

Prayers In Heaven/Judgment On Earth

Revelation 8:1-12

Introduction: 1) Few spiritual disciplines are more difficult to cultivate than the discipline of prayer. One reason is it is hard work. Another is we fail to see the immediate benefits. It seems to be wasted effort. However, that latter opinion is misguided and misinformed. Oswald Chambers got it right when he said, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.” If you doubt this, you need only look to Revelation 8 to see what God does with our prayers in the context of future and climatic spiritual warfare. What is the context?

2) Revelation 8-9 contains the 2nd great series of judgments; the 7 trumpets.

Revelation began with a greeting from the Trinity (1:1-8) and a glorious vision of the exalted Lord Jesus who walks among His churches (1:9-20). 7 letters to 7 specific historical churches comprise chapters 2-3, and then a significant turn takes place in 4:1. John is told, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” John is taken in the Spirit both to heaven and into the future as God shows, sign-i-fies, to His servant His plan for the consummation of history. Chapters 4-5 are a glorious vision of 2 parts: chapter 4 focuses on God the Father, the Lord of Creation. Chapter 5 focuses on God the Son, the Lord of Redemption. Thus by creation and redemption God has the right to do with this earth and its inhabitants as He pleases. Chapter 6 begins the divine account of the

Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, Daniel's 70th week. The 19th chapter will bring it to its rightful conclusion with the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His earthly millennial kingdom. Chapter 6 contained the seal judgments and introduced us to the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse. Chapter 7 is something of an interlude or parenthesis, a break in the action, that teaches us that: 1) in the midst of great judgment there is still mercy, 2) God is not through with the Jew, and 3) The Tribulation will also be a time of great revival as "a great multitude which no one could count" (7:9) will "wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Now, however, the judgment of God on planet earth resumes with the blowing of the trumpets. The 7th seal contains the 7 trumpets.

3) What unfolds is an amazing truth that our prayers ascend to heaven and unleash the power of God in judgment upon evil. They matter! They work for God's glory and our good. Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." I suspect, in light of Revelation, he had no idea how true his words were!

I. Jesus Christ has all authority 8:1-2

- It is well said, "It is often quietest before the storm." The stillness and silence can almost take your breath away in anticipation of what may come. Those words are appropriate when they are applied to the Trumpet Judgments of Revelation 8. Revelation 8:1 speaks of silence in heaven, but

only for a 1/2 hour, a short time. Judgment almost too great to imagine will quickly follow and when it is finished, 1/3 of God's glorious creation will be gone, destroyed by the God who made it.

- These judgments recall the plagues God poured out on Egypt and the story of Joshua and the battle of Jericho. Interestingly, in both God moves in response to the cries of His people. Now, God will do it again as the Sovereign Lord Jesus acts in response to the prayers of His people. The prayers of God's people are an important theme in Revelation. They were first mentioned in 5:8. In 6:10 we see martyred believers crying with loud voices for justice. Now in chapter 8, the prayers of the saints are noted again (vs. 3-4). In light of the judgments that have preceded (ch. 6) and those that will follow (chs. 8-9, 15-16), the response of King Jesus to the prayers of His people takes on an even greater significance.

1) His authority is awesome to contemplate 8:1

- “Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between His will and its accomplishment on earth” (Elisabeth Elliot).
- The Lamb who took the scroll from the Father in 5:7 and began to open the seals in 6:1 now breaks the 7th seal. All of heaven is suddenly silent “for about half an hour” (symbolic of a short time). The heavenly host wait with anticipation to see what the Lord Jesus, the Warrior Lion/Lamb

will do next as He judges the earth for its idolatries, immorality and rebellion against His rightful authority.

- Why is heaven silent? Some believe it allows time for God to hear the prayers of the saints in verses 3-4. That is certainly possible. What is more certain is, “It is a dramatic pause that makes even more impressive the judgments about to fall upon the earth” (Mounce, 170).
- Habakkuk 2:20: “The Lord is in His holy temple; let everyone on earth be silent in His presence.”

Zephaniah 1:7: “Be silent in the presence of the Lord God, for the Day of the Lord is near.

Zechariah 2:13: “Let all people be silent before the Lord, for He is coming from His holy dwelling.”

- John MacArthur says, “The hour of God’s final judgment had come – the hour when the saints will be vindicated, sin punished, Satan vanquished, and Christ exalted.” (238).

2) His authority is delegated to angels 8:2

- “We should wrestle in prayer and fasting for the things we know are God’s will in our lives and families and our church and our city and our world. But by and large we should probably leave it to God how he will

use angels to get his work done.” (John Piper, “Angels and Prayer,” 1-12-92).

- God does indeed use his angels to carry out his will. Some of the time it is in specific response to our prayers. Daniel 10 and an angel’s response to Daniel’s prayer makes this clear (see vs. 12-14). Angels and demons are engaged in warfare in the spiritual realm in a manner we could never truly imagine. Now, in 8:2, our sovereign Lord gives 7 trumpets to “the seven angels who stand in the presence of God.” The non-biblical Jewish book 1 Enoch 20:2-8 makes reference to 7 angels who stand before God and names them: Uriel, Raphael, Raquel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel and Remeil. Trumpets, according to Numbers 10, called the people together, announced war, and proclaimed special times and events. They were sounded at Mt. Sinai when the Law was given (Exodus 19:16-19), when Jericho fell (Joshua 6:13-16), when the king was enthroned (1 Kings 1:34, 39). A trumpet will sound at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and when Christ returns (Matthew 24:31). These in chapter 8 are eschatological trumpets of judgment. Christ, with all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18-20), summons his angels to carry out his will on earth.

II. The prayers of the saints are gathered in heaven

8:3-5

- “When there is no hope on the horizontal level; there’s always hope on the vertical level” (Adrianisms, vol. 2, 40). Prayer activates us and engages us in spiritual warfare in the present and also the future. And, it is not a battle, a war, lightly to be entered. Chuck Lawless of SEBTS notes 5 facets of what he calls “warfare prayer” in general. He writes:
 - 1) Warfare prayer is varied and intense.
 - 2) Warfare prayer is to be constant.
 - 3) Warfare prayer is in the Spirit.
 - 4) Warfare prayer is watching and persevering.
 - 5) Warfare prayer is for all the saints.
- Moving to our text David Platt, looking at warfare prayer in the context of Revelation 8-11, notes several aspects of the spiritual conflict we are to engage. He says:
 - 1) Our battle is fierce!

(There are demons who are fighting you and want to destroy you).
 - 2) Our prayers are effective!

(Our cries go up and His kingdom comes down).
 - 3) Our God is faithful!

(He will demonstrate His power, vindicate His people, extend His mercy, and uphold His justice). (Sermon, 9-16-12).

Most Christians do not consider prayer to be anything at all like this. But it is! Look now at the presence of our prayers in heaven and the power they unleash.

1) Our prayers rise before God in heaven 8:3-4

- “It is a good fall when a man falls on his knees” (Spurgeon, Sermon # 1992). “Another angel,” separate from the seven trumpeters, comes before the altar of God “with a gold incense burner” (cf. Ex. 30:1-10; 2 Kings 6:22; Heb. 9:4). We know this is the altar of incense because “He was given a large amount of incense to offer.” However, something unique and unusual is to be mixed with the incense as he offers it before “the gold altar in front of the throne.” It is “the prayers of all the saints!” Mixed, both the incense and the prayers of the saints rise as a sweet aroma and fragrance “in the presence of God.” Mounce again is helpful, “The scene in heaven suggest that there is something sacrificial about genuine prayer. Both the believer and his prayer enter the presence of God by way of the altar” (175).
- For centuries the saints of God have talked to God in prayer, praying for his kingdom, asking for his will to be done, for his kingdom to come on

earth. Those prayers have not been in vain. Those prayers have been heard. Those prayers that Satan sought to thwart and block by his demonic host got through to heaven. Now, they ascend before God and He delights in their fragrance. In some inexplicable, mysterious providence, they become the means whereby God moves into action and brings His kingdom. Hendriksen says, “The Throne-Occupant sees the sighs and sufferings, he hears the request and the thanksgiving of his children who are in the midst of tribulation. The angel understands this: he realizes that the prayers are heard. Hence, he takes the censer, now emptied of its incense, and fills it with fire of the altar, and empties it upon the earth; that is *God has heard the prayers of the saints, and the judgments upon earth are his answer to them*” (142).

2) Our prayers return in judgment to the earth 8:5-6

- “Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven, but getting God’s will done on earth. It is not overcoming God’s reluctance but laying hold of God’s willingness.” (Richard Trench, *“Yes” Will Come*).
- The angel takes the incense burner filled with fire from the altar and hurls it to the earth. There follows “rumblings of thunder, flashes of lightening, and an earthquake.” A storm is coming flowing out of the prayers of verses 3-4. The language of these verses is reminiscent of Sinai with its

thunders, lightnings, and earthquake (Exodus 19:16-19), and the vision of Ezekiel 10:2-7 where a man clothed in linen fills his hands with coals and scatters them over the city. Intercession has turned to judgment, not according to man's timetable, but God's! The angel priest casts fire upon the earth followed by harbingers of impending storm and disaster. The cosmos trembles before the presence and power of its Creator. A day of reckoning has arrived. "The 7 angels are prepared to blow" (v. 7).

- Romans 12:19 reminds us, "Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath; For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to Me, I will repay," says the Lord." (cf. Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30). There is coming a day when God will make things right. The trumpet judgments are a portion of that day. We need to wait on Him. He hears our prayers. He will not be late. He will be right on time.

III. Judgment on earth follows from our pleas to God 8:6-13

"God's delays aren't God's denials" (Adrianisms, vol. 1, 44).

- In Matthew 6:9-13 we find what we call "the model prayer." There Jesus tells us in v. 10 to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That prayer is once more being answered in the trumpet judgments of Revelation 8-9. The seal judgments of chapter 6 saw the destruction of 1/4 of the earth (6:8). The trumpet judgments will see the

destruction and devastating of 1/3 of the earth. The word “third” occurs 13 times in chapter 8 and each is like the tolling of a bell with the ring of judgment.

- The precise nature of each trumpet is not altogether clear, though the end results are quite plain and tragic. The judgments recall the plagues of Exodus, which God visited upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The first 4 of chapter 8 are natural in that they affect the land, salt water, freshwater and stellar bodies. The 5th and 6th trumpets of chapter 9 unleash demonic forces that torment, then kill. The 7th trumpet (11:15-19) will constitute the 7 bowls of chapter 16. In the blowing of the first 4, four facets of God’s sovereignty over His creation are revealed as He acts in response to the pleas of His people.

1) God is sovereign in judgment over the earth 8:6-7

- When we depend upon our organizations, we get what organizations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do; when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon God, we get what God can do. (A.C. Dixon, *Expect Great Things*, 221).
- The first of the angels “prepared to blow.” He blew and “hail and fire, mixed with blood, were hurled to the earth. So a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was

burned up.” The imagery is that of the 7th plague God brought on Egypt in Exodus 9:13-35, with allusion also to Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:19). “Burned up” occurs 3 times. Blood is probably symbolic of terrible judgment. Whatever this is, great devastation follows this cosmic storm that had its genesis in heaven (Mounce, 178). That it is 1/3 indicates that, “although God is bringing punishment on the earth; it is not as yet complete and final. The purpose of the visitation is to warn people of the full wrath of God yet to fall, and in so doing to bring them to repentance” (Mounce, 178). Tragically most won’t as 9:20-21 painfully reveals. These words fulfill what Jesus promised and prophesized in Luke 21:25-28. Patterns of this judgment have occurred throughout history. However, in the Day of the Lord, it reaches a crescendo. As Osborne says, “nothing will escape this terrible judgment” (351). Whatever these images represent, the impact should rattle our bones in awe of this God.

2) God is sovereign in judgment over the seas 8:8-9

- “Prayer releases the grip of Satan’s power; prayerlessness increases it. That is why prayer is so exhausting and so vital” (Alan Redpath, *Expect Great Things*, 223). Romans 8:22 reminds us that all creation has been groaning since Adam and Eve were defeated by Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). One can only imagine its pain during this time of horrific

and cataclysmic judgment. However, in response to the prayers of the saints, these judgments are actually Satan's defeat and a prelude to Creation's redemption.

- John sees something “like a great mountain ablaze with fire hurled to the earth.” The apocalyptic vision is not describable with human language. The results, however, are. “A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” The judgment recalls the first Egyptian plague where “the rivers were turned to blood, killing the fish and making the water undrinkable” (Ex. 7:20-21)” (Mounce, 180). Again, the judgment is partial not total. Time is running out for the defiant and idolatrous earth-dwellers, but it is not completely gone. Not yet.
- Osborne notes, “The sea lanes were called the lifeblood of Rome because the Romans were so dependent on the sea for both food and commerce (see also Rev. 18:17-19). Thus, this is even more devastating than the first plague. It is difficult to imagine such an extensive apocalyptic judgment” (353-354).

3) God is sovereign in judgment over the rivers and springs 8:10-11

- “No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it” (Guy King, *That Is Not Possible*).

Now the 3rd trumpet blows and a great, blazing star named “Wormwood” falls from heaven on a third of the rivers and springs. The waters become wormwood and many people died from its bitter poison.”

- This judgment parallels 1) the 1st Egyptian plague that contaminated the fresh water supply (Ex. 7:20) and 2) it is a reversal of the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness at Marah where the Lord made bitter water drinkable (Ex. 15:22-25). The word “wormwood” appears only here in the New Testament. It “is mentioned eight times in the Old Testament, where it is associated with bitterness, poison, and death (Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4; Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7; 6:12)” (MacArthur, 249).
- That it is a “third” again tells us it is partial. That it comes from heaven tells us it is a sovereign act of God in response to the pleas of His people in 8:3-4.
- It is not clear whether John intends the star to be understood naturally or supernaturally, as an angel (cf. 9:1) or possibly an asteroid. Again, its end result is indisputable. The springs and the rivers that provide our drinking water are poisoned and many died as a result. The water becomes bitter and poisonous and the inhabitants of the earth become even more familiar with the bitterness and death of God’s just judgment.

- “God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it” (John Wesley).

The 4th trumpet sounds and a third of the stellar heavens are darkened with an accompanying effects of darkness on the earth. This plague looks back to the 9th plague in Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23). Amos 5:18 teaches us, “The day of the Lord is darkness, not light.” Joel 2 says the day of the Lord will be “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” The darkness of the 4th trumpet anticipates the demonic activity of chapter 9 and even greater sorrow.

- We would be foolish to press the details of what we read in a crassly literal way. We would be equally foolish to simply symbolize these images away. They are symbols, but they represent real and catastrophic eschatological realities. The bottom line as David Platt well says in this: “do not put your ultimate hope in created things. All things – even the most secure things like the light of the sun – all things in heaven and on earth are passing away” (sermon). Osborne summarizes well the impact God intended to make on finite humans who too often wish to shake their fist in God’s face and scream, “I’ll live my life my way!” He says, “The purpose of the first four trumpet judgments is primarily to disprove the earthly gods and to show that Yahweh alone is on the throne. By recapitulating the Egyptian plagues, God wants to make his omnipotence

known to the world and to show the futility of turning against him. Each of these judgments addresses a different aspect of life in the ancient world and in the modern world as well. The first shows that the material world is no answer, the second and third address the sea trade, including food supplies, and the fourth focuses on life itself in the heat and light of the celestial bodies. The four together prove that those who live only for this world have chosen foolishly, for only in God is there true life. Earthly things turn on us, and we dare not depend on them.” (357).

Conclusion: Prayer is an action of finite sinful humans that in some amazing and mysterious way moves into action a sovereign and omnipotent God. I cannot explain it, but I do believe it. Spurgeon said, “Prayer is a gift from God as well as *appeal* to God. Every prayer for mercy is not a cause, but a result! Divine grace is at the back of prayer and at the base of prayer” (Spurgeon, Sermon # 1992). This is true on the cosmic level. It is also true on the personal level. Prayer is what moves God to judge the world and vindicate His saints. Prayer is also what moves God to save a soul and bring them into His kingdom. There is coming a day when you will either have the mark of the Beast (13:16-18) or the mark (the Name) of the Lamb (2:17; 14:1). Time is short. Judgment is coming. Salvation is as near as a prayer: “Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved!” (Rom. 10:13).

