

God's Final Message Revelation 9:20-21

Introduction

God speaks in many ways to humanity:

- 1) The Bible
- 2) Prayer
- 3) Spokespersons like preachers and teachers
- 4) Our own conscience
- 5) World events

I want to focus on the last idea today. It may be a bit controversial to talk about this because of how so-called prophecy preachers try to write end time history. One of the most famous theologians of the 20th century, Karl Barth, once said that pastors should have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. We need to be aware of the world around us but not allow the news discourage or frighten us. Christians are people of hope.

Different views throughout history:

- 1) **Every event is directed by God because God is sovereign.** This is the position of many Calvinists.
- 2) **God created all things and then lets things run themselves.** This is the position of Deism. Many of the founders of the USA were deists.
- 3) **God gives people free will but still directs the events of the world.**

This last view seems most convincing to me when I read the Bible. We can read many stories in the Old Testament where kings and various people made their own choices. But in the larger picture of things, God worked out his plan for the redemption of Israel. The Old Testament prophets like Daniel, gave detailed predictions about the rise and fall of various kingdoms. Yet, the leaders of those kingdoms make their own decisions, most of the time, without any knowledge or concern for the God of Israel. God worked through all of that to move his great plan forward.

I believe the same is true throughout history and even in our own day.

There are many events today that concern people:

- Plagues: covid
- Wars: Ukraine
- Economy: rise in inflation

As we saw a few weeks ago, Jesus told of these things happening before his return.

People have many questions about these things, as do I. I cannot answer all these questions. I only have theories and speculation. As I have said before, we must be very careful not to get caught up in theories, opinions, and speculations.

Five levels:

- 1) Dogma
- 2) Doctrine
- 3) Opinion
- 4) Speculation
- 5) Heresy

There is still a lot we can learn by reading difficult and unclear passages in the Bible. I would like to look at one of those passages this morning.

Revelation 9:20-21 [read it later]

Context:

(I want to give some background to our passage today so that we understand the urgency and significance of what it has to say for us.)

1. **Scroll**

5:1-2 Scroll with seven seals. Who can open the scroll? In the ancient world, only the designated person could break a seal of a letter.

No one is found in heaven or earth. Only the Lamb 5:6-8. This results in praise to the Lamb. Why is this scroll important? It reveals the events towards the end of this present age.

2. **Seals**

Chs. 6 and 7: Opening of the seven seals to the great scroll

Seal 1: White horse: Conqueror comes conquering

Seal 2: Red horse: no peace but war

Seal 3: Black horse: Famine and inflation

Seal 4: Ashen horse: ¼ of the population dies by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts

Seal 5: Cry of the martyrs under the altar of heaven, asking God how long.

Seal 6: A great earthquake, darkened sun, blood red moon, falling stars, a time of great woe
An interlude and sealing of the 144,000, a symbolic number for the new Israel. A great crowd from all tribes, nations, and languages who came from the great tribulation around the throne of God.

3. **Trumpets**

Seal 7: The last seal is the Blowing of the seven trumpets

Broken open then silence in heaven, preparing for the sound of trumpets.

Trumpets blown by 6 angels.

Trumpet 1: hail, fire, blood 1/3 of the earth burned up

Trumpet 2: something looking like a great burning mountain throne into the sea; 1/3 of sea creatures die and 1/3 of ships destroyed.

Trumpet 3: star falls from heaven and 1/3 of rivers and springs are contaminated and many people die

Trumpet 4: 1/3 of sun, moon, and stars are darkened.

Trumpet 5: star falls from heaven representing a heavenly being who opens a great pit from which locust-like creatures come to torment humanity for 5 months (elaborate description in ch. 9 of these creatures)

Trumpet 6: four angels bound at the Euphrates river release an army of 200 million soldiers who kill 1/3 of humanity by plagues

There is a pause at this point.

Trumpet 7 is blown with Christ's return in 11:15.

Our text for today:

Revelation 9:20-21

²⁰ The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Problems today on people's minds:

- Covid
- Ukraine/Russia War
- Inflation
- Loss of morality
- Depression and anxiety

A key question for us to ponder: Does God cause these problems? What is God saying to us through these problems?

The mystery of God:

- 1) **God is sovereign.** God has set up natural laws, that if broken, will create pain and sorrow for humanity. Some of the problems we face today are because people are manipulated nature and tried to control the natural laws God has setup.
- 2) **God gives people freedom to discover.** When mixed with sin, this freedom can cause great harm to humanity. Many people can be affected by one person's bad decision. There are great trials right now that affect almost everyone on the earth. The world is a broken place with many sinful leaders.
- 3) **God works through human freedom to bring about his will.** People may think they are doing what they want, but their choices are part of a bigger plan of God. God allows bad things to happen to people to help them seek him.

In the Bible, there are many accounts of how God allowed plagues and wars to come to Israel as a way to wake them up from their spiritual laziness and rebellion. God did not bring Job's suffering but allowed that suffering to come. There was never any question in Job that God was not in control.

I will not claim that God is causing all of the problems we see today. I put most of the blame on sinful, selfish, and ungodly leaders and fleshly people, including those who call themselves Christians but do not live like Jesus. But God may be giving us a message through the events of today. Are we listening?

Two types of problems in our text today:

1. Wrong Worship (v. 20)

Key human issue: idolatry
(items made with materials of descending value)

- Gold
- Silver
- Bronze
- Stone
- Wood

We give value to things of this world that decay, rust, or get stolen. As Jesus warned in Matthew 6:19, people have made their treasures things of the earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

We were created to worship God. If we do not worship God, we will worship something else.

Psalm 135:15-18: *15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands. 16 They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. 17 They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. 18 Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

2. Worldly Wants (v. 21)

- Murders: abortion, neglect of the elderly
- Magic Arts: horoscopes, palm readers, ouigi boards, folk religions and superstitions
- Sexual Immorality: pornography, the media, enticing clothing, moral compromise
- Thefts: embezzlement, cheating on taxes, pilfering employers

God's desire for us: repentance so we can be recreated into his image.

Repent = to turn away from sin and go a new direction.

Why will people not repent?

1. Deceived: by Satan and false teachers, more concerned about what others think than what God thinks
2. Excuses: we will look into spiritual matters later in life, go to church on the holidays, give our token and Pharisaic devotion
3. Hardened hearts, closed minds: things of God are not important enough
4. Enticed by the world: the glitter of new technology, clothes, cars, and comforts
5. Doubt: the infiltration of humanism, secularism, the belief that there is no God

Two local pastors were fishing on the side of the road. They made a sign saying, "The end is near! Turn yourself around now before it's too late!" and showed it to each passing car. One driver who drove by didn't appreciate the sign and shouted at them, "Leave us alone, you religious nuts!"

All of a sudden they heard a big splash, looked at each other, and the one pastor said to the other, "You think maybe we should have just said 'Bridge Out' instead?"

There is still time for us to repent now.

God is patient 2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

When God speaks to us, how will we respond?

My fear for us is that we have a tendency to become spiritually lazy. We lack spiritual discipline. Few of us pray in any substantial way. Few of us read the Bible in any transformative way. Few of us participate in the mission of God beyond a brief hour on Sunday morning, if we even come.

I am not exempting myself from this because I have my own challenges in spiritual discipline and growth. Laziness is a deep, human problem that affects us all.

We need to reverse course:

1. **Soften our hearts:**

2 Corinthians 6:1-2:

As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

2. **Repent**

God calls to us, not out of wrath but out of love.

The people of God out to be the first to repent.

2 Chron 7:13-14

¹³ *"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

3. **Focus on the Lamb**

The offer of grace, forgiveness, new life now, and eternal life to come.

The book of Revelation is all about the Lamb who is the only one worthy to open the scroll and the only source of life.

Church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:19-20):

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

We should have no fear if our hearts are right with God.

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Scroll (5:1-2)

Seals (chs. 6-7)

Trumpets (chs. 8-11)

The mystery of God:

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1. **Wrong Worship (v. 20)** Matthew 6:19; Psalm 135:15-18
2. **Worldly Wants (v. 21)**

Why will people not repent?

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2. Excuses
3. Hardened hearts, closed minds
4. Enticed by the world
5. Doubt

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2. **Repent** (2 Chronicles 7:13-14)
3. **Focus on the Lamb** (Revelation 3:19-20)