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Advent Vision: The Seven Trumpets

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Rev. 11:15-18

No book of the Bible is more challenging and more confusing, more widely-interpreted and wildly misused, than the book of Revelation. The weirdest and strangest stuff in the whole Bible is found here in Revelation. Page after page, chapter after chapter, symbol after symbol makes you scratch your head, and question, “What is going on here? How can we possibly understand that?”

So, of course, Pastor Lew and I, in a moment of great bravery or great foolishness, decided, “Let’s preach from the book of Revelation in the weeks before Christmas.” This year, instead of talking to you in Advent about Mary, Joseph, the angels, and the shepherds, we’re going to dig in to the weirdly-wonderful book of Revelation.

And here’s why. Revelation is reassurance. Revelation is reassurance for suffering Christians.

Now, just to remind you, Revelation was written by a man named John. He was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles, and he also wrote the Gospel of John, along with three short Biblical letters (1, 2, 3 John). In Revelation, though, John writes down a series of spectacular, astonishing visions of heaven, visions of the heavenly realms, visions of the world we live in seen through the eyes of God. And John shared these extraordinary visions, these reassuring revelations, with suffering Christians in his day who were being persecuted by the Romans.

Revelation is still reassurance for suffering Christians. Many Christians in our world – and many Christians in this room –

are going through hardship, turmoil, struggle, tribulation, persecution, faith crises, family conflicts, economic stress, spiritual despair. We're plagued by terrorists, besieged by cultural changes, assaulted by worldly values, deafened by ungodly voices. We are being challenged every single day, aren't we, to just fit in like everybody else, and to stop standing up for what we believe in.

Revelation is reassurance for suffering Christians, for you and me. Revelation reminds us that God is still in control, despite all the madness of this world. So over the next month, in our weekend and Wednesday night sermons, we're going to look closely at several important symbols, or images, from Revelation that speak to our struggles. We start today with a tough one: the seven trumpets.

Halfway through the book, we start reading about the seven trumpets. In chapter eight, John tells us about seven angels who are standing before the throne of God. Each angel holds a trumpet. One by one, the angels blast their trumpets; and, one by one, terrible and frightening events unfold.

These visions that John records are not literal, minute-by-minute descriptions of human history or future history. These are God-given, Spirit-designed, visual images of spiritual realities that God wants his people to grab hold of.

Trumpets blare, and plagues fall upon the earth, one by one. Hail and fire, mixed with blood, fall upon the earth. A burning mountain falls into the sea. A great star falls from heaven and poisons the waters of earth. The sun, moon, and stars are partially darkened. Smoke pours from the earth, and darkens the sky. Giant locusts torment the people of earth who don't believe in God. Angels and millions of mounted troops bring death upon much of the earth's population, while the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these

plagues, fall deeper and deeper into sin. All of that is recorded in Revelation chapters 8-9: alarming events prompted by the first six trumpet blasts.

See, Revelation is not for the faint of heart. Revelation is not for those Christians who only want to hear the Good News, for those who don't want to believe that God ever gets mad. We may try to pretend, sometimes, that our own routine, familiar sins don't have awful consequences; but God doesn't pretend. God knows. God sees the consequences. And God is telling us, in John's vision of the seven trumpets, that our sin is destroying the world. Our sin is destroying our relationships. Our sin is destroying our health, and our future.

We read about it every day in the paper, on the internet. We see it every night on the TV news. And it's not just the criminals out there, or the terrorists, or the law-breakers who are destroying our world. It's us, too. My sin, and your sin, has devastating consequences. Listen to those angel trumpets screaming out, one by one. Look around at the world you live in, and see John's vision happening today. It's frightening. It's awful, isn't it?

But I said there were seven trumpets, didn't I? Chapters 8 and 9 record the destructive events that came after the first six angels blew their trumpets. We jump to chapter 11. Finally, here comes the reassurance. Here's the real solution to the world's woes. Verse 15:

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is*

*and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”*  
(Revelation 11:15-18)

What is God saying to us here? What does John's vision of the seventh trumpet have to say about our lives, and about our world, today?

God is in control! God will see you through! His salvation will happen. His promises come true. His Son will reign.

Yes, sin is real. Yes, our suffering and sickness and war and racism are all real. Yes, God's wrath against sin is real, and this world is being destroyed. But Christ will reign. God is in control! *'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.'*

Do you recognize those words, from verse 15, used in the *'Hallelujah Chorus'*? As Christians, we can sing "Hallelujah's" not just at Christmas and Easter, but every day. We face real-world troubles, and the first six trumpets of Revelation teach us that the world we live in is being destroyed. But listen for that seventh trumpet. Hear it sounding forth, on this first Sunday in Advent. The seventh trumpet calls us once again to believe in a living, victorious, triumphant Savior. Jesus died to conquer sin for us, and he rose to break the power of death in our lives. The seven trumpets teach us that sin and destruction are real, but the power and the victory of Christ are real, too. And he shall reign forever and ever!

Revelation is reassurance for suffering Christians. Amen.