

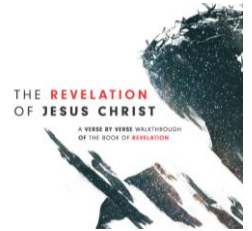
Title: Revelation, Part 16: Spiritual Power

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 8:1-13

Big idea: End times events remind us of three powers that help us become more like Jesus.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 7: 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.



One of the joys of being a pastor is the opportunity to spend a lot of time in the Scriptures to prepare messages. Preaching and teaching and leadership are the top roles I play. And studying Scripture is not meant to simply be an intellectual exercise. Rather, what should happen in us is this...that both our minds and our hearts are increasingly open to God's Spirit taking the truth of Scripture and using it to [change us, transform us, help us become more like Jesus in character and conduct](#). And, even though Revelation is largely about future events which require simply understanding what they mean, it holds much truth to change our hearts, to transform us so that we become more like Jesus.

Here's today's **Big Idea: End times events remind us of three powers that help us become more like Jesus.**

I believe that every person who is a committed follower of Jesus here wants to become more like him. As we step deeper in this book and we see these fantastic, other worldly images, they will become springboards to help us become more like Jesus.



In the prior chapter we learned about these images that appeared as Jesus opened each seal of this scroll. Each image represents events that will happen as we approach the end times, including war between nations, civil war, famine, disease, and increased persecution of Christians.

John stopped before he described Jesus opening seal 7 and there was a pause or interlude. But in this chapter, Jesus opens the final seal and we see angels blowing trumpets that prelude more terrible calamities that will come on the earth. This chapter today only explains the first four of these 7 trumpets.

Some general thoughts to keep in mind about these calamities that we'll see in the weeks ahead. We have a long stretch coming up that describes the not so pretty future.

1. John explains similar calamities from different perspectives.

Many biblical scholars say that these seals looked at the calamities from the perspective of believers and the trumpets from the perspective of unbelievers.

2. These ongoing calamities will intensify over time.

These are kinds of events that we see happen on an ongoing basis in the world but will be more common and more severe as the end times approach.

3. These calamities both judge the wicked and call unbelievers to repentance.

You'd think that when catastrophe and calamity affect a person far from God, that they would turn to Him. Most don't. A few do.

4. These calamities don't symbolize God's final, final judgment.

They are meant to be serious warnings but not final doom. The trumpets warn and then we have later in Revelation 7 bowls of judgment that are poured out.

In this chapter John introduces us to another group of 7 (like the seven seals we've seen), 7 trumpets. I'm going to show you a part of the Bible Project animation which sets up the next two chapters. Then we will read the chapter.

video <https://bibleproject.com/learn/revelation/> **8.08-8.51**

Rev. 8.1-13

Rev. 8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. ³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. ⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. ⁶ Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. ⁷ The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. ⁸ The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. ¹⁰ The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky 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 turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. ¹² The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. ¹³ As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

Rev. 8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Half an hour is not 30 minutes of clock time, but symbolic for a short time. Scholars differ on what they believe this silence was for.

- some sort of sabbatical rest before the millennium
- a time to reflect over this vision of the throne room we just got
- a period of rest before the rest of the visions are given
- a special pause for the prayers of the persecuted Christians to be heard
- to symbolize the awe and dread for what is about to happen
- a sign of God judgment because the OT would often use silence as a sign for judgment

Probably the best way to understand this silence is reflected in this phrase we use: the calm before the storm.

² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

Their trumpets were not modern-day trumpets but most likely a shofar, a ram's horn used in Jewish life for several reasons.

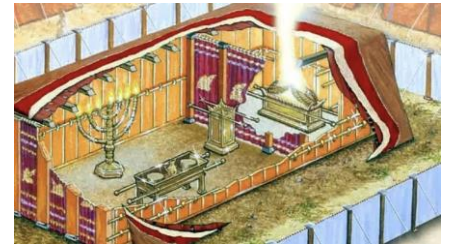
- to sound an alarm of approaching danger
- as part of the fanfare of special celebrations like the inauguration of a new king
- to announce the death of someone notable
- a summons for soldiers to gather for battle. It would be akin to the old church bells ringing to let the community know of significant events.

In this case, these angels will blow their trumpets to announce a new woe or calamity that is coming.

There's a brief break in the explanation of these trumpets with vs 3-5. It's a transition section that concludes the seals and introduces the trumpets.

³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.

A Jewish person understood what incense was all about. In early Judaism, before they had the temple, they had a portable temple called the Tabernacle. You've seen this before. The final temple was modeled after this one.



In these visions, John alludes to what was in the tabernacle.

This is one of those allusions. An altar was placed right in front of this curtain that separated the rest of the tabernacle from the most holy place where God was seen to dwell.

And on top of this altar, called the altar of incense, were these golden bowls that were filled with incense and used in their worship and seen here as representing our prayers.

This is a strong assurance that the suffering's prayers are not forgotten because God will perfectly vindicate their persecutors.

⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

As incense rises up so do our prayers rise up to God. These are our prayers and the prayers of the martyrs. He says that they are prayers of the saints, that is believers. They are not hollow, meaningless prayers. Let me describe a hollow prayer.

When I was in the university in my junior year, I took a trip behind the iron curtain that was sponsored by the school. Some of you may only vaguely know what the iron curtain means. It was a political boundary line between free western Europe and communist eastern Europe before communism fell. Ga Tech sponsored an annual USA-USSR cultural exchange program. And, we got credit for the trip after we wrote a paper about our experience.

It was a defining moment for me in many ways. I came to realize how dead-end communism is and it made me even more appreciate for the freedom we currently experience in the west. During 6 weeks, I visited several republics in the soviet Union and E Germany, Poland, Czech, Romania, and Hungary. We often travelled by train. In each communist country the tour guide took our passports in case we wanted to stay in a country. I never understood why anybody would want to stay in a communist country.

Well, when we were in E Germany, while travelling by train, we made a quick stop in a town for maybe 10 minutes. Then we took off again on the train. About 30 minutes later, we were wondering where a couple of our guys were. We hadn't seen them. After we discussed the matter and the tour guide asked us questions, we realized that those 2 guys had messed around at the prior station, taken too long, and had never gotten back on the train. And, they didn't have their passports.

I will never forget our East German communist guide when she realized that two of the group were still back there. She quickly did the sign of a cross like a quick prayer to the God she didn't believe existed because she was an atheist.

That's a hollow prayer. However, God does the prayers of a lost person who realizes their lostness and asks God to save them.

The guys finally were able to catch up with us. One of the guys said that when he realized that the train had left and they had not id nor could they speak German, he took up smoking.

With the political situation in Rome at the time that resulted in the persecution of those Christians, they were probably very fervent in prayer.

⁵ Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

A censer was used in the OT rituals, and it's used in some churches today.

Priests would put coals into the censer and then sprinkle incense made of 5 spices on the coals which would release the smell.

And, once a year on the day of atonement the high priest would go behind this curtain into the Holy of Holies (where God was) to put blood of a sacrificed goat on the covering of the Ark of the Covenant as temporary payment for the sins of the people.

The altar of incense was critical to this function, as the smoke and incense preceded the high priest coming into the Holy of Holies and it provided temporary covering of the prayers of God's people until he could sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial goat on the mercy seat.

The thunder and lightning and an earthquake refers to a big theological word I'm going to give you: theophany. A theophany is a visible manifestation of God. These things are reminiscent of when the Hebrew people were in the wilderness and God made his presence known to them with similar earthly manifestations to assure them that God was present with them. Here God heard the prayers of his people amidst their tribulation and will bring judgment on their persecutors.

6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

They were going to blow them one at a time. They are prophetic foreshadowing of God's judgment against evildoers. They demonstrate hardness of heart by many unbelievers.

Some scholars believe that the four trumpets in this chapter represent four epochs or time periods of the destruction of Roman power. Historians can point to four significant enemy attacks that continued to shrink Roman power.

The first five trumpets are patterned after five of the plagues of Exodus. God sent the plagues to prove His sovereign presence and power and to show the powerlessness of other so called Egyptian gods.¹

These four trumpets all point to a shrinking deficiency of the world's resources as the end times approach. They affect three parts of created order, earth, air, and water suggesting that creation is being systematically undone as we approach the end times. These first four trumpets affect the physical world and the next three the spiritual.

Here are [the calamities each trumpet announces](#).

- [Trumpet 1: effects on the food supply](#) caused by famine, fire, and war. Last year my daughter who lives in California had to evacuate because of the fires. When she returned it looked like miles and miles of land was scorched like a bomb had dropped.
- [Trumpet 2: effects on the ocean](#) (animals die, ships destroyed) which in turn effects food supply, commerce, and the economy.
- [Trumpet 3: effects on fresh water](#) making it toxic which causes sickness and death, perhaps related to famine.
- [Trumpet 4: atmospheric disturbance](#) perhaps a solar flare, meteorite, or something that diminished the light we get which is very important. And the bible often uses darkness to refer to evil.

Every disaster in our world is an opportunity for unbelievers to think about eternity and where they will spend it. That's one of the purposes of these calamities we will see as we get closer to the end times.

He ends this chapter with this.

¹ Osborne, G. R. (2016). [Revelation: Verse by Verse](#) (p. 149). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

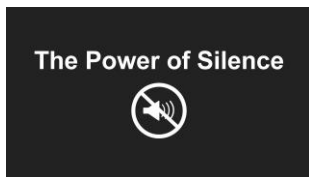
13 As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”

The significance of this must have been devastating to John. The calamities unleashed by the blasts of the first four trumpets were bad enough. But this eagle was essentially say the worst is yet to come.

Ok, pretty foreboding, huh. Remember, though, that in the end Jesus wins and he restores things back to their pristine condition.

So, back to the big idea.

Big Idea: End times events remind us of three powers that help us become more like Jesus.



The Power of Silence

Remember this verse, *Rev. 8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

Silence is powerful but for many, it's something they want to avoid.

In studies at Harvard University, college-aged participants were asked to sit in a room and “entertain themselves with their thoughts.” They were allowed to think about anything. Before they entered the research room, they had to leave behind anything that could distract them, such as books, cell phones, and writing materials. In one part of the experiment, the researchers attached an electrode to each of the subjects’ ankles, allowing the students to self-administer a mild electrical shock. One-third of the men and one-fourth of the women were so uncomfortable with their thoughts and silence that they preferred a distraction, even if it meant shocking themselves. One participant shocked himself 190 times. The researchers concluded that many people would rather do something, even if it's potentially harmful, than simply be with their thoughts and be silent.

Silence, however, is a very powerful and helpful experience to help us become more like Jesus. We live in a world that bombards our senses 24/7 but we weren't made for that. When we can experience and live in silence, it is healing to our souls. And sometimes we simply need to be silent before God.

Look at these verses.

Ecclesiastes 3:7 There is...a time to be silent and a time to speak,

Habakkuk 2:20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

Psalms 46:10 Be still and know that I am God.

Silence can help us become more like Jesus.



The Power of our Senses

Throughout Revelation John is describing things about him and his world that we know about through our senses. We smell incense, we hear trumpets, we see this throne room, the wormwood mentioned in relationship to fresh water in this chapter tastes bitter.

God gave us bodies that interact with him and his creation. In the creation account God said after creating Adam and Eve that this part of His creation was not just good but very good.

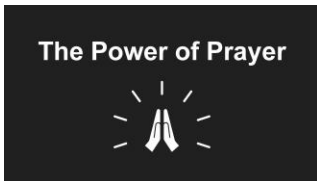
God made us a unified, wholistic beings. We are not over here body and over here soul. We are one unified amazing, created being.

In the New Testament era the Pharisees taught that the soul existed in contrast to another religious group called Sadducees who didn't. Both Jesus and Paul clearly sided with the Pharisees' view. They both believed that we have/are a soul that can exist independent of our body. We live in a world that includes both the material (i.e., our bodies and brains) and the immaterial (our souls, God, angels and demons).

God has combined earthy stuff in bodily form and spiritual power to make holistic, living human individuals with physical senses. And he promises brand new bodies that will live forever.

God created Adam as a living soul forming him from the dust of the earth and giving him the breath of life. Adam did not have a soul but was a soul formed of earth and spirit.

Appreciating our senses and recognizing they are God given gifts that let us interact with Him and his creation is a powerful way we can become more like Jesus.



The Power of Prayer

In this chapter John parallels our prayers to incense with a pleasing aroma to God. The Psalmist wrote,

Psalm 141:2 May my prayer be set before you like incense;

God delights in our prayers. We grow when we pray. Things happen when we pray. James wrote.

James 5:16 The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results

Prayer is the God-ordained conduit through which he has determined to channel his sovereign power and response to the concerns of the saints²

He loves our prayers. He wants our prayers. Prayer things and changes us.

‘What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny?

Here is the astonishing answer: the prayer of the saints and the fire of God. That means that 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’ (Torrance).³

So, [The three powers](#)

1. [The Power of Silence](#)
2. [The Power of Senses](#)
3. [The Power of Prayer](#)

How about trying this this week. Go be in nature, a park setting, a forest, by a lake and hopefully not a lot of people around. Use your senses to soak up God’s magnificent creation, sit in quietness, in silence, and pray. Do that often and you will see Jesus transform you.

² Patterson, P. (2012). [Revelation](#). (E. R. Clendenen, Ed.) (Vol. 39, p. 209). Nashville, TN: B&H.

³ Morris, L. (1987). [Revelation: an introduction and commentary](#) (Vol. 20, p. 120). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.