

Revelation 8: 6-8; "The Sounding of the 1st Trumpet", Sermon # 67
in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered on
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The angel who has the golden censer, we have seen, is representative of Christ in His mediatorial work of interceding for all of his saints. In verses 3 and 4 He is shown in visionary form mixing the merits of his blood and righteousness, which is called "incense" in verse 3, with His own prayers and the prayers of the saints for their being upheld during these times when Satan attempted to obscure the true Biblical doctrines of God and Christ from being understood. This was his strategy after the fall of the Pagan Roman Empire. If he could not destroy Christianity and the Church by means of open and hostile persecution, he would try to destroy it by the introduction of much false doctrine, strife, and schism. Remember, Church and State had been joined together when Constantine came into power in 323 A.D over the whole Roman Empire. And so the term, "the earth" in this part of the vision that John is seeing, is referring not to the political Empire exclusively, any longer. It is referring to the visible Church of Jesus Christ, as it was being affected by the joining of Church and State in the Roman Empire. So when we come to verse 5 and following, where we see the angel (Christ) taking the censer and filling it with fire from the altar, and throwing it to the earth, and this being followed by the sounding of the seven trumpets, we must think of the things that we read of in these verses as the announcement of great calamities of spiritual judgments which would come upon the visible Church as she became more and more corrupt in her teaching and in her government. The visible Church in this time period was becoming something which was not pleasing to Almighty God. The Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all authority and power in heaven and earth had been given, would mediate God's judgments just as He mediates all of God's blessings to His true people. There were, in every generation in this second time period from 323 A.D. to 756 A.D., many true Christians and many true churches. However because the joining of Church and State brought with it some dreadful consequences, Christ's judgments would come upon all falsehood and error; the effects of which would be just like those that a terrible storm would bring, to a community hit by it directly. In this section, of the Trumpets, that we will be proceeding through, we will find a series of calamities coming upon the visible Church which had joined herself to the Roman Empire in its decline and fall. I would like to spend the rest of my time with this sermon attempting to show you the meaning of the 1st of these great calamities which came upon the visible Church. In the sounding of the first trumpet we are hearing the announcement

of a dangerous hail and firestorm. After we determine the meaning of this storm, then we will look at the effects that the storm had upon the visible Church and apply it to the state of our churches today.

1st- The Calamity of a Dangerous Hail and Firestorm.

Our Verse 7 says, "The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown down to the earth." "And a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." This is indeed an awful picture to contemplate; a storm this destructive. And I believe that we can apply it, without any difficulty to the Arian Heresy and other heresies which came into the visible Church and affected it greatly for some time during Constantine's reign and afterwards. These were heresies which surrounded the Deity of Christ and the Deity of the Holy Spirit. If you do not see Christ as God, how can the merits of His blood and righteousness have any real effect in your salvation and His intercession for you? If the Holy Spirit is not God, if He is merely an influence, then how can it be said that Christ is in us the hope of glory? How can the good work of His grace most certainly be established by a mere influence? How can the Father and the Son be said to abide in us forever? But deity in both establishes all these things. Each of the words which describe this storm has a spiritual meaning. There are many truths of the salvation of men that are affected by the Deity of the Son and the Spirit. Therefore Christ brings this storm. Storms are something that God uses to cleanse as well as destroy. Some things are destroyed in order that a cleansing might take place. The hail is something that is very destructive to crops especially; and people and property in general. Many of these words which describe spiritual calamity coming upon the visible Church here, were drawn from the plagues which were visited upon Egypt by God when He freed Israel from their bondage in Egypt. So too, spiritually, the Church of Jesus Christ was being drawn more and more into worldly attitudes of compromise in both doctrine and practice. So this is how our Lord Jesus Christ would deal with it. James 4: 4 says, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity to God? "Whoever wants to be a friend of the World makes himself the enemy of God." Christ's true Church must be separate from the world. Our Lord would send a hail and firestorm, mingled with blood. These would be "thrown to the earth."

Turn with me to Exodus 9: 13. Here we find a description of one of the plagues which God sent upon Egypt in order that His people might be freed from Pharaoh, who is a good picture of Satan; and from Egypt which is a good picture and type of the World. These are both enemies to God and enemies to the Church's becoming faithful and true. "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, "Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to

your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth." "Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth." "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." "As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go." "Behold tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now." "Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die." "He who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses." "But he who did not regard the word of the Lord left his servants and his livestock in the field." "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt--on man, on beast, and on every herb of the field, throughout all the land of Egypt.'" "So there was hail, and fire mingled with hail, and fire darted to the ground." "And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt." "So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation."

Now there are a number of things here which are significant for our consideration. Here we find a literal storm, which when it is described for us, is very much like the spiritual storm which spoken of in Revelation 8: 7. Our God and our Christ are very much interested in the same spiritual goal in that passage as they are in this. It says, "Let my people go, that they may serve Me." But God's people cannot serve Him when they are in bondage to the World. The World is that which affects the heart of the Christian and keeps him from serving Christ. Men and women who are in this bondage are serving their own lusts and pleasures. They are interested in being seen as important, powerful, and secure because of their riches and their worldly wisdom. An unbeliever is this way by nature; but it ought not to be the case for one who says that they belong to Jesus Christ. Neither shall it be, in the final analysis. God in Exodus 9 is saying, "I will send all My plagues to your very heart." "I will send them upon your servants and on your people that you may know that there is none like Me on the earth." This was literally, physically done and accomplished by God in that day in order that His people might come out Egypt to serve and worship Him. He did this literally spiritually in this day of the second stage of the Roman empire, and He is doing it in our generation as well. The Lord separates the wheat from the chaff, to separate what was false from what was true. In that day He sent a real spiritual hail and firestorm to do it. There have been many

times when this has been the case in Church history, but this time period was perhaps the greatest.

Pharaoh is a picture of Satan here in Exodus 9. He holds, if he can, God's people in bondage to the world so that they cannot truly serve him in the way that pleases Him. The Lord will, at times, send "his plagues on those who are servants of Pharaoh and on the people of the world so that they will know that there is none like the Lord in all the earth. Satan and the World are poor substitutes for God and His glory, and yet some of God's servants try to take this route. "The world is passing away, and the lusts thereof, but he who does the will of God shall abide forever. Have you seen the vanity of this world? Have you learned that all the world's boasted pomp and show shall come to an end rather shortly? If you as a Christian have not learned this, God will be teaching it to you. Satan exalts himself against God's people in that he will not let them go. But "he who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and livestock flee to the houses." "He who did not regard the word of the Lord left his servants and his livestock in the field." A person who fears the word of the Lord in regard to his judgments which are coming upon the World, will seek to protect his true interests. A worldling will protect his worldly interests. A Christian's true interests are spiritual, and they involve his heart and what binds it or frees it to serve God. A person who professes to be a Christian can come to learn to love false doctrine because it happens to fall in line very well with the worldly lifestyle that he prefers and cultivates. He can come to the place where he confuses fleshly earthly wisdom with spiritual wisdom from God. God will not permit this to prevail in his true people. He will bring judgments upon His visible church to teach the lesson to them.

In the days of Constantine and for many years afterward, these things came to pass. The storm which Christ threw upon the earth against false doctrine was mingled with the blood of those who took their stand against it. James Durham in his commentary on this place says, "It was a violent storm, and that against the most substantial and fundamental points of Religion, to wit, the Godhead of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, with which, there can be no Christianity, this being the rock upon which the Christian Church is built." (Matthew 16) "And there was never more fire or blood in a storm; the Church was undone with contention, so that no general Synod (even that of Nicea) could remove it, but they burst out more; and Constantine's sad regrades (trying to work out a deal with them) and serious expostulations with Bishops because of this, and the many contrary Synods (some of which sided with Arius) confirm it." "Much blood and persecution followed thereupon by Constantius, Valens, and other Arian Emperors and Governors (besides that which was committed by the

Vandals in Africa than which was there never persecution more cruel and barbarous." This leads me to my next point.

2ndly - The effects of this storm and application for us today.

"A third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." There were many professed Christians leading the charge against the true Christians, that were affected by these judgments. Let me give you a sample. John Foxe says in book on the Christian martyrs, "A barbarous people called the Vandals crossed over from Spain to the north coast of Africa, and under their great leader, Genseric, defeated the Roman army and conquered the whole country." "As the vandals were Arians they abused the Christians wherever they found them, laying waste all the cities they passed through, and inflicting such havoc and ruin upon every object of beauty and value, that the name of Vandal has ever since been a proverb for ruthless destruction." "They even burned the fields of grain so that as many of the people as escaped the sword might perish by the famine." "They plundered the churches, and murdered the bishops and ministers in many cruel ways." This was the cruelty of the Arian heretics persecuting Christ's true people. But the effects spiritually upon the Church itself just as great or worse; the numbers of people who no doubt perished and went to hell because of how greatly this doctrine prevailed. Durham says, "There were not only many, but exceedingly eminent men, both Civil and Ecclesiastic, led away with the error of Arianism; sundry Emperors, many kings of the Goths and Vandals were favorers of it; many Bishops of great note in the Church did propagate it; yea, sometimes whole Synods of many hundreds did establish it and condemn the truth, and the defenders thereof, as the Synod at Tyre in 336 did condemn Athanasius under the pretext of turbulency, murder, and adultery." This, I believe, is what is being referred to when it says, "a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The visible Church of Jesus Christ was brought to a place where every thing of the beautiful vegetation of outward profession of Jesus Christ in truth, was largely destroyed because of this scourge of false doctrine. Those eminent men in the visible church who held so tenaciously to the false doctrine of Arius were burned up by Christ's judgments. The many people professing to know the Lord who sided with them, the "grass", were burned up as well. Isaiah 40: 6 and following says, "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field." "The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass." "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever."

We can apply these truths to ourselves in this way. We must, by the grace of God, study often, and carefully the Word of God in order to remind ourselves of the truth once given to the saints. We must contend for this truth as it says in

the Book of Jude, verse 3. Jude says, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God in to lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Please know, and see, and understand the devastating judgments and calamities that the Lord must and will bring upon all the persons who tamper with the truth of the Word of God. Those persons who would twist the truth about God Himself being One Essence and 3 Blessed Persons. Those persons who would twist the truth of Christ as being God and Man both; two natures in One blessed Person; those persons who use their Ecclesiastical or Political authority to attempt to destroy the foundations of our faith in these foundational doctrines of our faith; they themselves will be destroyed. Jude says in verse 5, "But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." The Lord Jesus Christ has come "to send fire on the earth." (Luke 12: 49) And it is indeed kindled. Each of us will have to come to terms with who this Jesus Christ is - Is He God or is He merely a man? How important it is to hold to the truth as it is plainly declared in the Scriptures, that He is God.