

Revelation 8: 1-6; "The Seventh Seal Opened", Sermon # 64
in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered by Pastor
Paul Rendall on July 15th, 2007, in the Morning Worship Service.

As we think about the structure of the Apocalypse, we have seen that the key to unlock this prophetic section of Chapters 6-20 in the book of Revelation, is to understand that "the kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." The last great world monarchy according to the book of Daniel is never named. However the identity of this last great world monarchy can be discovered by the careful reader of the Scripture, because in Daniel chapter 2, verse 40, it says, "And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others." "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with the ceramic clay." "And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile." "As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay." "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever." This last kingdom mentioned is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The 4th or last world monarchy is Rome because Christ's kingdom was set up in the days of that kingdom. Christ was crucified by and under Roman authority. The description of the Roman Empire is one which is distinct from the other kingdoms mentioned in Daniel 2. It is the feet and toes of the great image seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It is described first of all as "strong as iron," in verse 40. It breaks in pieces and shatters everything. This is what the Roman Empire was like in the times that we have been studying, in Chapter 6, in the first six seals.

Here in Chapter 8 we find the Lord Jesus Christ opening the seventh seal, and here commences the part of the Roman Empire's rule, that begins the mixing of the clay with the iron. Certainly this mingling of iron and clay could mean that the Empire itself in the dignity of its institutions and government would be weakened by the invasion of the Goths and the Vandals, and the mixing of the Romans with those peoples. But I think that there is a greater spiritual meaning for our study today in the book of Revelation. I believe that it represents the reality of the merging of Church and State during this 2nd time

period of the Roman Empire. It was men and leaders trying to put them together in such a way, that Christianity became the legislated religion of the Empire. This was very good at first sight, but after a few years it would prove to be very problematic for the true Church of Jesus Christ. When the Emperor Constantine came into power in 323, he abolished the persecution of Christians, and promoted Christianity in every way. He tried to meld together the iron with the clay. Iron and clay do not adhere to each other and neither can Christ's kingdom ever be united with worldly political power in the way that some men would like to see it. The potter's clay is a substance which can be molded and fashioned and cling to the iron for awhile, but not indefinitely. So too, the policy of trying to have the state integrally linked to the Church would work for the advance of true Christianity in some temporary ways, but would undermine its advance in others. But the true believers who were ministers in Christ's kingdom, the Church, rightly saw their calling as being to declare and to define true doctrine in accordance with the Scriptures. They would faithfully represent Christ to people in positions of authority in government, who have a place of influence in the rule of the governments of the nations. They believed that God's truth, which is found in the Bible, should be followed and implemented in the laws of the land and the policies of the government itself. And it is a noble goal; to see the moral commandments of God's Word brought into the laws of a nation, and the knowledge of the One True and Living God and His Son Jesus Christ being promoted to the fullest extent. This is wisdom.

But Jesus had said that "My kingdom is not of this world." "If it were of this world, then would my servants fight to establish it." So the relationship of Church to State is very important in the book of Revelation, and it is very important also, to the outworking of Christ's glorious kingdom upon the earth. The nation or kingdom that will not worship God shall perish, it says in Isaiah 60, verse 12. "Those nations shall utterly be ruined." The nation or kingdom that will not acknowledge God's Son Jesus Christ to be Lord of heaven and earth; that nation cannot be blessed in the sense that He will bless nations in the coming Millennium. Psalm 72: 17 - "His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun." "And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed." Wherever the kingdom of Christ has come among the nations of the earth, it has brought blessing with it. This should be an acknowledged fact in 21st century America and in all the world. It has only been our sins as a nation that have brought down the dignity, and disgraced the beauty of righteousness and holiness, and what God has done for us as a nation, in the United States of America. The worship of the True God and His Son Jesus Christ are what God is pleased with. The strength of America is her faith

in God, and her preaching of His Word. It is in declaring the salvation from sin that is found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The weakness of Rome during this time period of 323 A.D. to 756 A.D. was that it tried to promote a political Christianity without faithfulness in doctrine. There were some political rulers such as Constantine, who called for councils and came to the right doctrinal conclusions. But there were other times in the Empire's history when what was false prevailed in the Empire and in the Church. God's true saints opposed this. And they did succeed in addressing and overcoming what was false, at times. This was the time period when many heretics came into the outward visible church and state, and tried to set themselves up as being orthodox. But still, Christ's Church, even if they were a remnant, would hold fast and hold forth the truth. She would triumph in this holy work, only by the intercession of Jesus Christ. For it was, and it still is today, Christ's glorious work of intercession which alone preserved the saints, and the truth of His Word, during the times of the anti-Christian darkness. We also see here that Christ righteously interceded by bringing judgments to pour out upon the Roman Empire itself and all those who rejected the Kingdom of Truth's advance. I want us to look first, for a few minutes, at some of the doctrinal and political problems of the time. Then we will look briefly at Christ's intercession for His saints.

1st- Let's look at the Doctrinal and Political problems of the time.

(Verses 1 and 2)

Christ was the One who opened the seventh seal, and it says that there was "silence for about half an hour." Usually there is a great silence, a great stillness before a great storm. In the beginning of the last chapter we saw the four angels "holding back the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree." They are holding back the winds of the storms of judgment which they would pour out on the people of the Roman Empire who professed to be Christians in that time period during and after Constantine's reign. In the time of Constantine's reign there was a silence in the absence of persecution, and a silence in the anticipation of what was to come. There were many professed Christians who were trying to bring in false doctrine to the Church under the name of true Christianity, and they tried to impose it upon God's true saints, both in Constantine's time and afterward. Many were the errors that men attempted to introduce into the Church concerning the Trinity and concerning the person of Christ. The Roman Empire had become spiritually-minded, but its orthodoxy was in danger. The "silence in heaven" is the anticipation by the true Church of what was coming next. Seven angels are given trumpets. The trumpet is an instrument that is sounded to give a warning, and sounded to call to battle. The saints of this time period had to be especially

upon their guard. Savage wolves were entering in to the flock. The battle front for the Church of Jesus Christ had shifted away from holding fast the confession of Christ before persecuting Emperors, to holding fast the truth of the foundational doctrines of the faith in church and state. The Arian heresy arose with great strength just before and during the time of Constantine. Arius was an anti-Trinitarian. He was a presbyter of Alexandria. Berkhof says that he was "a rather skillful disputant, though not a profound spirit." He believed that the Logos, the Word, Jesus Christ was a being created in eternity past, but not brought forth eternally from the essence of the Father. He was not eternal or of the Divine Essence. Arius was opposed in his views by his own bishop Alexander "who contended for the true and proper deity of the Son and at the same time maintained the doctrine of an eternal sonship by generation." Eventually he would be opposed and overcome by that great champion of truth, Athanasius. Arianism spread so rapidly that it threatened to overwhelm the Church. It threatened to turn Christianity into a kind of religious philosophy. "The Arian heresy," the Encyclopedia of Christianity says, "threatened to split the Christians of the Roman Empire into two hostile groups at the very moment that Constantine had gained the political supremacy and was seeking to bring a new political unity to Rome after its nearly fatal division." In 325 A.D. Constantine called the council of Nicea, which was attended by over 300 bishops. Berkhof says, "Besides the orthodox and the Arians, at this council, there was a great middle party which constituted a majority, under the leadership of Eusebius of Caesarea, and which was also known as the Origenistic party." They took their principles from the teachings found in the writings of Origen. The Encyclopedia of Christianity says, "This middle party had Arian leanings and was opposed to the doctrine that the Son is of the same substance with the Father; what is known as homoousios." "They denied that the Son was created from nothing, as Arius insisted, and they ascribed to Him such attributes as eternity." "They agreed that Jesus Christ was of a substance similar to that of the Father (they called this homoiousios). But He was not of the same substance as the Father, which is the orthodox position which the Scriptures teach.

The orthodox group was a minority when the Council of Nicea opened, but it gained strength as many of the middle party, the Semi-Arians joined with them to defeat the radical position taken by Arius." "The orthodox Nicene party charged the Arians with reducing the Son of God to a figure of secondary importance comparable to the world of creatures, since Arius appeared to have invented Christ as a kind of intermediate being, almost solely for the sake of the creatures." "They also insisted that he offered to humanity an imperfect and inadequate Redeemer, neither truly God nor truly man." "Eusebius of

Nicomedia presented to the Council of Nicea the Arian confession of faith, which embodied the position set forth by Arius." "The delegates rejected this in horror, and Eusebius of Caesarea was so shocked by its heretical tone that he presented to the Council the creed of his own church." "This creed was revised by the Council so that would more explicitly meet the Arian problem, and in this revised form it became the Nicene Creed of 325." It gave the orthodox view of the Trinity in the following words: "We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and our salvation came down and was made flesh and became man, suffered and rose on the third day, ascended into heaven, and is coming to judge the living and the dead." "This was a very conscious and careful refutation of all aspects of the Arian heresy concerning Jesus Christ." "The Council also placed an anathema on all those who insisted that there was a time when Christ was not, or who taught that He was of another substance or essence, or that Christ was created, changeable, or alterable." "Arius and five of his followers refused to sign the Nicene Creed and were banished by Constantine to Illyria." This Council did not end the Arian conflict, but was rather only the beginning of the storm which raged in the Church until 381 A.D.

Now 2ndly and briefly in closing - Let me introduce into these conflicts the truth of the Saving and Keeping Power of the Intercession of Christ.

It ought to be very obvious to us all by now that there was, in these matters, a very definite interceding of Christ to establish the truth about Himself and His Godhead. He is alive and watching over His church now, even as He was alive and watching over His Church then. He ever lives to make intercession for His people individually, and His people collectively. Arianism threatened to ruin the Church's conception of her great God and Savior Jesus Christ. This was a concerted strategy of Satan. But our Lord replied in a might way. Verse 2 of Revelation Chapter 8 says, "Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given 7 trumpets." "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar." "He was given much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." This is how Christ intercedes for His people. He is the "angel" of verse 3. He is pictured as taking a censer, coming and standing at the altar, and being given much incense, He offers it with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before

the throne. O how many prayers must have been offered up in the difficult days that we are studying now, in the History of the Church, when Arianism threatened to take away the truth of our Savior's Godhead. How can we be saved from our sins by a Christ who is only a man, a created being; and not God? The gospel itself was being endangered. We are right to pray against false doctrine. We are right to pray for the truth of the Bible's statements about Who Jesus Christ is, to prevail. He is Very God of Very God, and nothing less. But the only way that this came to be established was when Christ took those prayers and added to them, the incense of the merits of His intercession. "Our helper, He, amidst the flood of mortal ills prevailing," Martin Luther wrote. He is our Mediator. He is our Advocate with the Father. He is the One who intercedes to prevail on behalf of His Church. It is on the basis of His intercession, together with our prayers, that the truth shall prevail in our day as well. Without His intercession, the Church's orthodoxy would be lost. But with His intercession truth shall prevail at last. We will speak more of this, Lord willing, next week.