

“Sweet and Bitter” // Revelation 8–11 // Revelation #8¹ (9:30)

Announcement

Alright, y’all, before we get started: **Church at the Dome** is just a few short weeks away--on Sunday, Sept 21 the whole church will meet together in one place, the Dean Smith Center in Chapel Hill.

You say, ‘**Why we doing church at the Dean Dome?**’ I love my campus.” **It’s because UNC needs Jesus**, too. Amen?

- Maybe he’s especially needed over there.
- And, listen, if you’re a Duke or NC State student, I get it, you don’t want to go to that place; but look at this like a mission trip into the evil lands of Mordor whatever.

Listen, on a serious note: This is a chance to celebrate what God is doing in the Triangle and dream about what he wants to do in the future. **From the beginning**, our mission has been to make Jesus famous in the Triangle. And this will be a big part of doing that. Imagine that place packed with 20K people lifting up the name of Jesus!

No individual campuses will have services that Sunday; we’ll have two **joint services**, one at 10 a.m. and one at 3 p.m. **FREE tickets for**

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Chester, *Revelation for You: Seeing History from Heaven’s Perspective* (London: The Good Book Company, 2019); Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2022); Dr. Conway Edwards, “[Get Right or Get Left](#)”, November 11, 2023, One Community Church; Gavin Ortlund, “[The Antichrist, Great Tribulation and Millenium: End Times Triage](#)”, Aug 23, 2022, Truth Unites; Jen Wilkin,

both services will be available starting Thursday, August 21 at 10 a.m. Everyone aged 3 and up will need a ticket.

- **Tickets are FREE**, but you need one to get in. I always say that events like this are like heaven: 100% free, but you gotta RSVP! But no need to stress, there will be **plenty of tickets** for everyone.
- For right now, just **mark your calendars, Aug 21**, as the time to jump on our website and reserve yours.
- BTW, when you register, you’ll also get an assigned parking lot. We got plenty of parking over there--and the farthest anyone will have to **walk is 10 mins**; but the really good lots, the ones where the coaches and players and refs and the wine and cheese crowd park for the games--**those will go first**.
- So there’s an advantage to getting on there quickly.

I also want you to invite your friends, family, and neighbors to join you that weekend. The worship will be incredible; the message will be simple; the sense of Holy Spirit movement will be palpable. It’s gonna be **amazing**.

You can find all the details about tickets, parking, what to bring, signing up to volunteer (cause we’ll need lots of those) and more at summitchurch.com/churchatthedome

“Seven Trumpets”, Session 5 of Revelation: Eternal King, Everlasting Kingdom Bible Study, July 1, 2024; Louie Giglio, “[A Severe Mercy](#)”, June 9, 2024, Passion Church; Matt Chandler, “Your Witness to the World”, Session 4 of The Overcomers Bible Study of the Book of Revelation, RightNow Media and Harper Christian Resources, May 7, 2024; Skip Heitzig, “[How Bad Can It Get?](#)”, May 28, 2023, Calvary Church. And others as noted throughout.

Intro

OK, **Revelation 8** if you have your Bibles... *If you are just returning to us after being gone for the summer, especially you college students, you're joining us in the middle of a series on the book of Revelation, which is a weird thing, I know, to just suddenly drop in on; it's going to feel a little bit like you're stepping into a blender. But the series has been great--you may want to go back and catch up on the messages if you've missed them.*

Revelation is not just a book of random speculations about the future, it's a book that profoundly shapes how you see life *today*. It's about the end of the world and the return of Christ, a subject which both fascinates & *terrifies!* a lot of people.

When I was in high school, a little book came out that took the world by storm. It was by **Edgar Whisenant**, a former NASA engineer turned prophecy-expert, called **(PIC) 88 Reasons why the Rapture Could Be in 1988**. Whisenant claimed that the Rapture (which is when Jesus comes in the clouds to gather believers to himself before he brings the end of the world)--Whisenant predicted the rapture would occur during the Jewish holiday of **Rosh Hashanah** in 1988, which took place between sunset of September 11 to sunset of September 13.

A lot of people objected, saying, "But didn't Jesus say no man could know the day or hour of his return?" And Whisenant said, "Yes, he said we can't know the specific day or the hour, but he never said we couldn't know the 3-day window the day and hour would occur in." The book sold **4.5 million copies**. Try to find one of these today online and it'll go for about \$80; back then they were like 35 cents. The little book **was a big deal at my little Christian school. Everyone was talking about it.** The book was in some parts fascinating and others, odd. For example, **1 of the 88** reasons why Whisenant said Jesus would come back in 1988 was that in 1988 the United States turned 212 years old; and, well, water boils at 212°F; plus, in 1988 the U.S.

Congress met for its 100th session, so, obviously, with those 2 things lining up in 1 year, 1988 would have to be the year of Jesus' return.

Sept 13, 1988 (the last day of the 3-day window) was a Tuesday. I remember it well: I was in the 10th grade and when soccer practice ended that afternoon, it was *just before sunset*. So, our coach at my little Christian school sat us all down and said, "Well, fellas, we're just gonna wait this thing out and see what happens." And then he looked at me and said, "And J.D., if it does, please make sure all the equipment gets put away." (Not a joke; he actually said that)

Of course, sunset came and went with no Jesus in the clouds. And so next year the author released 89 reasons Jesus would come back in 1989--he explained he'd gotten the date wrong because he'd used the Gregorian calendar instead of the lunisolar one, which, of course, you know, can **happen to the best of us**.

Now, you **may or may not have had that experience**, but I know some of you grew up with all kinds of questions about the 2nd coming of Christ--when it's happening and how it's happening and whether there's a rapture involved and if you're gonna be left behind. Later in this message, I'll try to answer some of those--or, at least, I'll give you some handles to help you think about it.

But first, let's just walk through Revelation 8 to 11:

Revelation 8 (8:1) opens by telling us that at the opening of the 7th seal judgment "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

- Up until now, the scenes in heaven have been quite boisterous; people *falling on their faces*, **worshiping** around the throne, **proclaiming** Christ's worthiness, **casting** their crowns at his feet.
- But here, at the beginning of chapter 8, all the praises stop and not a word is spoken. Complete silence in heaven for half an hour, and that's because the last of the 7 seal judgments has been

opened, which introduced to us a new set of judgments called the TRUMPET judgments.

All in all, there are 3 different sets of judgments presented in the tribulation:

- **The SEAL judgments (Rev 6–7) (PIC)** (which we've already covered)
- then → **The TRUMPET judgments (Rev 8–11)(PIC)** (which we're looking at today) and later we'll cover
- → **The BOWL judgments (PIC)** those will be in **(Rev 15–18)**
- Each of these series of judgments consists of 7 judgments each (so, 21 in all), and all of them take place during this 7-year period we call the GREAT tribulation.

Now, remember, there are a couple of different ways to read Revelation (actually, there are several, but 2 primary ways):

Some say we should read this book as if it's talking about an actual 7 year period coming in the future.

- If you read the book that way (as I do) you'll read these 3 sets of judgments as occurring chronologically, meaning we have **The SEAL judgments (THEN the) → The TRUMPET judgments (and THEN the) → BOWL judgments**.
- *As one set ends*, the other begins, each building on the other, each round getting more intense.

The other way to read this book is to see the tribulation not as a literal 7-year period coming in the future, but as a metaphor for the age we're living in now.

- If you read the book that way, the things we read about are symbolic of things happening now, and, in that case, you'll see the Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments as basically 3 different versions of the same thing--

- John is **not giving us, by this reading, a specific chronology** so much as he is taking us through these symbols *cyclically* 3 different times.
 - You'd think of it like the "instant replay" in a football game, showing the same play from three different angles.

As I've explained, I read the book more chronologically. I believe Revelation presents these things as future things--and, honestly, it's just hard for me to read all this stuff as if it's stuff that is already happening, that we're already going through.

- **(I'm not saying that the age we live in now is easy**, I'm just saying that some of the stuff we see in these judgments is really bad and goes beyond what we seem to be going through now.)
- **That said, I still think there's a lot we can learn about our present situation from what Revelation tells us** about the future because, like John says, even if the official Antichrist is not here yet, the *spirit* of antichrist is.

Remember, I told you this in our last study: **The best way to see the Great Tribulation is as an intensification of what we're already going through.** What we're experiencing now are the tremors, like the early tremors before a big earthquake comes.

So, with that in mind, let's walk through the trumpet judgments... and you better **BUCKLE UP (Got your tin foil hats on?)** This is not for the faint of heart:

8:7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

- (One thing to notice as we go through these trumpet judgments is how they mirror the plagues in Exodus.

- Among the first Exodus plagues was hail raining down on the earth; here we have “hail and fire mixed with blood,” which obviously intensifies that plague.²
- Some scholars wonder whether this might point to volcanic activity or even fallout from a nuclear bomb.)

Verse **8**: The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea (saying “something like a great mountain...” means, “I don’t really know how to describe what I saw”), and a third of the sea became blood (another allusion to the Exodus plagues) **9** A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

- (Again, this may be symbolism pointing to a nuclear bomb, or it could be an asteroid.)
- Astronomists say that if an asteroid of any size were to hit the earth, it would do so at about 130Kmph, which would cause massive devastation and a severe disruption of the food supply, which is what’s pointed to here.)

The 3rd and 4th trumpets are similar. Vs **10** The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water...**11** and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

(Another allusion to the Exodus plagues: In the Exodus, God had made the bitter water sweet. Here, that’s being reversed.)

In chapter 9 we see the 5th and 6th trumpet judgments: **9:1** And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.

(This falling star here is a reference to Satan, who is described by Isaiah as a star who fell to earth.³ The bottomless pit, Scripture tells

us, is where some of the demons are being held.⁴ (And, btw, in my transcript, I have all these references if you want to see them).

2 He (this fallen star, Satan) opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft (the sun being darkened, another allusion to the Exodus plagues). **3** Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth (locusts: *another* allusion to the Exodus plagues), and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. **4** They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. **5** They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.

This judgment lets out a massive increase in demonic activity on earth. Here’s the thing to know about demons:

- **First**, they’re real.
- And **second**, demons are always given limits for their work in the world, meaning they can only do what God *ALLOWS* them to do-- which is good, because otherwise they’d destroy us all. Even here, they are told not to destroy the earth itself and not to touch believers.
- But, they do have power to afflict terrible things on unbelievers.

Look at how he describes these demons, vs **7**: In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle... their faces were like human faces... their teeth like lions' teeth...they had breastplates like breastplates of iron (BTW, you’re not supposed to try to **recreate this image** in your head. This is symbolic speech:

- “Locusts with a man’s face...” means these demons have human-like characteristics;

² This “hail and fire mixed with blood” is an image from Jeremiah.

³ Cf. Isaiah 14:12.

⁴ Cf. Isaiah 24:21, 22; Ezekiel 26:19–20; Luke 8:31, Romans 10:7.

- “teeth like lions’ teeth,” means they’re predatory (and beloved notice... whenever God chooses an animal to represent... cat family)
- “breastplates of iron” means they’re invulnerable to human resistance.⁵

Vs 5 tells us they have tails that sting like scorpions, which means they cause *physical sickness; mental anguish*; they promote *thoughts of depression and suicide*; they intensify things like *anger* and *blasphemy* and *rage* and *pride*. They *magnify feelings of despair*.

- **Demons don’t invent sin in your heart**; they *take whatever is sinful* in you and amplify it, like pouring gasoline on a campfire.

(Again, **notice the similarity with the plagues of the Exodus**: here we have angels who destroy a significant part of the population, which is similar to the 10th plague where the death angel killed every firstborn in Egypt.)

In **9:20**, John brings the trumpet judgments to a close by saying: **20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues** (here John just outright calls them ‘plagues,’ like in Exodus), **did not repent of the works of their hands... 21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.** (Which is similar to how Pharaoh responded, hardening his heart!)

- **You read this, and you wonder**: After all this, they still won’t repent?
- I wonder: **What excuses** will they come up w/ **NOT** to repent?
 - Will they **try to explain all these things away** as just a run of really bad luck?
 - Or will these things make them rage more against God, blaming him for all of this, or saying, *“How can there even be a God of love if these things are happening?”*

- Or most likely they’ll turn to the false promises of the Antichrist instead of turning to Jesus.

It all seems kind of crazy, but it does make me ask this: **What excuses are you giving to avoid repentance?**

- (Again, the **tribulation is an intensification** of what we’re already experiencing now, and the Bible tells us that even now God allows tragedies into your life to wake you up to him. **He shakes you; sometimes he wounds you, to wake you up.**
- I talked once with a professional athlete who had just signed a **multimillion dollar contract** to play for a professional team, but had done something really stupid and gotten hurt while doing it, which not only ended his career, it voided his entire contract. All money was cancelled; he lost literally everything. He told me, through tears, “I can’t believe I threw away my entire career for a few seconds of fun.” We talked together, even cried together for a while. He said, “Pastor, do you think God is trying to speak to me through this?” I said, *“Bro, I think God is screaming at you.”* He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Well, you say you can’t believe you threw away your entire career for a few seconds of fun at a party; what if the bigger tragedy was that God saw you were throwing away eternity for a few seconds of fame on a football field?” **And then I told him like I’m telling you**: Sometimes God has to put us flat on our backs so we’ll finally be looking the right direction!” I’ll never forget sitting in that coffee shop here in the Triangle with this guy. When I told him that, tears just welled up in his eyes and he said, “I know that IS what God is doing; I’ve been running from him and he’s calling me back to him.” And I invited him to give his life to Jesus and right there in front of me, he bowed his head and prayed to receive Jesus as his Savior. In fact, it was a little weird--when I asked him if he wanted to receive Jesus, he said, “Yes,” and he reached out and grabbed

⁵ “And the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.” (You ever heard the sound of a locust flying? Just

one is loud and scary; hearing that mighty horde would be a terrifying phenomenon.)

both my hands and started to pray out loud, and I felt so self-conscious about it; here I am in this coffee shop holding hands with a grown man, a famous man, who was just pouring his heart out to Jesus, but he wasn't shy about it at all! It was one of the sweetest repentance prayers I'd ever heard.

What if God is doing that in your life right now? All that stuff that's going on in your life--it's not God rejecting you because he hates you; he's trying to wake you up because he loves you.

- That's what's going on here in **Revelation 9:20**.
- We always say, "**These things aren't happening to PAY you back** for your sin but to BRING you back from your sin!"

Will you repent? Or will you be like these people--who despite all the wakeup calls, they **(vv 20–21)** "did not repent of the works of their hands" but hardened their hearts?⁶ Like **Pharaoh in the Exodus?**

In **Chapter 10**, we have a little interlude, during which John tells us about another mighty angel he sees holding another little scroll (a scroll which explains more about these judgments and God's work on earth **10:9** So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.")

- This is an image, btw, taken from the **prophet Ezekiel**, who describes the message from God he received that way.⁷ Sweet to the taste (because it comes from a God of love who has provided our salvation), but **bitter to the stomach** (because it also describes judgments on earth coming against people who refuse to come to Jesus--people we know and love and work alongside.)
- When we **sing about the coming** of Christ, I often find myself saying, "Jesus, I want you to come back; but there's still so many people who don't know... people I love who haven't repented yet. And yes, I want your justice on earth, and I want your Kingdom to

come, but **give them more time**, please bring them to repentance before it's all over!" **Sweet AND bitter.**

Every faithful Christian feels this way. BTW, something that is popular in our day is for people to try to change this part of God's message; to leave out the bitter part as some kind of archaic superstition from the past, so that what we're left with is a god of snuggles and rainbows and giggles who only creates warm fuzzy feelings in your heart. **But no faithful Christian has ever read these things that way.**

This book, this scroll, is not a book of suggestions where you take the parts you want and leave what you don't, like it's a buffet line at the Golden Corral where you assemble your favorite religious meal.

- Jesus claimed to be the **Lord from heaven with all authority**... He either is or he isn't.
- He said **this book comes with that authority**. Again, it either does or it doesn't.
- **So, either accept what it says or reject it**, but don't do the logically incoherent thing of taking the parts you like and leaving the ones you don't.
- That's **not submissive worship, it's idolatry**--it's recreating God in your image. You are basically saying to God, "I don't like you the way that you are, so I'm going to refashion you into the God I want you to be!" You can't do that.
- When my **2nd daughter Allie was a little girl**, we got her one of those "build a bear" packages for her birthday, and so she and I went down to the mall and she got to assemble a little stuffed bear exactly to her liking. It was fuzzy where she wanted it to be fuzzy; it was exactly the colors and shape she wanted it to be. **That's fine when a child is building a play toy, but it's an insulting way to approach God:** "Well, I don't like this part or that part. So, I'll just change you. *THIS* is the god I want!" What you end up with

⁶ Again, just like Pharaoh did in the Exodus?

⁷ Ezekiel 2:8–3:3

is a god who is basically just a deified projection of you. That's why I say it's **idolatry**.

Either accept this book as it is--the Word of God--or reject it. Listen, this book SHOULD offend you. It should be bitter at times. If it doesn't offend you, you're not reading it right.

- **And when it offends you, you've got to decide**, "OK... am I going to reject God's word about himself and recreate him in my image, a **god who likes whatever I like**, is ok with whatever I'm ok with, and hates whatever I hate, or am I going to submit to who he says he is?
- If you're a **faithful worshipper of God**, you take the bitter along with the sweet.

CHAPTER 11⁸ (You still with me? Hang with me for just a few more minutes, and then I've got some more **killer takeaways** at the end, OK?) In 11:3, we are told about 2 witnesses whom God raises up to lead in global revival: **3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.**"

- **Sackcloth means** their message is one of repentance... They command people to turn from worship of themselves to worship of Jesus.
- **Vs 6** tells us the world hates their message⁹ and does all they can to resist them, but these witnesses are (a) endowed with God's power by which they can do miracles, including even the power to stop the rain, John says, and (b) they are supernaturally preserved in the world so they cannot be totally snuffed out.
- You see in **vs 3** that they prophesy for **1260 days**, which is 3.5 years--or half of the 7 year tribulation.

⁸ Starts with John being given instructions to measure the Temple... which means God is measuring the health, vitality and faithfulness of his church. This indicates ownership. He is told not to measure the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, because they do not belong to God and will experience judgment.

- **Vs 7** tells us that after they have "**finished their testimony**," the beast from the bottomless pit--that is, the **Antichrist**, filled with demonic power, is given the ability to destroy them.
 - **BTW, interestingly:** the word used for "**finished**" there in **vs 7** is the same word Jesus used when he died. Before he gave up his spirit at the cross he said "**Tetelestai**: It is finished." That's the same root word for what John says here.
- **Vs. 11** tells us they **lay dead for 3.5 days**, similar, of course, to Jesus laying dead in the grave for 3 days, during which time the world rejoices over their deaths,¹⁰ and then, **vs 12** **Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.**

OK, 2 questions: First, who are these witnesses? Real quick:

- **Some read this extremely literally**, believing they are 2 specific individuals who lead in global evangelization. Some even say it's Elijah and Enoch, since those 2 Old Testament saints are the ones who never officially died. Or some say Elijah and Moses.
- **Others see these 2 witnesses** as representing all of God's witnesses during this time, **Jew and Gentile**, who faithfully testify to Jesus' salvation during the Tribulation. This is what I believe.
- **Still others say these 2 witnesses represent God's messengers** throughout all of history, i.e. one represents the Old Testament and one represents the New.
- **Whichever it is, the plotline is the same:** the witnesses are faithful; they are hated; they suffer; and God gives them miraculous power and preserves them until their work is done.

⁹ Vs. 10 says their words are a "torment" to the world.

¹⁰ BTW, vv 9-11 say that the whole world watches their death, which wasn't really possible until TV and internet.

OK, 2nd Question: Is vs 12, when the witnesses hear a loud voice and get called up to heaven--is that an allusion to the rapture, where Jesus appears in the clouds to rescue his church out of a world undergoing judgment, is that what's happening here?). Maybe.

Interestingly, the word rapture never occurs in the book of Revelation; you get the idea for the rapture from other passages like 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Cor 15.¹¹ You basically have **3 options** (CHART):

- **The rapture could happen *before* the tribulation:** that is, before the 7 years of the tribulation officially start. That's called the "pre-trib" position, ("**pre-trib**" for "pre-tribulational rapture of the church." If you read the *Left Behind* series, that's the perspective they take. Any *Left Behind* finds out there? Team Kirk Cameron? Team Nic Cage?) That's a tough choice. One's a committed Christian; the other is the greatest actor of all time.
- Then there's **mid-trib**, which means you believe Jesus will come back in the middle of the tribulation, and at that point you'd probably see vs 12 as an allusion to the rapture, after the first $\frac{3}{5}$ years of the tribulation.¹²
- The last option is **post-tribulational**, which is the idea that when the tribulation is fully over, Jesus comes back to earth physically to officially commence the millennium, and that's when the church joins him.

You say, "Pastor, which are you?" Honestly, I go back and forth depending on the day. I probably stay mostly in the mid-trib or post-trib categories. **But... we'll see!**

¹¹ E.g. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:50–57; John 14:1–3; Matthew 24:30–31

¹² People of this persuasion sometimes suggest the "7th trumpet" in these trumpet judgments is the same 'last trump' Paul refers to in 1 Cor 15 when talking about the rapture.

- And for those of you who don't believe in a rapture at all, you can count on me flying over to you as we zoom through the sky, smacking you in the back of the head and saying, "I told you so."

Chapter 11 ends with 2 witnesses joining the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures worshiping the Lamb, and they say, "**We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was... and he shall reign forever and ever.**" (11:17, 15). Which is, btw, where Handel got the words for the Hallelujah chorus.

- **BTW, do you see how Revelation goes in cycles?** You have a series of judgments on earth; faithful testimony and suffering by Jesus' witnesses, and then we always end up back in the throne room in worship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that's Revelation 8–11! (That's 4 whole chapters, y'all!) Now, like I did with The Seal Judgments, I have...

4 Takeaways

1. Expect suffering

Regardless of how you think of the timeline, we can and should expect continued trouble until Jesus comes back. Remember: ***The best way to see the Great Tribulation is as an intensification of what we're already going through right now.***

As the Apostle John tells us, **1 John 4:3, *the spirit of antichrist is here***¹³ *and--bad news--he hates you.*

- *And he's in charge of a lot of the world's systems--education, business, entertainment, the military, the media, world*

¹³ 1 John 4:3

governments, big religion... which means you should never expect to be loved and appreciated by this world.

- Listen, if the world is generally a big fan of yours, you're not doing it right.
- **If the Antichrist likes you**, bad news.

But be encouraged, his reign is just for a little time.

- That's why these visions of judgment always end with a picture of a sovereign Jesus on the throne over it all,
- because that means he gets the last word and this terrible time where the spirit of antichrist holds sway is coming to an end soon.

I love how **Randy Alcorn** says it: "This (troubled) world is as close to hell as believers will ever get... and as close to heaven as unbelievers will ever get."

Persecuted believers around the world! Stay faithful: Soon your suffering will be swallowed up in everlasting joy.

2. Embrace judgment

As I alluded to earlier, a lot of people have a hard time thinking about a God of love judging the world. But it's a very important part of the Christian worldview.

In fact, chapter **8, vs. 3** Scripture presents the angel pouring out the trumpet judgments as standing before the golden incense altar in heaven, an incense altar which represents the prayers of the saints, and--get this--he **presents the trumpet judgments** as God's answer to prayers the saints have prayed for years.

- Look at vs **5: Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar** (which represents the prayers of the saints) **and threw it on the earth.** (IOW, these trumpet judgments are God's

answer to all the prayers the church prayed. And you're like, "Wait, I never prayed for all this!"

- Yeah, **but you prayed for healing for the world**, and, you see, without justice, there's no healing. You see, ultimately what causes all the pain in the world is sin, what **causes family trauma** and physical sickness and natural disasters and betrays is the curse of sin, and **unless God brings an end to sin**, suffering and injustice will only continue.
- You see, **if God allows sin into heaven**, sinners would just turn heaven into hell again.
- God is judging sin, and removing it, because that's the only way to peace, the only way to the world as we've always wanted it to be.

The **great biblical dilemma is how God could exact perfect justice** on the earth and still save sinful people whom he loves.

- **It's like I've told you before:** We're like, "God, why don't you stop all evil? God, just remove evil from the world! Why don't you do that?" **OK, well, if tonight, at midnight, God removed every ounce of evil** in the world, how many of us would be left here at 12:01? Anyone?
- **Heaven is described as a place of no more tears.** And I want to be in a place like that. **But, I've asked you:** if heaven is a place of no more tears, how could J.D. Greear be there? Because I think of how many times I've caused tears through my selfishness or thoughtlessness. Can I go? Can you?)

The **great biblical dilemma is how God could exact perfect justice on the earth--how he can get rid of sin--and still save sinful people he loves.**

- And the way he did that was through the cross, the lamb who was slain, where God's perfect justice against sin was carried out. Jesus died a brutal death, suffering our judgment against our sin, and now he can save all those who put their hope in him.
- **For those who receive Christ's offer to save them**, they can go into God's new world of perfect justice with their sins forgiven

and removed, Christ having paid the price for their justice in their place.

Listen: your sins will either be judged in Jesus, on the cross, who died in your place; or you'll be judged for them.

For you who are not Christians--you say you want justice in the world but hear me, you don't want justice right now. Justice would destroy you. And me. **What you need is mercy**, and Christ has offered that to you.

- The word the 2 witnesses use is 'repent.' Repent means change your mind about Jesus: change your mind about who is in charge of your life; change your presuppositions about who God is; believe and submit to what Jesus has revealed.

Ultimately, there's only 2 categories of people in the world; those who have submitted to Jesus and received his salvation ... and those in rebellion against him. Which category are you in?

Listen: **When the news about the sinking of the Titanic** was being reported in New York, *The New York Times* on its front page printed two columns: lost and saved. Those who made it to a lifeboat were saved; those who didn't were drowned—unless you were Rose who found a floating door and refused to share it with your supposed boyfriend, Jack--But otherwise, just 2 categories.

- **In the same way, there are only 2 categories of people** in the world: those saved by Jesus and those who will drown in judgment.

3. Be broken

Christian, I want you to urge you to stare into these visions with eyes wide open until it turns your stomach bitter.

- Every person you know will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. Do you care?
- Does that break your heart? Has it changed your life?
- When's the last time you told someone about Jesus? Do your friends know? Does your family know how urgent the message about Jesus is?

Many Christians are functional universalists.

- A universalist is someone who believes that ultimately everyone will be saved and there's no future judgment for anyone.
- That may not be what you actually believe in your head, but it's how you live.
- You don't live with any urgency, any brokenness about people you say you love who are headed toward judgment. You're a functional universalist.

Listen, friend: If you really believe these things, it has to change how you see the world. It has to change what's important to you and how you talk to your friends.

I saw an ABC news story about a woman who parked her minivan on the side of the road to run drop off something on a friend's porch; she got out and, to her horror, it started to roll backwards (it was on a pretty steep incline, and she had forgotten to take it out of gear, and at the bottom of the hill was another high traffic road. Her twin 2-year-old daughters were in it. She tried to get back in but couldn't reach the front door in time, so in a split-second decision, she threw herself under the van just in front of the back wheel to try and stop it. It worked. It crushed 3 of her ribs and it almost killed her. But in the

interview she said, without any hesitation, **“It was worth it.”**¹⁴ Our message is even more urgent than that, and it’s worth the sacrifice of everything to get it out--our money, our time, bodies--all of it.

Paul said he was in anguish night and day over the fate of fellow Jews who had rejected Jesus. His soul was never really at rest knowing how many people he loved were still lost. **Is that how you feel?** God give us a brokenness that leads to prayer and urgency and sacrifice in telling people the good news about Jesus!

Finally,

4. Be confident

VAMP

Again, every presentation of judgment in Revelation ends with a glorious picture of Jesus on the throne at the end, surrounded by people of every tribe and tongue and nation worshiping him.

- What we see is that **though this world with devils filled would threaten to undo us**, Jesus’ mission will be accomplished.
- **And he expects his church**, because of these visions, to be bold and audacious, expecting his protection and provision.

Pastor Tony Evans, in Dallas, tells the story of doing an evangelistic crusade in Brice Stadium in Columbia, SC. Somewhere between 15–20,000 people had gathered there to hear him preach the gospel, and before the service, all the planning team and local city pastors had gathered downstairs, underneath Brice stadium, to go over the night and pray. It had been overcast all day, and just before they went into

prayer, one of the event coordinators came in and said, “Bad news: we’ve just been warned that a major storm is coming our way and it is scheduled to be right over us at 7:00” (when the event was supposed to start). So, Pastor Tony said, “We went into prayer, and we prayed that God would hold off the rain--but we were all praying ‘safe prayers.’” He asks, “Do you know what a ‘safe’ prayer is? A safe prayer is where you say, ‘Lord, if it be thy will, don’t let it rain.’ You throw in the ‘if it’s your will’ bit because that way, if it still rains, you can get God off the hook.” So all us pastors are praying all these safe prayers, but at the end, a little 5’1” lady named Linda, not a pastor, just one of the backstage volunteers said, “May I pray?” And she said, “Lord, we are here at Brice stadium doing what you asked us to do. You asked us to proclaim your Word and we have spent money, time, and energy putting this crusade together, doing what YOU told us to do, God. So it seems that you would be embarrassing yourself, Lord, if you let it rain, so therefore, Lord, [and *here’s where it got crazy*, Dr. Evans said], I command you to stop the rain.”

Dr. Evans said, “All the preachers looked at each other and waited for lightning to strike this poor little 5’1” woman who was commanding God to stop the rain. Then we all walked up into the stadium,” he said. “It’s now 7:00 and time for the service to begin. The emcee came out and said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, we know rain is supposed to come; but we’re just going to go as long as we can.’ And we began the service,” Pastor Tony said, and “you could see all these dark clouds headed toward us. And you could hear thunder, and you could start to hear the splatter of rain just outside the stadium. Then it began to mist in the stadium, and you could see people start to leave. But then I looked down from the platform; Pastor Evans said, and there’s little Linda in the crowd, sitting next to a gentleman who opened up his umbrella and put it over her. Linda, expressionless,”

¹⁴<https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/03/mom-lies-down-as-speed-bump-to-save-daughters-in-rolling-car>.

she said, “quietly reached up her hand and pushed away his umbrella.”

“And then it happened,” Dr. Evans said. “As we sat there in Brice Stadium, with our own eyes we saw the rain clouds split; half of them went around the left of the stadium, and half of them went around the right side, and then they came back together at the other end of the stadium and rained over there. It was the most incredible thing I’d ever seen.

Dr. Evans says: “The preachers were being spiritually polite,” but Linda prayed with an audacity that came from knowing how committed the Lamb on the throne is to doing what he said he’d do.”

Now, hear me: my point is not that you should never say, “If it’s God’s will” when we pray. No, we always pray in submission to God’s will. The point is that visions like the ones we see in Revelation prompt that kind of boldness--and there are times when we say, “Jesus, yes, the opposition we face is fierce, but you said this gospel would be preached in all the world, and I’m not in charge of all the world but I’m right here in this place right now, so let it happen *here*. Give me that power you promised. And you pray open a miraculous door for someone to hear the gospel.

“And though this world with devils filled, will threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God has willed, his grace to triumph through us! The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him--one little word will fell him! That word above all earthly powers--” is the word of faith, the word of the gospel, the name of Jesus. We speak the name of Jesus over lostness in the world, and that one, mighty little word will “fell him.”

So, 2 questions today: **Have you received him?** Are you ready?

- **Listen, life is short. It’s like a vapor, Scripture says.** An accident, or a heart failure, or a car wreck could do more than put you flat

on your back (as happened to my professional athlete friend); this very night you could be in eternity.

- **Are you ready? Have you received Jesus?** Are you fully submitted to him?
- There’s only 2 columns: those united to Jesus are saved; those apart from him are lost.
- **Believer, are you ready?**
 - **Let me ask it to you this way:** If Jesus came back today, what would you regret leaving undone? Someone you never told about Jesus? Someone you never got reconciled to--you never asked their forgiveness or extended them yours? **Are you ready?** Be ready, for the Son of Man comes at the hour you think not.
 - **Or how about this: What audacious thing is God telling you to attempt for the gospel?** Is he putting something in your heart right now? Someone you need to **share Christ** with. **Some bold venture:** Now, don’t do it all willy-nilly—I’m not telling you to go do something stupid; but you’ve got to listen for the Spirit’s leadership. But what audacious thing is he putting in your heart? Maybe it’s **just to reach out to somebody** this week--maybe invite them to **Church at the Dome**. Or reach out, and pray for a miracle.

Bow your heads... if you’re not ready, I want to give you a chance to get ready! Never received Jesus? Leave you in this moment: Pray for courage to do what God is telling you to do!