

05.24.20

Revelation

Chapter 8 - Revealing the Forces of the Heavens

The Sound of Silence in Heaven

vs. 1-5

Revelation 8:1-5: When the Lamb broke 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 came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

His point is that we're dealing with a kind of time that you're going to be able to see as we go through the book. So, to perceive this to actually be like 30 minutes is to perceive that God has the same watch that we have and that He's counting down a particular amount of time, which is not true. As we've oftentimes made reference, when you're into the heavens, you're not in the realm of time necessarily. So, He's going to be conveying that there is a season.

Well, to explain it better, if you were to turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John and you were to look in John 4, as Jesus is talking to the woman at the well, one of the statements that He makes is in verse 23.

His statement is this,

(John 4:23) “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”

Now, the phrase is “an hour is coming”. Is He talking about actually 60 minutes in which something is coming?

The same thing is true if you were to look at John 5:35.

It reads this way,

(John 5:35) “He (John) was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while...”

Another word for “a while” is actually the word “*hōra*,” which is the same word “hour”. What is Scripture telling us? That the word that is being used is for a period of time. How much period of time? Well, at this juncture it's not saying, it's just for a while, and in that particular setting that John 5, the reason the translators translate it that way is what does it mean? It meant for a while.

By the way, John is the same author of the Book of Revelation. So, as you go through John 12:23, time for Christ to be glorified,

(John 12:23) “... The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

Is he talking about a particular hour? Absolutely not.

The same thing is true in John 16:4, the time of the disciples' trials; it's made reference to an hour of their trials, of their testing.

In even Revelation 3:10, it says the time of testing, or an hour of testing is upon you. It is not talking about 60 minutes. It is talking about a specific time.

In Revelation 14:7, the time of judgment, “... the hour of His judgment has come...” Once again, not referring to 60 minutes.

So, as we come to this, there is something else that is being meant and that's what we want to understand within the context of the passage.

As you begin in Revelation 8:1, the breaking of the seventh seal has a sense of finality to it and really conveying the fact that God is ending this thing through this period of time.

The phrase goes this way,

(Revelation 8:1) “When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”

“A time such as a half” is probably the best way to put it. A half of what? Well, Daniel actually makes an interesting statement in Daniel 9:27 that there is a period of seven that is actually going to be halved, and we understand as

we go on and look at Scripture that that period of seven is 7 years and that half is 3 1/2 years. So, at the time of the middle of the 3 1/2, we understand something happens that is very intense. What is it that happens that is very intense? Well, Jesus talks about in Matthew 24, the “abomination of desolation” will happen, and one will come into the temple and set himself up as God.

You see that same thing recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2, in which it's actually conveyed that the lawless one will come in.

The point is that we're talking about a period of time, we don't know exactly how long, that is going to be interrupted right in the half. By the way, the term “half” is actually in the text. So, somehow, a period of time is going to be halved. What is that period of time? Well, here again, as we continue to see, that's going to be defined in the Book of Revelation and in Revelation Chapter 11 it's mentioned as 42 months and it's mentioned as 1,260 days, which in both cases is 3 1/2 years. So, in each case it's doing the same division as Daniel did. The half is revealing right in the middle there's

going to be something that happens that is going to be earth shattering. Then what's going to happen? Well, the passage says, "silence in heaven". Now, this is conveying something, and I know that the tendency is to immediately go to a passage like Habakkuk or Zephaniah, in which it wouldn't be erroneous to do that, but to come to the conclusion that we're talking about reverence. And yes, we are talking about reverence, but we're talking about something else, more specifically, and that is God is drawing back and not doing something. Now, that doesn't mean that He's inactive and it doesn't mean that He's passive and it doesn't mean that He's detached. But what it means is He's holding back something. It's an interesting picture that for a time, for half a time, there's going to be a holding back in the heavens and a picture of silence.

If you turn with me to Zephaniah, we'll maybe get a picture of this. If you look at the very beginning of Zephaniah 1, it's talking about the judgment of God upon the earth. How do we know that? Because He literally is

declaring a fire sale and He's saying everything's going to go, and it reads this way,

(Zephaniah 1:2) “I will completely remove all things...”

So, I'm figuring that's like all things.

“... From the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.

(Zephaniah 1:3) “I will remove man and beast;

I will remove the birds of the sky

And the fish of the sea...”

Just in case you didn't get the “all things” part. So, he begins to convey that.

Now, watch what is stated in verse 7,

(Zephaniah 1:7) “Be silent before the Lord GOD!

For the day of the LORD is near...”

What day is he talking about?

Well, verse 14,

(Zephaniah 1:14) “Near is the great day of the LORD,

Near and coming very quickly;

Listen, the day of the LORD!

In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

(Zephaniah 1:15) A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation..."

That's the day, right? But what is the silence conveying? Well, the silence is conveying that God is pulling back in the sense that evil is being loosed, and this fundamental principle is really seen throughout Scripture. In other words, when God is silent, then evil begins to feel emboldened. So, what is God doing? Well, Revelation tells us that God is revealing something to us. What is He going to be revealing to us at this point? Well, what would happen if God were just to pull His people out? I'll give you examples.

Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians, and by the way, 2 Thessalonians will make reference specifically here in Chapter 2, to a "half time" change. If we could put it that way. It says people were wondering at this juncture that maybe the gathering of the saints had already come, and they've been left behind. (2 Thessalonians 2:1) And he says, "Don't worry, you'll know when it happens."

His statement will be,

(2 Thessalonians 2: 3) “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first...”

That's what's called the “abomination of desolation”. More specifically, the time in which the evil one, the lawless one, will actually step into the temple and declare himself as being God.

But the passage says,

“... for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”

In other words, he becomes emboldened.

(2 Thessalonians 2:4) “who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

(2 Thessalonians 2:6) “And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed.”

(2 Thessalonians 2:7) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

(2 Thessalonians 2:8) Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay...

In other words, what reveals the lawless one? Well, restraints are taken out, and when that's taken out, evil becomes emboldened.

Let me show you another passage. Psalm 50. If you look with me. And there are a number of passages that we could look at, and we will look at a few more, but in Psalm 50, it conveys the same fundamental principle in which God is actually addressing the wicked, and He says, "You began to think I was just like you because I didn't do anything."

(Psalm 50:16) "But to the wicked God says,
"What right have you to tell of My statutes
And to take My covenant in your mouth?"

(Psalm 50:17) For you hate discipline,
And you cast My words behind you.

(Psalm 50:18) When you see a thief, you are pleased with him,
And you associate with adulterers.

(Psalm 50:19) You let your mouth loose in evil
And your tongue frames deceit.

(Psalm 50:20) You sit and speak against your brother;
You slander your own mother's son.

(Psalm 50:21) These things you have done and I kept
silence;
You thought that I was just like you..."

See, that's what begins to happen.

In fact, at the beginning of this chapter, the same
fundamental principle. It actually starts off with, in verse
5,

(Psalm 50:5) "Gather My godly ones to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

Of course, the cry in verse 3 is what?

(Psalm 50:3) "May our God come and not keep silence..."

In Proverbs 28, it reads this way,

(Proverbs 28:28) "When the wicked rise, men hide
themselves;
But when they perish, the righteous increase."

When you drop on down to Proverbs 29:16, what does it say?

“When the wicked increase, transgression increases;
But the righteous will see their fall.”

When we talk about the great tribulation, what we're talking about is hell being unleashed, and that's what makes it a great tribulation. It's not God being unleashed. It's hell being unleashed and man getting what he wants.

So, what happens when God is silent? Well, look with me in Ecclesiastes 8. What happens when righteousness is silent? The heavens are silent at this juncture. What happens?

(Ecclesiastes 8:10) “So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.

(Ecclesiastes 8:11) Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.”

What's happening during the time of the great tribulation? Well, what's happening during the time is great tribulation, which, by the way starts at the halfway mark, is that God backs off and pulls out that which restrains evil. Evil starts pouring out. In fact, one of the things you'll see is the trumpets as we start going through Revelation. As the trumpets begin to blow, it's literally hell is opened up and the demonic creatures are coming out. So, what happens when the heavens are silent? This is why the psalmist says, "Don't keep silent because the enemy is gloating over me. He thinks he's winning." But God is revealing the wickedness of the world. Man thinks, "Well, we need to get God out of the picture. If God were out of the picture, we would be just fine." Well, let's see. Let's see what would happen when God gets out of the picture.

So, when you come to Revelation 8 and the seventh seal is broken, we're coming to that mid-point of the tribulation and now the great tribulation has come, and the best way I could describe it is in Revelation 13. If you look with me in Revelation 13, I think you'll see the

picture pretty clearly. Revelation 13, a great beast comes out of the sea. We won't go into all the explanation of the of the beast, but he'll begin to take power in the world, and the description here is this, that it was given to him to say whatever he wanted to say. You know, if you let people do whatever they want to do, what will they do? That's an interesting question, isn't it? If you were to erase all the laws, if you were to take all the laws out of the city, what would happen? This is why the antichrist is actually not called the antichrist in Scripture, he's called the lawless one, and if you were to take the law out, if you take right and wrong out, if you were to erase absolutes, what would people do? Well, if you've ever read the Book of Judges, every man did what was right in his own eyes. It's horrific, it's terrible. It's a terrible book to read, but it's something that you need to read because that's what happens when people have the license to do whatever they want.

So, if you look with me in Revelation 13, what happens when the beast is set free?

Well, it says,

(Revelation 13:5) “There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months...”

That's like half of 7, isn't it? So, once again, half of a period of time, God is silent and evil begins to reign, and you go, “Wow. That's a horrific and terrible thing.” God says, “Yes, this is why you need Me to reign.”

What is Revelation trying to stir in our heart? The cry, “Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. We need You to rescue us.” So, the intensity of the ends of the ages is going to increase, because that which restrains is going to be taken out, and we're going to begin to see. Many believe this literally is a picture of the rapture in which God takes out His people and they, as a restraint of the world, are now taken out and nobody really cares about what is right and wrong, and there they go.

So, in Revelation 8, when we look at the passage and it begins, yes, it's a very somber and sobering picture of holiness before God, but more specifically, the heavens are becoming quiet is the picture at this moment and this is what will begin to ensue. Now, this now begins to

interject as the declaration of silence is beginning, the trumpets are getting ready to blow. So, He has the seven angels that are going to blow the seven trumpets, or best describing the spirit world is going to be set loose; air going through the trumpets, sound coming through, and we're going to see the spirit world move on the earth. We're going to see the spirit world move on the heavens. We're going to see the pit opened up. We're going to see all kinds of once again, terrible, horrific things during the time in which restraints are taken off and lawlessness reigns within the realm.

If you look with me,

(Revelation 8:1) “When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

(Revelation 8:2) And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.”

And at this juncture, have they blown yet? No. They're getting ready to. So, all this is kind of an introductory. Restraints are coming off, God's being silent, and now the world is going into the realm of, “Ok, we're going to follow the beast,” and he's going to speak out

blasphemous words, and you're going to say, "God, you're going to let him get away with that?" He says, "I'm letting him reveal himself." It would be like you standing before a judge and the judge walks out and leaves somebody to listen to everything, but he walks out of the courtroom, and the guy starts talking while the judge is out of the room. "Judge, when are you going back in?" "Just a minute. Let him hang himself." So, the world is showing its stuff. It's showing who they really are.

So, we come here in verse 2, and these angelic beings are not sounding but something else is happening. So, verses 3-5 is demonstrating to us that not only is God not passive in this, but God is orchestrating two things at once. He is orchestrating and revealing the hearts of men in their evil, and that's going to be seen during this time. But He's also going to be revealing the hearts of those that love Him, and He's going to be conveying that within the passage.

If you look with me in verse 3,

(Revelation 8:3) "Another angel came and stood at the altar..."

Now, the altar is the place, as Scripture will say, before the throne, which is telling us that it's God's favorite place. Why is it God's favorite place? Because the altar is a place of sacrifice, and this place of sacrifice, the place of love, and God so ordained that even with when you look at the tabernacle in the Old Testament and the picture of the tabernacle and the Holy of Holies, what was in the Holy of Holies? The Ark of the Covenant. What's on the top of the ark of the covenant? The mercy seat. What is that a picture of? Christ is going to be merciful to us and die for us, and what a picture of an ark, which really is basically about the size of a place that they would use to hold bones of the person that was dead. So, here you have this ark and instead of death, there is the death of Christ that is resurrected. So, the staff of Aaron, of course, that is within the Ark of the Covenant that is being conveyed which budded. I mean, you have a dead staff and it's budding and you have the laws of God, which Christ said, "I came to fulfill the law, and all the things that are there, the manna from heaven, I'm the Bread that comes down out of heaven." And you begin to see the heart of God in this Ark of the Covenant that has a

mercy seat on it and Christ says, "I came for you." And it's a great picture. What's at the throne in the heavens? The place of the altar, the place of sacrifice, and that's what means the most to God. "Greater love has no man than this," and God has so orchestrated that in the heavens, the place of sacrifice is the greatest place.

(Revelation 8:3) "Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer..."

Once again, the picture of gold is something that's been refined and something that is now valuable. Peter will make reference to this fact that we go through difficulties and trials and it's like we're refined by the fire and now we come out like pure gold, better than gold. So, the picture is that something has gone through the fire, has been refined and it has a censor and it has an incense and has a smell, and it's for the purpose of burning, which once again makes reference to the trials and the tribulation, and it brings forth an aroma that cannot be forgotten by God, and that's the picture. You have this amazing thing that happens in trials and tribulation. Well, they say that you remember scents, smells better than

anything else; you'll forget almost everything, names of even relatives, but a certain smell will immediately thrust you into a particular memory. So, God is saying, "Remembered. I remember what you've done."

"... and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne."

So, all these things are revealing to you what the heart of God is and what's important to Him, and it is clear that what is important to Him are the prayers of the saints, and they're around the altar. Now, the question is, what are the saints praying? We understand that the word for prayer, "*proseuchē*," makes reference to the fact that you're praying upward towards, but you have a wish. So, what is the wish that you're praying for? Well, let me just show you. There are a couple of passages that will, I think, clarify it for you and me.

One is found in Ephesians 5, which brings us immediately to the incense and we see that within the text.

So, if you pick up with me in Ephesians 5, it reads this way,

(Ephesians 5:1) “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

(Ephesians 5:2) and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

The picture is very clear that the aroma is the sacrifice. So, it's at the altar. In other words, what is the prayer of a believer? “I want to be like My Savior.” What does that mean? “I want to give my life for Him.”

If you look with me in Philippians, you see the same truth and you'll see it all the way through.

But in Philippians 2, it tells us this,

(Philippians 2:3) “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

(Philippians 2:4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

(Philippians 2:6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

(Philippians 2:7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

(Philippians 2:8) Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

I'd call that the altar. Now, what he just got finished saying is, “Have this same mind in you.” So, what are you wishing for? “That I might be like You.” In every case, the prayer of the saints is to be like Christ.

You see the same thing in Colossians. If you look with me. It says, “Keep seeking things above”. Remember the text in Colossians 3? Read it with me.

(Colossians 3:1) “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

(Colossians 3:2) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

(Colossians 3:3) For you have died...

There's the altar, right?

“... and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

(Colossians 3:4) When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

So, it's that great picture that is being conveyed.

You see the same thing in Hebrews 12, when you look at, “You have need of endurance,” and “Christ died on the cross and endured the pain. You too prepare yourself for the same thing,” or 1 Peter, “I suffered for you. Arm yourself for the same purpose.” He suffered to give you an example that you might do the same thing.

The prayer of the saints is a very strange prayer. It's a prayer around an altar, and it says, “We want to give our lives for You,” or as Romans 12 says, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God.” That's our prayer. Now, it doesn't seem like the kind of prayer that most people pray, but that's what makes them saints, or more specifically, holy, or more specifically, different than the world. Because those that are called to follow Christ,

hear and love things very different than the world, and their longing is not necessarily to be noticed by men. It's not necessarily to be applauded by men. It's not to have a lot of money. It's not to have a grand position. It's to follow Christ, and Jesus already told them, "Take up your cross and follow Me." And the believer goes, "Yes, we're with You." That's our prayer. So, in Revelation 8, when it talks about the prayers of the saints, this is what begins to happen in the realm specifically of great tribulation. So, there are going to be people at this time that are actually going to be given their lives. Now, we believe that church has been taken up, but there are going to be people making decisions during this time, and why are they going to be seen so clearly? The answer is because they're making a decision. So, the point is this, when righteousness is silent, God is still stirring in the hearts of men. Like with Abraham, or even like, strangely enough, as Peter talks about righteous Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, where it seemed like righteousness was totally silent, it says that his heart was stirring within himself, and God is moving in the hearts of men, and God is defining and revealing. There are times in your life where

it seems like there's nobody that's good around you. It almost feels like God is silent in the influences around you. What is He revealing? Well, first of all, He's revealing the evil that is there, and they're showing themselves powerful and strong, and they're saying things that they never would have said had they been in church. But those that are truly God's are also coming before God and saying, "Lord, You've called me to suffer; this I want to do." And you can hear them crying out, "May I be like You in this most difficult time, just like on the cross." I mean, no brighter light has shown than the one that was shining on the cross that says, "Not My will, but Yours be done. Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." And you see the love of Christ that is shining at a time in which there is no light except for His, but how bright it is.

So, a great text that begins to talk about the golden altar, and then it says,

(Revelation 8:4) "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand."

What a great picture. Because here again, what we understand is there's a lot of mayhem, there's a lot of trials, there's a lot of tribulation, but God is revealing, and God is showing and how good God is in this.

There's a passage in Psalm 35. If you look with me, just by way of jumping back and forth and really seeing this picture. I mean, when we read Revelation, it's not as much that we're seeing something new as it is we're understanding the big picture.

So, in Psalm 35, you begin to hear the psalmist in which he cries out,

(Psalm 35:1) “Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;

Fight against those who fight against me.”

And his cry in verse 17 is not unlike many of the saints that are pictured in the heavens after or during the tribulation.

(Psalm 35:17) “Lord, how long will You look on?

Rescue my soul from their ravages,

My only life from the lions.

(Psalm 35:18) I will give You thanks in the great congregation;

I will praise You among a mighty throng.

(Psalm 35:19) Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me;

Nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously.”

Of course, he goes on to say that they say these terrible things, and then he says in verse 22,

(Psalm 35:22) “You have seen it, O LORD, do not keep silent;

O Lord, do not be far from me.

(Psalm 35:23) Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right...”

What will happen in Revelation is you'll see the seven trumpets, and the evils will begin to be released. God is calling them out. He says, “Ok, now's your time to go.” But the final seventh trumpet will then point to ok, now God's doing it. And we have the seven Bowls of Wrath, which the seven Bowls of Wrath have to do with God's anger against those who have been so hostile against His.

What is God angry about? You're hurting His loved ones, and that's the great picture that you see in particular because it's almost like in Revelation, there are times where He kind of stops and goes, "And now here's a picture to explain this." And you see that in Revelation 12, in which you see this picture of here's this woman that is dearly loved by God, and this dragon tries to get her, and then he tries to get her child, and you go, "Ok. So, what are You trying to tell me?" God's saying, "It's personal. You're trying to kill My kid, and you wonder why I'm upset. It's personal." So, as you go ultimately to the wrath of God, you begin to feel the heart of God. When you think of the tribulation, you think man talks about the apocalypse and all this stuff. It's man that has kind of conjured up, "God's really mad and He's going to destroy the world." The only thing God's doing is revealing man's anger, man's hostility. When He comes, He comes to save, and He comes to rescue. So, how we've twisted and distorted this Armageddon thing, you know? Yeah. I mean, it actually says Armageddon in Scripture, but it's basically a word that says there's a place between mountains, a great valley. "Ar" is a mountain, "megiddo"

is a valley, and He says, “Yeah, in that valley, which is kind of northwest of Jerusalem, there's a place where many wars have been fought, and that's going to be a place in which one of the great wars are fought. But who is it that's fighting, and who is it that's coming with hostility? It's the world coming against Jerusalem and trying to wipe them out, and revealing a message that “We hate Your people.” And God says, “I'm not going to stand by.” But for a while, there's going to be silence, and in that silence, God is going to be revealing.

Now, if you look at the end here in verse 5, it reads this way,

(Revelation 8:5) “Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”

What you have is that obviously God is not detached. He's revealing things. He is showing the true colors of evil, but He is also showing the true colors of those that follow Him. He is also, if you look within this passage, weighing the hearts of men, and He is stating that the hearts of His

saints, the cries of His saints, the prayers of His saints have power. We would perceive, “Well, they died for nothing.” God says, “They haven't died for nothing.” The very thing that's going to move the heavens with great power and authority, are the prayers of the saints. He wraps them up and He says, “This is what we're going to throw to earth.” And they're going to hear the voice. They're going to hear the voice of a testimony. They're going to hear the voice of a praise that will resound, will shake the earth and they're going to hear a praise that will literally put fear in the hearts of men. So, what an interesting picture this is, and I believe that many of these things literally are going to happen, but what He's pointing out is that these prayers are not wasted. They are powerful. You think, “Well, I just told the Lord, ‘I want to be like You.’” He says, “We're collecting these, and the storm and lightning is going to come from this and power is going to come, and every knee will bow, every tongue will confess.” When? When they hear the thunder, because ultimately, when you come to Revelation 19, the seven peals of thunder are the praises of the saints. “What was that noise we heard?” Have you ever been in a

big crowd, you hear the thunder of that crowd in a game? It's just a roaring almost like thunder, and it shocks you. Well, you're going to hear one, but it's going to be the praise of the saints, and they're going to come in the majesty with God and every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess.

If you look with me in Matthew 24, you see this picture painted by Jesus. It's great reading these things, isn't it? To know there's a reason for all this. But in Matthew 24, Jesus says, "The beginning of the birth pains is going to be difficult times, but you'll know when we reach the halfway mark after lawlessness has increased.

(Matthew 24:15) "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet..."

Once again, we talked about that in Daniel 9.

"...standing in the holy place..."

Which we also read in Thessalonians.

(Matthew 24:16) "then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains."

(Matthew 24:17) “Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

(Matthew 24:18) “Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

(Matthew 24:19) “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

(Matthew 24:20) “But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

(Matthew 24:21) “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

Of course, it is the great tribulation that brings out all the evil, but the wonderful thing is it says in verse 27, and it's almost like we got a picture of it in Revelation 8,

(Matthew 24:27) “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

What do you think is causing the lightning? The saints.

(Matthew 24:29) “But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON

WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

(Matthew 24:30) “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.”

Well, all you have to do is read Revelation 19 and you understand who the clouds are. The saints, all dressed in white, riding on white horses with Him and lightning and thunder. You hear the thundering noise, “What is that?” “Praise God.” Yeah. God's not just making noise. You're hearing the sound of praise. So, once again, people are saying, “Yeah, I think I might miss it.” You're not going to miss it. Everything's going to be shaking, and all the earth is going to be shaken and those things that can go away, will go away, but God will reveal Himself in all of His glory with His holy ones. What made them holy? They said, “I want to be like You.” At a time in which they could have done anything they wanted to do. I mean, the sky's the limit, there is no law. There are no boundaries. What did

they say? “I want to be like You.” And there's a lot of power in that.

The fundamental principle that God has given us within the text is that there is great power because there are going to be times where it's going to seem like righteousness is silent. The question is, what are you going to do? And in that time, when you do the right thing, God will use you powerfully where you are, and what a wonderful principle that is.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your lovingkindness to us, once again, and giving us Your word and revealing to us Your plan for the future. There are times even now, within our life in which it seems as if the good is silent, but this is just our opportunity, and it is not You being passive. You're just revealing the truth. Lord, we give You thanks for these times in which You allow us to shine for You and you allow us to think upon You, and You allow us to long for things that the world would not long for. That we might be distinct and different; so different that it

would be as if lightning were coming out of the heavens and thunder were proclaiming it, "Our God is a great God, and we choose to follow Him."

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. God is talking to the church; He's talking to us now. We know that these things are going to happen. We know that they're going to come to pass, but He's revealing to the church today what He has called us to do. As Paul so aptly put it in 2 Thessalonians 2, we know that lawlessness is already at work. The heart of man is very rebellious, and we can see him leaving the throne of God and saying, "I'll just do anything I want to do." His perception is that God may even be thinking like he thinks because God's not saying anything to him at this time. Because he is not struck by lightning or because some earth doesn't open up in front of him, his perception is, "I must be ok, or maybe God doesn't even care." We know that's not true, and it is in those times of silence that you're revealing the heart of men. In this moment of silence, examine your heart. Come clean with God. What would you do, if you could do anything?