

## **Bow Down! Heed the warning signs – The 7 Trumpets: Revelation 8-11**

### **Revelation 11:15-19 The seventh trumpet**

*<sup>15</sup> The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:*

*‘The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.’*

*<sup>16</sup> And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, <sup>17</sup> saying:*

*‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
the One who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power  
and have begun to reign.*

*<sup>18</sup> The nations were angry,  
and your wrath has come.  
The time has come for judging the dead,  
and for rewarding your servants the prophets  
and your people who revere your name,  
both great and small –  
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.’*

*<sup>19</sup> Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.*

We are now over half way through our ‘Heaven Open’ sermon series looking at the book of Revelation, so we are right into the deeper material of John's apocalypse which means ‘unveiling’. Remember that Revelation was written to encourage the struggling Christians living in seven churches in Asia Minor which is now in modern day Turkey. John’s hearers would have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, particularly the book of Daniel which prophesied the rise and fall of various empires and rulers, and gave some hints about the coming deliverance of God's people. But in his final chapter Daniel is instructed to 'close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.' So for centuries, everyone wondered what was written in that scroll, until one Sunday on Patmos, John was praying and saw this vision of heaven opened with the scroll right there waiting to be revealed.

John wept because he thought no one could open it, but then he saw that there was indeed one worthy to open the scroll: Jesus, who is described as both the conquering Lion and the lamb who had been slain.

Like a proper Roman last will and testament the scroll was bound with seven legal seals, one each for the subject, the notary, and five witnesses to testify to its validity. As these seals are opened one by one by seven Angels, they each reveal the plight of human history over the last two thousand years since Jesus ascended to heaven and ushered in these last days before his second coming. But it has to be said what the seals reveal isn't light reading!

Mims and I have had the privilege of staying at a friend's house in the South of France this last week and I spent some time praying through and researching this talk.

I have to admit that it was rather unnerving to receive various emergency alerts on our phones warning of imminent threat to life from torrential rains and flooding, whilst seeing calamitous headlines about the riots happening in cities across France, and all this just a couple of weeks after reports of apocalyptic scenes of wildfires all over the country!

But Jesus said in Mark 13:7-9 'When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of the birth pains. You must be on your guard.'

So Jesus was indicating that although human history is littered with war and catastrophe, despite the challenges, something new and better is being born.

The birth of God's promised kingdom has begun, but it's a long and painful delivery. Why Has it taken so long? 2000 painful years seems like an agonising wait?

Well Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

God wants everyone to turn to him, instead of remaining in our sinful state where we value selfish pride and worship created things instead of the universal creator. When we face the inevitable troubles of life, do we turn to God for mercy and comfort, or do we stick to our guns and press on belligerently in our own strength?

The message of Revelation challenges us to see the bigger picture, and consider who is in ultimately charge of the world we live in.

In the chapters we are considering today, from 8 to 11, the seventh seal of the scroll initiates the blowing of seven trumpets by seven Angels. If we weren't awake before, these trumpets are Gods early warning system calling us to pay close attention to our spiritual condition.

Trumpets were familiar to John's hearers since watchmen were routinely posted on ancient city walls to sound the call to warn of invaders or herald important visitors.

The seven trumpets in Revelation detail 4 warnings that affect the planet and then 3 warnings or 'Woes' as they're known affecting all its human inhabitants.

When you start to list out what the warnings are, it is clear to me that we need to take heed, as time is marching on.

The first four trumpet warnings all describe ecological disasters. Firstly a third of the land is burned up by fire, then a third of the oceans are affected by pollution, (caused by something like a super-volcano), then one third of the fresh water rivers become undrinkable and toxic, and finally even the atmosphere is affected such that a third of the sun and the stars become obscured.

Paul wrote in Romans 8: <sup>19</sup> the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed' & <sup>22</sup> 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.'

One of the themes throughout the Bible is the suggestion that the state of the land and our planet's ecology is inextricably linked to the spiritual state of humanity. The trumpets warn us to repent of idolatry, immorality murder and robbery. Perhaps this also includes our negligence in carrying out one of our Eden directives of stewarding his creation well and sharing its resources fairly.

Whilst I am usually a pragmatist when it comes to environmental matters, I do feel increasingly convicted that I need to find ways to avoid exploiting others through my consumption and polluting ways, or contributing to inequalities that offend God's heart. Perhaps fasting from consumerism should develop into one of our most important spiritual disciplines for our time. Remember that the 5th Mark of Anglican Mission is "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth".

After the 4 ecological warnings, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets echo the plagues of Egypt from Exodus 10. Pharaoh's heart was so hard that he refused let the Israelites go to worship the Lord even though he had every opportunity to repent and yield. Even after a plague of locusts devoured all the crops, darkness had covered the land and death visited every Egyptian family, Pharaoh still didn't acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty in it all. His blind belligerence and hardness of heart eventually destroyed both him and his army. What is the state of our hearts today?

John's language also recalls the Old Testament prophet Joel, who describes a large and mighty army, with forces like locusts beyond number, coming to conquer. The descriptions are grim. Whether these depict physical armies like drone swarms or evil spiritual alliances bringing horrific regional conflicts, the trumpets and woes are a sombre warning to wake up and not to take God for granted. There are powerful spiritual forces at work causing hardness of heart in the world right now. And this spiritual oppression will be all the more tormenting as the day of the Lord draws near. Peter reminds us to be on our guard because he says 'your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring Lion looking for someone to devour.'

If we do come under spiritual attack, and when that day of evil comes, we need to be ready to take our stand. Thankfully Christians are issued with a special gift - the armour of God, which Paul describes in Ephesians 6. The first thing he instructs us to put on is the helmet of salvation which guards our mind with full assurance that we can stand under God's protection and authority. Becoming a Christian means saying 'Yes' to following Jesus, and 'No' to the sin which tries to enslave us. But once we admit that we are powerless to sort ourselves out and instead confess our need of Christ, that is when he pours out his Grace and forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live peacefully instead of fearfully. As we embrace our purpose in God's kingdom, we take the helmet of salvation issued to us as our primary item of battle gear. We also have the rest of the armour to put on: The breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the shield of faith, the shoes of readiness and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. If you are not confident you've taken hold of God's armour or need help putting it on today, then do ask someone to pray it through with you. It's good to know you are not alone and actually you are on the winning team.

And that is what the final trumpet confirms. The God of heavens armies is sovereign over all the powers, principalities, empires and dominions that can ever set themselves against him.

The final trumpet is preceded by a great and mighty Angel standing with one foot on the sea and one on the land – uniting and stabilising them again. He roars like a Lion and the sound of it is like thunder – which makes me think this is Christ bringing order to the world. He gives John a little scroll which is the Gospel message and shows him two witnesses whose prophetic ministry to the world are violently rejected. John's language recalls the High Priest Joshua and Zerubbabel in the book of Zechariah. Together they symbolise unity between King and Priest – in other words, Godly government. If humanity continues to reject a Godly government and a holy peace, then that is when God will necessarily intervene.

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the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.'

<sup>16</sup>And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, <sup>17</sup>saying:

'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
the One who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power  
and have begun to reign.'

So even when we see dreadful things happening around us, we can still give thanks because God has begun to reign. His just and gentle rule will prevail, but it is our job to tell everyone both about his great love for us shown in Christ, but also to warn them against selfish arrogance or apathy.

The gospel is a message of both joyous comfort and a solemn urgency. We find rest for our souls, but an urgency in our mission. The world needs to wake up before it is too late, the warning trumpets fall silent and the bowls of justice are poured out. If you think about it, when you pour water out of a bowl, it is spilt, irreversibly. But that is next week's instalment...

Let's pray for soft hearts but alertness to take our stand and put our armour on daily.