



Date: October 9, 2022

Speaker: Paul McIlwraith

Unveiling Hope – Revelation 8-11

I know what you are thinking, *Paul, you have your special days mixed up. Today is Thanksgiving not Remembrance Day.* I know, but what you just heard sets the tone for today.

Good morning everyone and Happy Thanksgiving. I trust it has and will be a wonderful weekend for you to gather with family and friends and to ponder all that you are grateful for this season. That song you just heard is called, *The Last Post* and it is one of the most distinctive melodies in the world. It is often played on a trumpet or a bugle and usually as a memorial or remembrance. That is why you may recognize it from Remembrance Day services that you have attended in the past.

It is interesting that there are only three notes in the entirety of *The Last Post* and the song was originally intended to be played during times of war. It was used as a signal to the entire military camp that the sentry posts had been inspected and that the area around the camp was secure for the night. It was also sounded at the end of battle so that the injured on the battlefield knew that it was safe to move and retreat back to their troops to get help. The music was later incorporated into military funerals and played as a final farewell to symbolize that the duty of the fallen soldier was over and that they could now rest in peace.

Although we, in Canada may only hear the song played once a year on November 11, at various places around the world it gets more regular air play. In fact, in Ypres, Belgium where some of the most intense fighting occurred during World War 1, *The Last Post* is played every evening at 8:00pm in

the town square by the musicians of *The Last Post Association*.

Why the trumpet to play such a somber tune? Well, as I mentioned there are some musicality reasons. There is a practical reason, it was small enough and portable enough to travel into war but there is also an historical reason. The trumpet has existed since antiquity when humans discovered that by blowing into hollow objects such as animal horns and sea shells, sounds could be produced. So artisans begin to craft trumpets out of wood and metal. In these earlier days, the trumpet was not considered a musical instrument but rather a signaling device for civic gatherings and religious or military purposes. Because of its high, clear tones, it could be heard for kilometres. Trumpeters used short “calls” to communicate messages over long distances. So in the Bible, any reference to a trumpet was most likely as a communication device and not a musical instrument.

Numbers 10:1-3, 7, 9, 10

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Make two trumpets of hammered silver for calling the community to assemble and for signaling the breaking of camp. When both trumpets are blown, everyone must gather before you at the entrance of the Tabernacle.

...when you call the people to an assembly, blow the trumpets with a different signal.

Blow the trumpets in times of gladness, too, sounding them at your annual festivals and at the beginning of each month.

In the ancient times, the trumpet was used more for communication and it was only in the late Middle Ages where a change in the trumpet’s design transformed it into a musical instrument and allowed it to be used to create some of the wonderful Jazz, Latin and Ska music we hear today. That is your music history lesson for this week. You will see why it is important as we jump into our text today.

We are now in the fifth week of a nine-week message series at North Park Fanshawe that we have entitled *Unveiling Hope. A Study on the Book of Revelation*. As we have noted each week, there has been some hesitancy in the past for preachers to tackle a book like Revelation mostly because it’s genre of writing

is Apocalyptic Literature which is difficult to interpret sometimes.

But as I hope you are beginning to see now that we are half way through the series, rather than a book of destruction and doom and gloom, Revelation is all about growing our faith and revealing Jesus. It is one of the most hope-filled books in all the Bible.

In Revelation 1, the apostle John, who is in exile on the prison island of Patmos because of his Christian faith is worshipping the Lord one day when he receives a revelation. It is like the Lord pulls back a curtain and gives him a powerful image of who Jesus is and reminds John that Jesus is with him.

Jesus dictates a message through John to his seven churches and to Christians everywhere. The messages contain words of encouragement, challenge and exhortation. Then in a series of visions, Jesus paints a picture of the future in light of the present reality. *Things aren't always as they seem.*

Last week, we looked at how Jesus, because He was the lamb that was slain, He died for the sins of humanity, He was the only one who was able to open the seven seals on the scroll that the One on the throne in Heaven is holding. It is the scroll that contains the history of the world, including your history and my history. It is the scroll that contains God's design for creation and bringing to fruition His grand redemptive plan for humanity as His Kingdom comes on earth as it is in Heaven.

With the breaking of each seal, it best describes what is going on in our world today. As seals one to four are broken on the scroll, evil, sin, famine, greed, death and destruction are revealed as creation cries out, *Come, Lord Jesus.*

In the breaking of seal five, those martyrs who have given their lives for the good news of Jesus cry out, *How Long Lord? How long before you come and make all things right?* As Jesus breaks seal six, those who reject Him cry out not to God but to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the lamb.

It all seems so hopeless until we discover that that the ones who know Jesus, will be sealed by the living God. They will be protected and their future secure in Him, although not necessarily spared from suffering

in the meantime. In fact, those sealed and redeemed by the blood of Jesus are given a mission in our world. We are to overcome evil, not by force or violence but by the very sacrificial love that was demonstrated by the lamb, Jesus, the one who was slain. We ended at that point last week, before we got to the opening of the seventh seal. Not quite sure what to expect.

Revelation 8:1

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal on the scroll, there was silence throughout heaven for about half an hour.

Given what we have seen with the breaking of the first six seals, what do you expect when the seventh gets broken? I mean evil, sin, famine, greed, death and destruction are revealed with the first six seals then there is the promised of God's people being protected so, I am thinking seal number seven has to be a doozy!

Perhaps, the Kingdom of God will finally come to earth when that seal is broken. Something big right? Instead, what do we get? Silence in Heaven. All the worship, all the calls of *Come Lord Jesus come*, they have all stopped. There is silence in Heaven. ...for about a half an hour. I love that, for about a half an hour. What is going on?

Maybe it is a dramatic pause kind of like our parents used to do with us, when we had done something wrong and we knew the punishment was coming. *Paul Scott McIlwraith.... pause.....* The use of the middle name and the dramatic pause, I knew what was to come next was not good. *You are grounded so that you will learn to be home at the time that you are told.* Maybe that is what God is doing here. A dramatic pause in anticipation of the punishment that is coming.

Some suggest that the silence actually represents the prayers of the saints both in Heaven and on earth ascending to God, on the throne before He acts again. We are not entirely sure. What is interesting is what emerges out of the breaking of the seventh seal. It is another set of seven actions.

Revelation 8:1-2

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal on the scroll, there was silence throughout heaven for about half an hour.

I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets.

It is like we get to the end of the seven seals, remember seven is the number of completeness in Revelation and then another group of seven actions is revealed, like those Russia *Matryoshka (Nesting) Dolls*. You open one and another fits inside it and another and another. It just keeps going. In this vision John receives, with the breaking of the seventh seal, there is silence for about a half hour and then he saw seven angels stand before God and they were given seven trumpets and here we go again. What is going on here?

In a word, it is *Judgement* time. Just as the trumpet playing of the *Last Post* that we heard a few minutes ago, is often used to signal or communicate a message during times of war, the seven trumpet blasts in this text are proclaiming something. That the time of Judgement is near. What is being revealed to us in this section of Revelation with the sounding of the seven trumpets is the terrible reality of Judgement. Do you remember way back in the gospel of Luke?

Luke 19:10
to seek and save those who are lost.

In that often quoted passage of Scripture;

John 3:16
"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life

From these verses, we can get caught up in the idea that God is some sort of Rom-Com, Hallmark, sappy love story, happy ending movies kind of God. That He is all rainbows and unicorns. Oh God is love but... He is also just. Sometimes we forget about verses in the Bible such as in Luke.

Luke 12:49
"I have come to set the world on fire, and I wish it were already burning!"

Honestly, as a preacher, it's easier to talk only about the good stuff, the love, the joy, the hope and the peace of Jesus and let the stuff like sin, repentance and judgement slide. But to neglect the tough stuff is to only preach a half of the good news of Jesus.

You may be scratching your head. *Love, Joy, Hope, Peace, I get that. Yep, that is good news but Judgement. How in the world can judgement be good news?* Well it is, in the Kingdom of God. Judgement demonstrates that God cares. Think of my example earlier. My mom addressing me as a child when I have done something wrong.

Paul Scott McIlwraith...pause...But what if after that she said nothing at all? What if she did nothing at all except walk away? It was when she followed up the pause with an action, grounding me, that I came to understand that she cared. She cared for my safety and for me learning that there are boundaries in life. She loved me enough to care when my behavior was not in line with what was expected and what was beneficial for my life.

God's judgement demonstrates that He truly cares about us. That our choices matter to Him. His judgement demonstrates that He takes evil and sin in our world seriously, that He is not indifferent or tolerant to it. God does not sit back and say, *oh it's okay, don't worry about it this time, try to do better next time*. No, He moves to take action against those things that will rob us of the kind of abundant life He has in mind for us as His creation. God's judgement is a positive thing and an important part of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim, do we understand that?

In his vision, John says things go silent for about a half an hour but then the activity begins. In **Revelation 8:3-5**, he sees an angel burning incense at the altar of the temple. In this wonderful bit of imagery, the angel mixes the prayers of the people, *Come Lord Jesus come, How long Lord?* with the smoke of the incense and it rises up to God. Then the angel takes fire from the altar and throws it on the earth and there is thunder and lightning and a terrible earthquake.

It is at this point that we see that God is not just about Rom-Coms and sappy Hallmark movies but also the kind of action that we find in movies like *Fast and Furious* and *Top Gun* mixed in. God is action! What is the point of the angel throwing the fire to earth? God is answering the people's cry for justice. The sounding of the seven trumpets that are about to come, are the way that God answers the people's cry for justice. Each trumpet proclaims to humanity that God's judgement has and will come.

Let's look at the blowing of each trumpet.

Trumpet number #1:

Revelation 8:7

The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed with blood were thrown down on the earth. One-third of the earth was set on fire, one-third of the trees were burned, and all the green grass was burned.

It sounds horrific and of course, judgement is not pretty but remember the imagery of apocalyptic literature. What does it mean that 1/3 of earth was set on fire, 1/3 of the trees were burned? This fraction 1/3 is used several times in this section and it is not to be taken literally but symbolically. It represents mercy. Whenever you see 1/3 in Revelation it means mercy. It means that God didn't go all the way. It could of, He could have gone 2/3's but He doesn't. The fraction 1/3 means that the judgement is not total. The blowing of the seven trumpets does not bring total judgement, there is mercy on God's behalf. It warns those in the world who are going down the wrong road, they better turn around!

Throughout Scripture, trumpets were used as a warning and in **Revelation 8** specifically that are blown by the angels to indicate that partial judgement is here (1/3), that is the mercy of God. But total judgement is on its way.

Now it is at this point that we have to understand that the warning blasts of the trumpets in John's vision here, signaling the coming judgement, is mostly directed at a specific group of people.

Revelation 8:13

Then I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air, "Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets."

Did you catch it? "*Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world.*" It is the same phrase used by the martyrs who cried out to God in **Revelation**

6:10, that we talked about last week, do you remember it?

Revelation 6:10

"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?"

This phrase, *people who belong to this world*, is used in Revelation to refer to all of those who rebel against God, oppose Jesus and are standing in the way of the coming of His Kingdom on earth. The trumpet blasts warning of the coming total judgement found in this section of Revelation are not for everyone. The warnings are not for those who declare to be followers of Jesus and seek to live out their faith each day. But, they are for those who have specifically and intentionally turned their back on God and the ways of Jesus. Do you understand that?

So maybe the next natural question and one that seems to be on our minds more and more as we ponder the state of our world these days is, when? When does the sounding of the seven trumpets depicted in John's vision actually take place? At what point in history? Will it be before Jesus comes again? Or after? Or during?

Well, just as we suggested last week, that the seven seals of the scroll are being opened even now. World events and natural disasters suggest that the four horsemen of the apocalypse are plodding along the earth today. So too, is it possible that the trumpets are being sounded, even now. Can you hear them?

Look at the nature of these coming judgements. With trumpet #1, *hail and fire mixed with blood were thrown down on the earth and a part of the earth is being burned.* Did you know that as of September, there have been almost 5 000 forest fires across Canada in 2022, scorching over 3.5 million acres of land? In the first eight months of 2022, there were 42 000 forest fires in the US alone destroying over 6 million acres of forest. The record setting heat wave across Europe this past summer was responsible for record breaking fires that decimated almost 1.5 million acres across 12 European Union countries. On August 22, a satellite

image captured 3 358 fires burning in the Amazon Rainforests of Brazil.

Part of the earth is on fire even today as the first trumpet suggests.

The blowing of Trumpet #2

Revelation 8:8-9

Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and a great mountain of fire was thrown into the sea. One-third of the water in the sea became blood, one-third of all things living in the sea died, and one-third of all the ships on the sea were destroyed.

I don't know where you stand on climate change and global warming. It is a pretty controversial topic for sure but the fact is that recent scientific studies have indicated that even small changes in the earth's temperature can lead to more frequent volcanic eruptions. When a volcano erupted in Tonga on January 15 of this past year, it spewed such an enormous amount of magma, fire rock into the ocean that it reacted violently and produced the largest atmospheric explosion in recorded history. It sent shock waves around the world and a plume of ash into the upper atmosphere temporarily impacting global weather systems. *A great mountain of fire was thrown into the sea* as Trumpet #2 warns.

The blowing of Trumpet #3

Revelation 8:10-11

Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch. It fell on one-third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star was Bitterness. It made one-third of the water bitter, and many people died from drinking the bitter water.

According to the World Health Organization, (WHO), 1 in 3 people globally do not have access to safe, clean drinkable water. Unsafe, polluted water, much of which humanity is responsible for by their own actions, kills more people each year than all the wars and other forms of violence combined. *Many people died drinking bitter water* as Trumpet #3 announces.

The blowing of Trumpet #4

Revelation 8:12

Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and one-third of the sun was struck, and one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars, and they became dark. And one-third of the day was dark, and also one-third of the night.

Daylight savings time began in Canada in 2022 on Sunday March 13 at 2:00am when we turn the clocks forward an hour. We literally adjust time so that we have longer evening daylight in summer. Daylight Savings time ends in just a few weeks on Sunday November 6 at 2:00am when we turn the clocks back one hour and have shorter evening daylight into the winter. We control day and night to a certain degree.

But the blowing of this fourth trumpet suggests something more catastrophic that disrupts the natural rhythm of night and day. With the blowing of this first four trumpets it suggests the natural order of the world, the environment and ecosystems has gone a little crazy. Did you notice the progression of this warning signals of Judgement with each of the trumpet blasts? It moves from that which affects the earth and food supplies (Trumpet 1), to things that disrupt the seas and commerce (Trumpet 2), to tainted drinking water (Trumpet 3) and the dimming of the natural light by which we see (trumpet 4).

Do these warning signals of judgement remind you of any other incident in the Scripture? Do you remember way back in the second book of the Bible, Exodus when God sends all sorts of bizarre plagues (frogs, gnats, hail) on Egypt, the natural order of things is disruption all to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go? But he stubbornly refuses. See, it is when everything is operating in a way so far outside the norm and the natural order of the world, that evil can get a foothold. When it seems like everything around us is out of kilter and or out of sorts, we also have to be aware of the spiritual forces at work.

After the blowing of Trumpet #4, **Revelation 8** comes to an end with that reminder that total judgement awaits not everyone but *those who belong to this world*, and are far from God. Let me read **Revelation 8:13** again. John writes,

Revelation 8:13

Then I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air, “Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets.”

We now move to the last three Trumpets.

Look at the blowing of the Trumpet #5.

Revelation 9:1

Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen to earth from the sky, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.

This is a rather frightening warning. With it, John is bringing to mind a star that had fallen from the sky recorded in the Old Testament. Are you aware of this star?

Isaiah 14:12

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
O shining star, son of the morning!

You have been thrown down to the earth,
you who destroyed the nations of the world*

Who is the fallen star? It is Satan, the enemy of Jesus and the fifth trumpet blast warns that Satan has been given the keys to the bottomless pit. Who gave him the keys? Could it be Jesus? Remember back in **Revelation 1:18** it says Jesus holds the keys to death and the grave. The keys have been given to Satan.

Given means that although evil does exist in our world today it can only operate under the parameters that the creator of the universe allows. We have to remember that we can never underestimate the power of evil but we also can't overrate it either. Jesus is still on the throne.

Satan is given some freedom to work his deception from the pit, that is the imagery describe in **Revelation 9:2-12**. There is smoke and darkness and weird looking locust (all imagery) and the torment will come upon.

Revelation 9:4

only the people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Only those who *belong to this world*, those who *do not have the seal of God on their foreheads*, only those who have not given their lives to Jesus, will face the wrath of Satan from the bottomless pit. Now it doesn't mean that we as Christians won't be impacted by all of the evil activity, as long as we are on the earth we will be, but eternally we are protected. It is as if God is saying to those who have rejected Him, *you have shut me out of every part of your life. You have shunned me, ignored me, ridiculed me. You want the way of the world. Okay, I will give you the way of the world. I am going to open the pit.* Have at it....

The blowing of Trumpet #6

Revelation 9:13-14

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice speaking from the four horns of the gold altar that stands in the presence of God.

And the voice said to the sixth angel who held the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great Euphrates River.”

Let me explain this because for the audience in John's day, they would have known exactly what he was getting at here and this image would have been terrifying to them. See the Euphrates River at this time, would have marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire in the day. It was from the east that Romans always feared that an invasion would one day come and destroy their empire. In the blowing of the sixth trumpet that warns of the judgement of God, John sees a vision of an army coming over the hills from the east. Can you imagine?

Revelation 9:15-19

Then the four angels who had been prepared for this hour and day and month and year were turned loose to kill one-third of all the people on earth. I heard the size of their army, which was 200 million mounted troops.

And in my vision, I saw the horses and the riders sitting on them. The riders wore armor that was fiery red and dark blue and yellow. The horses had heads like lions, and fire and smoke and burning sulfur billowed from their mouths. One-third of all the people on earth were killed by these three plagues—by the fire and smoke and burning sulfur that came from the mouths of the horses.

Their power was in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails had heads like snakes, with the power to injure people.

This is frightening. All of this is deeply symbolic yet horrifying but that is just it, judgement is not for the faint of heart. The use of 1/3 again in this text represents God's mercy. His judgement isn't total, yet. There is still mercy.

Unfortunately, in our world today, the scene I just read from in Revelation is not as difficult for us to comprehend as maybe it once was. We live in a world where at times, things seem to be going askew. Such as bizarre natural disasters. Hurricanes hit Florida almost every year so they are not unusual but what made Hurricane Ian's impact so devastating last week was that it was so slow moving. It lingered over places like Fort Meyers and Naples causing catastrophic damage. As Ian approached Tampa, its powerful winds literally drained Tampa Bay for awhile. Where there is normally 4 metres of water, there was none. Strange.

Acts of violence such as people walking into schools or daycares and shooting children would have repulsed us at one time, now that news is relegated to the second section, page three on the newspaper. We have gotten used to the evil.

But the angels are blowing the trumpets to get the world's attention. To warn us of impending judgement and, to call us to turn from the way we are living as people who belong to this world, and instead return to God. Calling us to repent of the way that we have been living and put our faith and trust in Jesus.

Unfortunately, despite all the chaos, evil and warnings of judgement there are some who still refuse to repent just like Pharaoh in Exodus when

God sent the plagues. His heart was hard and he refused to listen to the Lord just as the people in John's vision.

Revelation 9:20-21

But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to repent of their evil deeds and turn to God. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that can neither see nor hear nor walk! And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The did not repent. Their hearts remained hard. Despite everything that was going on around them. God's judgement demonstrates not that He is a tyrant but that He truly cares about us. That our choices matter to Him. His judgement demonstrates that He takes evil and sin in our world seriously and He moves to take action against those things that will rob us of the kind of abundant life He has always had in mind for us, His creation. Do you understand that?

God's judgement is a positive thing and an important part of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim. The seven trumpets in John's vision of Revelation are not the instrument that brings about repentance. They sound the warning. They draw our attention. To those things that hopefully will compel us to repent and bring us back to God. Oh, I almost forgot.

The blowing of Trumpet #7

Revelation 11:15

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: “The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.”

There is a time approaching when Jesus will return and the Kingdom of our Lord will fully come on earth as it is in Heaven. That is good news, wonderful news to us, but not to everyone. Not to those who refuse to repent.

I love the way Darrel Johnson wraps up this section on the Seven Trumpets in Revelation, in his book, *Discipleship on the Edge*.

He reminds us that there is a God. Even the fact that we are seeing much of what is prophesized in the Bible being played out all around us gives further credence that there is a God and this is God's world. As the Creator, the world either works God's way or it doesn't work. When we turn from Him, there will be ramifications. But God has even provided a way through our rebellion and stubbornness. He has given us Jesus, the Lamb that was slain for our sin. It is when we turn back to Him, that we find that God is there, ready to receive us and welcome us home.

The trumpets are sounding. The One who has a right to judge is sounding a warning. Judgement is upon us. So how do we respond to this section of the book of Revelation? I think there are three ways:

1. **We need to repent.** We need to confess and turn from anything that is getting in the way of us living for Jesus. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can do this.
2. **We need to pray.** Our world is in desperate need of prayer. Pray for family, friends, neighbours, classmates and co-workers that they too will come to know Jesus and live their lives for him
3. **We need to share our faith.** The sounding of the trumpets reveals a world in desperate need of mercy. That kind of mercy that God provides through his son, Jesus. We have that good news so we need to continue to share it, not in obnoxious ways but in humility and love of the one who lives in us.

So, are you repenting, are you praying and are you sharing the hope that you have in Jesus with others because there is a day coming soon when Jesus will return. Judgement will be complete and those who believe in His name will have life eternal in Him. That is truly something to be for thankful for today.

Points to Ponder

Unveiling Hope – A Study of the Book of Revelation

Revelation 8-11 (Seven Trumpets)

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. What do you associate the playing of the “Last Post” with in our culture? In what ways does that fact that it is played by a trumpet make the song even more poignant?
2. Where have you seen *silence* used for dramatic effect in our world today? Why was it significant that there was about a *half hour* of silence with the breaking of the seventh seal?
3. What does judgement mean to you? In what ways have you been judged by people? How is the judgement of God different from the judgement we encounter from others in our daily lives?
4. What does it mean that the blowing of the trumpets by the angels represents the coming of God’s judgement and the warning of His total judgement yet to come?
5. Which of the seven trumpet blasts impacted you the most? Explain why it had such a profound effect on you.
6. Why is God’s judgement a positive thing and an important part of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim?
7. Discuss the statement, *evil does exist in our world today but can only operate under the parameters that the creator of the universe allows.*

8. In light of the coming of God’s judgement, why is there a need for us to repent, pray and share our faith with those around us?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Discuss with your group, the manner in which you can repent, pray and share your faith, coming out of this message on God’s judgement.