

# **The Silence of God & The Cries of His Suffering Saints Revelation 8:1-6**

This morning we arrive at the eighth chapter of Revelation. This chapter may hold one of the most impacting truths we have studied so far in this final book of God's Word. This chapter before us contains the twin truths that explain what has happened to the prayers of every believer and saint of every age of human history. The twins truths are that God illustrates for us:

## **The Destination & Application of Our Prayers**

Each time we pray in Christ's Name that prayer rises before the Face of God our Father.

God our Father is seated in the Throne Room of the Universe as the Almighty Lord over all. He is the all powerful, He is the all knowing, He is the all caring, He is the all loving, and He is the always and everywhere present One to whom we are to unceasingly pray. So to make that lesson Jesus taught about us as His followers to “always pray”, we now come to the illustration of what happens when we pray.

This chapter explains prayer. Where prayers go. What God does with them; and how God answers prayers that don't get an immediately visibly response. For most believers the perplexing issue is when God does not answer what we ask Him to do, especially when it involves us as His children being oppressed, afflicted, unjustly treated, harmed, any horribly abused. When nothing happens from our perspective, what is happening up there where we can't see right now: the Throne of God.

What goes on at the Throne of Grace & Mercy, as the writer of Hebrews calls the Throne of God?

That mystery is here beautifully explained. Revelation 8 explains the Silence of God, and the Cries of His Suffering saints.

## **The Silence of God & The Cries of His Suffering Saints**

Silence after a profusion of sound can be deafening. Nothing stands out more clearly in Revelation 8 than the deafening, half-hour of silence that opens this next chapter.

In His carefully orchestrated plan to reveal Christ to His Church, God has given this chapter as one of the most vital places to connect the dots between the unanswered prayers of saints for thousands of years, and the perfect plans of God. First remember that this chapter comes to us, engineered by God to arrive right after seven chapters filled with:

## **The Sounds of Worship in Heaven**

The most obvious part of Heaven's silence during this half hour that John witnessed is the pause of all those sounds around the Throne. Think of all the sounds of Heaven.

Chapters 1-3: From those first moments on Patmos when this guided tour began, as John felt the sound of Christ's voice he describes as "a loud voice like a trumpet" (Rev. 1:10). John goes on to hear Christ's voice "like the sound of many waters" (1:15); and then after the tour of the churches John again hears a voice that was like "a trumpet" (4:1), that speaks so powerfully that when he sees the speaker, the Risen Christ, John faints (1:17). The scene that fills those chapters after the guided tour of the seven churches, is a very loud, cacophony of sounds:

Chapter 4 shows God's Throne surrounded by "thunderings and voices" (4:5); and the voices of cherubim unceasingly saying "Holy, Holy, Holy" (4:8); followed by the voices of the 24 elders repeatedly saying while face down after casting their crowns "You are worthy O Lord" (4:11).

Then chapter 5 introduces a "strong angel with a loud voice" (perhaps speaking above the voices of cherubim and 24 elders) saying "Who is worthy" (5:2). Then when Christ the Lamb steps forward, the cherubim fall down before Him with the 24 elders; and the elders sing the song "You are worthy" (5:9-10). That is quickly followed by the voices of myriads, uncountable angels, plus cherubim, plus 24 elders saying with a "loud voice" the seven part doxology: "Worthy is the Lamb" (5:12). Then joins into that already innumerable, and incomprehensible group "every creature" in Heaven, on Earth, and in the Sea say together a four-fold doxology "Blessings, honor, glory, and power" (5:13).

Chapter six doesn't see any quieting of the sounds around the Throne. The voices of the cherubim are "like thunder" (6:1), as one after the other they boom out "Come and see" (6:1,3,5,7). Then the voices of the martyrs, is witnessed as being that they "cried with a loud voice" petitioning God with the words "How long" (6:10).

Then after the almost six chapters of the sounds of Heavens, comes the:

## **The Sounds of Wrath upon Earth**

As God finally addresses the rebellion on Earth directly, chapter six ends with the terrifying sounds of every lost human around the globe crying out in deathly shrieks (6:16-17) at the heart-stopping, life-quenching rumbles of the mega-quake, the meteors streaking and crashing, the piercing clap of the sky splitting apart, and the echoes of destruction, as every land area across the globe lurches around (6:12-14).

Those are the sounds that fill the pages of Revelation's record, given by God. The scene God paints is loud, very loud:

It is loud like a trumpet blast.

It is loud like standing at the edge of a huge waterfall.

It is loud like the rolling, booming, and shaking of a huge thunderstorm.

It is loud like the voice of an angel, which made Roman soldiers frozen with terror in Matthew 28.

**It is louder than anything we can imagine as myriads of myriads, and countless waves of angelic and human creatures speak, chant, and sing.**

**Finally, it is a collection of sounds never before heard and the heavens and the earth begin to crumble under the weight of God's wrath.**

**Then, everything stops.**

Now comes the deafening scene of:

## **The Silence of God**

All those sounds of heaven and earth were intentionally made a part of the record, just as this statement about silence. God is using the contrast to point to what may be the *most vital* lesson in the whole book of the Revelation.

But can any doctrine be *most vital* in a book so huge, powerful, and overflowing as the twenty-two chapters of Revelation? Maybe. Here is the lesson. God's Word sets before us side-by-side, the silence of God and the poured out prayers and cries of suffering saints throughout all the ages. God shows us two incredible truths, and illustrates them for us in a way that is unforgettable.

God shows everyone of His saints for all of human history:

## **The Destination & Application of Our Prayers**

If we look carefully, the scene in 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Revelation explains to us one of the great mysteries of Heaven. We can see how God responds to the prayers of His saints. Prayer is huge in the life of a believer, and it is fitting that here in Revelation, God would give some all encompassing teachings about the role, purpose, and importance of prayer in our lives.

We are not disappointed. Just as Jesus commanded His disciples to pray the Disciples Prayer, that model for us about how to come before God in prayer, here God shows what He does with those prayers.

## **God Captures & Holds Every Prayer of His Saints**

This chapter shows how God captures and holds every prayer of every saint down through the ages.

The scene around God's Throne is set in chapters 4-7. Then there is a pause. Silence. Not momentary, but for approximately the same amount of time it takes for an Old Testament priest to refill the incense supply and rekindle the coals to keep that incense smoke rising before the curtain.

In the Old Testament, the altar of incense in Exodus 30:1-10, shows the priority of prayer. Prayer (symbolized by the smoke rising from the golden incense altar, was closest to the Holy of Holies. In other words, prayer was what brought us closest to God.

But, the fire that burned the incense to make in smoke came from the coals taken off the brazen altar where the sacrifices for sin were burnt. So prayer is based on the sacrifice of Christ. Prayers can be made because Christ opened the way. Prayers rise before the very Throne of God. Prayer offers us immediate and constant access to Him at all and at any time.

In Luke 1 we meet Zacharias, father of John the Baptist as he tended the altar of incense. In Exodus 30 we find the detailed specifications of all each priest had to do twice a day. The time usually allocated for that

rekindling of the coals, and refilling the incense spread on the coals was 30 minutes. So in Revelation 8 we are seeing an allusion to the prayers of the saints illustrated in the:

## **Tabernacle Incense Offerings**

One half hour, was the average time it took to maintain the golden altar of incense in the Tabernacle and Temple. Turn for a moment to Exodus 30. God was very specific about the placement and care of this golden altar. The spice mix that was used in the incense was regulated. God was saying prayer is so important that I want it done right.

Twice a day: once before the first offering, and then after the final offering was what God asked for. Almost as if the incense that portrayed the prayers before the Throne were the package through which the sacrifices arrived.

Look for a moment at the:

## **God's Tabernacle Layout**

The altar of incense was closest to the Holy of Holies. It was the place that God specified as closest to Him. That altar was the one spot a priest could go at anytime and be closest possible to God. The fire was to never go out, just like our prayers are never to cease.

But what was that special golden altar of the Temple (and Tabernacle) furniture for anyway? The answer is the great and perhaps most powerful lesson.

Prayer is the greatest tool, weapon, and resource we have.

Prayer lifts us before the very face of God.

Jesus our Intercessor opens the door as our prayers rise.

The Spirit of God holds, shapes, edits and delivers those prayers to the Father.

The entire Trinity is totally involved in our prayers.

## **Prayer Connects Us to the Throne**

Prayer was taught and commanded by Jesus as His constant tool for tuning our hearts, focusing our minds, and guiding our lives. Even those stages of prayer we learned in Matthew 6 are so evident now as we think of the destination of prayer.

Jesus told us when we prayer to first focus on where they were headed: Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Prayers are sent to God the Father, seated on the Throne, surrounded by the awesome reverence of Heaven.

There is one thing we are told to always do, remember? Praying always is how Paul says it in Ephesians 6:18. We are to pray without ceasing as Paul also said (1 Th. 5:17). Were those just words of hyperbole? Or is the obedient giving of our selves to Biblical praying the greatest source of blessing, growth, peace, and power?

This morning Revelation 8 may give us the answer. Please open there and stand with me as we enter before God's Throne and see what God does with prayers, what God thinks of prayers, and how God uses our prayers in His eternal plan.

## **The Silence of God & The Cries of His Suffering Saints**

Revelation 8:1-6 (NKJV) 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 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. 6 So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

Pray

These six verses give us the most intimate glimpse into the inner court of the Lord God Almighty; and how there, standing in God's presence, are seven mighty spirits (Hebrews 1:14), and also called seven flames of fire or archangels. These angels get to present to God and dispense for God the amazing act of answering prayers for justice.

## **Prayers Rise & Collect in Front of God**

Here we see at last how it all fits together in God's Plan. God reveals here, how the prayers of all the saints have always been collected, often held for thousands of years, and now taken to finally work together with God's power, to fulfill God's purposes.

Here the great promise that the vengeance that only rightfully belongs to the Lord, is finally poured out upon the sinners upon earth. Here starts the preview of Hell. God has patiently waited, watched, recorded everything, and at last, in Heaven's perfect time, begins His eternal response to mankind's unrepentant sins.

There are three divisions we could trace for this amazing chapter.

## **The Silence means GOD WAITS: REPENT while you can (v. 1-2)**

Perhaps the message of Psalm 46:10 can touch us in a new way as we see that verse against this backdrop:

Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!

God asks all humans to pause and quietly ponder the offer He has made for us to seek and find Him if we will but seek with all our heart.

This is the silence of His patience as Peter wrote about.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The heavenly setting is absolute stillness before God's Throne.

All the voices of the myriads of angels, heavenly creatures and saints we heard in chapters 4 and 5 are now strangely silent. There is a holy hush as the great High Priest who ever lives to intercede for us sends the angel to the Throne with the prayers of His saints.

The Lord Jesus ever lives in Heaven to pray for us. Now, those prayers from His saints that He collected as the only Mediator between God & man are brought to the Majesty on High.

## **God Stops Everything to Listen**

The silence in Heaven may well be a precious insight into how vital our prayers are to God. Everything halts before the Throne as the prayers of His saints arise before our Almighty God. If everything else halts and God breathes in the sweet fragrance of the devoted prayers we offer, doesn't that make us want to pray, and pray, and pray: without ceasing, as Paul exhorts us?

This altar is seven times noted (6:9; 8:3 twice; 8:5; 9:13; 14:18 and 16:7) in heaven; and is not an altar of burnt offering. Jesus was offered once and there are no animal sacrifices in heaven needed.

So the only other altar is the altar of incense. This altar is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Books of Moses (Exod. 30:1-10; Lev. 16:12; Num. 16:46) just in front of the Holy of Holies, the tiny room of God's presence over the Ark of the Covenant.

This altar was hollow, rectangular box, covered with gold, standing 3 feet high and a foot and a half square. Along the top of this Incense altar was a small rail fence to hold burning coals from tumbling off as the priests came to offer burnt incense as a fragrant wrapping around the offered sacrifices.

Because the incense was offered before the first sacrifice and after the last, it is almost as if the offerings of the people were sent to God tied with the fragrant ribbons of perfumed incense smoke.

## **The Sacrificial Offering of Prayer**

In the context of Revelation 8 we see how God looks upon our prayers as sacrifices. He sees prayer as rising from the altars of our heart. He collects prayers rising as a fragrant aroma of perfume from a devoted spirit. He responds to all prayers, raised worshipfully to Him as our Almighty, All Hearing God.

What an awesome privilege it is to pray. And, what a captivating thought we see as God waits for these prayers to rise before Him. Truly He seeks such worship, adoration, devotion and praise from each of us.

Is the altar of your soul burning with fragrant incense to God this morning?  
Are the coals of your soul glowing with fire for Him?  
Do our prayers fill His presence with our devotion?

Those are some awesome thoughts that should really draw us to bow in our souls before our Creator and speak to Him our worship!

You may have nothing to give to God more important right now than your prayers. And as they rise Jesus is waiting to capture them and pour them out before the His father, our Lord God Almighty!

## **The Collected Prayers means GOD LISTENS: PRAY all you can (v. 3-5)**

One of the big problems of life is that we often speak too soon. But God is patient! The rest of the picture in this chapter is that prayers prompt the hand of God. As the angel takes a censor, fills it with coals from the altar and hurls them down to wreak horrible vengeance upon the earth. So if the rising fragrant incense is a picture of our prayers rising to God, then the fiery coals hurled to the earth is a portrait of the power of answered prayer in God's perfect time.

In the Old Testament we see this same type of action as an angel pours coals over Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10:2) as a prelude to the destruction of the city and its inhabitants. Isaiah also sees that altar; and a burning coal is used to cleanse his foul mouth (Isaiah 6:6).

The picture of Revelation 8 differs from the other two Old Testament scenes because these coals are the long withheld vengeance response of God to the prayers of His persecuted saints.

H.B. Swete once said, "The prayers of the saints return to the earth in wrath." These are the prayers shared by all of God's people since Eden. This prayer was first detected as Adam stumbled from the garden in shame, again as Noah slowly stepped off the ark and survey the ravages of the Flood, God's friend Abraham may well have prayed this as he crossed the desert to wait for a city God would some day welcome him into. And on and on it has been.

We today join that chorus, mankind's sin had caused; and have echoed through the corridors of Heaven, spilling out before the Throne. **THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS (PERFECTLY DONE) IN HEAVEN.**

The angels who carry out this sacred service at the altar are the ones who stand "in the presence of God". In ancient royal courts only the most favored were honored to stand in the King's presence. They also were the first allowed to go and do his bidding. One of the great honors of an Old Testament prophet was to be able to say "The Lord God before whom I stand" (I Kings 17:1; 18:15; II Kings 3:14; 5:16).

Do you feel the honor of standing boldly in Christ before God's Throne? Do you experience the thrill of His Presence this morning?

You can know no greater joy or awesome pleasure in life than this, prayers offered in Christ's Name rise and come to rest before the Majesty of High, our Lord God Almighty. As God collects and waits to respond, our Intercessor Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:24-25), our prayer Helper the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:26-27) intercede and adjusts our prayers. As we pray we know that we are heard, because through Jesus we are God's beloved sons and daughters!

So God waits, God listens, and now:

## **The Firestorm of Wrath means GOD RESPONDS: FLEE if you can (v. 6-13)**

In a manner similar to Egypt's 7<sup>th</sup> plague (Ex. 9:23-24) at the hand of Moses, we see the trumpet judgments start with hail, fire, and blood.

### **Trumpet Number 1 (v.6-7): Plants Burned**

Revelation 8:6-7 (NKJV) So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. 7 The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

This is most likely literal and would have a devastating effect on the atmosphere (smoke and ash), human life (breathable air), animal life and food chains (habitats and food destroyed).

If the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet attacked the land, the 2<sup>nd</sup> is an assault upon the sea.

### **Trumpet Number 2 (v.8-9): Oceans Devastated**

Revelation 8:8-9 Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9 And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Whether a uniquely created flaming object or a comet, meteor or something, this is a object is a real problem. Unlike current movies, there is no combined human military genius to deflect the judgment. There are no heroes to brave their lives and even die to save the planet. In an instant a third of the ships are gone (there were over 25,000 military, merchant and cruise ships registered in UN records in 1995).

Can you imagine what this involves? Atomic fuel, munitions, aircraft, diesel fuel, cargoes and passengers all evaporate. The tidal wave from such an event will erase countless coastal properties. The fouled, poisoned waters will wash ashore every continent and dead marine life will rise in a stench reaching most of the world.

### **Trumpet Number 3 (v.10-11): Drinking Water Poisoned**

In deadly sequence the 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet blast is heard.

Revelation 8:10-11 Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning 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 men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

This may be the arrival of a poisonous frozen ammonia comet or something similar. An interesting fact is that the Russian meaning of the name CHERNOBYL is literally "wormwood". Just as radioactive fallout carried along by wind, water and soil is deadly to life, so this judgment will pollute life upon the earth. No matter how it arrives, it is dreadful in its effect.

### **Trumpet Number 4 (v.12): Sunlight Dimmed**

As the 4<sup>th</sup> trumpet sounds we can hear the words of Jesus echoing down the Mt. Of Olives as He warned in Luke 21:25-26 *"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of*



*nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; “men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.”* Listen as John describes this literally happening

Revelation 8:12 Then the fourth angel sounded: 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 were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

The universe is finely tuned. Even a variation of 5% radiance in our Sun would have long-term devastation on planet earth. A 33% change is catastrophic and unimaginable. Thus Jesus said people would die from sheer fright and powerlessness to comprehend such devastation.

## **The Angel’s Message of Doom**

Finally, as an omen foreboding even further doom, God sends another warning.

Revelation 8:13 And I looked, and I heard an angel (or eagle) flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”

Remember the 4<sup>th</sup> creature in Revelation 4:7? “and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.” Maybe the cherub from God’s presence came or another angel, no matter who this is the message is clear, more trouble ahead!

What are some lessons to hold onto from this chapter?

### **The Earth-Dwellers Who Never Become Citizens Of Heaven, Will Have A Bad Ending.**

What is an earth dweller? The expression is found seven times (6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:8) in the book and speaks of a type of people, those whose life is tied only to this world. It is thus another term for a worldly person, one who is at home and wants to live for this doomed planet.

### **Only You Can Choose Your Destination:**

As the Bible opens with Jesus seeking His lost ones in the garden with “Where art thou”. So it ends with Jesus calling “come to Me and drink of the water of life”. Over and over He invited and all you need to do is come to Him!

## **The Silence of God & The Cries of His Suffering Saints**

### **God Captures & Holds Every Prayer of His Saints**