

Revelation 8:1-5
The Sound of Silence

Let me start with some good news – because of the various aspects of today's service – ordination and installation of officers AND communion, the message will be a bit shorter. We'll only focus on the first 5 verses of Revelation ch 8. It's actually a good break point in the passage.

The book unfolds with a series of 7's – SEALS, TRUMPETS, HISTORIES, BOWLS OF WRATH, AND SEVEN various visions.

The seven cycles retell the same story dealing with the period between the first and second coming of Christ. They glimpse the reality from different angles but are all dealing with the same time frame.

❖ **Vision of Heaven and SEVEN Seals on a Scroll ch 4-8:1 5:1-8:1**

Six seals opened (6:1-17)

followed by interlude – Chap 7 The 144,000 Stand before the throne

➤ 7TH SEAL introduces 7 Trumpets

❖ **SEVEN Trumpets 8:2-11:19**

6 Trumpets followed by Interlude, then 7th trumpet

REVELATION 8

The Seventh Seal—the Trumpets (seven Angels with 7 Trumpets)

1 When the Lamb broke the **seventh** seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

V. 1 SEVENTH SEAL AND SILENCE.

Thus far the scenes in heaven have been anything but silent:

4:8 The four living creatures "do not cease to say, `Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God'" and the twenty-four elders constantly confess God's worthiness to receive glory, honor, and power (4:11).

When the Lamb receives the scroll, new songs of praise break out among myriads and myriads of worshipers (5:9-14). The martyrs' lament (6: 10) and their song of salvation "day and night" add to the heavenly cries and proclamations of joy and praise (7:10, 15).

Now comes 30 minutes of Silence in heaven. That had to be odd. The angels must have been bewildered.

This silence is a bit like what people talk about just before a tornado hits. This silence is the calm before the storm, a hush of awe and expectation before the Lord's intrusion in judgment: **"Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling" (Zech. 2:13). "Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near" (Zeph. 1:7).**

All heaven is silent as the worshippers await what is to come.

John sets the scene for the next set of SEVEN that follow.

There are Seven angels who stand before God, and they are each given a trumpet.

Before the trumpets sound, we get a picture before the throne of golden censer with much incense that is added to the prayers of the all the saints (6:10) that were going up before God.

10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Now in chap 8 we see that their prayers are going to intersect with the righteous judgment from God. What is hard for us to keep in mind is that even as God sends judgment, He is graciously warning the people of what is to come. He is giving them/ Us time to repent.

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

This imagery should remind us of John's earlier vision from ch 4:5, and the Lord's descent on Mt. Sinai to make a covenant with Israel - Ex 19:16-20

Rev 4:5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God

Ex 19 - NOTE THE TRUMPET sounds when God came down to the mountain...

16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled...18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. 19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.

In Num 10:2-3 two trumpets were used to call the people to the holy assembly in the tent of meeting. In Lev 25 a trumpet blast announced the arrival of the jubilee year. Trumpets were a key part in the conquest of Jericho, and the return of Christ will be heralded with a resounding trumpet blast - Matt 24, 1 Cor 15, 1 Thess 4.

While we don't get the exact content of the prayers on the altar, 6:10 does give us the most important clue. The sense of the passage is that the cry of the saints is connected to what the angel does next -

8:5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

As we'll see, there are trumpets judgments that will follow. The scene will shift from heave to earth, and we see fiery judgments that fall from heaven to earth. The judgments in the trumpet cycle come from the altar of incense of the prayers of the saints which have been offered to God.

The original audience would see Roman society shaken by scandal, intrigue and threatened by external assault, but the saints remained faithful. God used such events to humble and expose human pride, purify the saints, and give all the opportunity to repent.

Such a pattern continued to be repeated throughout human history, and it continues today.

Kingdoms, peoples, nations are shaken and toppled as they try to exalt themselves on the earth.

Johnson...p.119

We see a link between the cycle of seals and the cycle of trumpets. The seals were broken and the horsemen who went out set the template of forces to be released in the cycle of trumpet judgments. As with the judgments from the 7 Seals, the 7 Trumpets are always subject to the Lamb, to do His will.

While we struggle with trying to decipher the mind and plan of God as the various seals are broken or the trumpets sound, God is always in control as He seeks the advance of His kingdom. He is also assuring that those sealed with His name will finally greet the great day of wrath with a sense of peace.

PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS: v. 3-5

This is an unusual passage about prayer as an angel adds incense to the prayers of the saints on the golden altar and the smoke went up before God. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of altar and threw it to the earth. Peals of thunder, lightning and an earthquake followed.

While it may make us a bit uncomfortable, it is hard to escape the connection of the prayers of the saints in 6:10 with the fiery censer thrown to the earth.

Beale: These verses present us with the effects of the prayers of the deceased saints pictured in 6:9-11. The power of these prayers seems to be related to the sacrificial witness of their lives.

The saints cry out seeking God to bring righteous judgment to avenge their blood shed by those who dwell on the earth. And in chapter 8 the prayers are thrown like a fiery ball on the earth and things are shaken up.

I understand why this might make you uncomfortable. It certainly isn't politically correct. It isn't how most of us pray regularly, including me. Most of our prayer is devotional, personal, seeking a sense of nearness with God. We pray for wisdom and spiritual insight. We pray for specific needs – physical, emotional, financial, relational. ALL OF THAT IS GOOD AND VALID. We are told to “let your requests be made known to God.”

The prayers of Revelation 6 which are mixed with incense in Rev 8, are also valid in a broader way. They fall in line with what Jesus taught – “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This type of prayer calls for the defeat of the enemies of Christ. It calls for the salvation of the lost, and for preservation of the saints in the midst of spiritual battles.

This is spiritual warfare prayer that has God's kingdom and His righteousness at the center. If I read this correctly, these are the prayers that prompted God's angel to throw the fiery censer on the earth.

If this disturbs or bothers us, we need to wrestle with it. The world and many in the broader church may say, “God would never do that.” Yet, scripture, especially Revelation tells us that He will. If there is a problem with this, it lies with us, not God. It means that there is something WE don't understand about God's justice, holiness, and righteousness.

It should be a red flag to us when we take a position in which we think we are being kinder or more gracious or tolerant THAN God. That position reveals that we have forgotten or never understood the amazing grace that we have been shown from God. **One thing that Revelation reveals is that there is a day coming in which the righteousness, rule, and recompense of God will be acknowledged as the basis and cornerstone for a happy universe. (Bonar Light and Truth p.410 Kindle)**

Chapters 6-8 remind us that as we pray for Christ to return, we must be prepared for what will accompany His return – God will use the birth pains to judge His enemies and purify His people.

In Romans 1 we see that God's judgment isn't always, or even necessarily, earthquakes and chaos. Often His judgment is simply letting the folly of our own decisions come to fruition. God simply lets us reap what we sow, individually, as families, as churches, and as a nation.

Some **REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER:**

Do our prayers come out of a sacrificial life, or do we come asking God only to throw us life-preservers to rescue us from our own foolishness?

Are our prayers calling in for divine reinforcement in the spiritual battle or are we calling in our heavenly butler to come rearrange the pillows in our family room? (Piper)

The prayers of the saints described in ch 6-8 focus on the holiness and truthfulness of God and a desire for that to be manifested in the execution of His justice.

There are numerous Psalms that deal with that theme (Ps 21, 50-60). While we may find ourselves uncomfortable with some of the language, we must remember that this is God's Word. While parts of the OT may make us feel way out of our comfort zone, we must remember that this was Jesus' bible, which He did not come to abolish, but fulfill.

Are our prayers directed toward obtaining benefit for ourselves or glory for God?

Do we see the prayers of the saints, dead and alive, as actual instruments of divine judgement, of the vindication of God's truth in the world, and the ultimate Salvation of those whom God will bring to Himself?

We don't wage war the way the world does. We wage war through sacrificial living and PRAYER.

APPLICATION**

THE seventh seal initiates the half hour of silence. That probably seemed like a long time.

The saints who cry out in 6:10 have been waiting a long time as well. Here God begins to respond to their cries.

DOES IT SEEM LIKE God HAS BEEN ABSENT WHEN YOU HAVE CRIED OUT TO HIM?

Take heart... HE HAS NOT FORGOTTEN HIS PEOPLE

Sometimes we may cry out and other times, like the Psalmist, we reflect the reality of 8:1 – Silence before God

1 My soul waits in silence for God only;

From Him is my salvation.

2 He only is my rock and my salvation,

My stronghold: I shall not be greatly shaken.

We can be silent when we know that God is our rock. The world may be shaken by the Horsemen, but our God reigns in heaven and over our lives.

Don't be fooled by the "YOLO, you only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get" mentality. That mindset will rob us of our appreciation of the fact that God is coming to display His righteousness and justice and vindicate His ways and His people.

How do we know that? He gave Himself on the cross and came out of the grave to prove it.

One reminder is right here at the Lord's Table.

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