

Sermons
The Seventh Seal & the First Six Trumpets (Part 1)
Revelation 8-9
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Well, tonight, it is my joy to bring us back to the book of Revelation as we continue to walk our way through John's letter to the churches, the seven churches, under the direction of our Lord and to us, as we think about the future. You know, we live in difficult times and those times remind us that we live in an uncertain world and that the Lord will bring, someday, history to its close. And we're learning how He will bring it to its close here in this wonderful book.

Growing up on the Gulf Coast, I lived through several hurricanes. I mentioned that to you before. Hurricanes, as you know, if you didn't grow up where you encountered them, they're not like tornadoes in that they are massive storms with diameters up to 300 miles. In fact, the highest sustained winds in a hurricane to hit the US sustained winds of 185 miles an hour during the Labor Day hurricane of 1935.

There's one aspect of these massive storms that absolutely fascinates me, and that is the eye of the hurricane. It can be clearly seen from satellite photos. There, in the middle of that massive circulation, there is a distinct center called the eye. The size of the eye depends on the size of the hurricane. They range from 5 miles to 60 miles across. On each side of the eye, in what's called the eye wall, you find the strongest, most violent winds in the storm. Whatever the highest winds are, that's where you'll find them. So, as the eye of the hurricane approaches your location, and I've experienced this, you are at that moment, as you get close to the eye, you are experiencing the fullest fury of the storm. But once the eye is directly overhead, winds that a moment ago may have been sustained at 130 miles an hour, are suddenly a gentle breeze. The deafening roar of the wind that you had to shout over inside of your house to be heard turns to an eerie silence. There's no rain that falls in the eye. And in fact, if it's daytime, you can look up and often see blue sky above you. But the calm in the eye is deceptively dangerous because once the opposite eye wall comes, in a moment that gentle breeze turns to the fullest hurricane force winds that the storm has to offer and to blinding rain. Because of the circulation, the way the storm turns, the powerful winds on the other side of the eye actually come at you from exactly

the opposite direction. The eye of the hurricane is literally, to use the figure speech, the calm before the storm.

Tonight, in our study of the book of Revelation, we come to one of the most fascinating passages in this book. The eye in the hurricane of God's wrath passes over the throne room of heaven. And for 30 long minutes there's an eerie calm. Before we're done tonight, we'll discover that there are several powerful lessons for us found in the eye of this storm.

Before we examine the passage together, let me just remind you of the context - where we are. We're, remember, looking at Jesus' words in chapter 1:19 as the natural framework, an outline for the book. 1:19 says, "Therefore write the things which you have seen [that's the vision in chapter 1], and the things which are [that's the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3], and [thirdly] the things which will take place after these things." That's where we find ourselves in chapters 4 to 22 - the things which will take place, the stages of Jesus' final triumph. That unfolds, in verses... in chapters 4 and 5, with a revelation of the Lamb and the seven-sealed scroll. And then, beginning in chapter 6 through chapter 18, you have the seven-year Tribulation. In chapter 6, we looked at the first six seals and the way they unfold. Then in chapter 7, we saw an interlude. We studied the Tribulation saints. Tonight, we come to the seventh seal which also is the first six trumpets in chapters 8 and 9.

Let me read for you just chapter 8, which is as far as we'll get tonight. We wanted to get through all of chapter 8, but let's read it together. Revelation 8, beginning in verse 1: "When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 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. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 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. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and 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. The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way. Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'"

With chapter 8:1, the interlude of chapter 7 and the view of the Tribulation saints ends, and the pouring out of God's judgment continues here with a fury. In these two chapters, I would say this is how to encapsulate it. In chapters 8 and 9, the Lamb breaks the seventh seal, which initiates seven trumpet judgments and eventually seven bowl judgments, and all of these in response to the prayers of God's people. That is the message of these two chapters.

It begins with the seventh seal in chapter 8:1-2. Let's look at it together. Verse 1: "When the Lamb broke the seventh seal..." Now, just to remind you of what this means, back in chapter 5, we watched as the Lamb (Jesus our Lord), took a scroll from the hand of God the Father who sat on the throne. And we learned then that that scroll is the title deed to the earth. And that title deed is sealed with the seven seals. And Christ begins to break the seals because He was the only one found in heaven and earth that was worthy to open the scrolls and to break the seals. And He begins in chapter 6 to break those seals. He broke the first of - the first six of the seven seals in chapter 6. And as He did so, a series of judgments were poured out on the earth. Again, as we discovered and saw in our study of chapter 6, the first five seals, as He broke them, brought about false peace on the earth followed by war, followed by famine, death, and divine vengeance. The sixth seal was more terrible, and it unleashes wholesale catastrophe on the planet. In fact, it's so bad, as we saw, that the world is forced to acknowledge that these are not

mere natural disasters. These are God's judgments. Now, back in chapter 6:12, is when Christ broke the sixth seal.

Now, we return to the seals in chapter 8:1 and here He breaks the seventh and final seal. And with this final seal, the judgments of the Day of the Lord, this entire period of time, specifically the Tribulation but concentrated in the second half of the Tribulation, those judgments intensify dramatically. Following the seventh seal, comes seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments. And when you think bowl, think a sort of flat saucer as opposed to a large bowl. And each one who has one of those bowls, each angel, dumps the contents of that flat bowl on the earth and with it comes God's judgment. So, a series of divine judgments are initiated with the breaking of this seventh seal that will lead right up to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, there's been much debate about the relationship between these three sets of judgments. You have seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. There are two primary views that you can read a lot about. One view says that these sevens are actually simultaneous. In other words, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls are mostly retelling events that have already been described in the seven seals. And they would say a few are distinct events that occur contemporaneous with the seven seals. But you can see this is one view.

There are several problems with this view, but I think the most obvious is you don't land on this view by a normal hermeneutic, a normal reading of the text, as we'll see as we walk through it. When you read it as you would read any other piece of literature, following the progressions laid out, you would say that these are not simultaneous but, rather, they are sequential, which is the other view. In other words, the seventh seal, the last of the seven seals, contains and initiates the seven trumpets. And the seventh trumpet contains and initiates the seven bowls.

Think of them like the stacking dolls. You know, you open one and inside you find the others. It's kind of like that. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets. The seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls. This is the view that best matches the data, and we'll see it as an unfolds.

There are several arguments to support this view. Let me give you a couple. One is, when we come to the seventh seal here, you will see that there is no description of any judgment connected to the seventh seal unlike the first six. It doesn't say what the contents are. Instead, there is only an anticipation of coming judgments and that is immediately followed by the seven trumpet judgments. So, it's perfectly logical then to conclude that this seventh seal contains the seven trumpets, that the judgment of the seventh seal is in fact the seven trumpets. In the same way, the seventh trumpet doesn't describe a judgment either. You can see that in chapter 10:7, chapter 11:15-17. Instead, like in this case, the seventh trumpet anticipates coming judgment. It's interesting, in chapter 10:7, it says that the seventh trumpet is the finish. It's the finish of God judgment. But chapter 15:1 says God's judgments are finished with seven plagues. And chapter 16:1 identifies those seven plagues as seven bowls of wrath. And then chapter 16:2 and following, describes those bowls of wrath in detail. So, when you put all of that together, the breaking of the seventh seal initiates a series of seven distinct judgments that are announced consecutively by the blowing of seven trumpets. And the blowing of the seventh trumpet initiates a rapid-fire series of catastrophic judgments that come at the end of the Tribulation. Those final intense judgments are described as the pouring out of seven bowls or seven saucers of God's wrath.

All of that is unleashed with the breaking of the seventh seal. So, fourteen different displays of God's judgment are all contained within the seventh seal. And that seventh seal, by the way, will last over a period of time. For example, we learn in chapter 9:10 that the effects of just the fifth trumpet will last for five months. So, it spans - these events span a period of time. Although we're not told exactly how long these events will last, we know, based on what we've discovered already, that they will all occur during the last half of the Tribulation, during the last three and a half years. So, the contents then of the seventh seal includes seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments. And the seventh seal includes all of God's final wrath, which will be brought to its conclusion at the second coming of Jesus Christ. So, once Christ breaks then that last seal, the seventh seal, it's now an open scroll and the entire contents of the scroll are completely visible.

What happens next is surprising. Notice verse 1: "...there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." Now, if you've been sort of reading and meditating along with me in our study of Revelation, this should strike you the way it strikes me. To this point in the book of Revelation, heaven has been a very noisy place. In chapter 4:5, there were "sounds and peals of thunder." In chapter 4:8, the four living creatures continued to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." In chapter 4:11, the 24 elders representing the church sing praise to God. In chapter 5:2, a strong angel proclaims, with a loud enough voice to be heard across the universe, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" Also, in chapter 5, the four living creatures, that special set of angelic beings, calls for praise and the 24 elders and the 100 million angels all join with the redeemed, all of creation praising God. In chapter 6:1, one of the four living creatures calls to John with a voice of thunder, and that happens with each of the four of the first seals. In chapter 6:9-10, when Christ opens the fifth seal, their cries from all of the Tribulation martyrs for vengeance. In chapter 6:12, when the sixth seal was broken, there was the roar of a devastating earthquake. In chapter 7:2-3, an angel cries out with a loud voice. In chapter 7, a great multitude, which no one can count, from every nation and tribe and peoples and tongues all cried out with a loud voice giving praise to God. Now, suddenly, there is silence. And the silence lasts for half an hour.

Now, as we know, there is no time in the presence of God. God is not bound by time. But John, as a human being and for him there is time, and for him the silence that occurred lasted for 30 minutes. Now, think about the transition for a moment. Think about what he's experienced, what he's seen, what he's heard, all of the things happening, all of the action that's occurring, all of the noise. And then, suddenly, heaven goes deathly quiet. It's the eye of the storm and nothing for half an hour.

I mean, just imagine that for a moment. Think about how awkward a few seconds of silence can feel. Imagine half an hour. The songs and praises of 100 million angels and countless multitude of the redeemed are completely silent. It's a stillness that can be felt. It's a silence that is really characterized by anticipation. It's a silence that's also characterized by a foreboding sense of what's about to be unleashed on the earth, as heaven sees now the contents of the open scroll.

The Old Testament often records silence as a response to the awesomeness of God and an anticipation of His judgment. For example, Psalm 76:8-9: “You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still when God arose to judgment...” Habakkuk 2:20: “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.” Again, the context is God’s judgment. Zephaniah 1:7: “Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near...” Zechariah 2:13: “Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation [dwelling place].” The courts of heaven, which had resounded with the deafening praise of countless multitudes, suddenly becomes deathly quiet. John MacArthur writes, “The hour of God’s final judgment has come. The hour when the saints will be vindicated, sin punished, Satan vanquished, and Christ exalted. The greatest event since the fall is about to take place and all heaven has seen waiting in suspenseful expectancy.”

Look at verse 2: “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God...” Now, in Greek as an English, there is a definite article indicating that this is a specific group of seven angels. Some refer to these seven angels as the angels of the presence because they stand before God. They stand in His presence. Those who do so sometimes identify them with Jewish teaching, in the book of Enoch, about those who are said to stand before God. You’ve heard the list of Uriel, and Raphael, and so forth, Gabriel and etc. We don’t know if that’s true. There’s nothing in the Scriptures that teach that. But what we do know is that these are seven angels who stand in the presence of God, and it appears that they are a high-ranking order of angels. One of them may be Gabriel because listen to how he described himself to Zacharias in Luke 1:19: “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God...” But regardless of the specific identification, here are seven specific, powerful, high-ranking angels who’ve been assigned this responsibility.

Verse 2 says, “...and seven trumpets were given to them.” God gives these seven angels seven trumpets. It’s interesting, angels factor prominently in the judgments of the book of Revelation. We’re going to see them involved with all of this as it unfolds. And trumpets - trumpets factor prominently in the life of Israel. They’re at the announcing of the giving of the Law at Sinai in Exodus 19. They were used to assemble the congregation of Israel, to prepare the people for war, to assemble at religious feasts, to announce news to the people, to commemorate the

crowning of kings, to call the people to worship, and, in Zephaniah, even to warn of the coming Day of the Lord. And so, trumpets were a major part of the nation of Israel.

But we come to the New Testament - we learn that a trumpet will announce the rapture of the church in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. It'll be at the sound of the trumpet that the dead in Christ will be raised and we who are alive will be gathered to the Lord.

And here, in Revelation 8, we learn that trumpets will announce a series of catastrophic judgments that God will unleash on the earth. The judgments that are announced by the seven trumpets will be more severe, as we'll see, than those that were contained in the seven seals, but the trumpet judgments will not be as severe as the bowl judgments that are yet to come.

Before these seven powerful angels, who've been handpicked for this task, can blow their trumpets, something else happens first. There's first a powerful interlude, marked by the appearance of an eighth angel. And more importantly, it's marked by the saints' prayers in verses 3 through 5. The saints' prayers. Look at verse 3: "Another angel came and stood at the altar..."

Now, who is this angel? Some have argued that, since this person interacts with the prayers of the saints, he must be Jesus Christ, our High Priest, the One who intercedes for His people. But there are several major problems with identifying this angel in verse 3 as Jesus Christ. Let me give you four major problems. One is in the heavenly scene that's already been constructed, Jesus Christ has already been identified and He is consistently represented as, what? The Lamb. The Lamb. Secondly, although in the Old Testament there is a mysterious figure called the "Angel of the Lord" who appears a few times through Israel's history, who is clearly a pre-incarnate appearance of the eternal Son of God, Jesus our Lord is never identified as an angel in the New Testament. So, this would be the only time. Thirdly, the Greek word for "another" angel (see the word "another"?) - that Greek word is a specific word that means another of the same kind. In other words, this angel in verse 3 is of the same kind as the seven actual angels that are in verse 2. A fourth reason this can't be Christ is whenever Jesus does appear in the

book of Revelation, He's always clearly identified. There's never any question that we're talking about Jesus Christ our Lord. So, this is another powerful angel.

And notice what he does: "[he] came and stood at the altar..." You'll notice verse 3 adds that this altar stood "before God's throne". What is this altar? This is heaven's version of the altar of incense from the temple. That becomes very clear as this passage unfolds since only the altar of incense was made of gold (Exodus 30:3) and this is a golden altar. In the Old Testament tabernacle and later in the temple, the altar of incense was a piece of furniture. It was the piece of furniture nearest to the Holy of Holies where God's presence was manifested. In Isaiah 6:6, you remember the coal the angel takes from the altar and applies to Isaiah's lips to cleanse him? That coal, we're told, is taken from inside the temple. The only altar inside the temple was the altar of incense. In Ezekiel 10:2, Ezekiel's coals of fire were taken from a location near the cherubim who were near God's presence. So, in both of those cases, we're talking about the altar of incense. That's what we're talking about here and I'll explain more of what that is in just a moment.

Now, verse 3 says that this angel was notice, "holding a golden censer". That was part of the worship of Israel. It's a flat, gold, fire pan that was used in the worship of the tabernacle and later in the worship of the temple. And verse 3 goes on to say, "...and much incense was given to him..." This incense was to accompany the many prayers of God's people. Verse 3 goes on to say, "...so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne." So, let's stop here a moment and see if we can understand what's going on.

First of all, who are the saints that are praying in this verse? Some say they're all the saints of all time who have prayed, "Lord, let your kingdom come." And this is their prayers. That's certainly possible. I mean, Scripture is, after all, filled with the cries of the righteous saying, "How long, oh Lord?" More likely, the saints in verse 3, who are praying or whose prayers are represented, are the Tribulation saints. You remember? We met them in chapter 6:9-11 and all of chapter 7. Based on the context, this is far more likely. These are the prayers of those who go into the Tribulation period as lost sinners and, through the gospel proclaimed by the 144,000 who are God's messengers (they're His missionaries) - through the preaching of the gospel in a

variety of ways, they come to genuine faith and then they are martyred for their faith. And so, this is likely the prayers in this verse. They come from the tribulation saints.

What were their prayers? Well, they're the same prayers we would pray in their situation – prayers for God's glory to be made known, for God's kingdom to come, for Satan and sin to be destroyed, for justice to be done in their violent murders. Most of all, for Christ to return and to take His throne as earth's rightful and eternal king. You know what I love about this? They were praying and all of heaven is stirring because of their prayers. I like what John Stott writes. He says, "Prayer is not the lonely venture it's so often feels. There is heavenly assistance and our prayers do reach God."

Verse 4: "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand." Now, what is pictured in these verses is the heavenly version of what happened every day at the tabernacle and later at the temple. At 9 am and 3 pm every day, many of the people of Jerusalem gathered at the temple - at the time of the sacrifice (the morning and evening sacrifice) and, at the same time, the lighting of the altar of incense and they gathered for prayer. So, at those two times daily, as Exodus 30 required, a priest entered the temple. Tradition tells us that he entered with two assistants. At those two times, they would first gather burning coals from outside the temple proper, at the bronze altar in the courtyard of the temple where animals were sacrificed and slain and burned. They would gather coals from that great, bronze altar along with fresh incense. And then these three men - the priest who had been picked by lot, as Zacharias was in Luke 1, and the two assistants would enter the Holy Place. You remember, in the temple the first, as you ascended those massive stairs up to the temple proper, the first room was called the Holy Place. And then there was a smaller, cubed room behind that, that was the Holy of Holies where God's presence was manifested. And they were separated by a massive curtain. So, as these three - the priest and His two assistants at twice a day entered the Holy Place to burn incense, they were doing so on the golden altar of incense to represent the prayers of God's people that were happening outside.

So, as they entered the Holy Place, they saw only three pieces of furniture. You can see them in this image that I have on the screen for you. To their left was the golden lampstand. To their

right, the table for the bread of the presence. And straight ahead of them, was the massive curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. And just in front of that curtain, was the golden altar of incense.

One of the assistants would pour out the hot coals, that he had taken from the bronze altar, onto that altar of incense. Then he would slowly back away, never showing his back to the presence of God. But backing out of God's presence, he would then leave the temple. The second assistant would move forward. And next to the coals, beside them, he would place the fresh incense. And then, he too, would slowly back out of the temple and leave. At this point, the priest, the one who had been chosen by lot to offer incense, was alone in the temple. The priest would walk forward and take the fresh incense, that had been deposited there on the altar of incense, and he would put it on top of those burning coals.

Immediately, as when that happened, the smoke began to rise and it would fill the room, and it would waft into the next room, into the Holy of Holies, picturing the prayers of God's people ascending to Him. Listen to Psalm 141:2: "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering." You see, the sweet smell of the smoke of the incense was to serve as a constant reminder to God's people that our prayers (don't miss this) - our prayers are like the sweet smell of incense in the nostrils of God. So, as the smoke of the incense ascended, it pictured the prayers of God's people ascending into God's presence and the fact that God hears. He hears. So, that's what happened in the earthly temple and what we have described for us, here in our text, is a heavenly version of that. The angel is offering incense along with the prayers of God's people, the tribulation saints, and the smell, you'll notice, is drifting into the presence of God. Notice verse 4: "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hands."

What comes next is God's answer to the prayer of the Tribulation martyrs in chapter 6:10. You remember what they said back in chapter 6:10? Those who were killed because of their faith during the Tribulation, "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?'" Well, God is about to answer.

Verse 5: “Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar...” So, the angel took the golden fire pan that he had, and he refilled it, this time, with the burning coals from the altar of incense, where the incense itself was burning. And then he does something shocking to all of those who watch. Verse 5 says he “threw it to the earth”. The angel hurled the burning coals mixed with incense to the earth and it plummeted to the earth like history’s greatest meteor shower. This is a graphic picture of the reality that God is about to answer the prayers of His people with the judgments that He’s going to bring up on the earth.

But don’t miss the major point. Don’t miss the connection. The major point is that the judgment of God that’s going to fall on the earth, in the second half of the Tribulation, will fall in direct response to the prayers of God’s people. This is a powerful illustration of what James writes in James 5:16: “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” Torrance writes this: “More potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world, more powerful than anything else is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth.”

Verse 5 goes on to say, after the angel did that, after he threw it to earth, “...there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning...” The silence of the last half hour is suddenly shattered. All of those things you read about there in verse 5 - peals of thunder, sounds, flashes of lightning - are connected in Revelation to both the awesome majesty of God and His impending judgment of an impenitent world.

Verse 5 also tells us there was an earthquake. That’s all it said. We know nothing specific about the nature of this earthquake as we do with the previous one in the sixth seal and as we’ll learn about others to come. However, since the judgments of Revelation always intensify, it is likely that this earthquake will be more powerful than the one back in chapter 6:12 in the sixth seal. What this angel does in verse 5 is a signal. It’s a signal to the other seven angels that it is time to sound their trumpets.

It's an amazing passage. And I want to stop and reflect on it because there are some powerful lessons from the eye of the storm, that is, from the eye in the storm of God's wrath that is being unfolded on the earth. There's a pause. What are the lessons we learn from the eye of the storm?

First of all, and I love this: the sweetness of our prayers to God. In the Old Testament temple and in the heavenly one represented in this text, the sweet-smelling smoke rising from the altar of incense represented the prayers of God's people. In other words, that's how God perceives our prayers. That ought to challenge you to pray more, Christian. Your Father delights when you pray, because it acknowledges your dependence on Him. It acknowledges His goodness. It acknowledges His generosity. His greatness. And so, Christians, pray because when you pray... And, again, this was represented in the Old Testament. This is nothing new in Revelation. This has always been true. When you pray, it's like the sweetest perfume you can imagine in the nostrils of God. Pray.

There's a second lesson and it's the relationship between our prayers and God's sovereignty. I want you to think with me just for a moment. You got to put on your thinking cap. But I want you to think with me about the timeframes that are in this passage in chapter 8:1-5. Now, remember, when he's writing this, John is on the island of Patmos in the mid 90s AD - 2000 years ago. And he has a vision of events there that were obviously at least 2000 years in the future because they haven't happened yet. We don't know how farther - how much farther into the future they will come, but we know it's at least 2000 years between the vision and the events themselves. And he sees, in this vision, God responding to prayers that are made, when? During the first half of the seven-year Tribulation. Now, you tell me. Were the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments we're about to learn about, were those already part of God's sovereign plan before the saints pray in the first half of the Tribulation? Of course, they were. They were part of God's plan when John wrote this book in the 90s AD. But more importantly, they were part of God's plan in eternity past because of what theologians call "The Eternal Decree". All of God's plans and decisions were made in eternity past. He determined all things, whatsoever, would be. So, all of this was set. It was always going to end this way.

But when these events unfold, at some point in the future, what is it that will move God to act? It's the prayers of His people. It's the prayers of His people. As I've said before, the God who decreed the ends, also decreed the means by which His ends would be accomplished. The engine that often moves God's purposes along the course of human history is the prayers of His people. Christian, pray! Pray because it's sweet to your God, sweet to your Father when you express your love and your worship and your dependence by asking Him for what you need. And pray because God may very well have decided to accomplish His internal purpose in answering your prayer.

There's a third lesson here, and this is, the encouragement to pray for larger kingdom purposes. You know, when you look at the Lord's prayer where we're taught how to pray, there's six petitions representing six categories of prayer. Now, think about those six categories. We're to pray for the glory of God - "hallowed be Your name". We're to pray for the kingdom of God, the will of God. So, when you look at it - the glory of God ("hallowed be Your name"), the kingdom of God ("Your kingdom come"), the will of God ("Your will be done"). And then we get to us in the second half - the final three petitions. We pray about the needs of this life - "Give us this day our daily bread." We're to pray about the confession of sin - "And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." And we're to pray about personal holiness - "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

You know what most Christians do? They spend their lives in two of those six categories. They spend their lives praying about the needs of this life ("Give us this day our daily bread") and confession of sin, and they completely ignore, or largely ignore, the other four categories. But did you notice the Lord's prayer begins, not with us, but with God? Can I challenge you to pray bigger, audacious prayers - not about you, but about God, about the glory of God, about the kingdom of God, about the will of God? Don't forget to pray for larger kingdom purposes. Someday, the kingdom of our Lord will come, in which God will be glorified, in which His will, "will be done on earth as it is in heaven" perfectly. And when those things come, brothers and sisters, it will be an answer to the prayers of God's people. When's the last time you prayed for those things?

Lesson number four is our desperate need for the gospel. Let's be honest. I'm enjoying our study of Revelation but it's hard. These are real judgments on real people who will live on this planet - people like your neighbors, people like your family and friends who don't know the Lord. This is hard. And because of the goodness and patience of God, it is hard for any of us to really come to grips with the fact that, one day, our God will manifest His justice against this world, and He'll do so in devastating, destructive judgment. I mean, today, think about it. Even His determined enemies, certainly those who just kind of tolerate God, or ignore God, or even those who claim to know Him but claim to know Him apart from His Son (like we were talking about this morning) - all of those people have lives that are filled with God's goodness.

Do you understand what God's doing with His goodness to the people around us who don't know Him? Listen to Acts 14:17. This is Paul talking to a bunch of idolaters. He says that the true God, the God who made heaven and earth, "He did not leave Himself without witness [to you], in that He did good [to you] and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." We live in a world when God just lavishes people with His goodness. And you know what happens because we are sinners? If we don't know the Lord, we misinterpret that goodness - "It's because God and I are okay. He's okay with me. We're going to be fine. I'm going to be fine at death. I'm going to be fine if Christ comes back. Don't worry about me." I hear that from so many people - "Don't worry about me. We're good. God and I are good." It's a misunderstanding of God's goodness in your life. It's His witness to you of Himself.

Turn to Romans 2. Romans 2:1: "Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment [on others], for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." You know, when you criticize and critique other people (and let's be honest, we all do that), God says, "*You know what? You're just accumulating more judgment for yourself. You're just reminding yourself and Me of all of the things that you are guilty of.*" Verse 3: "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?" Really? I mean, you think that's going to happen? You and God are okay? Now, watch verse 4: "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and [His] tolerance and patience..." In

other words, do you just take for granted, because God is so good and so generous... If you're here tonight and you don't know the Lord, you might easily, mistakenly interpret all the good things God has filled your life with as the fact that He's never going to deal with you in any other way. That's not what the Scriptures teach. The Scripture teaches that you must come to Him through His Son. You must repent of your sins and believe in Christ as your only hope of being right with God. And right now, that goodness that you're experiencing - look at it. Verse 4: "...not knowing that the kindness of God [that you're experiencing right now. God intends to] leads you to repentance?" God is being good to you so that you will repent of your sins and put your trust in His Son. Verse 5: "[If that's not how you respond] But because of your stubbornness [your unwillingness to do that] and [your] unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS..."

Paul says, "*Listen, don't misunderstand God's goodness. God is being good to you because He is good, because He's loving, because He's generous, and to urge you to repent and trust in His Son.*" Please do that. Because if you refuse to do that, Paul says, "*You are stockpiling God's wrath.*" It will come. It's true. It's real. It will happen. The only shelter from that storm is in the person of Jesus Christ. I trust you have found Him to be your shelter by repenting and believing in Him. I love the way Paul describes Christ. He is the one who rescues us from the wrath to come. If you're in Christ, you have a Rescuer. He's not going to let you endure the wrath of God that the rest of sinful men face. And my prayer for you, if you don't know Him tonight, is that you will come to find Him, your Rescuer.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, these are hard things for us, not because we doubt Your love, Your grace, Your wisdom, or even Your goodness. But Father, for those of us in Christ, we're reminded of what we deserve. Lord, if You hadn't intervened in our lives, if You hadn't saved us, if You hadn't pulled us out of our sin and made us right with You through Jesus Christ, we would face the wrath to come, either in the Tribulation or at the judgment. But Father, we thank You that that's not our fate. For those of us who have repented and believed in Jesus, we have a Savior who

rescues us from the wrath to come. We have nothing to fear. We know You as Father, as Protector, as Provider, and even as Friend. Father, help us to be grateful for Your goodness. Help us to celebrate. And, Father, help us to learn the lessons that we see from the eye of the storm in Your wrath. Lord, help us to pray, to see that our prayers are sweet to You because they show our love for You, our dependence on You, our comprehension of Your wisdom, and of Your goodness to us. And, Father, remind us that often You act to accomplish Your eternal purposes in answer to the prayers of Your people.

Lord, I pray for those who are here tonight who don't know You. Oh God, I pray that You wouldn't let them mistake the goodness that You are lavishing on them right now as a cause for complacency or apathy. Lord, help them to see that every day You do them good, You are pleading with them to turn in repentance and to believe in Your only Son. And may they do that even today, before their head hits the pillow. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!