in chapter 8 you had the opening of the seventh seal. And so after this interlude that shows the protection of the saints we come to the verses where the last seal is open.

[ 22 : 30 ] It's the seventh seal and it completes this first cycle of judgment. So let me tell you the first thing I want you to note in this. The stunning silence of heaven is something brothers and sisters that should sober us.

The stunning silence of heaven that we see here in chapter 8 and verse 1 is something that should sober us. Several things that grab the reader's attention.

The stunning silence of heaven. Is it strange that in view of what we've already seen in the book of Revelation that there's silence? Because if you look back in chapters 4 and 5 there's a lot of praise and worship that's going on.

John had been bombarded with this glorious sense of by the sights and the sounds of heaven. And he had seen what few had beheld and what few have heard.

He heard the ceaseless praises of these angelic attendants around the throne. But all of that is suspended for a half hour now as the seventh seal is open.

[ 23 : 45 ] And of course the question why this silence? Are there not times as Thomas Carlyle has said that silence is more eloquent than words?

And is there not a sense as one proverb states that silence is also speech? So there though there is silence here there is a whole lot really that's being said.

this silence that filled heaven. Why this silence in the heavens? It's heaven's response to the impending judgment that was going to come upon the world.

It compares with what Zephaniah wrote in chapter 1 and verse 7 and listen to that. Be silent before the Lord God for the day of the Lord is near.

The Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guest. Some would see this as the silence that comes before the storm.

[ 25 : 02 ] And textually it connects with what has preceded in the breaking of the sixth seal in chapter 6 verses 12 through 17 and what follows with the trumpet judgment.

Here is this awe-inspiring jaw-dropping kind of judgments that are coming and heaven's response to this is absolute silence.

We're uncomfortable with silence, aren't we? Can we take a minute? Let's not take a minute. But heaven was silent in view of what was about to be released on the earth in the day of the Lord.

But notice look at verse 2 and I'm not through I'll come back to this silence because there's something else that really needs to be said regarding it. But notice what you have in verse 2 you have these seven attending angels.

Wow aren't you just thrilled with just the court of heaven as we've gotten to see these angelic representatives 24 elders you get to see these four living creatures and here it is seven more attendants showing up.

[ 26 : 20 ] Probably there are innumerable more attendants but here we see some see these as heaven's archangels and there are said to be seven of them among whom are Michael and Gabriel and Gabriel in Luke chapter 1 verse 19 he introduced himself as one who stood in the presence of God.

Elijah in 1 Kings chapter 17 verse 1 speaks about the God before whom I stand and that pictures of their ready service to do the will of God and thus we see these seven heavenly attendants and they are given seven trumpets and these are the trumpets that we're going to usher in the next wave the next cycle of the very judgments of God it is as if they were moving in place about ready to blow the trumpets they are just not ready to be ushered in just yet but they are as it were waiting in the wings and such is the role of angels in scripture and David in psalm 123 when he calls upon 103 when he calls upon his soul to bless the Lord oh my soul and all that's within me bless his holy name he closes out that same psalm when he calls on the very angels of God he says bless the Lord you as angels you mighty ones who do his word obeying the voice of his word that's what these angelic attendants do and did this stunning silence of heaven should should sober us as we in part get a glimpse through scripture of this awesome day of the Lord so awesome that John would ask who was able to stand so awesome that the heaven ceases its activities of even worshiping the living God for half hour but there's also something else the prevailing prayers of the saints should encourage us the silence that sober us but the prevailing prayers of the saints of God that we see in this passage of Revelation chapter 8 verses 3 and 4 it should encourage us in our personal and corporate understanding as well as ministry of prayer notice around the altar we see another angel verse 3 came and he was in a another role other than the blowing of the trumpets the order of the day for the seven angels that stood before God his role is to offer fragrant incense with the prayers and notice the prayers of all the saints in the temple the offering of fragrant incense preceded the offering of the first sacrifice of the day in the temple and followed the last offering so this this this incense that would go up as a fragrant aroma before God preceded the daily sacrifices and it was on the other end of the daily sacrifice as a sweet aroma before God an Old Testament temple service the picture here is that the fragrance of the prayers of the saints before the God of heaven you see that 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 the saints on the golden altar before the throne so this the fragrance which the ascending of the fragrance pictured the ascending of the prayers of the saints and the fragrant odor of the incense pictured the fragrance of the prayers of the saints going up before God so another way to view the silence of heaven at this point is that heaven's silence was a temporary suspension of the praises of heaven so that the prayers of the saints would be prominent before God in heaven oh listen to the prayers of the psalmist where they

asked the

Lord Lord incline your ear to me oh brothers and sisters do we understand the value the worth the impact of the prayers of God's people before him and here it was that these prayers are prominent in heaven already we've seen that the Lord regarded the prayers of those who had suffered for their Christian witness the martyrs in chapter 6 we've looked at them their prayers there were for the avenging of the blood on those who dwell on the earth oh brothers and sisters prayer matters to God this is an interesting dimension of the prayer life of the saints and we're going to notice exactly what they were praying for the impact of the prayers of God's people should never ever be underestimated and I believe that we often are too casual in prayer prayer does matter and thus we should be careful in our praying and faithful in our praying and conscientious in our praying and kingdom focused in our praying and God honoring in our praying mindful of Jesus words listen to them as he teaches us and instructs us to pray pray then like this he says our father in heaven hallowed sacred holy holy is your name and notice the next phrase your kingdom come and not only that what's he say your will be done where on earth as it is in heaven again significance of prayer and the prayer the prevailing prayers of the saints of

[ 33 : 11 ] God that we see in here should encourage us in our praying to the living God prayer matters brothers and sisters we were just finished our holy trinity meet holy trinity class and we were highlighting the values and one of the ones that came to surface was the value of the irony of weakness I think I don't know if we really understand how weak we really are how utterly dependent we are I mean for us to posture ourselves before God in humility and recognizing our utter need of him JBC we put it this way we spoke about prayerful yet daring dependence on God so that weds both humility and courage before God ours is a to be a humble sincere dependence that should characterize our life and our prayers but then the coming judgment on the earth should motivate us the silence should sober us the prayer should encourage us but the coming judgment on the earth friends should motivate us that's the final thing

I want you to note in verse five the angel took the censer filled it with fire from the altar threw it on the earth and there were peals of thunder rumblings flashings of lightning and an earthquake huh quite a different scene than what we see in even in verses three and four we see the prayers of the saints going up from the altar before God but here we see fire coming from the altar down on the earth it's a picture of judgment in these verses verses four and three and four we get a glimpse of the priestly service in the very throne room of God prayers and incense go up before God in his heavenly temple but note also what comes down from the Lord on the basis have you of what had gone up before him it is the very prayers of the saints of

God that are instrumental it seems to be a cause effect relationship of the judgment of God coming down upon the earth huh how valuable meaningful significant are the prayers of the saints this angel presumably takes the same censer that was offered up in incense to God with the very prayers of the saints and he fills it with fire from the altar and throws it on the earth prayers going up to the throne fire coming down judgment from the very throne of God huh prayers of the saints seem to have been the catalyst for the judgment of God related both to the six and the seventh seal and the judgmental of God on earth is in relationship to the prayers of the very saints of God huh the value of the prayers of the saints is seen in passages like in

Luke chapter 18 verses 7 and 8 and let turn there with me to page 877 877 look at verses 7 and 8 it fits the revelation context and will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night will he delay long over them I tell you he will give justice to them speedily nevertheless when he the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth power prayers of the saints look at verse 5 particularly looking back we have seen similar kind of phenomena in chapter 4 turn back over to chapter 4 and verse 5 we see these phenomena that accompany the presence of God we see them both in heaven that display the glory and the splendor of God but when we see those phenomena on earth those are judgment things that accompany the very judgment of God on earth and I'll show you a couple of passages like that look at chapter 4 and verse 5 from the throne came flashings of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire which are the seven spirits of God but turn back to over in revelation to chapter we see that in chapter 8 and verse 5 but look also in now revelation chapter 8 and verse 5 this comes after the seal judgments but look at chapter 11 and verse 19 and we see the same phenomena after the trumpet judgments after the seventh trumpet you see the header there on page 1034 look at verse 19 then

God's temple in heaven was open and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple there were flashes of lightning rumblings peals of thunder and an earthquake and notice it adds something and heavy hail look at another passage and this follows the bowl judgments chapter 16 verses 18 through 20 so you have these similar phenomena that happen after each of these cycles of judgment chapter 15 excuse me 16 verses 18 through 21 and notice the increase of the intensity after each one of the cycles of judgment after the seals and then after the trumpets and then after the bows there are things that are added there and there were flashes of lightning rumblings peals of thunder and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth so great was that earthquake the great city was split in three parts and the cities of the nations fell and God remembered

[ 40 : 37 ] Babylon the great to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath and every island fled away and no mountains were to be found and great these additional phenomena great hail stones about 100 pounds each fell from heaven on people and they cursed God for the plague of hell because the plague was so severe increasing in severity in each round of judgment the scenes of God's judgment the similarity of these signs of God's presence and particularly in Revelation leads some to conclude that these are signs and I believe so of God's final judgments that being the case the in essence the judgments seem to be the same but perhaps viewing them from different angles and revealing essentially the same thing but perhaps highlighting the intensity and perhaps some particulars in each of these series of judgments the cameras are rolling but emphasizing different things as these series of judgments!

roll along so what are we saying in view of the coming judgment of God on this world should not this motivate us to carry the message of the gospel to a world marked for destruction when we see the impending judgment of God that is to come on this world that should motivate us in our role as light bearing believers in this world and view of the clouds that are gathering what must we do passages like this should motivate us to sing songs and pray prayers and reach those who need Christ in our world because the judgment of God is sure and certain and is on a trajectory that has started that will not fail but aren't you glad that as a believer that the main person in scripture has borne the very wrath of

God for you on Calvary that's what your salvation and mine is about and as those who have been sheltered from the very wrath of God that was poured out upon the very son of God the lamb of God who's taken away the sin of the world should not that motivate us to go in view of an impending judgment from the very throne of God to bring others in silence that sobers prayers that encourage judgments that motivate this is the message of revelation the one who has redeemed his people one day will reclaim his world and brothers and sisters in the interim our role is to be faithful light bearing courageous obedient repentant people in sync with heaven even while we live on this earth join me in prayer even as our musicians come  
Ž Ž Thank you.