

Prayers and Silence

Revelation 8:1-13



The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Prayers and Silence

Revelation 8:1-13

Main Idea: God hears the prayers of His people and brings justice to all creation.

At the end of Revelation 7, the patriarchs of the Old Testament, the multitudes, the angels, the creatures and everyone else worships the Lord as the invasion of Heaven into earth continues. There is a taste of heaven that the world receives (and shudders as it does so). The judgment of God is being poured out as the seals on the scroll are being opened. Previously, there was an extended pause after the sixth scroll. Now the judgment continues. The Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah opens the seventh scroll. Yet, for all the raucousness of the previous seals, heaven falls strangely silent. Events unfold and an angel ministers at the altar, dealing with the prayers of the saints before the throne. There is a mixture of prayers of the people and the offerings of the heavenly beings. The holiness of God and the prayers of the people unite in one and are returned to earth. The prayer we have all been taught by Christ Himself plays out in this moment; "your kingdom comes, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..."

With the breaking of the Seventh Seal, the angels who had marched out and were issued trumpets and proclamations of judgment sounded loudly from the heavens. The seals maintained a subtlety to them reflecting the brokenness of man's heart and creation that would drive a world to tear itself apart. However, the sounding of the trumpets loses a fair amount of that subtlety as their effects on the world are catastrophic. With each blast of the trumpet, the world feels the effects of a sovereign God who reigns victorious over all creation. God further establishes Himself as the King over all and the One able to pronounce judgment and bring justice to all creation.

Silence

While there may be times that God feels silent or far off, usually

this is only a case where we have difficulty hearing. Rarely does heaven remain silent for those who desire to hear. This makes the silence of heaven in this sense all the more haunting. Every previous scene painted a picture of activity and loud, abundant praise, but at the start of Revelation 8, heaven grows quiet for 30 minutes. During this time, an angel stood at the altar with the golden censer. This angel presented the prayers of the people to God. It embodied the practices of the temple in the Old Testament that pointed to this moment. The prayers of people arose to God with a strength and power beyond what man could offer. Even more, the prayers prayed in the fullness of the Spirit of God were poured out on the earth. Prayer aligns our thoughts with God's thoughts and returns with the power and strength of God behind them. The same pearls of thunder, rumblings, and flashes of lightning accompany the prayers as the angels sends them colliding with earth. The holiness of the prayers of the saints stems only from God and, just as everything else has shown itself to be unfit to bear His holiness of God, the world reacts in much the same way.

Silence, for many people, can be haunting, especially when there is a particular hope of hearing someone. You wait in eager expectation, almost holding your breath until the response comes. In a spiritual sense, this time, no matter how short or how long, can feel like an eternity. Our souls long for the end when we will be one with our Heavenly Father. Thus, we cry out the same prayers as did the martyrs from the breaking of the fifth seal that God would bring His judgment to completion. During whatever times of silence we may endure, we can persevere knowing that God hears our prayers. Even during the silence, God hears us and awaits His perfect timing. We may not always be able to see God's hands or hear His voice, but that does not mean His presence has departed. God still hears our prayers and returns the prayers of the people with strength and might.

The Reigning of Judgment and Justice

The trumpet blasts represent the pronouncement of God's judgment on the world. In the first trumpet blast, hail and fire mixed with blood is thrown down on the earth burning one third of all

the earth. With the second a burning mountain was thrown into the sea destroying a third of all of the creatures in the sea. The third, a blazing star falls from heaven effecting one third of the waters making it bitter (wormwood) killing many people because of it. The fourth blots out a third of the sun, moon, and stars in the sky. In each case, 1/3rd of all creation is destroyed in the process (a number that will become more significant in Revelation 12). While there is debate as to what John exactly saw and whether he was able to fully comprehend it, thus making it either symbolic imagery or literal, God's sovereignty to maintain justice on the earth is upheld. Just as at the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the stars in the sky, the separation between land and water, the air and the animals, God is now undoing creation by that same hand. The world, through the effects of sin, is unholy and undeserving of the presence of God.

Furthermore, the prayers of the saints asking for God to avenge their spilt blood from Revelation 6:9-10 is finding its fulfillment in the trumpets. Their prayers have been heard that the fullness of God would come and pronounce judgment on the world. While this may seem harsh, this prayer and the judgment of God should be sought eagerly by every believer. Although no one is innocent by their own actions, through faith in Jesus Christ, we stand as those who are sealed with the mark of the Holy Spirit and will be spared (Revelation 7). Where we were once deserving of the justice we see as God demonstrates his sovereignty over the world, now, we have been declared righteous and Holy by the blood of Christ. The scene paints a bleak picture. But it must be read as following chapter 7. God is withholding judgment from those whose sins have been bought by the blood of the lamb who declares judgment. He is the propitiation, the payment that satisfies, the fulfillment of the consequences of our sin.

For all of the chaos and destruction of the first four trumpets, Revelation 8 ends with a harrowing warning. "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 8:13, ESV). The eagle, representing the messenger of God, knows what is coming for those who have not submitted to God. As tough as the previous judgments have been, woe to the person who must endure the next three.

Discussion Questions

- As the angel hurls the prayers of the saints to the earth, what effect does this have on the earth? Where have you seen this description previously in the bible? What does this tell us about the power of our prayers?
- How is your prayer life currently? Does understanding the weight and power of prayer affect your desire to pray?
- When have you experienced the silence of God? Describe what happened and what you did during this time?
- What part of the world does each trumpet affect and how much was destroyed from it?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
- How does God demonstrate His sovereign nature over all creation? What does this tell us about the Kingship and authority of God?
- Define propitiation: _____

- We have access to a God who reigns over existence and creation, who hears our prayers, and works for the good of those who follow Him. How does this help us to follow Him? How does this help us persevere through the times of silence?