

Revelation 8: 12 and 13; “The Sounding of the 4th Trumpet”, Sermon # 70 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 2nd, 2007, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We have seen in the previous sermons that the 7 trumpets blown by the 7 angels of God are the announcement to the Church of Jesus Christ of things that would endanger the life and strength of the Church, which would compromise the witness of the Church, and if not heeded would destroy the souls of men eternally in hell. The blowing of the first six trumpets takes place in a certain period of time, from approximately 323 A.D. to 756 A.D. But the effects of the dangers from false doctrine, from the plagues and judgments which come upon men and upon the visible Church continues to this present hour. The truth of the devastation of what false doctrine does, and of men building a false Church upon it, is something which continues to have its evil effects down to this very day. These systems of error and heresy will continue until the time of the Millennium when Christ's truth through His Church will come to reign upon the earth. We have seen that there has been a certain progression in the blowing of these trumpets. The 1st Trumpet was announcing the dangers of the false doctrine of Arianism and also the many errors related to the doctrine of God Himself. The 2nd Trumpet was announcing the dangers of the denial of the Deity of the Holy Spirit, and the errors connected to the 2 Natures of Christ and His one Person. The 3rd Trumpet was connected with the errors and heresies of Pelagius, who propagated the falsehood of man not having Original Sin, and man's supposed ability to please God without the special grace which comes through Jesus Christ.

Now when we come to the 4th Trumpet we find that the errors and heresies which are being announced are not related to one particular person, or even to one particular heresy; but rather, it is the announcement of the coming of darkness into which the visible Church was entering. The greatest problems that the Church of Jesus Christ has ever had to face, are related to the confusion that exists in regard to what the Church should hold to as true doctrine, and how she should be ruled. This is the picture given to us under the 4th Trumpet. It was because of this great darkness which came into the visible Church, that the stage was set for the rise of Antichrist in both the Eastern and Western sections of the Roman Empire. Many woes would follow. So the question that we are asking this afternoon is: What kind of darkness descended upon the visible Church during these days of the 2nd great time period of the Trumpets? And the answer is that the kind of darkness that descended upon the Church in that day, and which continues to this day, is described for us in 3 ways.

1st - The striking of a third of the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars. (Verse 12a)

This darkness coming upon the visible Church of Jesus Christ was caused by the “striking” of a third of the Sun, Moon, and the Stars. The gospel and the truth of the Word of God are light to fallen men's minds. False doctrine struck at the Church of that day and it dimmed the light being shined forth by the Church. The Church is well pictured here as the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars. The Church's glory is Jesus Christ Himself, who is pictured as the Sun in Malachi 4: 2. “But to you who fear My name the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” Jesus Christ is the One Who is the Light of the world, even as the Sun in the heavens lights our earth. Even so, Jesus Christ is the One who shines in the darkness of this fallen world, and into the darkness

of men's hearts. When Christ was crucified, it says in Luke 23: 44, "Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour." It was the false teaching of the Pharisees and the leaders of the nation of Israel that struck at the glory of Christ; His teaching and His rule over them. This is what caused them to put Jesus to death. And yet they could not stop the accomplishment of God's purpose. The glory of Christ was only eclipsed for a time, and then He rose from the dead. Now that He has risen from the dead the Church has been given light and life through His exceedingly great power to shine forth as the Sun, and the Moon, and the Stars to successive generations.

Turn with me to Song of Solomon chapter 6 and verse 10. The Song of Songs, I hope you will know, is not primarily a manual for marriage. It is primarily a mystical spiritual description of the loving relationship between Christ and His Church. If the verses that I am about to read to you are a description of a physical woman, she must have been quite striking in her appearance. "Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and awesome as an army with banners?" This is, most evidently, a description of the Church of Jesus Christ. She shines forth with the Light that has been given to her by Jesus Christ. In this sense she is the source of spiritual light to a fallen world. In Acts 13: 47, Paul says, "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" When the sun is struck in this vision here in chapter 8, it means that the Church's ability to preach Christ and to see his glory in the Church, was being greatly hindered, and her witness darkened.

The Church is also pictured well by the Moon, that wonderful celestial body which has no light of its own, but reflects the light and glory of the Sun. She is "fair" because of this light that has been given to her. Her light is a received light, reflecting the powerful and glorious light of Christ the Sun. The stars in the sky are lights shining, but they are also of a lesser glory than the Sun to the eyes of those who behold them here upon the earth. This is always the perspective that should be taken by the minister of Jesus Christ, and concerning him. He realizes that he has truth to give, truth to share, truth to proclaim, and truth to teach. He realizes, also, that the glory of Christ is meant by God to be seen as greater than any man or minister. A true minister, a true Christian, does not want to strike at the glory of Christ or to compare his own wisdom with the wisdom of God's Word. He deliberately puts himself under the authority of the Word of God; he wants Christ to be seen and Christ to shine into the hearts of men. His Christianity is not a philosophy or a teaching which he imposes on the Word of God. But this was what certain men did in the time period that we are talking about. And it has affected the Church and her witness to this day.

These doctrines of Christ's deity, the Deity of the Holy Spirit, the absolute necessity of Christ's grace, the understanding that man is by nature sinful; when these doctrines are rejected and not received, then darkness comes as a further judgment from God. It reminds me very much of the ninth plague which God sent upon Egypt when Pharaoh refused to let Israel go. "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt." "So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days." "They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days." "But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." (Exodus 10: 21-23) We must understand why true doctrines are so essential, and we should study how to defend

them from the Word of God. The falsehoods propagated in the times that we are speaking of, are not dead. The darkness appears still to be spreading. “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” “Walk as children of light.” (Ephesians 5: 8 and 9)

2nd – A third of the Day and the Night did not shine –

A third of the visible Church was affected then, and I believe that it is so even today. The visible Church is spoken of as the Day and Night. A third of these two did not shine. In the Beginning God appointed the Sun to rule the Day and the Moon to rule the night. Even so, in the New Creation brought about in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, God has appointed Christ, the Sun, by means of His Word preached and taught by the Church, to rule spiritually over the nations and in His Church especially, to receive glory and honor. This righteous rule is hindered significantly if corruption in doctrine and Church government takes place. Here in these verses it means that the Church’s ability to rule righteously over the Lord’s people was being greatly affected. Both the Sun and Moon, a third of them, did not shine. These were the “dark ages” that you have probably heard about. The meaning of this mysterious phrase, “a third” needs to be investigated. So turn with me to Zechariah 13, verse 7.

Here we have verses which speak prophetically of what happened to Jesus Christ when He was “struck” by the rulers and leaders of the nation of Israel and the Roman soldiers in His crucifixion. “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion, says the Lord of hosts.” “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; then I will turn My hand against the little ones.” “And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the Lord, that two thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.” “They will call on My name, and I will answer them.” “I will say, ‘This is My people’; and each one will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’” This was a demonstration of the Lord’s faithfulness and His mercy.

These verses in the 8th of Revelation are just the reversal of the proportions which we find in these verses. It is Satan’s strategy to undo the good work of the spread of the gospel and the truth of God’s Word. The “third” of the Sun, Moon, and Stars means a definite proportion related to the people who claimed to be Christians in that day. There were hypocrites and formalists. There were a certain number who had fallen to error and heresy. They thought they were light but they were totally darkened. They weren’t walking in light. They were still walking in darkness. Whereas in Zechariah, where the certainty of God’s grace was at work to produce the definite result of conversion and separation unto holiness by the word of Truth, one third would be saved and refined and tested, and truly know the Lord. Two-thirds; the group who thought that they knew the Lord, the Pharisees and leaders of Israel and the people, approved crucifying Christ; and they would perish. It was a definite proportion. Salvation is all of God’s mercy. A definite and certain number. Certainly some of those who approved of Christ’s death repented at the preaching of Peter. And even so, in the days that we are speaking of, and in our own day as well, God grants the grace of repentance, and the gift of sight, to those who once were terribly blind spiritually. “Pity the nations, O our God, constrain the earth to come.” “Send Thy victorious word abroad and bring the stranger home.”

3rd – This would be a darkness which would bring great woes and it would last for a long time. (Verse 13)

“And I looked,” says John, “and I heard an angel 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 about to sound.” In concluding this sermon this afternoon, I want to tell you why it is that I have chosen to interpret these Trumpets as referring primarily to troubles within the visible church. Most Historic Postmillennial expositors have chosen to interpret them from the standpoint of the fall of the political Roman Empire. I believe that the Book of Revelation’s primary concern in God’s mind is not the establishment of Christ’s kingdom politically upon the earth, but rather spiritually. “My kingdom is not of this world, therefore My servants are not fighting,” Jesus says. God’s concern in this book is that the suffering persecuted saints would be able to see and know and understand better who their true enemy is, and then knowing that truth, the Church would be able to endure her sufferings; to endure, and to triumph in the preaching of the gospel in each and every generation until Christ comes.

I believe that the greatest woes to the Church are not political, but rather spiritual. “Do not fear those who can kill the body, but rather fear Him who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell.” “Yes,” says Jesus, “fear Him”. Spiritual battles are of far greater significance in the history of the world than even the greatest battles of nations, because they affect the eternal destiny of people. Physical battles, even when one dies in those battles, do not of themselves determine eternal destinies. Many of the men that fought in the Civil War on the side of the South were godly men, even if their view of the institution of slavery was not right. The way that they lived, the things that they did, even in their cause, they showed in many cases, their true Christian character, and as such, proved that their spiritual cause was greater than their states-rights cause. There have been many battles and wars in the history of the world that have been very significant. But the Bible and the Book of Revelation are not really dealing with them. The Bible is dealing with the way of eternal salvation and the things that are a threat to the obtaining of that salvation.

It is the battle for men’s souls, and their coming to have the victory over sin and death, which are man’s greatest concerns. Therefore I have chosen to view these word pictures under the trumpets as related to the errors and heresies of that day which set the stage for the greatest of Satan’s spiritual deceptions – the Antichrist, which we will be looking at in some detail in the weeks to come. We shall see that the Antichrist is a spiritual usurper to the throne of Jesus Christ and His headship over the Church. Yes, there are political ramifications to this false spiritual rule which emerge at many places in the history of the Church. But again, it is the danger to men’s eternal souls that is the greatest danger; not the political dangers of being imprisoned or persecuted. Rome Pagan became Rome Christian in the transition from persecuting Emperors to persecuting Popes. The political interests of Rome in our study will no longer have the primary significance for us except in the context of the forward progress of the gospel, or the things that lend to its being slowed or stopped. The dark ages brought about this slowing, as we have seen, and next came the rise of the Antichristian powers from without and within the visible Church. The Roman Empire did fall, but the Emperor then came into the visible church of Rome. Mohammed and Islam became, and is to this day, a great threat to the visible church. This too, will have implications for many kings and kingdoms politically, but even greater implications to the souls of men. The warning of the Trumpets is this: Beware of false doctrine, a false church, and false

authorities in that church, having the ultimate influence over your soul. Woe, Woe, Woe, to the inhabitants of the earth whose souls are deceived by false religion and a false gospel. But blessed are those who hold fast to Jesus Christ and to the truth of the blessed Word of God.