



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Revelation 8:1-9:21

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English Standard Version

“Warnings for the World”

This is the 17th sermon in the series on The Book of Revelation entitled,
“The King’s Triumphant Return.”

Revelation 8:1-13

“When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ 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, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ 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.

⁶ Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. ⁷ 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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

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 and on the springs of water. ¹¹ 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.

¹² The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a 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.

¹³ Then 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 blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

Revelation 9:1-21

¹ And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. ⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. ¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. ¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word and making us Your people. As we look at this vision of evil in the world, and the cries of the martyrs, and the end of everything, overwhelm us as you overwhelmed John. Remind us of what this is all about. Lord, help us to see that Jesus is Judge as well as Savior. Do this for each of us, this morning, in the majestic name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Snowpacaplyse? Snoworry.

As you well know, we've just been through one of the biggest snowstorms many of you have ever seen. I lived in northern Vermont for a year and so this wasn't even close to the most snow I've ever seen.

But for Northern Virginia, this was seen as an **enormous** challenge. The nicknames we gave to it, "**Snowpocalypse**" and "**Snowmageddon**" merely revealed that we have no real understanding of what an "**Apocalypse**" or "**Armageddon**" will actually look like. Those are momentous Biblical words that are used to describe death and destruction on a massive scale.

And we trivialized them.

Not only that, we panicked. We were scheduled to have a Men's Retreat the weekend of the storm. I think Bill, Jon, Greg, and Dave did an excellent job of preparing a plan for the weekend, communicating the plan, and then executing the plan. And since then they've come up with an alternate plan so that we'll still be able to have the retreat, now rescheduled for April.

However, in the midst of that all retreat planning, I'm estimating that between the four of them and myself, we received in the neighborhood of 100 emails and phone calls that said something to the effect of ... "**Oh My God — We're going to have a huge snowstorm.**"

It was as if there was this collective thought that none of us involved in planning the retreat owned televisions or computers — we couldn't possibly know what was about to happen — even though this barrage of panic and worry came largely **by email**. In 13 years as your pastor, my opinion of my own church had **reached its lowest point**.

And the primary thing I was thinking about was that after preaching through Revelation for five months, **nobody's heard anything I've said**. We've utterly **missed** the point of God's sovereignty, we don't **believe** that Jesus reigns, we can't **handle** the purification of faith through hardship, and we're totally **unprepared** for either suffering or persecution in this life. There was a collective breakdown of our ability to trust God in the midst of what amounted to **serious inconvenience**.

I immediately thought of Paul's rebuke to the Corinthian church in **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**, "*But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*" And I seriously considered going back and starting Revelation all over again.

But one thing stopped me from all that. Or should I say ... one person. And she doesn't know I'm going to say this. But in the midst of the snowstorm, there was **one** among us who was a shining beacon of **trust in a sovereign God**. While we were encased in anxiety about how the snow would affect our lives, she sat in a nursing home, and day after day after day, she watched her mother slowly die. Karen's faith in the midst of that situation, one far more difficult than shoveling snow, reminded me that when the circumstances of our lives really become difficult and hard and filled with suffering, there are some among us who actually do get it. And because of their faith in a Sovereign God, they're able to get through it. And for that I am grateful.

I say all that because we're about to open chapters 8 & 9 in the Book of Revelation. And it's going to reveal God's ongoing judgment on the world. And it's filled with images that are confusing and frightening. And it will reveal who the saints really are. And hidden amidst the overwhelming horror of these chapters, **God's grace is there**. But panic and worry will obscure our vision and dampen our faith, and without faith it is impossible to see God. **Hebrews 10:23**

pleads with us, “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*” And **Hebrews 11:6** says, “*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*”

So today we’re in back in Revelation, now in the deep waters of chapters 8 & 9, and we start with ...

8. 1-5: SILENCE¹

“When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.³ 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,⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.⁵ 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 sixth seal at the end of chapter six showed the dismantling of the present earth and heaven through a great earthquake that would shake and shatter the earth and the sky. We might then expect the seventh seal to disclose the new creation that is to come. Instead, when the Lamb breaks the seventh seal ... nothing seems to happen. We read, “*there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*”

Now remember, everything we’ve been told about heaven in the Book of Revelation so far involves worship ... including many loud praises and a great deal of singing. **Revelation 4:8**, “*And the four living creatures ... day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”*”

Revelation 5:9-14, “*And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,¹² saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”*

Revelation 7:9-10, “*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*”

All we’ve gotten so far is been unceasing praise, thousands of loud voices, and worshipful singing. And now ... **silence**. What is in the seventh scroll that would cause heaven

1 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr. Dennis Johnson, pages 136-152; *Discipleship on the Edge* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 190-199; **And the sermon “The Lord’s Strange Work” by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA, 12/7/08, www.faithtacoma.org**

to just ... stop?

We have to go to the Old Testament Prophets for the answer.

Habakkuk 2:20, “*But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.*”

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 has roused Himself from His holy dwelling.*”

This silence is the calm before the storm. For God’s enemies on earth it’s the silence of dread and fear; but for those sealed by God it’s the silence of eager expectation. I think this kind of silence is hard to imagine. Our world is so full of noise. During the snowstorm, I had a small taste of what this silence might be like. In the middle of the night, we lost power ... about 2 am. And the sudden silence woke me up. No humming of the myriad electronic gadgets that fill our houses. No buzzing of the alarm clocks. No rattle of the furnace. You can’t hear the computers or the DVR. Just sheer, unadulterated ... silence.

And it was marvelous. I got up and looked out the window, at the falling snow piling up all around our house, glistening white even in the middle of the night. And you couldn’t hear a sound. And I thought, “Is this what it will be like, standing before the Lord, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and made as white as snow?” I don’t know. But I know it was an amazing feeling.

Here in Revelation 8, we’re told that it only lasts for “*about half an hour.*” Try to be absolutely quiet and completely still for half an hour ... **it’s really hard**. And it seems like a really long time. Your senses are heightened, waiting for something to break the spell.

For John, that came in a stunning fashion. He sees seven angels with seven trumpets, ready to sound the warnings of God. But before they do, another angel enters the scene to offer incense before the throne of God. The incense is burned, and rises before God with the prayers of the saints.

Remember we heard these prayers back in **Revelation 6:10**, “*They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”*”

Now God has heard and is answering the pleas of these martyrs, as well as the prayers of the saints still on earth, in the midst of the battle. And then this angel, verse 5, “*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.*” And then the seven angels step forward to blow the ...

8. 6-12: TRUMPETS

“*Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.*⁷ *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.*⁸ *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.*⁹ *A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*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 and on the springs of water.*¹¹ *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.*¹² *The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a 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.*”

As the trumpets begin to sound, the scene shifts from heaven to earth, fiery judgments fall upon the earth; fire with blood falls on the land, a great mountain is thrown into the sea, stars burning like torches fall into the rivers and springs, and the sky is partially darkened. The judgments symbolized here in the trumpet cycle come from the altar on which the incense of the saint's prayers has been offered as God's answer to His people's pleas. John's hearers at the end of the 1st Century would see society shaken by scandal, split by intrigue, and threatened by assault ... but they were not to be paralyzed by fear! Such traumatic judgments are merely instruments in the hand of the Lamb, exposing the emptiness of human arrogance and summoning the nations to repentance.

The most significant Old Testament parallel comes to us from the book of Exodus and the description of the plagues God unleashed upon Egypt in order to force them to release His people from exile. In the first trumpet John sees hail and fire thrown to the earth. In the seventh plague we read, **Exodus 9:22-26**, "*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt."*"²³ *Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt.*"²⁴ *There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.*"²⁵ *The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.*"²⁶ *Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail."*

In the second trumpet John sees a mountain thrown into the sea, turning the water to blood. In the first plague in **Exodus 7**, the waters of the Nile are turned to blood, killing all the fish in the river. In the third trumpet John sees a great star, named Wormwood, burning like a torch, fall into the water, making it bitter and poisonous. The same consequence of the first plague, which we read in **Exodus 8** made the water unfit for drinking. The Prophet Jeremiah twice pronounces similar judgment on Israel, **Jeremiah 9:15**, "*Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with bitter food [literally "wormwood"], and give them poisonous water to drink."* The fourth trumpet affects the source of light, echoing the ninth plague on Egypt, which brought complete darkness on Egypt for three days.

Whether God opens seals and sends his riders — conquest, violence, famine, and death; whether God has the trumpets blown — sending calamities upon the earth, though limited in scope; or whether we wait for the bowls to poured out in the unrestrained catastrophe of the end; all of it is done **as a means by which the Lamb rescues and vindicates His suffering church.** And only those sealed with His name will greet that day with joy.

And though I'd rather not preach on judgment ... **it is Good News.** How is that? How is **judgment** Good News? Simply because judgment shows us that God **cares**. Judgment says that we and our choices **matter** to God. Judgment says that God takes evil and sin **seriously**. Judgment says God is not **indifferent** to evil, nor **tolerant** of sin. Judgment says that God moves **against** both evil and sin.

But the judgment is not total.

Did you see the fraction "one-third"? It occurs eight times in the text: "*a third of the earth,*" "*a third of the sea,*" "*a third of the rivers,*" "*a third of the waters,*" "*a third of the sun,*" "*a third of the moon,*" "*a third of the stars,*" and in chapter 9, "*a third of mankind.*"

The fractions spell mercy. **Mercy?** Yes, only one-third, not two-thirds. The fractions, of

course, are not to be taken with mathematical literalness. **None of the numbers** in Revelation are to be taken with mathematical literalness. The fractions are **symbols**, not statistics. One-third is a symbol — a symbol of mercy. Judgment is not total.

Why, then are these trumpets sounded? They're sounded to warn the world of the pending total judgment. But knowing that much of the world will not respond to the warnings of God, the trumpets are then accompanied by ...

8. 13-9.19: **WOES**

“Then 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 blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

^{9:1} And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. ⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. ¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. ¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions’ heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.”

The fifth and sixth trumpets are different from the first four. The first four signaled environmental disasters of some kind, affecting the world in which we live. These trumpets reveal direct attacks upon **“those who dwell on the earth.”**

Remember the opening of the seals were given to us from the perspective of the church and were unfolded in terms of how they affected the people of God. The trumpets, in contrast, are given to us from the perspective of those who **don’t** belong to God, repeatedly referred to us as **“those who dwell on the earth.”**

There are two more Old Testament precursors to the use of trumpets that seem to

correspond with what we see here in Revelation 8 & 9. The first comes to us from the siege of Jericho, **Joshua 6:2-5**, “*And the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. ³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.”*”

As the priests who blew the trumpets marched before the Ark of the Covenant at Jericho, so we’ll see in **Revelation 11** that the seventh trumpet brings the ark of God’s covenant into view. And like ancient Jericho, which blocked the entry of Israel into the Promised Land, so Babylon the Great must fall before God’s people can find their permanent home in the New Jerusalem.

The other precursor we have comes to us from Joel, chapter 2, our responsive reading this morning. **Joel 2:1**, “*Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near.*” And then, like the fifth trumpet, a locust army is unleashed. This locust army in **Joel 2** supplies the imagery that John uses here to portray the demonic riders emerging from the abyss when the fifth trumpet sounds.

And finally we have the introduction of Satan, “*as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.*” He brings with him more pain, and more death, and more destruction. There’s an irony here for those who serve Satan. First we see that he cannot touch those marked with God’s seal, so he afflicts those “*who dwell on the earth,*” who receive beast’s mark, and who worship his blasphemous images. In other words, **he attacks his own**. Satan rewards his subjects with torture. In the words of St. Augustine, “**sin** becomes the punishment for **sin.**”

“*Those who dwell on the earth*” is a technical term in Revelation, reserved for those who stand in the way of the coming of the Kingdom. It refers to those who are in rebellion against God. One commentator says that these are the people who are at home in the present world order of power and violence, people of earthbound vision, trusting in earthly security, unable to look beyond the things that are seen and temporal.

And therefore Judgment, warning judgment, gets worked out on the stage of history before the final appearing of the King. Just as the seals of the scroll are being broken even now and the four horsemen of the apocalypse are riding loose on the world, so also the trumpets are being sounded.

The purpose of the woes is to warn mankind of what must come if it remains unwilling to repent and turn to God. The world will ring with divine judgment against sin and evil. And if you do not repent, then “*those who dwell on the earth*” will suffer from their ...

9.20-21: FAILURE TO REPENT

The purpose of the trumpets cycle is to **sound** the alarm, **warn** the complacent, **call** them to repentance, and to **summon** the church to holy spiritual warfare. The plagues associated with the trumpets **proclaim** God’s supremacy in all things and prefigure His coming judgment, but they also leave time to repent.

Yet tragically, we read, “*The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did*

not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk,²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

The Book of Revelation reveals that in the last days God will release terrible devastation on the earth and many will die. And yet, the most shocking thing we read in these chapters is not the destruction of the world around us. It's not the catastrophic loss of life. It's not the end of the world as we know it. All of which happens and will continue to happen in order to bring the world to its senses so that it would reckon with the one true and living God **and repent**.

The Apostle Peter gives us much the same warning, **2 Peter 3:7-13**, *“But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, **but that all should reach repentance.**¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!¹³ But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”*

Death flees before the Lord because God is seeking repentance. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person. The worst thing is living unrepentant, missing out on life with the living God. And then dying unrepentant, missing out on life with the living God. So death is kept at bay giving us more opportunity for repentance. This is sheer grace.

But when we witness the death and destruction of the seals and the trumpets, what are we to do? How are we to react ...

CONCLUSION: *When Thousands Die?*²

In the last 50 years, there have been 17 official famines on the continent of Africa. The most recent ones have come in Darfur, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Thousands starved to death every time.

In 2003 there was a massive earthquake in Bam, Iran. There was widespread destruction and thousands died.

In 2004 a giant Tsunami hit in the South Pacific, the waves wiped out entire islands and numerous villages. The death toll was over 200,000.

In 2008 there was a major earthquake in Sichuan Province, China. Almost 70,000 were killed, including many children whose schools collapsed on top of them. Also in 2008, Cyclone Nargis, struck the Irrawaddy Delta in Burma killing over 145,000 people and devastating the country's former capital and largest city, Rangoon, making it Burma's deadliest natural disaster in history, the costliest North Indian cyclone on record, and the second deadliest North Indian cyclone in recorded history.

And just over a month ago, we all witnessed the devastating effects of the earthquake in Haiti, which claimed over a quarter of a million lives. It was like thousands of other catastrophes

2 The conclusion is adapted from *A Godward Life: Savoring the Supremacy of God in all of Life* by Dr. John Piper, pages 268ff.

in history, but it caused me, more than usual, to search the Scriptures for help in dealing with it.

The Bible reveals to us that life is given freely to us by God. Life is not something we possess by virtue of our merit. We do not “own” our life in relation to God. Life is God’s and is on loan to us freely so that we might enjoy glorifying God with it. It is always and totally at His disposal, never rightfully at our disposal. Life belongs to God.

The Bible reveals that God is the one who takes life just as He is the one who gives it. As God’s rightful possession, life is God’s to take when He pleases. He does not need to consult with anyone else because His authority as Creator, Sustainer, and Owner of life puts it totally at His disposal. He is not doing any evil when He takes back the life He gave whenever He chooses.

There is a sense in which God’s sovereignty overrules but also uses the death-dealing work of Satan in the tragedies of the world. We must come to terms with both the sovereignty of God and the truth that Satan, on God’s leash, is involved in the miseries of pain and death.

When Jesus was asked about a tragedy in which a tower in Siloam fell on eighteen people and killed them, He answered, **Luke 13:4-5**, “... *do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?*” ⁵ *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*”

This means that God’s purpose in suddenly taking life is not necessarily to show a group’s greater sinfulness. Rather, in dealing with them in a just way according to His authority and His ownership of life and His right to rule the world as Lord of all things, one of His purposes is to warn the rest of us **that our lives are in His hands** and that we should repent of sin and be ready at any time to die.

Ezekiel 18:32 tells us that God says, “*For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.*” The heart of God is large and complex. He’s able to be grieved over the pain of his creatures, while at the same time ordaining that this very pain and death take place for a higher and greater purpose that brings Him more joy than if he had run the world in another way.

Why is that? Because we need judgment if we’re to have salvation.

Without the doctrine of divine judgment we have no doctrine of divine salvation. Without a serious doctrine of divine judgment, of God’s holiness and justice demanding his punishment of the wicked, nothing of any real importance is left. There’s no great salvation because there’s no fate worse than death to be saved from. There’s no great Savior because we have no need of such a figure. There’s no Christmas, no incarnation of God the Son, because whatever problems man may have they’re not so much that only the mighty God can solve them and certainly are not so much as require the suffering and death of the God-man. Christ was bearing our judgment on the cross, but what is the point of that if there is no such judgment? No judgment, No Christmas, No Easter, No salvation.

Our response to these chapters, our response to the judgment of God, therefore should be to weep with those who weep and not to delight in the destruction of anyone in this age, but to extend the love of Christ and the hope of salvation as long as we can to those who live. When confronted with the question why, we must look to the God who has absolute rights over us and take heed to ourselves knowing that our time will be soon.

Let us repent and live utterly for the glory of the One who made us for the joy of knowing Him and showing His glory. Let us gather as many of the perishing as we can into His banquet hall while there is still time.

After all, He's the King.
And He's coming again.
And He's calling us to be ready.

Think about that. You need to pray.
Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing Jesus to us. For those of us who need a new perspective on our world, on our life, on all those questions we can't answer this side of heaven, enable us to really see. Help us to focus on Jesus. Use these visions of Revelation to change us into people who trust You ... no matter the circumstances ... in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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2 Peter 3:14-15a, 17-18

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation ... You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.