

THE SILENCE IN HEAVEN **Revelation 8:1-6**

INTRODUCTION:

I do not often preach from the Book of the Revelation. The reason is because I do not understand the book very well. I know a few things for sure about this book.

- I know there are a multitude of different interpretations, firmly held and tenaciously defended, by a variety of scholars.
- Because these scholars not only do not all agree and they often contradict one another, I know that they cannot all be right. In fact, it is possible that none of them are correct.
- I know that, in the end, God wins, Jesus reigns and the saints are rewarded for eternity.
- I know that, in the end, Satan loses, his angels are defeated and his servants are tortured for eternity.

And I believe if God wanted me to know more than that, He would have made it plain, just as He has made plain everything else He wants me to know.

Because the Book of the Revelation is such a minefield of controversy, such a hotbed of speculation, such a labyrinth of interpretation, I typically give it a pretty wide berth in my preaching. But two weeks ago, I preached from Revelation 10 on the theme of The Little Book. And this week, I will preach on the subject of The Silence in Heaven.

Now if you are hoping that I will attempt to give a date for the second coming of the Lord, you will be disappointed. If you are thinking I may try to identify some political figure as The Antichrist, you will be discouraged. If you are wondering if I will endeavor to decode the meaning of "666", you will be dissatisfied.

I know enough about the second coming of the Lord to realize I am prevented from determining when it will be. I know I must live in readiness because he could return at any time. I know that when he does, I want to be living for him. And really, isn't that enough to know?

The Book of the Revelation was not given to us so we would have a printed order of service for the hereafter; it was given to us so we would have insights for living in the here and now.

With that in mind, I want us to take a broad view of Revelation 5, 6, 7 & 8 and then I want to zoom in and take a close-up look at Revelation 8:1

- In Revelation 5, we are introduced to a couple of images that are important to everything that follows: a scroll sealed with seven seals and a slaughtered lamb that, strangely, is alive again. This is a rather lengthy passage but I want to read it to you in its entirety so you can picture the scene and feel the emotion that John experienced when God revealed this vision to him.

^{5:1} Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song:

*"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

*¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our
God,
and they will reign on the earth."*

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they sang:

*"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"*

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"*

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

- In Revelation 6, Heaven's Lamb begins to open the first six seals that are on the scroll. After each of the first four seals is broken, one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (or, of the Book of the Revelation) rides forth. First a rider on a white horse, then a rider on a fiery red horse, then a rider on a black horse and finally a rider on a pale horse. After the fifth seal is broken, John is granted a vision of the fallen Christian martyrs, robed in white. After the sixth seal is opened, there is a great earthquake, the sun turns black, the moon turns red, the stars fall to the earth and every mountain and island on earth is removed from its place.
- In Revelation 7, it is revealed that Jesus' faithful followers are protected, preserved and rewarded for their loyalty to the Lord.
- Then, in Revelation 8, the Lamb breaks the seventh seal and that triggers total silence in all of heaven for about a half an hour. It is here that I want to camp out and settle down to do some careful thinking.

Up to this point, heaven has been pictured as a pretty noisy place. In Revelation 1:7, all the peoples of the earth are mourning. In 1:10, John heard a voice like a loud trumpet. In 4:1, he hears the voice like a trumpet again. In 4:5, John hears rumblings and peals of thunder emanating from the throne of God. In 4:8, John sees and hears four living creatures praising God day and night and they never stop. In 5:2, a mighty angel makes a proclamation in a loud voice. In 5:9, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are pictured singing a new song. By 5:12, there is a multitude numbering "thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand" all singing in a loud voice. In the next verse, every living creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth joins in the chorus. As I've already noted, when the first seal on the scroll is opened, there is a voice like thunder. In 6:16, kings, princes, generals, the rich and the mighty, the slaves and the freemen are all calling on rocks and mountains to fall upon them. In 7:10, a multitude that is so great that no one could count it is crying out to God in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Then, in 8:1, the seventh seal is opened and there is silence.

For a hush to fall over all of heaven, something important must be taking place. Let's see if we can figure out what it is.

To do our detective work, let's look first at:

I. **What Happened Before The Silence in Heaven**

Immediately before the opening of the seventh and final seal, all creatures are worshipping God and they are worshipping the Lamb of God. Angels; four apocalyptic living creatures; heaven's elders; the white-robed saints from every nation, tribe people and language...everyone and everything is worshipping God and His Lamb.

What a thought! When we, as redeemed saints of God, worship the Lord and the Lamb, all of heaven stops to listen. Doesn't that put a new perspective on what we do here each week? Doesn't it make you want to praise Him with a little more passion, a little more thought and a lot more care?

And doesn't it give you a new view of your attendance? When a hush falls over heaven and God, the saints and angels listen to the sounds of praise, will they be able to pick out your voice? Or will your part be missing because you are AWOL?

II. What Happened During the Silence in Heaven

Would you please listen carefully to John's description of what happens during this half-hour silence in heaven?

^{8:1} When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. ⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

During the thirty-minute silence in heaven, an angel takes a golden censer or bowl to the altar. Typically, even today in churches that have very formal worship, a censer has a bed of burning coals in the bottom and incense is placed on the coals. Fragrant smoke then rises from the censer and this symbolizes the prayers of the people that are rising up to the throne of God.

Revelation 8:3 pictures exactly that image as the angel stands at the altar and he receives much incense to offer along with the prayers of all the saints.

Here's the takeaway from this revelation: when the prayers of the saints are offered to God, all of heaven falls silent. Loud worship, enthusiastic praise and thunderous sounds cease when the prayers of the saints are offered to God.

If all of heaven is so attentive to our prayers, shouldn't we take prayer more seriously than we do? God is so focused on our prayers, shouldn't we be? Half-hearted, insipid, tepid prayers do not deserve the attention God gives them. Prayers that are selfish and out of harmony with God's Kingdom and His scheme of redemption do not warrant His rapt consideration.

The hymn-writer asks, “Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?” My older brother has written, “I’m challenged by that question. When I pause to reflect what God has done with my infrequent, sometimes hurried prayers, I wonder what He could do if I lived in the center of His will and He lived in the center of my life.”

Like many a dad and many a grandpa, I’ve had a child try to tell me something or make a request of me that I failed to listen to. I was busy thinking about something else, preoccupied with listening to someone else, inattentively focusing on somewhere else. But what a realization that I can pray with the assurance that when I talk to God, all of heaven is still and nothing will distract my Father from hearing what I am saying to Him. Doesn’t that put a fresh face on prayer?

For us to understand and appreciate this silence in heaven, there is one other thing we ought to consider:

III. **What Happened After the Silence in Heaven**

Out of the silence, action developed: an angel came before the altar of God with a censer. He mixed the prayers of the Christians with incense and combined them with fire from the altar. The smoldering incense sent plumes of aromatic smoke into the air, symbolic of the prayers of the people rising before the Lord. The burning coals from the altar were from the fire upon which the sacrifices were made and thus represented forgiveness and the cleansing of the saints.

Then the angel put it all in the censer and threw it over heaven’s ramparts. The censer, plummeted through the air, landed on earth. The text says that on impact there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. The prayers, which had ascended from earth now descended to earth with immense force. Prayers reenter human history with incalculable effects and our earth is shaken daily by them.

When God’s saints worship, heaven falls silent, when God’s people pray, heaven listens attentively and after God’s children pray, their Father responds because of their prayers so that God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Isn’t that the way Jesus taught us to pray? Didn’t he tell us to ask that God’s Kingdom would come so that God’s will would be done on earth as it is in heaven?

It seems to me that one of the lessons of Revelation 8 is that when people pray, heaven falls silent, God listens and circumstances change.

The silence in heaven is the climax of worship, the context of prayer and the *catalyst* for the Kingdom.

CONCLUSION:

I will freely admit that I do not fully understand prayer. There is much about the subject that is too profound for me to grasp and too powerful for me to comprehend. But the clear witness of Scripture is that when the saints of earth pray, the God of Heaven acts.

Scripture has revealed to us that there is one prayer God will answer in less than the beat of a heart, and He is waiting to do it this morning. When a soul asks God for salvation, He is faithful to hear, to answer and to save. Will you come and ask Him now?

INVITATION: #139 – *“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”*