

# Silence in Heaven

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, we don't really like to admit before you that we are confused. Father, we find it a lot easier to think that your word is confused and that ultimately you are confused.
- So, Father, we're just being honest with you about that. We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do a mighty work in our lives this morning as we think about your word.
- We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would reveal to us our divided heart and our confusion. And at the same time, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would lead us to see the wisdom of your word, your great unsurpassed wisdom and justice and mercy.
- And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would incline our hearts, turn our hearts to you and to your wisdom and to your Son, wisdom made flesh, who died upon the cross for us.
- And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Nowadays, even people in their mid-20s can start being curmudgeons and can tell teenagers how much harder it was in high school than it was for them.
- [ 1 : 2 9 ]     Amen. Amen. My youngest son in geography. This is geography in grade nine. I can't remember now why, but in the unit where they were covering the continental drift, you know, the drift of the continents, as part of that in their class time, they watched the Ice Age III movie.
- For those of you who know that movie, it's an animated film about a chipmunk trying to get an acorn. At the same time, talking about global warming and climate change, they watched The Day After Tomorrow and the movie 2012, which, of course, is spectacularly ironic.
- It was based, of course, on Al Gore's book earlier. And to watch it now for information when it's obviously been completely and utterly proven to be false, of course, is an even deeper irony.
- But that's actually part of what was happening in grade nine geography, at least in one particular school. And so now it is that people, many of you, a few years older than my son Tommy, can now start to tell people how harder it was in high school and how more rigorous it was for you than it is for the current generation.
- And so for those of us who are quite a bit past our early 20s, and we can even be more deeply ingrained in our curmudgeonly view of current education. But I mention all of this.
- [ 2 : 5 8 ]     I mention Ice Age, for instance. Actually, just last night, you know, I'm always following high culture in movies. And so we watched The Croods last night, which was about a Stone Age family dealing with catastrophes.
- And often, of course, movies that talk about something like the end of the Ice Age are really making comments about today. And Hollywood has movies about sort of the end of the world. I'm not trying to put them down just as according to Al Gore.
- But the fact is that on one hand, when us modern or postmodern people figure out what we are, listen to texts like Ken read just a few moments ago about Revelation chapter eight.

It can sound sort of problematic to us. Like, George, how on earth can the Bible talk about stuff like this? End of the world. Like, really? All these things are going to be happening.

Come on. How on earth can we possibly take the Bible seriously? Actually, the thing is that we need... Here's the thing.

[ 4 : 07 ] If you could put the first point up, Andrew. Here's the thing. We need to sort of have a bit of a thing to clear our minds a little bit as we start to listen to Revelation eight. And the first thing that we need to understand is this.

That the end of all things can be sensationalized or forgotten, but cannot be reasonably denied. I mean, actually, for many decades, there's different stories or tales of some type of imminent ecological catastrophe that's going to befall the planet.

And obviously, some of those, as some of them, are shown not to be the case. And there's always, obviously, people who say, of course, we shouldn't trust these things. Human ingenuity will get over it. But, in fact, Hollywood talks about these things.

And whether or not global warming and global climate change caused by our use of fossil fuels, whether or not that is correct, the fact of the matter is that science, in fact, does say that there will be the end of all things.

Like, that can't be denied. But the second law of thermodynamics wins. And the second law of thermodynamics says that the amount of entropy, unusable sort of random energy in a system, is always increasing.

[ 5 : 41 ] So whether it's a billion, billion, billion, billion years from now, eventually all the planets, all the galaxies, all the stars, there will be just entropy. They will all come to an end.

That's what science tells us. And long before entropy wins, our own planet will be completely and utterly destroyed. The sun is winding down.

The sun is winding down. And at some point in time, as sufficient amount of it is burned up and its mass changes, the powers that keep the sun at its current size will start to weaken and the sun will expand.

And as the sun expands, Earth will be burned to a crisp. And how that will look in terms of how it's described, of course, I don't know how that will be. But while we might not want to think about it or we might want to sensationalize it, the fact of the matter is that the end of all things cannot reasonably be denied.

And if we listen to Revelation 8 thinking that it can be reasonably denied and hence any type of talk about the end of all things is just completely and utterly foolish, showing how stupid the Bible is, then we won't even begin to have any type of reasonable discussion or reading of the text.

[ 7 : 02 ] We need to, in a sense, have, like, you know how sometimes, I've never been to one, but they talk about in wine tasting, you have something to cleanse the palate so you can taste something fresh.

We need to have that when we come to read such texts as Revelation chapter 8. Something to sort of cleanse the palate in the mind and make us just pause for a second and say, okay, one moment.

And before I sort of go all ballistic on this text, before I start rolling my eyes to the back of my head, let's just, the end of the world cannot reasonably be denied.

In fact, actually, one of the very interesting things is to actually look at what the Bible is saying, comparing it to what everything else can possibly say.

Like, what does a certain form of science typified by guys like Richard Dawkins, what does it have to say about the end of the world? What does Buddhism have to say, or Islam, or Hinduism, or the spirituality that we've cobbled together from bits and pieces to suit ourselves?

[ 8 : 08 ] Like, the fact of the matter is, is that often people have problems when they look at the Bible, but they don't, we often forget as human beings that once we've asked a question, that question touches everything.

It's not as if we can just ask a question of the Bible, which is, in a sense, implicitly a question that we can ask of Buddhism, or Islam, or Hinduism, or scientism, or naturalism, or empiricism, or a whole pile of other isms, or Marxism, or feminism, or queer theory.

Like, the fact is that, well, one moment, before we sort of maybe dismiss what the Bible says, how does it actually stack up compared to what a whole range of other things would actually say about the end of all things, given that the end of all things cannot be reasonably denied?

It cannot be reasonably denied. The timing of it can be talked about, but the end of it cannot be reasonably denied. So how is it actually that the Bible and Christianity fares if we actually start to just take another step back and look at things?

And here, Andrew, if you could put up the next slide, here's the thing that I would suggest. I can only have hope if the living God, the God of the Bible, is the one who brings all things to an end.

[ 9 : 22 ] I can only have hope if the living God is the one who brings all things to an end. The second law of thermodynamics shows no mercy.

This week on Monday, I had a physical. I'm a bad boy. I haven't had a physical for like eight years, seven years. I know you're supposed to, when you get to be my age, have them every year.

I finally had a physical. At the start of the physical, the doctor asked me how tall I was. So I told them, I used to be this height. I know I'm shorter. I like telling my kids that gravity wins.

And so I wasn't sure how much I've shrunk since I hit my peak at a particular age. But here's the thing about this particular text, that the second law of thermodynamics doesn't show any type of mercy and doesn't give us any type of hope.

Now, we shouldn't choose a philosophy just because it gives us hope. But on the other hand, we shouldn't dismiss hope as a clue in terms of the meaning of the universe and the meaning of life.

[ 10 : 41 ] Like, why is it that hope is so attractive? Why is it that hope seems to be something which is deeply rooted in human beings? Why is it that so many novels and movies, even The Crudes, that movie last night, part of it was about a system of rules and thinkings which extinguished hope in people?

Like, why is it that we understand that hope is something which is significant? And if that's the case, well, then what exactly is it that Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism or secularism or this scientific discovery, like, how does that fit with hope?

And we shouldn't pick something just because of hope. But on the other hand, a system of thinking, a text that talks about hope is something surely that fits in with part of the data that should be important to us when we're trying to figure out what actually is true and what it is that we should be serving, loving, obeying, trusting, and hoping in.

And the fact is that if, in fact, the living God is the one who will bring all things to an end, then, if we read the Bible, we understand that at least there can be some hope that we can call out to God for mercy, that God can do something, that if there is a living God who will bring all things to an end, then perhaps there is meaning in life.

Perhaps there is meaning even in suffering. Perhaps hope is a clue to the existence of the reality of the living God, the same living God who is revealed in Scripture and was most preeminently revealed in the person of Jesus and his death upon the cross.

[ 12 : 25 ] Now, some of you might say, George, did you hear what Ken read? A third of the earth, a third of the seas, a third of the fresh water.

Like, George, how on earth do you think this text possibly talks about hope? Let's look. So if you have your Bibles, hopefully you brought your Bibles, let's turn to Revelation chapter 8.

And if you forgot your Bibles, there's always, there's just one left here, but if you go to that door over there, there's always a few extra Bibles and you're welcome to keep it or return it after the service.

And let's turn to Revelation chapter 8. It's the last book in the Bible, if you're not familiar with where the Bible, where the book of Revelation is. And we at Church of the Messiah were preaching through the book of Revelation.

That's part of the way, preaching through books of the Bible, that we want to help ordinary people be confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ. And so what we're going to do is we're not going to look at the beginning of Revelation 8. We're going to go right to the hard part in Revelation 8.

[ 13 : 27 ] All of these terrible things that come on the planet. So start reading at verse 6. Verse 6. 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 fire, a third of the earth was burned up.

And a third of the trees were burned up. And all the green grass was burned up. Just sort of put your finger there for a second, just to sort of give you the context. What happened earlier in the first five verses, we're going to look at those in a few moments.

But the Lamb is revealed. He opens the seventh seal. There's a half an hour of silence in heaven. At the end of the half hour of silence of heaven, the seven angels come with trumpets.

And then God gives an angel some incense. And the incense is thrown on the fire of an altar before the throne of God. And as the incense rises, because it burns in the fire, the prayers of Christians rise to God.

[ 14 : 36 ] And in response to the prayers of Christians rising to God, God sends the angel to the altar a second time. And this time the angel grabs fire and hurls the fire from the altar before the throne of God.

He hurls it at the earth. And how it appears on earth is in these seven different visions, these seven different scenarios.

And so the first one is, as I just read, and then the second angel blows his trumpet, verse 8. 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. And just sort of pause here for a second.

A couple of weeks ago, if you were here and you happen to remember, I talked about how one of the things, the ways the book of Revelation is written, it's a little bit like Groundhog Day. It sort of talks about a scenario of judgment.

[ 15 : 50 ] And then it looks like it talks about a scenario of judgments leading up to the final judgment. But it sort of goes over the same territory, but in a different way.

And it's going to happen again another time in the book. And a way to understand these scenarios is a little bit like this, I think. Imagine that I gave you seven pictures of my daughter, Victoria.

Maybe some of you have never met my daughter, Victoria. She goes to another church in Canada. And so I gave you seven pictures of my daughter, Victoria. Victoria, maybe my wife and I look at these seven pictures thinking that if you get these seven pictures and you look at them, you'll have a really good sense of Victoria.

Now, if you look at all seven pictures, you'll get a real good sense of Victoria. But if you were to try to Photoshop all seven pictures and put them on top of each other, well, the nose would be in seven different places, the ears in seven different places.

It would look like a Picasso painting. And you wouldn't have any vague idea if you took the seven pictures and superimposed them on each other. What on earth Victoria looked like? It would be more confusing afterwards than before.

[ 17 : 03 ] And I think that's what's happening here with these seven different scenarios, all describing the one throwing the fire on the earth. That we're to take each one of them as a bit of a scenario and sort of be captivated by the image, to think about the image, to meditate upon the image.

Then there's sort of another image. And if you look at all seven of them together, in some way, it describes both things that go on in the planet right now. Like I'm guessing that if you lived in Chernobyl in the Ukraine, when the disaster happened, that you might have some resonance with this text.

That maybe if you were a Christian living in Syria, parts of Syria today, you would have some resonance with this text. If you were a persecuted Christian in China, living in some area of unbelievable ecological devastation, you might have some resonance with this text.

We live in post-industrial, very safe, democratic, capitalist Canada. We might not have the same type of resonance. But on one hand, the text describes things that go on in the planet today.

And at the other hand, it will describe the end in some way that I don't know how all the seven images will fit together when the end of all things come.

[ 18 : 16 ] But we can take some confidence that when it all happens, if we are there, that we can see how in some way all these seven things somehow fit with what happens at the end of all things. But that we shouldn't get locked up into trying to nitpick how to put all of the seven images together, just as if I gave you seven pictures of Victoria, you wouldn't impose them all on each other.

Yet you look at each, and after you've looked at each and thought about it and meditated upon it, you have some sense of the end. So we've done the first trumpet, the second trumpet.

The third trumpet is verse 10. 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, 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. Just sort of pause. So the first angel talks about the dry land.

The second angel talks about the salt water. The third angel talks about fresh water. And now the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck.

[ 19 : 34 ] In the original language, it's as if the angel of God hurls a plague. Okay? Hurls a plague. And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so the 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. And there the idea is that for one, assuming you're at the equator and there's 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of night, it means that for four hours of the day there's complete and utter darkness.

Complete darkness. And for a third of the evening there's complete darkness. No moon, no stars. None at all. Complete darkness in the sky.

And then verse 13. Then I looked, and I heard an eagle. And it's sort of interesting, the eagle, we don't capture it, but an eagle in the Old Testament is an unclean bird.

Ritually unclean. Then I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead. Woe! Woe! Woe!

[ 20 : 40 ] Woe! To those who dwell on the earth at the blast of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow. Now, remember the original question is, I said in my second point that I can only have hope if the living God is the one who brings all things to an end.

And this passage describes terrible suffering. Even my analogy about how some parts of the world might have great resonance with this text. If you are a persecuted Christian in a part of China suffering terrible ecological pollution destruction.

If you're in a part of Syria, and we could go on. We could go on to places of great famine and great war and hardship. There might be parts of the world that Christians gathered, maybe just in some hut somewhere or somewhere in the bush, hiding around a Bible.

That a text like this might have profound resonance to what they're experiencing. Whereas for us it becomes more of an intellectual puzzle influenced heavily by radio preachers who try to say, you know, the first thing is big oil and the second thing is, you know, whatever.

You know, nuclear waste or whatever. And then there's North Korea and all that. I actually think that's profoundly unhelpful and means we don't read the text very clearly. But how with all this suffering is there hope?

[ 22 : 05 ] Here's the question. Andrew, if you could put it on. The Bible is posing us a question. Does suffering lead me to exalt myself against God? Or does suffering lead me to seek refuge in the immensity and sovereignty of the untamably good God?

Now, even by posing this question, remember I said that part of the problem we have when we read the book of Revelation is that we don't read the book of Revelation realizing that it's an undeniable fact that all things will end.

Like that's just undeniable. It's forgotten. It's ignored. We amuse ourselves to death. But it's undeniable that all things will end. And if we sort of just live in a state of constant amusement of ourselves and not thinking about it, then the things in the book of Revelation, we can't even begin to engage with them.

But if we realize that the end of all things is in fact undeniable and then we can look a little bit about how Marxism or how psychoanalysis or queer theory or Buddhism or spirituality of our guru, how does this talk about the end of all things?

Then all of a sudden there's a way for us to actually look at these things in a far different light. But here's the other thing is the fact of the matter is that many of us are deeply confused and conflicted about suffering without realizing it.

[ 23 : 47 ] It is not unusual for me to have a conversation with a person where something like this can happen within minutes of each other in the conversation. Where somebody can say, I will not worship a God who does not do something about evil and injustice.

And then two minutes later they can say, I will not worship a God who judges. One moment. You don't want to worship a God because he doesn't judge injustice.

But now you want to worship a God who judges. And then two minutes later they might say, I abhor, I hate people who divide the world into good people and bad people.

Don't people understand that, you know, even with terrorists, even with what those people that, you know, our culture labels as terrorists, that there is good and bad in every person. That in fact, Solzhenitsyn said, is that the line dividing good and evil does not come between groups of people and nations and ideologies, but the line between separating good from evil goes right down the middle of every human being.

And then two minutes later they might say, how dare God judge me as doing evil? Well, that's heavily conflicted thought.

[ 25 : 08 ] That's heavily conflicted thought. In fact, the irony is that we can go through this motion of how come God doesn't judge evil and injustice, and then go through how come God judges?

That's a terrible thing. And how come we separate the world into good and evil when we should understand that good and evil sort of runs right through every individual. And then we say, how dare God judge me as if I have any evil about me or there's evil with me?

And then we think the Bible's confused and conflicted. And we haven't understood that we have a deep confusion and conflict inside of us which is unrecognized and makes it hard for us to hear the Bible.

And so the question of the text is, does suffering lead me to exalt myself against God, or does suffering lead me to seek refuge in the immensity and sovereignty of the untamably good God?

And that comes through many ways in this text. The fact that in the first series of judgments it's a quarter, in the next it's a third. It's not total. There's a chance that there's even a pause between each of them, that at the end of all of these four, before we go into the final three, that there's this creature which is unclean like you and I are in and of ourselves.

[ 26 : 42 ] It says, whoa, whoa, whoa. You know, it's like, I know it's a slightly different whoa, but it's still a warning. It's like, you know, if we see a, I don't know, you know, maybe after church, you know, a little kid, a parent loses track of their little kid, and then we see them starting to go hurtling down, and, you know, maybe we think they're going to crash their head against that metal bar, and we go, whoa, stop, and we try to grab them, like we warn them.

Like all the way through the text, that there's not yet total type of destruction. It's not as if it comes upon the human race without any type of warning. And at the same time, at a certain type of level, we understand certain types of things about suffering.

Like, if, like, you know, surely, for many of us, for many of us, when we hear maybe about the death of a loved one or something like that, and maybe in a very tragic or terrible situation far from home, and one of our terrors for that person was that they died alone, that they suffered alone, that there was no one with them.

If there was to be something which we knew was going to happen all of a sudden to Ottawa, and we only had maybe a half an hour, an hour before it hit, and that we didn't have time to run for it, surely for many of us, wouldn't we want to have someone with us at that time of anxiety?

So if, in fact, that is the case, even with a human being, that we understand how there's something about suffering that makes us wish that there could be someone that we would suffer with, why is it that we necessarily think that suffering will somehow incline our hearts away from God?

[ 28 : 25 ] Is it, in fact, not possible that suffering can incline our hearts to God? Neither choice is inevitable. And that suffering could incline our hearts to God, that, in fact, apart from the fact that we have a fundamental hardness and rebellion against God, which is part of who we are, on the other hand, we can understand that if, in fact, we would want to have a person with us, why wouldn't we want to have God with us?

Remember my second point was that it's, I can only have hope if the living God is the one who brings all things to an end.

Now, some of you might say, okay, George, that's actually sort of interesting. Sort of interesting. But here's the problem, George. You can't deny this, George. You know, isn't it the case that so many people, when they read books like the book of Revelation, that it leads them to do nothing?

Don't you think it sort of leads too many people to say, oh, well, God's going to be in control of it, so we don't have to do anything about ecological damage. Oh, God's going to do everything, so we don't have to deal with tsunamis.

Oh, God's going to deal everything, so we don't have to deal with corrupt despots that just plunder the country and use their military to oppress the people.

[ 29 : 50 ] Don't you think, George, that reading texts like this, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it gives you sort of hope, but it doesn't actually lead to any type of action. Don't you think, George, that secular people have a far greater bias towards fixing things and having action?

Well, obviously I can't deny that there are people who read the book of Revelation and are led to a complete and utter type of pietism and quietism, which means that we don't do anything at all.

I can't obviously deny that. But are they getting it from the Bible? Look again with me. We're going to sort of jump a little bit. Look, remember all those bad things that happened.

I don't know if you noticed something about it, but it's actually very significant to thinking about this whole question. Look at the first trumpet, and look at the second half of verse, look at verse seven.

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.

[ 30 : 56 ] But notice that. What does that mean? It means two-thirds of the earth wasn't burned and two-thirds of the tree wasn't. Look at the same thing in the next verse. Verse eight, 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.

That means two-thirds weren't. And you'll see the same thing with the third. The third angel is that, we'll go down to verse 11, a third of the waters became wormwood and many people died from the water because it had been made bitter, but two-thirds wasn't.

And it's the same with the light and the dark. And here's the thing. The first thing is, I guess I'd always like to, I like to push back at my secular friends who talk about the virtues of secularism and say, you know what, Stalin's forced famine in Ukraine, look at Cambodia, what happened when Pol Pot was there.

Like, you can multiply examples that, you know, secularism, look at the whole history of the USSR, secularism does not guarantee action.

And it's even hard to understand how within secularism, that rooted within secularism, are the roots to say that that part of secularism that doesn't act, it's wrong.

[ 32 : 29 ] In fact, often what happens when we see that that's wrong, it's borrowed language from the Christian faith. That in fact, the Christian faith, the Bible text here, gives us a bias towards action.

Of not only having our hearts inclined to God during our suffering, but it asks us another fundamental deep question. Andrew, if you could put it on. Does my health and prosperity and safety deepen me in idolatry?



Or does my health and prosperity and safety deepen me in habits which humbly and gratefully bring glory to God? Does my health and prosperity and safety deepen me in idolatry?

And at the heart of idolatry whether it's an idolatry of Canada or of big oil or of socialism, but there's always rooted within that in making an idol of ourselves, seeing ourselves as gods, exalting ourselves.

Or does my health and prosperity and safety deepen me in habits which humbly and gratefully bring glory to God? You know, I don't have time to do it, but if you're interested in the devotional thing, it would be very interesting to go back and read chapter 2 or 3 of Revelation and read about the seven churches and you read those seven churches and you realize that all the things that are going on in the book, all the horrible things that are going on in the book, they all affect different churches differently.

[ 34 : 02 ] So it is here. You know, a few years ago there was that devastating event that happened in Haiti and it was very closely followed by a devastating effect in Japan. But in Japan, because of their technological prowess and their wealth, it was cleaned up very quickly.

It was dealt, I mean, I'm not denying any of the death or the real suffering that happened, but it was dealt with far quicker whereas the results of the earthquake in Haiti are still lingering and going on and on and on and are unfixed and unrepaired.

And just think for a second to ourselves, what would happen if some of these things happened to Canada? Let's say it was a third of the ocean. Well, the third of the ocean happened to all be around between India and China.

Well, that's fine. It doesn't touch Halifax and Vancouver Island. It doesn't touch me going to Florida for a holiday. The ocean there is fine.

And let's say the image of the fresh water happens to Canada, but it happens through the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence and a river that flows into Hudson Bay.

[ 35 : 10 ] And then we can say, well, it sucks to live in Toronto and Montreal, but we're fine. In fact, not only would we be fine if the water in the Great Lakes turned so poisonous that they couldn't drink, they couldn't do anything, it was going to affect Toronto and Montreal.

In fact, we would prosper. People from Toronto, businesses would move from there to places like Ottawa. My housing value might double in a year.

I could be richer. You see, if you're part of the two-thirds not touched by it, what's going on with you?

What's going on with us? If this was happening all over the world and it would be devastating in a place like the Sudan, it might be unbelievably devastating in a country like Kenya, but even if it happened to a third of the fresh water in Canada, we have lots of fresh water and we would be able to organize tankers and pipelines and within no time there'd be extra water from other sources in places like Toronto and places like Montreal and the population would relocate and it would be a bit farther from the water and cities like Ottawa would prosper and those of you who have businesses here, own houses here and if you were a really smart business person and you saw it happen, you might quickly buy up a few other properties knowing that your property values are going to go way up and you're going to make a killing.

And you might or might not spend any time, I might or might not spend any time thinking about what's happening in Kenya and the Sudan or even what's happening in Toronto.

[ 36 : 53 ] That in fact, my safety, health and prosperity could just deepen me in the idolatry of capitalism or central planning or of my own health, of the fact that I am like a god.

But is that what the Bible, is that what all this talk about woe and judgment, is that what the text is meaning for those of us who are part of the two-thirds? Surely, it's a call to us.

Surely, it's a call to me and a call to you. Surely, that's at the heart of this text that we should not just walk about with even harder hearts at the problems that befall people, but that God wants us to incline our hearts to Him and in the face of suffering say, Father, have mercy on those who are suffering and Father, have mercy on me.

Incline my heart to you. And Father, as I enjoy the blessing at this time of great trouble on the planet, my health and my prosperity and my safety, Father, deepen in me habits which humbly and gratefully bring glory to God.

Some of those habits will be habits of compassion and generosity and prayer and ascending. You see, friends, this is one of those, if you're a guest here, you can understand, this is part of why the Bible talks about tithing, for instance.

[ 38 : 32 ] Like, how is it when we're prosperous and every one of us in this room, let me tell you, I was in Nairobi a few months ago and I'm not trying to denigrate any poor person here in Ottawa, I'm not trying to denigrate how hard it is, if you're here this morning you're very poor, I am not trying to denigrate your experience, but let me tell you, compared to Kenya, there are no poor people in Ottawa.

I mean, compared to what you can see on the city streets in a place like Kenya, there is no poverty compared to that. And even a poor person is rich compared to the real poverty, the unbelievable poverty in certain parts of the world.

And so you see, how is it? Okay, so I, if God wants, if God is calling me not to have my heart get hardened and hardened in idolatry and deepened in idolatry, if God is calling me that while I enjoy prosperity and safety and physical health and strength that I am to somehow develop habits that bring glory to God and have me trust in Him and hope in Him, and well, what might that look like?

And for some of us, it might be that God calls us to be a type of a missionary or a type of pastor that means that we give up 100% of what we have. But for most of us, it might just mean 10%.

10% gratefully received. My kids, many of you might don't remember this, but about five or six years ago, seven years ago, a Kuro, a priest from Nigeria was here, and just before he left to go back to Nigeria, I let him do a Nigerian service in Canada.

[ 40 : 09 ] And I am dancing challenge, I can't dance to save my life. And he wanted us to do the offering the Nigerian way, which means that we sang a praise song and everybody danced down the central aisle to put money in the plate.

And he announced to everybody that George would leave the way. And I still have fallen memories of Kendra and this guy who doesn't go to our church anymore because he moved, his name's Guy.

And they obviously saw my huge distress. And so they came and linked arms with me and helped, they did all the dancing, I sort of did this, like Frankenstein walking down the aisle.

But they actually danced and sort of covered for me and we went down the aisle. And you see, that type of those habits of financial sacrifice, that's why disciplines like tithing are in the Bible.

But then some of you might say, George, aha, aha, aha, I knew you were going to get to these type of religious rules, these types of things that I just don't like about the Christian faith.

[ 41 : 18 ] And while the rest of it's very challenging, you're starting to touch on something which is very, very, very dangerous. Is it just, okay, it's just religion, George, and you know, religion is all about paying off God.

It's about going through certain types of motions to pay off God. And that's why I choose to spend my Sunday mornings not paying off God, but I have a nice sleep in, I go to a Starbucks, I have a nice latte, I read the paper, I have some fun.

Like, I'm not into doing all these religious things to pay off God. Isn't that what you're talking about? Not at all. Let's look at the part of the Bible here which I hadn't read. Let's look at the first five verses. In closing, I see my time is up so we'll have to do it very quick.

Look at Revelation chapter 8 verses 1 to 5 and I ask yourself two things. First of all, what are they going to be looking at during the half hour of silence and what's going on in the altar?

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.

[ 42 : 42 ] 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. The first six seals have come.

The seventh, the chapter which we read just before that is sort of an interlude where we look at the saints and at the end of that interlude we have this profound hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the lamb who was slain for what he does for his people, how he'll wipe away every tear, he'll cover us with his presence.

It's a beautiful, beautiful hymn of praise to what the lamb does for those who put their faith and trust in him and then we see the lamb who was slain. And for half an hour all of heaven is completely silent because they look at Jesus, the lamb who was slain.

And then when it comes time for the altar there's no sacrificial animal on the altar. The altar is empty. Why is it empty?

Because the lamb who was slain, the one for all sacrifice, the once for all lamb of God that came to take away the sin of the world, that sacrifice has already been made on Calvary.

[ 44 : 02 ] And that's why there is no animal on the altar to be sacrificed. There's nothing on the altar to be sacrificed. And so for the first half hour they just all look at the lamb and then when it comes to the altar the altar is empty.

See here's what the Bible is teaching us before it goes into this teaching on suffering. It goes into this teaching on suffering knowing that in our pagan hearts in our pagan hearts we see always two options.

And one option is to thumb our nose at God and live an irreligious, unspiritual, materialistic, secular life. And the other option is to do a lot of that stuff but tip God by little sacrifices.

A few dollars in the plate an appearance at church periodically or whatever it is to learn a mantra to learn how to do Tai Chi to learn how to do this a little sacrifice that we offer to pay off God.

But what the text is saying when it's going to be calling us and asking us whether suffering will incline our hearts to Him or away from Him or how we will use our prosperity and health all the way through it it sets the stage for that by first suggesting this if you could put it up Andrew.

[ 45 : 19 ] God is not waiting for me to make a sacrifice. He is waiting for me to humbly turn to Him and be gripped by the once for all sacrifice made by Jesus.

In the suffering in the prosperity in the pauses between in the warning in all of that God's desire is not that I figure out some way to thumb my nose at Him or some way to make a sacrifice a religious act that will pay Him off.

He wants me to join with the saints in heaven and all the angels and archangels and not think that I can make a sacrifice He is waiting for me to humbly turn to Him and be gripped by the once for all sacrifice made by Jesus.

God's wrath that I deserved on Him. You see as we look upon the once for all sacrifice made by Jesus as that grips us as it grips us it will push us into new life.

It will shape us in terms of an understanding of a need for compassion in new life. The vision that it's the end of all things will draw us to new life and new habits.

[ 46 : 50 ] And the once for all nature of it and the historical nature of it grounds us. What about you? What about you?

Is this text hardening your heart or softening it? Is it hardening you towards God or softening you and me towards God? Let's stand. Father, it's hard for us to admit that there is a confusion and lack of clarity and a selfishness and a self-centeredness and an idolatry within us that makes your word unclear that confuses us about what your word talks about.

We thank you, Father, for your word. We thank you, Father, for the once for all sacrifice of your Son upon the cross. We ask, Father, that in your mercy and in your kindness your Holy Spirit would be deeply poured out within me, within each one who is here.

we ask, Father, in your mercy and your kindness that your Holy Spirit would be deeply poured out upon us to soften our heart towards you, to incline our hearts and minds and wills towards you, to turn our eyes to the once for all sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross so that as we think upon that, that it will so grip us to push us into new life, so grip us to draw us into new life, so grip us to shape us in new life, and so grip us to ground us and be the basis for all new life that we enter into.

And, Father, it is the cry of our hearts that your Holy Spirit would so turn our eyes towards your Son. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior.

[ 48 : 59 ] Amen. Amen.