

Prayer, Plagues and Painful Perversity - Early Morning Service

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Now please turn back with me to Revelation chapter 8, on page 1032, 1032.

Maybe when you were listening to Sam read Revelation 8 and 9, you were thinking, I'm sure glad that James is preaching this and not me.

Don't worry, I'm not saying, boy, I wish that you were preaching this and not me. I love God's word and reading it from beginning to end, and some have thought Revelation is a closed book, so we shouldn't preach or teach from it, but I couldn't disagree with that sentiment more.

This is a word that we need to hear, especially at this time and day and age in our world. Now you know that next Wednesday, Canadians will stand and keep silence for one minute in honor of those who stood for our country in military service and conflicts.

Chapter 6 of Revelation ends with the question, who can stand? And the answer to that question, chapter 7, is the servants of the Lord and the saints of Christ, according to his grace by faith.

[1 : 19] And chapter 8 begins with the opening of the seventh seal, followed by silence in heaven for about a half an hour. Do you want to wait for a half an hour and see what that's like?

I think we'll continue on. Now, if a day is like a thousand years to the Lord and a thousand years is like a day, then what about 30 minutes? What would that be like in heaven to the Lord and to the servants and saints of Christ?

Silence in heaven is a clear contrast, but also a complement to everything else, everything else that has taken place in heaven up to this point in Revelation.

But it is also a prelude of what is to follow in these first five verses of chapter 8. And so angels and saints, censors and prayers, appear on the scene.

And the angels play their part, and the saints theirs too. So the saints pray, petition the Lord, and heaven and earth is moved.

[2 : 24] Now, is that the way you think of your prayers when you pray on earth as it is in heaven? Not the power of prayer, but the power of God through prayer.

And so it seems like prayer unleashes this power of God. Peals of thunder, rumblings, flashing of light, and earthquake. However, the Lord uses prayer to unleash his power.

The Lord calls us to prayer and uses these prayers for his purposes in judgment and expressing his grace. And that's why you pray call us like we did last Sunday, which read like this.

O God, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness, be ready to hear the devout prayers of thy church, and grant that those things that we ask faithfully, we may obtain effectually through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Interesting, isn't it? That's a prayer about prayer. That's about God's godliness, yes. It's about the church. But a prayer about our prayers, so that we're stirred to pray, and know that our prayers actually have effect.

[3 : 36] Well, the Lord hears the prayers of his saints, using them for his power to change sinners in verses 1 through 5. Do you need to move on there from that to verse 6 to the end of the chapter though.

And so not only does the Lord summons or woo us, I think, to prayer according to his power, but he also uses instruments to warn us of what is to come. And so beginning with verse 6, Christ reveals to John a vision of seven angels and seven trumpets.

And the first four angels and trumpets blown demonstrate the coming destruction on earth. The first two angels of those four and trumpets issued destruction on earth directly, though not totally, because only a third of the objects suffer this.

The first angel, it has to do with environmental disasters. The second one has to do with economic chaos. And the second two angels and trumpets issue destruction on earth from heaven, of a cosmic nature.

But again, only a third of the objects suffer the consequences. The third angel and trumpet has to do with human agony. And one commentator has said about the fourth angel and trumpet has to do with a kind of barbarian behavior.

[4 : 52] The Lord is gracious while directing destruction. His grace is evident because the destruction is not complete, since he preserves two-thirds of his creation.

The Lord keeps his covenant made to Noah, I think, in this we see, where he said to Noah, never again will this kind of destruction cover the face of the earth. And this destruction isn't actually to the same extent of that one, though, though it's quite painful and powerful.

Some wonder if the Lord is loving, how can he let this kind of evil continue on earth? The Lord's goodness is greater than the world's evil.

And this scene gives us a glimpse of his grace to a world undeserving of his kindness. And the purpose of this kindness is always to draw all people to repentance. The final verse of chapter 8 is a key one in explaining what just took place.

And if it's not enough, how much more and how long will this go on? Read with me. This final verse of chapter 8.

[6 : 00] Look down with me at your Bible. Verse 13, as it says, as we read. And 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 blast of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow. We're impacted, aren't we, by eagles.

And this one does even more with his message. From wooing believers then to warning unbelievers. We see that in Revelation chapter 8 and 9, the purpose of these seven angels and trumpets, I think, is to rock and to jolt the world out of its complacency and self-centeredness.

It is a call to repentance and it's to warn the unbelieving of the Lord's real judgment. This chapter ends with what is better than a neon sign flashing, I think, warning, warning, warning.

Warning isn't enough, though. Christ reveals to John three woes, more graphic than what preceded, with these angels and this trumpet blast. Just imagine if the silence wasn't broken, though, that actually starts this chapter with these four warnings and the three woes that follow.

[7 : 17] Move on, though, to chapter 9, verse 1. And the intensity of destruction and pain increases with the fifth angel and trumpet. The suffering subjects are those who lack the seal or mark of God on their foreheads.

The suffering is directed towards the living beings who reject and resist the grace of God. And they are in contrast to those who are marked with the seal of God on their foreheads.

You might ask, well, what mark is it that John actually sees? And we don't really know, but the church is interpreted in this way, saying actually at baptisms, I'd sign you with the cross to mark you as Christ's own forever.

There's a clear difference between those who are saved by grace and those who are not. And so the subjects suffer torment. But notice this, not death.

Those who are yet to receive the message of salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These people are driven towards death but aren't granted that relief.

[8 : 20] Look at me with verses 5 and 6. They were allowed to torment them for five months but not kill them. And their torment was like the torment of the scorpion when it stings someone.

And in those days, people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. And why not?

Because a physical death is no relief for a conscious and body tormented by these symbolic Exodus-like locusts that sting with scorpion effect.

The only relief of a sin and death-oriented life is the message and the work and the cross of Christ. Why would the Lord do this? Notice in verse 5 the limit placed on the torment.

This is another indication of the grace of the Lord. Like the limits the Lord placed on Satan in the torment of Job, who was righteous, the Lord is gracious towards those who will not receive his message of forgiveness.

[9 : 26] Letting it only happen for five months at the hand of Apollon, or Apollon, who is not an impersonal evil, but an evil being.

The very one who masquerades as their king, lord, and promiser in verse 11. He is the one who doles out the torture here, where the tempter actually equals the tormentor. Just think about when you're tempted to sin sometime. And so sin, death, and the devil are just like that. They promise pleasure, power, and freedom, but in the end it's only pain, dissatisfaction, addiction, slavery, to more of what is never actually delivered. Sadly, those who hear the message of the Lord cannot or will not accept the Lord's forgiveness and turn to him. But that's not all. That's only one woe. There is one more in chapter 9, and yet another one that we'll follow later.

And so we continue on in verse 13. There we learn the sixth angel in trumpet issues what the fifth could not. Did you notice that? Namely, death.

[10:38] In verses 15 and 18. All this is actually not happening in succession. It's actually happening simultaneously on top of one another. But notice this. Where does this happen? Death is dealt near the fall of Adam and Eve.

Out of the fourth river mentioned in the creation story, that's Euphrates, comes four angels to kill. But limits, again, are set upon one-third of mankind.

And so plagues, like that of God's people in Egypt, dealt the death to another one-third. And that leaves one-third to remain. Maybe stand.

Maybe abide. And why does the Lord do this? Well, look with me at verses 20 and 21. The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands, nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear and walk.

Nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

These people would not repent of idolatry or immorality.

[11:49] And this is always what it comes down to in relation to the Lord of heaven and earth. Our relationship with the Lord and others is what matters. It's the vertical and the horizontal.

Did I get that right? Vertical. You know, upwards and across. Up to the Lord and across and out to others. So, we cannot be moral apart from worshiping the Lord.

Morality follows and flows from our worship of God. So, all the Lord wants from the world is to repent and to return and to receive his forgiveness and renewal of life.

But what's the point of all this? What's the point of chapter 8 and 9? Well, the purpose is that these seven angels and trumpets is, again, to rock, to disturb, to unsettle us out of our complacency and self-centeredness, to call us to repentance, and to warn us, warn the unbelieving, of the Lord's real judgment to come.

And that's his judgment, not our judgment. Well, if you're counting, we've only covered six angels and trumpets. Two woes, another one to come.

[13:03] That seventh one will come later. But the graphic nature of these two chapters isn't only for those who don't know the Lord. I think it serves to move you and I to prayer.

And proclamation. It really serves to convert us in our own complacency to compassion. And to pray words like these ones that were actually assigned for this day by the Anglican Network in Canada in a collect.

It comes from, actually, I'll have you turn to it on page 131 for the sixth Sunday after Epiphany. Let's read this in closing.

Because I think it's really fitting as a prayer, prayers that actually move heaven and earth, to unleash what it is that God has in his mind and is his will to judge and at the same time show grace. Let's pray this collect together in closing 131. O God, whose blessed Son was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us the sons of God and heirs of eternal life.

[14:13] Grant us, we beseech thee, that having this hope, we may purify ourselves even as he is pure, that when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom, wherewith thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end.

Amen.