

Sermon
Therfield Chapel
5th October 2008
Revelation 11: 15-19

On 6th June 1944 the world witnessed probably the greatest logistical operation ever mounted – D Day - otherwise known as the Normandy Landings

By the end of the day around 140,000 soldiers setting out from the South Coast had landed on French beaches

10,000 were dead by sunset as were 7,000 Germans

6,900 ships were used in the operation plus 12,000 planes

Within a month, a million men were ashore

But D Day was only one battle – albeit a vital one

It's probably fair to say that The Allies' success on D Day made final victory Europe a virtual certainty

But despite the great victory, the war still had to be fought to the end

In fact fighting continued for more than a year

Germany surrendered on 7th May 1945 (11 months later) and Japan on 6th August of the same year

In the church we rightly think a lot about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus

These were decisive battles with sin and evil and Satan

Because of them the final victory of the kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness is assured

But we know that even despite Christ's victory, sin and evil are still present in this world

And that the church has been given the task of living out that victory and proclaiming it to a world that largely doesn't care

It's not a struggle as to who will be the final winner – that question was settled at Calvary

But the struggle is still on

D Day has already happened but we fight onto our Berlin

Now here in this passage in Revelation 11 we find a brief account of the future conclusion of the conflict – the Berlin of the struggle if you like

Here will see the final act in the struggle between God and Satan; between the world and the people of God

Look in verse 15:

¹⁵The 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."

So we're looking into the future

Now this passage needs context – it doesn't hang on its own but is a part of the whole Book

So let's just refresh our memories about where we're up to

As you can see in tonight's passage we find the seventh and final trumpet sounding

Now you'll remember that the previous six trumpets all heralded God's judgement on the earth – we found them in chapter 8

- (1) Trumpet One – scorched earth
- (2) Trumpet Two – polluted seas
- (3) Trumpet Three - contaminated water
- (4) Trumpet Four - Signs in the heavens
- (5) Trumpet Five - Satan and the locusts
- (6) Trumpet Six - A scene of war and destruction

Now I suggested that it difficult to avoid the conclusion that some things that happen in world history – some tragedies and natural disasters - are the result of God's judgement in action

In the ancient world the trumpet was used to make people sit up and listen

To help us understand these trumpets I reminded you of the verses in Luke 13 where we have an account of Jesus talking to some people about a tower falling down, seemingly killing eighteen people

And Jesus asks the question: "Do you think that they [the people who died] were worse sinners than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish"

Jesus is making the point that tragedies should be seen as a warning and should lead us to repentance – it's as if he cautions us against seeing them only as an occasion to philosophize about their cause

And so the lesson we drew was that when we see earthquakes and tsunamis and terrorist outrages and credit crunches and countless other things

They're a reminder that life is brief and fragile

They're to focus our minds on bigger meanings because usually our smaller meanings evaporate when we face pain and upset

They're a reminder that God may be speaking to us and we better listen

In those now famous words of CS Lewis:

““God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world”

Let's make sure we listen

So those six trumpets are a warning

And yet sadly we found in verse 20 (chapter 9) that there was no repentance following those judgments

Then after the 6 trumpets we have an interlude before the 7th trumpet – an interlude found in Chapters 10 and 11

I think that the interlude reminds us of what the church's role is during the Gospel Age

So in Chapter 11, amongst other things we find that there a temple of God on the earth and two witnesses to whom God gives power and authority to prophesy or preach and work miracles

Most probably the temple is the church

I think that the witnesses represent the church's proclamation; God speaking His word in a world that despite being judged by God carries on in rebellion against Him

These verses are a reminder that amidst all the tumult of judgement and distress and martyrdom, God still has places where people worship him and speak for him

Yes God seeks to speak to people in the cataclysmic events of the world, but He also has His people preaching the gospel to the very end

God never leaves Himself without a witness

But we find that the witnesses are murdered and whilst their bodies lie in the streets there's great celebration and gloating over their deaths

We should never underestimate the lengths that fallen human beings will go to to extinguish the word of God

As sinful people we don't want the truth and would rather invent and inhabit a worldview that makes no room for God and His word

We're reminded that without God's grace in our lives, all of us both individually and collectively want to be our own source and beginning; we want to live without bowing the knee to anyone; to live without the humiliation of needing to be forgiven

We don't want the Cosmic Interferer in our lives

Frank Sinatra put it well (with his anthem for fallen man) :

For what is a man, what has he got?
If not himself, then he has naught
To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels
The record shows I took the blows and did it my way!

Yes, it was my way

And doing it "my way" means that we suppress God's truth and if necessary silence His prophets – as we find here - in our attempts to airbrush God out of His world

And then we come to tonight's passage and here find the final trumpet – the seventh one being blown by an angel

Trumpets were sounded in the ancient world before an important announcement was made

But they were also used for other reasons

A particular note warned of immanent danger – a warning as we've already seen

But another note heralded an all clear – that the threat had gone away

It was like that during the Second World War when there was a siren

There was one sound for an immanent bombing raid and another for the all clear

And for the people of God – this seventh trumpet is the all clear sound

The kingdom of God is coming

I have a hunch that this is the same trumpet that Paul spoke of when he wrote of Christ's return in I Thessalonians :

¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹

So let's pick up three themes from this short passage and comment on them

The trumpet sounds victory
The trumpet sounds judgement
The trumpet sounds reward

(1) The Trumpet Sounds Victory

As you look around you, you will have noticed that God's kingdom has not yet fully come

We don't live in a world where The Creator is centre stage

We don't live in a world where the Name of God is universally hallowed and honoured (far from it)

We don't live in a world where all the people praise and worship God

In fact in our society it's true to say that most people carry on as their Maker doesn't exist and in many cases declare that He doesn't exist

And we live in a world with innumerable problems which result in countless tears and incalculable suffering

All is not well with the world to put it mildly

And so we can say with the Lord's Prayer that the Kingdom of God has not yet come on earth as it is in heaven

There are lots of kingdoms that carry on without reference to the Lord

But here we are told that following this last trumpet:

15b "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

¹ I Thessalonians 4:1v6

So after this trumpet is sounded, there are no kingdoms or nations left that belong to anyone except Christ

The is almost certainly the Second Coming

The time Jesus spoke of when he said:

²⁷For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

There will be a sudden and dramatic return of the Lord Jesus to earth that all will witness

And the world as we know it will be no more

Christ will return to take what is rightfully His

And all the kingdoms of the world will belong to him

And he will reign for ever and ever (as Handel's Messiah reminds us)

We remember the words of the Christmas reading "And of his kingdom there shall be no end"

He will reign over a regenerated earth in unchallenged authority forever²

The world will be turned the right way up

And His kingdom will be consummated

And so for us, "There will come a day when all the evils of history – the plagues and famines and wars and all the rest will become like a bad dream from which we've woken up"³

And so we have a declaration of praise from the 24 elders who say:

17 "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.

We're used to the refrain: "The One who was and is and is to come"

But here we have no 'is to come' – because by now he has come

So here we have a declaration of the victory of the King – King Jesus

² Harry Woods, sermon preached on this passage.

³ David Pawson

Now when we in our country want to make an announcement of some great event – perhaps the birth of a royal child or a great military victory – we sound the guns of the artillery

And so one commentator called the second half of verse 19, “heaven’s artillery”:

And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

At last Christ is going to rule the world

These things must have been a great encouragement for those early Christians as they faced terrible persecution at the hand of a hostile and violent world

A new world was coming

(2) The Trumpet Sounds Judgment

For those who are not brought to repentance by first six judgements, the 7th trumpet will be a woe⁴

It will be the final woe from which there is no appeal

Look in verse 18: “The time has come for judging the dead”

And at the end of the verse: [the time has come]“For destroying those who destroy the earth”

The Bible teaches that at the end of the world all – both Christians and non - Christians will be raised in body and soul to stand before the great white throne of God

Look over into Revelation 20:11-15

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Notice how all those are dead will be given up – raised up - to face judgement

So when Christ comes to reign – when his kingdom fully comes, we have the inescapable fact that he will come with his scales of justice and with the sword of the executioner⁵

⁴ Michael Wilcock. The Message of Revelation.

And everyone will stand before God

When I was twelve a policeman in Cheshire reported that my mother jumped a red traffic light

And in those days you had to attend court to face the magistrate – even for a motoring offense

Now I remember seeing the letter; she wasn't invited to court she was summoned

It's the same for anyone facing justice

And with God's final justice, there'll be no opting out, no excuses to be made that will carry any weight whatsoever

Not believing in God in this life will not make a jot of difference as to whether or not you will appear

God is ultimately unavoidable

We will all be summoned

And it will be a day of great revealing

Jesus speaking of that day said that there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed and nothing concealed that will not be made known or brought out into the open⁶

The apostle Paul spoke of a day when God will judge the secrets of men's hearts

Everything is written in God's great books – every thought and deed in history is recorded

The Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote: "All men's sins are printed in heaven, and God will at last read them out in the ears of the whole world"

And we know from this very book that on that day men and women will call upon the mountains and the rocks to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb⁷

But there'll be nowhere to run to; no where to hide

There'll be no excuses that will carry any weight

⁵ Harry Woods ibid

⁶ Luke 8: 17

⁷ Rev 6: 16-17

In this country, when we stand before the court we can't say: "I didn't know what the speed limit was" or "I didn't know that theft was wrong"

For we all have a duty to know what the law says

All laws in democratic societies are enacted publically and the statute books are available for all to read in the public library

And it's the same with the moral Law of God – the Ten Commandments that will almost certainly form the basis of God's judgement

The standard by which we will be judged was set our three and a half thousand years ago and is set down in every Bible in the world

So there is a sense in which God's law is public – open for all to see

And we have a duty to know what's in it

And even if there isn't a Bible for a thousand miles we all have a conscience which gives us a sense of right and wrong – such thinking led Paul to argue that the law of God is written on the hearts each one of us

And so none of us will be able to say on that Day, "We didn't know"

And of course on that Day the most serious indictment against all of us will be "What did you do with the Truth incarnate – the Lord Jesus – did you heed him?"

What was your response to the one whose word cut through all the webs of lies and deceits that the human race spins day by day

"What did you do with my Son – the one who came from heaven to reveal the final will and purpose of God"

The coming of the Lord Jesus blew away all the excuses that may exist

God has made himself known – we can't plead ignorance – certainly not in the country

I tend to agree with Jim Packer who wrote: "No man is entirely without inklings of judgement to come"

The final reason that people don't believe is always the same, they don't want to – the truth is just too inconvenient

It's mainly not because of ignorance

It's just the same as in the days of Jesus when he told the story of the rich man in Hades who asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers of the judgment to come and Abraham said:

³¹ 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

Fundamentally it's not a lack of evidence that causes people not to believe

So the dead will be judged and God will destroy those who destroy His world

And on that Day of Judgment we will ask: Is it possible to give thanks to God after all that?⁸

And the answer will be yes

People ask: "Why does God allow evil? Why doesn't He do something about it?"

And when we read the Book of Revelation to them about the coming day when God will do something, how often do people say: "Oh, I don't want Him to do that!"

We can't have it both ways

Either God will destroy evil or evil will destroy all that is good and right and will finally triumph over good

Often we shrink from judgement, but how much does our reaction stem from a lack of concern for the glory of God?⁹

And what of Christian believers on the Day of Judgement?

Well, to those forgiven by God

To those who have accepted the judgment inflicted on Christ in our place, we have nothing to fear

For Christ has been judged in our place so that we never need be judged

Paul tells us that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

All who accept Christ we will stand before that great white throne not as we are but as we are in Christ

⁸ I got this thought and what follows from it from a sermon by David Pawson

⁹ Michael Wilcock

William Secker wrote: “There is no possibility of standing before Christ but by standing in Christ”

And in Christ we are forgiven and justified

To be justified means that God’s final verdict of “not guilty” is stamped on us now

We can have no fear, not because we are guilt free but because on the cross Jesus bore the wrath we deserve

And we will be acquitted

In the days of the American pioneers as they moved West across the Great Continent, one great fear they faced was being caught by a prairie fire

Even the fastest horse couldn’t outrun the spread of such a fire, let alone a human being

The solution those early pioneers found was very simple

When they saw a fire on the horizon coming toward them, they would take a match and burn a designated circular area around them

Then they would take their stand in the burned area and wait for the prairie fire to come

Even if they faced an avalanche of fire they found that they would be safe because fire had already passed over the place where they stood and the fire had nothing to burn

Eventually using this method they learned not to be afraid of the coming firewall

On that Great Day of the Lord, when the fire of God’s judgment comes, there is only one spot that is safe

Nearly two thousand ago the wrath of God was poured on Calvary

There the Son of God took the wrath that should have fallen on us

And if we take our stand by the cross, we are safe for time and eternity¹⁰

But there’s no where else that is safe

(3) The Trumpet Sounds Reward

Look in verse 18:

¹⁰ Michael Green, Illustrations for Biblical Preaching p207.

The time has come for judging the dead (we've already thought about) ,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great—

This is one of several passages in Bible that speaks of reward for the people of God

Here there are rewards for the prophets, the saints, those who reverence the name of God
both small and great

That seems to include all Christians to me

One thing's for sure, I expect that on that Day God will blow all our categories of what
constitutes the great and the small believer

I know a Christian lady who looks after her sick and complaining husband day after day

She rarely complains herself although every day is a struggle

She's probably never led a Bible study or led many souls to Christ or been on the mission
field

In the world's eyes she's not in any way successful – by how our society counts success

And although she seems small in once sense I think she's probably one of the great ones
to God – a real hero

I think one day He'll say to her: "Well done good and faithful servant, enter now into the
joy of your Lord"

God will reward small and great

And look at the last verse in our passage:

¹⁹Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his
covenant.

So John sees this amazing temple not built by human hands and in it is the ark of the
covenant

The temple and the ark is where God lives

Now in the Old Testament the thing that characterised the temple and the ark were no
entry signs

No entry to gentiles; to women; to anyone but the priest; to anyone except the high priest
– lots of restricted areas

God was unapproachable and they had to learn that lesson – the way to God was dangerous and difficult

But here notice that we find that the way to God is open for all the people of God

“God’s temple in heaven was opened”

We shall stand before Him in His Temple

And we shall see the King in all His dazzling beauty and splendour

Paul said in Romans 5, “And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God”¹¹

I think this was what he was talking about

This is our ultimate reward – we inherit God himself

Henry C. Morrison was an American missionary in Africa for 40 years

Eventually he headed home by boat

On that same boat also rode Theodore Roosevelt (the American president) who’d been on a hunting trip in Africa

Upon arriving in New York’s harbour there was great fanfare to greet the president back home

But no one was there to meet Morrison

Morrison, dejected, prayed and said to the Lord that on coming home he might have had some recognition for forty years in the Lord’s service

He recorded that a small voice came to him and said, “Henry—you’re not home yet.”¹²

God will reward those who are His

Let’s pray

¹¹ Romans 5:2b

¹² Michael Green, Illustrations for Biblical Preaching p306