

*All Things New: The Seventh Trumpet Sounds*

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*2 Chronicles 34:29-35:3; Luke 22:24-30; Revelation 11:15-19*

Our final Scripture reading is from Revelation 11:15-19. May God bless the reading of His holy, perfect, and sacred Word. "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great -- and for destroying those who destroy the earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm."

Perspective can change everything. For many, many years, umpires and referees were the way everything was judged on a field of play – basketball, baseball, football, the refs made the calls and that was that. But in the last 40 years, inexpensive ways to film everything have led to the instant replay. Baseball, the last major sport to hold out, started a form of instant replay in 2008. Suddenly, calls by a referee could be challenged and held to the standard of what was found on tape.

According to the NFL's website, in data from 17 years of the instant replay, an average of 1.3 plays a game are reviewed. Do you know how often a reviewed play is overturned? 37% of the time! It turns out that a different perspective can show us that our eyes did in fact deceive us, that we didn't have all the information we thought we had, that with a better point of view, we could make a better decision.

Have you ever watched a movie a few times and started noticing things in the background that you never saw before? That's because you have a different perspective. Maybe something a politician says sounds like a really great idea until someone shares the negative sides. Again, perspective makes us reconsider what we think we know.

As we move into the latter half of Revelation 11, we are starting to transition into a new part of the book. One portion is ending, and as we'll see in Revelation 12 through most of the rest of the book, a new perspective on events will arise. But here in passage about the seventh and final trumpet blast, there are a couple events that might help us shift our perspective on God and eternity and what life is all about. They might not be new to you, but hopefully we will leave here with a different perspective than many people, especially unbelievers, have about why we are here and what a relationship with God is all about.

Three weeks ago now, we studied the first six trumpet blasts found in Revelation, which followed the opening of the seven seals on the scroll given to the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, Jesus our King. Then there was a pause...we studied John being given the sweet and sour scroll, and we heard about two witnesses that would testify to the world. This week, we come back to the major plotline, back to the seventh and final trumpet blast.

When the seventh trumpet blasts, we appear to reach the finale of the book. That's not the case. We will actually hear about the judgment of the world again in another more detailed cycle, but this sets us up for that to happen. But here's the first thought I want us to explore together today: *the end goal of Christ is not to provide an escape so much as it is to remake.*

Note what the loud voices say: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." It is not, "the Kingdom of God has destroyed the kingdom of the world." It's not even here that it's overcome the kingdom of the world. It's that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. God now completely and totally owns and reigns over this world. Not that He ever didn't have sovereignty and authority, but now He has come to establish His rule so that sin and all that comes with it are vanquished and removed.

Here's why this is so important: this world belongs to God. Not to Satan, not to any evil beings; it belongs to God. This world is His. We chose to sin and made a mess of things; God's enemies tried to exploit our weakness and rebellion; yet this world is still His. When we reach the true finale of Revelation, we'll see the old heavens and old earth "pass away," but that's very different language from destruction. Jesus will say, "Behold, I am making everything new!"

God's purposes are not to destroy and start over, but to remold, remake, and renew all that went wrong and make it right. The closest God came to destroying everything and starting over was the flood, and even then He spared the human race through Noah and all the animals. Had God wanted to destroy it all and begin again, that would be His right. And yet that doesn't seem to be what He's up to.

This gives us a different perspective on the afterlife, and it changes how we view life now. Because so many people have this view of escape. That we just want to escape this world to get into the next one. And there are themes of escape in the Bible – escaping the judgment that leads to hell, escaping evil. In 2 Peter 1:4 and 2:20, Peter talks about escaping the corruption in the world. And we do have many warnings that we should not love the world or the things in the world – John tells us that in 1 John 2:15. However, this can also be an excuse to not do anything for the Kingdom now, to just sit around and wait with other believers for the end to come. It can create in us a coldness towards not only this world, which is smart, but a coldness towards people, who were created in God's image and may yet be saved by His grace. Hating the evil of the world cannot lead us to hating the people that matter to God.

We live in the world, and while the world has an imposter reigning over it now, it will not always be that way. This world is passing away, but it will have continuity with the world to come. We are not to love this world, but we are not to merely escape from it either. We are meant to be agents of transformation in this world. We are being transformed ourselves.

Romans 12:2 tells us, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” 2 Corinthians 3:18 – “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Think about the transformation we studied for over a year in the book of Acts, how the disciples who were transformed by the Holy Spirit got the news of Jesus, who wasn't thoroughly known throughout all of Israel yet, out to the entire Roman world in less than 30 years. Their work utterly changed the ancient world. The spread of Christianity today is due to the transformative efforts of believers around the globe who have made a difference – preaching, teaching, guiding, doing acts of kindness and justice and mercy. Is the current king of this world raging? Oh yeah. But this world is transformed as believers let Christ work through them.

We are like ambassadors living in a foreign country. Our job is to slowly but surely change the culture around us to more reflect our homeland. It's OK to want to see the new heaven and the new earth; it's OK to want to go home to Jesus. All that's good. But we've got a job to do now, to stand for our Lord now. Most of the time, that's just living lives that please Him. Sometimes, it's testimony to the good He's done in your life.

But rarely ever is it escaping the difficulties of the world. Paul in 2 Corinthians 10 says that “the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” That's not retreat. That's fighting on the frontlines in prayer, in witness, in worship and fellowship. We don't need to huddle together until Jesus comes back. We can be bold because no matter when He comes, He's got us, and He has a place for us in His Kingdom.

Another quick thought, not a big one, but an important one. Changing the subject slightly. The voices say, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” I want us to note the grammar here. The Kingdom belongs to the Lord – that's God, God the Father – and to His Christ – that's the Son. And “he,” singular, will reign forever and ever. The Kingdom belongs to a plural – the Lord and His Christ – but “he” singular will reign. This is another one of those places that gives us evidence of the Trinity. God is Father and Son, yet one. We can't fully understand the Trinity, that there are three persons in God but only one God, but signs of it are all over the place, even here in Revelation.

Moving on...the twenty-four elders worship, giving thanks. They give thanks specifically because His reign has finally arrived in its fullness. I think this is so important because it's nothing more than what they've prayed for daily for their lifetimes. What prayer? Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And for just a moment, I want us to think about that. *Are we ready for God's Kingdom to come?* The elders are longing for it; when they see it, they break out in a hymn of praise. They are so ready for justice to be done and for reward and reconciliation to be released upon the faithful. They are excited for God's reign to finally happen.

So we've talked about the problem of wanting to escape, right? That desire just to get away from the evil and sickness and sadness of the world, which in and of itself isn't bad but can cause us to forget our purpose here on Earth to represent God and to faithfully follow Him, to do the works God created us for. If escape is one wrong choice for the believer, the flip side of that is compromised contentment with the world.

Now this doesn't mean contentment itself. John the Baptist, Paul, and the author of Hebrews all advise us to be content with what we have, free from the love of money. In 1 Timothy 6:6, Paul teaches his young apprentice, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." What I mean is finding our contentment in our wealth, in our things, in our pleasures. How many of us, if we were truly being honest, would be disappointed if Jesus came today because we'd miss out on something we wanted to do of the world?

Hey, for me, new James Bond movie coming out in April, I'm kinda looking forward to that. I'm so busy, there's a lot of shows I've missed I wouldn't mind catching up on. That doesn't mean it isn't nice to have something to look forward to, something to enjoy. God is a storyteller, as the fact that His book contains so many stories of so many people clearly indicates. I like stories too. But how many of us would be like, "Jesus, could you wait? I have so many plans. I wanted to go to Europe or Japan or Israel. (Going to Israel sounds like a good thing for a Christian to do.) I thought I'd get married and have a family. I thought I'd get to enjoy retirement. I have a stack of unplayed board games and unread books and unwatched DVDs. Could you come back next month?"

But no, this is what we must watch out for. As God's representatives on the earth, as His adopted sons and daughters living here to transform our culture and witness to God's love, we can't be falling in love with the world either. It doesn't mean falling in love with sin, even. It means falling in love with anything that isn't of God. Idolatry comes in a lot of forms, some very subtle. Idols don't have to be golden statues. They can be whatever it is that pulls us away from the love of God.

I admit, I have to be really cautious about this. Because I like my stuff. Yet it's only stuff; it isn't going to last; when this world passes away, when God remakes it, I don't think He's going to remake all my stuff. I think the stuff I'll get are the rewards He gives me for my faithfulness, not the things I bought with my extra money. Are we ready for the Kingdom to come, for God to reign? Because when God comes, justice will be done and we will be freed from sin and we can enjoy Him forever. Do we want that more than our things? It's an important question for us to think about.

Now the last thing I want to talk about is this vision following the praise of the elders. "God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm." For the time being I want to skip over the pyrotechnics and get to the fascinating stuff. Throughout this vision, John has been in the temple, describing the temple of God in heaven; God's throne is in His temple. But now, God's temple is open – it's exposed to the whole world. And not only that, we have this curious relic sitting there – the Ark of the Covenant.

Biblically, the last time we see the Ark of the Covenant is in today's passage from 2 Chronicles during the reign of King Josiah. Shortly after his death, the Babylonians invade and conquer Judah, taking with them all sorts of treasures from the temple. Did they get the ark? Maybe, maybe not. An ancient book called 2 Maccabees that we don't believe is Scripture says that the prophet Jeremiah hid it on a mountain, and that where it was wouldn't be revealed until the day when God gathered His people again. But since 586 BC, no one's seen it. So contrary to what you might have learned from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it's never shown up again.

So why is it in the heavenly throne room, and what does it mean for us? Here's the important thing for us to know and remember: *God's open temple and the Ark of the Covenant remind us that God is with us and for us.* You might remember that the first six trumpet blasts were tied to events in the Exodus – the punishments and plagues were parallel to those Egypt suffered.

So now move ahead forty years to the end of the Exodus. What happens? God leads the people into the promised land. Their first stop? Jericho. What do they do by God's command? They carry the Ark of the Covenant around the city and blow their trumpets for seven days. On the final day, the walls come down and the city is utterly conquered, the proof that God is with them and will give the promised land into their hands.

The Ark was the constant reminder that God was with them. The Ark had no power in and of itself. But God promised Moses that He would speak to Moses from between the cherubim, the heavenly winged creatures built into the ark. Where the ark went, God was. And for the vast majority of the Ark's history, it stayed behind a massive curtain, a huge veil, first in the tabernacle they carried with them in the wilderness and then in the temple. Only the high priest went into the Holy of Holies where the Ark was, and only once a year. The average Israelite, even though being one of the chosen people of God, couldn't approach the Ark or come near God's place in the temple.

But now, the heavenly temple is open and the ark is there. There is no veil any longer. When Jesus died on the cross, a mysterious thing happened – the huge veil in the temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn in two. God is no longer hidden from us, separated from us. God's dwelling place is with us, and it is open to all who would come in faith to Him. Through Christ, God draws near to us. Our eternity is one in God's remade, restored, new heaven and new earth, with Him near us always. He is for us – the Ark that traveled with the Israelites reminding them of His presence and power has not been lost to the ages, but sits in God's temple, a sign that He is still fighting for us. He has not forgotten.

Does this mean that all of this has come true in real-time right now? No. We still have to wait for the final day. We still have to wait for the fullness of God's Kingdom to come, His full presence to dwell with us. His heavenly temple is not yet come to earth; the world is not yet remade in His perfection. But it is coming. He is with us in the Holy Spirit He sent to dwell in each one of us. So here we wait – neither escaping *from* the world nor getting too comfortable *in* it – knowing that one day soon, the God of the universe and His Christ, our Savior Jesus, will come to reign as the final trumpet sounds.