The Seven Trumpets

Revelation 8:1-9:21

Key Verse: 8:6 “Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

 Last Sunday I received a call from Dr. Augustine Suh, who used to be with us and now works at the UBF headquarters in Chicago. He commented on my sermon, especially on the rapture of Christians before the seven year’s tribulation. He said that there are four main Christian beliefs about the millennium, and our UBF ministry stands by the theory of A-millennium. A-millennium means that there is no specific millennium before Jesus’ second coming. In other words, we are now in the era of millennium. There are other three theories of millennium: *pre-millennium*, which means that Christ returns before the millennium comes; *dispensational millennium*, which means that Christians will rapture before the seven year’s tribulation and then Jesus returns before the millennium comes; *post-millennium*, which means that the millennium comes first, then Jesus returns. Do you remember which theory I interpreted Revelation from last week? Yes, I interpreted chapters 4-7 based on the *dispensational millennium*, which many nondenominational evangelical churches in the US believe. But it is up to you, which theory of the millennium you believe. It is not necessary here to argue which one is right and which one is wrong. The important message is that Jesus will come again and we should be prepared and ready to welcome him. It does not really matter whether the millennium comes before Jesus’ return or after his return. The important thing is whether we can live in the kingdom of heaven or not, whether we are washed by the blood of Jesus or not, whether our white robes are prepared in heaven or not, whether our names are written in the book of life or not. We believe that we all are resurrected and will be changed like angels just as Jesus is.

 Studying the book of Revelation is not easy and simple, and its interpretation often causes conflict and division. It is like interpreting another’s dream. In fact, even John Calvin and Martin Luther did not write commentary books about Revelation. So, we should be humble and prayerful before we study this book. As we heard in the introduction of Revelation, in UBF we are recommended to interpret Revelation with the combined view. The combined view means that we respect all different views and incorporate the merits of each view and accept it with objective consensus. For example, in Revelation there are several series of wars, disasters, and judgments on this earth, but we believe that the major symbols of Revelation repeat a pattern depicting the suffering of God’s people, judgment against God’s enemies, and the triumph of Christ. This is relevant to anyone, from the early church to present day and into the future, and everyone agrees with this.

 Let’s go back to today’s passage. Today’s passage is the second cycle of judgment based on the Seven Trumpets. In chapter 6 we studied about the Seven Seals. Gods’ wrath was revealed when the six seals were broken. Today God’s wrath is revealed when the Seven Trumpets are blown. Still, the seventh seal is not opened, yet.

What happened when the seventh seal is opened? Look at 8:1-5. “***When he opened 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, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand. 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***.” (8:1-5) There was complete silence for 30 minutes in heaven after all creatures in the universe joined the heavenly chorus. This silence reminds us of God’s sabbath after his six days of creation. During this period God plans for future work through the seven angels with the seven trumpets. Before the seven angels blow their trumpets, an angel who took a golden censer, offered the incense with the prayers of God’s people to God. It is amazing that our prayers which we offered to God will go up to the throne of God in heaven. God never forgets or ignores his people’s prayer on this earth, but answers them in his appointed time. Last Sunday we shared our prayer topics for the new year. I encourage you to pray, not only for yourself, but also for each other. I believe that our prayers for ourselves and for others will reach the throne of God and be stored in the golden bowls in heaven. Amen!

When the angel threw the censer filled with fire from the altar to earth, it became the signal for blowing the seven trumpets. What happened when the first trumpet was blown? Look at verse 7. “***The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on 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***.” The plague with hail reminds us of the 4th judgment against Egyptians in Exodus 9:23-26. The hail with fire mixed with blood burned a third of earth, a third of its trees, and all of its green grass. This is the environmental catastrophe which brings the immediate and global shortage of oxygen and food.

 What happened when the second trumpet was blown? Look at verses 8-9. “***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, and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.***” Now God’s wrath moved from the earth to the sea. When the second trumpet was blown, the third of the sea was destroyed, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. As you know, more than 50 % of oxygen on earth is produced by our oceans. But, a third of the oceans will be destroyed. People will suffer more from the shortage of oxygen. Those who enjoy seafood will be frustrated, and those who are in the luxurious cruise ships will be buried under the sea with their ships like *The Titanic*

 Look at verses 10-11. “***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—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.***” The third trumpet caused the destruction of rivers and water. When the third trumpet was blown, a great blazing star, named Wormwood, fell to the rivers and springs, and turned the waters bitter. Those who drank the bitter water died. People now suffer from lack of water while they suffer from shortage of oxygen and food. In 1986 there was a great explosion in a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine. More than 8,000 were killed during that short period and 2 million people are still suffering from radiation exposure. A hundred miles from the explosion site are still restricted. All land, trees, and water inside the several hundred miles are either contaminated or dead. It is estimated that it will take 20,000 years for the land to restore from radioactivity. Ironically, the name’ *Chernobyl’* means “Wormwood” in Ukraine.

What happened when the fourth trumpet sounded? Look at verse 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***.” This constellational turmoil is parallel to the events from the sixth seal. In 6:12 when the Lamb opened the sixth seal, the sun turned black and the whole moon turned blood red and the stars in the sky fell to earth. What will literally happen when the sun loses its light? This earth will face a severe change of temperature which will threaten lives on this earth. Trees and plants will not grow and considerably reduce the production of oxygen. The earth also will face meteor showers and the collision of asteroids. What a dreadful day and horrible future for the earth! But the angel said that that is not the end. He pronounced more judgment to come.

Look at verse 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***!” Here an eagle indicates an angel. The angel proclaimed more judgment by the blasts of the other three trumpets. What are they? Chapter 9:1-12 describes the events from the fifth trumpet sound. When the fifth angel sounded the trumpet, a star fell to the earth from the sky. (9:1) Here a star is Satan or a demonic spiritual being like a fallen angel. The star has the key to open the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like smoke from a gigantic furnace. It was like a volcanic explosion. The sun and sky were darkened by smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts which looked like horses came down to the earth. Verses 7-10 describes how the locusts look like. Their heads have crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. They had breastplates and their wings sounded like thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails of scorpions which had the power to torment people for five months. Their king’s name is *Abaddon* in Hebrew and *Apollyon* in Greek, which means Destroyer. What a grotesque and disgusting image of locusts! Locust were John the Baptist’s well-being food in the desert. I also enjoyed fried locusts for a source of protein when I was young. But at the day of the fifth trumpet locusts come as destroyer and torturers. Look at verse 4-5. “***They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that the sting of a scorpion when it strikes.”*** Locusts usually eat grass or plants and damage trees. But their mission was changed. They were asked to torture only people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They torture the people for five months with the sting of scorpions. Have you ever gotten bitten or stung by scorpions? I hear that those who are bitten by scorpions will die within an hour. But those who are bitten by these scorpions would not die. Look at verse 6. ***“During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them***.” They are not even allowed to die. The agony and pain are so terrible that they wanted to die, but death did not allow them to die. Without death they are being tortured by the stings of the locusts for five months. Some people foolishly brag about their willpower saying, “If there is a hell, I don’t care if I suffer there. I will not feel anything there anyway.” Still others say, “If there is a great tribulation, I will endure it. If not, I will die then.” Sorry to say that death will not allow them to die. They will be tortured until they are thrown into the burning hell where eternal torment awaits.

Still, there are controversial arguments about the definition of hell. Some say that hell is not a real place, but a symbolic location. How does a loving God let people suffer in the burning pits of hell? Of course, our God is loving, but he is also righteous. He saves and he judges as he did at Noah’s day. Jesus mentions the existence of a burning hell in Mark 9:43, “*If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out*.” John also said in Revelation 21:8, “*But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death*.” Amen!

What happened when the sixth trumpet was blown? Look at verses 13-17. When the sixth angel sounded the trumpet, there was a voice from God for the four bounded angels. “***Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates***.” These four angels are demonic spiritual beings who are asked to kill a third of mankind. The four angels have an enormous army, numbered at two hundred million. They are asked to kill a third of mankind through three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur that come out of their mouths. A third of earth is destroyed and a third of mankind killed through the second cycle of the wrath of God.

What is the response of those who remained on this earth? Look at verses 20-21. “***The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts***.” They did not repent or pay attention to God’s warnings. They continued to do evil, worshiping idols and killing each other. What is the purpose of studying these horrible dreadful judgments of the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets? It is to fear God and to repent. Through these series of terrible images and events God wants people to stop doing evil and to turn to him. Giving lessons is the purpose of education, but peoples’ hearts are stubborn and corrupted. When you violate the traffic law, you are fined and sent to a traffic school. When I attended a traffic school, they showed pictures of several terribly crushed vehicles which accompanied death. The purpose of showing these pictures is to give warning to drivers so that they may drive safely and carefully. In the same way God showed the horrible images of catastrophe through John’s revelation so that people might learn lessons and turn their hearts to the Lord. But they would not get lessons or repent. They kept doing evil.

Proverbs 1:7 says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction*.” These days people have no fear of God. They despise God’s word and his warning for judgment. They are like people who despise warnings and safety rules and will not wear mask during the pandemic and finally die. A few days ago, there were riots in Netherland by those who protested against their government which ordered a nationwide lock down for public safety. Paul the Apostle described them well in Romans 1. “*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness…For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened…Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them*.” (Ro 1:18-32) Some historians say that COVID-19 is the price of human beings’ sin who violated the creation order. We must hold fear of God and repent. We must stop doing evil and turn to God. We must not treat God’s warning lightly like the people of Noah’s day. Peter warned in his letter to the saints, “*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*.” (2 Pe 3:8-9) Let us pray that the fear of God may fill the hearts of all people on this earth! Amen.