

Text: Rev. 9:13-21

Title: "Woe to the earth-dwellers – Part 3"

Time: 10/8/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro: Our passage this morning describes the sixth of seven trumpet judgments coming to the earth during the great tribulation period after the rapture of the church, during which God's people, with a few sealed exceptions, will no longer inhabit the earth.

You may remember from Chapter 8 that the first four of these judgments will be natural disasters, some of which could be man-made, some not. The first trumpet involved a hailstorm mingled with fire and blood, which destroys 1/3 of the plant life of the earth. In the second trumpet, an asteroid hits the sea, causing 1/3 of the sea creatures to die and destroying 1/3 of the ships on the sea and in harbor. The third trumpet causes a meteorite airburst called Wormwood that contaminates 1/3 of the earth's fresh water resources. And then in the fourth trumpet, 1/3 of the earth's atmosphere contains obstructions that darken the day and night skies.

Last week we saw that the 5th trumpet caused all men on the earth to be tormented supernaturally by demons that looked to John like locust-scorpions. This would go on for 5 months, during which period men would seek death but be unable to die. This judgment is called the first of three woes. The sixth trumpet judgment and the seventh are the second and third woes (8:13, 9:12, 11:14).

I would like for us to begin this morning thinking about the meaning of that word *woe*. If you look it up in a dictionary, you will find basically that *woe* can have two related mean-

ings. It can be an exclamation of personal sorrow, like it was for Isaiah in Isaiah 6:5, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"; or like Paul in 1 Cor. 9:16, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" We are familiar with these kinds of exclamations of personal sorrow.

But a *woe* can also be a denouncing curse that can produce personal sorrow. That is its meaning in these passages in Revelation, and I was struck this past week at how often our Lord used the word *woe* in this way in His ministry. He pronounces a curse that produces personal sorrow on people a number of times in His preaching. He used it against the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida for failing to believe in Him (Matt. 11:21); He used it against the scribes and Pharisees because of their false teaching (8 times in Matthew 23); He used it once against Judas for his betrayal (Matt. 26:24); and He even used it against those who are rich, full, laughing, and flattered by men (Luke 6:24-26).

But think for a minute about what happened when Jesus pronounced a woe upon someone. It was business as usual for Chorazin and Bethsaida after they heard His woe. The scribes and Pharisees ultimately had Him crucified after they heard Him. Judas betrayed Him anyway. The rich have stayed rich; the full have stayed full; the laughers have kept on laughing, and the those who are flattered have continued to accept flattery. The woes that Jesus spoke were not enactments of present judgment, but gracious warnings of future judgment. He spoke them to keep people from judgment, not to bring it upon them. Where His woes were believed, people could avoid their denouncing curse.

We are reading about these woes of the trumpet judgments during this same time of grace, a period of judgment withheld. We are told about these things now because the Lord desires us to believe them and to avoid them.

So with that understanding of the Lord's gracious purpose behind a passage like this one, I want us to see that there are really two forms of woe in this passage – the woe of the sixth trumpet judgment, which affects 1/3 of the inhabitants of the earth, and the woe of the hard human heart, which affects all the rest.

I. The sixth trumpet brings 1/3 of the people on the earth woe (vv. 13-19).

Illustration: This past week I had the privilege of enjoying some great preaching on the 5 Solas of the Protestant Reformation at our NRBFC fall conference in Hopewell Junction, NY. It is the 500th anniversary of Luther's nailing the 95 theses on the castle-church door at Wittenberg against the Roman Catholic Church's sale of indulgences. The 5 Solas were actually summary points of Protestant theology: *Sola Scriptura* means "the Scriptures alone," *Sola Gratia* means "grace alone"; *Sola Fides*, "faith alone"; *Solus Christus*, "Christ alone"; and *Soli Deo Gloria*, "to the glory of God alone."

Application: That word *sola* is an important one in this book of the Bible called *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. There is one who sits on the throne; there is one who is worthy to open the seals of the scroll; and in our passage there is one voice that comes from the four horns of the golden altar of incense (v. 13). We first read of this altar in 8:3. There we find an angel who represents Jesus Christ, the high-priest with a golden censer that brings the prayers of God's saints

to the throne of God. That censer crashes to earth in judgment, and so in this sixth trumpet judgment we see not only horrific tragedy, but also horrific tragedy that is under the control and command of Jesus Christ, the High Priest and the Lamb. Christ alone is the judge of this sixth trumpet judgment. He judges as the provision of salvation rejected.

Jesus commands that four angels are loosed at or near the River Euphrates. This likely represents four nations that converge for warfare in that area (v. 14). One third of men will die, but it will be the angels and the One who alone commands them who will do the killing (v. 15). They will do so right on the prepared schedule. This does not just happen on its own. Their number is given as 200,000,000 (v. 16), and their weaponry is described as involving the red of fire, the blue [jacinth] of smoke, and sulfur (vv. 17-19).

Illustration: John is trying to describe what he sees, and it seems clear that he can hardly believe his own eyes. He hears the number of these troops at 200,000,000, and scholars estimate that in John's lifetime, that would have been about what the population of the entire world then was. He even has to assure himself with "I heard their number" (v. 16). Today, of course, it is far easier to imagine a force of this magnitude gathering in the area of the Euphrates. China by itself has 1.4 billion people, 775,000,000 of which are available for its labor force. If that is one of the four nations gathered by their angels, it is easier to imagine 200,000,000 troops gathered together for battle.

It is also easier today than it was in John's day to imagine how fire, smoke, and sulfur combine as powerful weapons of conventional warfare. Gunpowder was invented around 700 A.D. in China and weaponized some 200 years later, but John describes in this first-century passage its power from

these tank-like horses. When these armies clash, 1/3 of the inhabitants of the earth are killed in this warfare.

Application: War is a terrible woe. It is always an act of God's judgment on the nations of the earth. Lincoln said in his 2nd inaugural address of our nation's civil war, "The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?" The offenses of man's sin bring the woes of God's judgment. Abraham Lincoln understood that. Do we? What is true of nations is true of individuals in this regard. Paul warns us in Gal. 6:7, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

II. The hard heart brings 2/3 of the people on the earth woe (vv. 20-21).

Illustration: In June of 1520, Pope Leo X issued a papal bull that was entitled, "Arise, O Lord." It was an attack on Martin Luther and his writings. In 1521 Luther would be summoned to defend himself at the Diet of Worms. His works were laid out before him, and he was asked a simple question - "Do you recant or do you reaffirm?" It was clear that the church would have Luther executed if he refused to recant his work. Luther responded: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it

is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. [Here I stand. I can do no other.] May God help me. Amen.”

Application: That is a resolve that comes from the heart of a child of God who loves the truth. Tragically, that same level of resolve can come from the hard heart of a sinner that refuses to repent of his sin. This is itself a great woe. When it comes to the works of their own hands, heart-hearted sinners say: “Here I stand, I will do no other.” When it comes to worshipping and obeying Satan and demons, they say: “Here I stand, I will do no other.” When it comes to the worship of idols, at every level of financial strata, in spite of the idols’ inability to see or hear or walk, they say: “Here I stand, I will do no other.” When it comes to their murders and sorceries [Gr: *pharmakon*; a word that includes drug abuse (cp. *pharmacy*)] and fornications and thefts, they say: “Here I stand, I will do no other.”

We read of the hardness of these hearts in this time of great judgment with some amazement that the human heart could be so committed to evil in a day like that. But what of our day? Is it not even more amazing that people are equally committed to these evils during this day of great grace and goodness? Consider Rom. 2:4-6: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds.”

Does God's goodness in withholding judgment lead us to repentance? Do we have a tender heart before the Lord and His law?

To answer that question honestly about ourselves, we should measure our walk against that of King Josiah, for the Lord called his heart a tender heart (2 Kings. 22:11-20). Josiah read God's Word and trembled before it with humility and a desire to see his life changed that he might conform to the will of God. God honored him for that. Is that how we read our Bibles? Would the Lord say that we have the tender heart He saw in Josiah?

Conclusion: We may never have to experience the woe of the 6th trumpet judgment. We may get to live out our days in the midst of God's goodness. If you are a believer on Christ for salvation from sin, your hope is the rapture of the church. You ought to take comfort that you will not know the woe of the trumpet judgments. I sincerely hope that is the case for each one of us here this morning.

But what will our hearts be like? Will we experience the woe of hard hearts mentioned by this passage? Will they be humble contrite hearts that recognize God's goodness and are willingly led to repentance? Or like those under this second woe, will we refuse to repent of the sin that is in our life? The works of our own hands rather than God's way become our focus. We worship demons and idols instead of our God. The hatred of murders, the escapes of sorceries, the lusts of fornications, and selfishness of thefts dominate us. Can we see this morning that the goodness of God leads us to repentance? Or will we live on with the woe of a heart that is hardened and unrepentant?

Will it be written of us some day, "They repented not"?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*