

Revelation 8:1

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- [0 : 00] There are times when we long for silence, and there are times when we are terrified by silence.
- Silence can be reassuring, and silence can be frightening. Silence can be heavenly, and silence can be hellish.
- John's vision is, most of the time, very noisy. We have horsemen and trumpets. We have thunder and earthquakes.
- We have the praise of angels and the redeemed. But as the seventh seal of the scroll is opened, the noise dissipates, and all voices are stilled, and there is silence in heaven.
- When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.
- [1 : 13] Silence in heaven. The reason we gather in this place Sunday by Sunday is because, thank God, heaven is not ordinarily silent.
- God speaks from heaven, and we listen. So this morning our task is an unusual one, to hear what God is saying in and by the silence.
- Silence. We need to listen to the sound, even the voice of silence. Silence in heaven. What's going on?
- Well, let's carefully examine the words of our text in Revelation chapter 8 and verse 1. It begins, When he opened. When he opened.
- And let's just stop there for a moment and not assume prior knowledge. Who is he? Who is opening the seals? Well, we've been told already in the vision in chapter 5 and verse 5.
- [2 : 14] We read and we considered this a few weeks ago. Then one of the elders said to me, Do not weep. See, the line of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.
- And so there, very clearly, the one who can open the seals is identified as Jesus. As the conquering, victorious, triumphant Messiah.
- The line of the house of Judah, the root of David. He was found worthy to open the seals. And so, when we find the seventh seal being opened, we know, of course, that the one opening the seventh seal is the one who has opened the six previous seals.
- Also, this is Jesus. And Jesus must always remain center stage. Our focus must always be on him. It is as Jesus opens the seventh seal that heaven falls silent.
- When he opened the seventh seal. The seventh seal. Again, we need to pause for a moment and recap as to the significance of the seventh seal.
- [3 : 30] And, of course, the significance of the seventh seal can only be properly understood in the light of and as the culmination of the opening of the previous six seals. There are only seven seals.
- This is the final seal. And it stands to reason that our understanding of the significance of the seventh seal will be impacted greatly by what has gone before. The previous six seals that have already been opened.

Again, for those who have been present these past few weeks, I wonder, do you remember the tension in heaven as it appeared that the scroll might remain unopened as no one was found worthy to unseal the seals?

Back there in chapter 5, we read in verse 2 of chapter 5, And I, that is John, saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?

But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. And John testifies, I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

[4 : 39] There's this great concern, this tension. Who is going to open the scroll? And then, of course, the answer is given.

And we've read that verse already as Jesus is identified as worthy of opening the seals. One was found. Jesus stood up to the plate.

He was worthy. And so the seals were opened and the content of the scroll revealed. As the first four seals were opened, we were assailed by the four horsemen.

Popularly identified as the four horsemen of the apocalypse, though not the language you actually find in the chapter itself. We've read the chapter, chapter 6.

These four horsemen, the bearers of warfare and famine and disease and death. We discovered that these satanic steeds served as instruments of God to bring temporal judgment on the earth.

[5 : 39] And as the fifth seal was opened, we were made privy to the place of God's people in the midst of the great tribulation, and very particularly those who had been martyred.

They were and are, continued to be, persecuted even unto death, but also protected from and in death.

Not just protected from death, but for those who were martyrs or are martyrs, protected in and through death. And we also heard, and we've read the chapter again, as the fifth seal was opened, we heard the haunting cry of those martyrs.

How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? A cry not for revenge, but a cry for justice.

And this question that was posed by the martyrs as the fifth seal was opened is the very question that will soon be provided an answer for.

[6 : 49] As the sixth seal is opened, we witness that the last day of the last days had now dawned, in the language of the vision, the great day of their wrath. The wrath of the one seated on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb.

The great day of their wrath has come. Perhaps we could view the opening of the sixth seal as revealing the dawn of that day, but falling short of revealing the great event signaled for that day.

And then in chapter 7, we are presented with an interlude in the opening of the seals that serves to answer the solemn question posed by the opening of the sixth seal, Who can stand?

And last Sunday morning, we were finding the answer to that question in chapter 7. Who can stand before the one seated on the throne? Who can stand before the Lamb?

Of course, we discovered the answer. Those and only those enabled to stand by Jesus. Only those trusting in Jesus and united to Jesus.

[7 : 55] Only such can stand. And now we come to the seventh seal. All is leading inexorably to one thing, the final and announced day of judgment, the consummation of all things, and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.

But what are we told? What transpires as the seal is opened? There was silence in heaven. It might almost appear as a monumental anticlimax.

Silence. Just silence. But is it just silence? That is the question. Does the silence speak?

We sometimes talk in conversation about the calm before the storm. I think this silence can be understood as the calm after and before the storm.

Now, what riddle is this? Well, let me try and explain. Well, I think this silence, rather, can be understood as the calm after the multiple storms revealed by the opening of the first six seals that we've just kind of scanned through in the last couple of moments.

[9 : 13] A calm after these many storms. But it's also, perhaps more significantly, the calm before the anticipated climax, the final judgment, and the ultimate ending before a new beginning.

I think this is how we are to understand the time reference. We're there in chapter 8. We read that there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. I don't think we need to take a view on the significance, if any, of the precise duration, half an hour.

But simply recognize that implicit in this time reference is the fact that it precedes a momentous event. It is that pause before that great momentous event.

It's the pause before something big transpires. This weekend, as we've already been thinking about with the children, we're celebrating 50 years since the lunar landing.

I'm pleased to let you know that I don't remember that. I was alive, but I don't remember it. And when the eagle landed on the moon's surface, but before Neil Armstrong took those historic first steps on the surface of the moon, Buzz Aldrin, who we've spoken of already, spoke into the radio and to the world, and this was broadcast to the listening millions.

[10 : 33] And he said this, this is the LM pilot, the lunar module pilot. I would like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in, whoever or wherever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate.

To pause for a moment and contemplate. That pause in the midst of and preceding a moment of huge significance. A moment of pause.

A moment of silence, if you wish. The half an hour in the vision is that pause before, but before what? What does the pause reveal?

What does the silence tell us? Does the silence speak? I'm going to suggest that the silence performs three functions, or speaks, communicates three truths.

The silence confirms what is taking place. The silence befits what is taking place, is fitting, is appropriate for what is taking place.

[11 : 37] And the silence warns us about what is taking place. Let's think about these three truths that the silence communicates.

First of all, the silence confirms what is taking place, or what is about to take place. We've already indicated that in the opening of the previous six seals, everything is leading towards the final judgment.

And the silence serves to confirm that conclusion. How so? How can silence confirm that conclusion? Well, in the Old Testament, silence can, on occasion, accompany or serve as a solemn prelude to God acting in judgment.

Let's just notice a couple of examples. There are more, but we'll focus on two that are particularly striking and clear. First of all, let's just read in Zephaniah chapter 1, and we'll read verses 2 and 3, and then verse 7.

So, you can just listen as I read the verses, or if you want, you can look them up yourself right towards the end of the Old Testament. Zephaniah chapter 1, verses 2 and 3.

[12 : 47] Notice if you are looking at the Bible that the section is entitled, Judgment on the Whole Earth in the Day of the Lord. And we read in verse 2 of the first chapter of Zephaniah, I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

I will sweep away both man and beast. I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble. When I destroy all mankind in the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

Very solemn language. And then in verse 7 we read, and God is speaking, and He's speaking to the world. And He says this, Be silent before the sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near.

Be silent before the sovereign Lord. And then very similarly, just very soon after, at least in the order of the books of the Bible, in Zechariah chapter 2 and in verse 13.

Again, the context of the passage is of God's judgment. And we read there in that verse, God again speaking, and He pronounces Himself, He expresses Himself in this way, Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling.

[14 : 04] It's the last verse of chapter 2. And then in chapter 3 of Zechariah, you have this presentation of a scene of trial or judgment.

And time doesn't allow us to go into the details of that. But the point is that these two calls that are extended to silence, to be still, are in the context of and precede God acting in judgment.

And I think the silence in the vision that we have recorded there in verse 1, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. I think that silence can be understood as the silence that accompanies or serves as a prelude to God in the person of Jesus as judge, judging the nations and peoples of the world.

What can we say about this day of judgment that the opening of this seal anticipates? Well, time doesn't allow us to say all that the Bible tells us about this day, but let me highlight four truths concerning this day.

You know, when we read the language of the vision, it's so fantastic in the kind of literal meaning of that word. We might almost imagine, well, this is just fantasy. But it's not fantasy. And this future day of judgment, we can say this and say it with great conviction.

[15 : 31] It is future, but it is certain. The day has been appointed. The day will come when what the opening of the seal anticipated becomes reality.

And the day will come when the nations and the peoples of the world will be judged. I think another thing we can say about it, and very much in the context of the opening of these seals, is this.

That the day and the judgment that will take place is partly in answer to the haunting question of the martyrs. There, when the fifth seal was opened, they posed the question to God.

They said, how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the inhabitants of the world? And what was the answer of God? It was wait a little longer.

Well, here the answer comes. No longer do they need to wait, because as the seventh seal is opened, we are given this insight that the day will come when that haunting question will be answered.

[16 : 35] And the very fact that that day takes place, in part, will be God answering the question posed by the martyrs. On that day, Jesus will be there as judge, and you will be there as one of those to be judged.

We will all be there on that day. It doesn't matter who you are or what you believe. You will be there on that day. And a judgment will be delivered concerning you.

Either you will be welcomed into the embrace of the Lamb, or you will be cast from the presence of God for eternity. Those are the two outcomes of that judgment. The silence in heaven confirms what is taking place, or what is imminently to take place.

But I suggest that the silence also communicates another truth. And it is this, that the silence befits what is taking place. It is appropriate, given what is taking place.

Judgment is a solemn business. You know, we've read the language in Zephaniah and Zechariah, and we almost recoil from it. We're uncomfortable with it. We'd almost kind of rather it wasn't there.

[17 : 50] We maybe even find it somewhat embarrassing. You think, what if people who aren't Christians read that? What would they make of our Bible and of our God? And it is true. Judgment is a solemn business.

And it is fitting that such a solemn occasion be marked by silence. We see that in our moments of solemnity. Be that as we gather for a funeral or on Remembrance Sunday, as we silently reflect on those who have died in war.

We are silent. Be that because we realize, we simply appreciate that it is the appropriate thing to do. Or we are even commended or requested to be silent.

Such occasions are marked by silence. Silence befits moments of solemnity. And there can be no more solemn occasion in the history of humankind than that final day of judgment.

But I think we can develop this idea of silence befitting what is taking place a little further. As we identify what is going on among those present on that day.

[18 : 59] I think there's a process that is going on or that will go on that involves three elements and intertwined. There's recognition. There's awe.

And there's submission. And as we explore this process, we will be able to see how fitting it is that there be silence in heaven.

But I've just said that there would be silence in heaven. And maybe that needs to be just explained a little. Perhaps I need to answer a question that you may be asking yourself.

If the silence is in heaven, why are we assuming, as I am assuming, that the silence extends to all? I think the answer to that is that on that day there is a sense in which heaven comes down.

Or perhaps more precisely, we might say that heaven becomes visible on earth. It's not so much about a physical movement. Though we use the language of heaven coming down.

[20 : 00] And the Bible uses that language. But rather it's that heaven, a reality that currently is hidden to us, becomes visible to us. And the silence that originates in heaven, indeed is commanded from heaven, envelops the earth.

I think that is a way, I think, a legitimate way in which we can understand this silence. And if we do, if we are willing to go along with that, we can then think about those involved.

And this process on that day that is fitting that there be silence. Recognition, awe, and submission. You see, on that day, all men and women will recognize, some for the first time, the Lamb who was slain.

We see already that happening as the sixth seal is opened in chapter 6 and verses 16 and 17, which I've kind of suggested might be the dawn of that day. And we read there that the inhabitants of the earth, the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, they call to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

They're able to see Him. They're able to recognize that He is. When perhaps all their lives they denied His very existence, but now they can see. There is recognition.

[21 : 19] At the close of our service, we will sing Psalm 46. And in that psalm, there is a call to recognition that I think is often misunderstood.

There's a very, perhaps the most memorable words of the psalm are found in verse 8, Be still and know that I am God. I think it's verse 8. It might be. It might not be. Be still and know that I am God.

I think this is often understood. It's often taken as a tender call to God's people to meditate quietly on the reality and goodness of God. But in fact, the context of that call is one of judgment.

And God is calling on His enemies to be still or to be silent. Today, the enemies of God often fail to recognize God.

They mock the very idea that there is a God to be known. Reserving their most bitter vitriol for the very suggestion that this God will one day stand in judgment over them.

[22 : 23] That He might exist. That He might exist. Some might grudgingly concede. But that this God would one day judge them. No, that is deserving of mockery and vitriol and utter rejection.

But not so on that day. You see, on that day, all will recognize. And that will be accompanied by silence.

You see, the recognition will also lead to the awe that I spoke of as part of this process. That the awe follows from the recognition. On that day, we won't be limited to a bare acknowledgement of the existence of God.

But on that day, all will, in some measure, see the majesty and splendor, the glory and holiness of God. And all will be silenced in His presence.

Recognition and awe. And tied in with that, submission. The submission follows on from the recognition. It accompanies the awe. All will submit as the command to silence is issued from the throne.

[23 : 28] We're suggesting the silence serves as a pause before the final judgment. But the silence or this aspect of it will continue through the final judgment.

There will be no protests, no appeals, no pleading of mitigating circumstances. You see, on that day, every knee will bow. And every tongue confess.

Yes. The Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 3, speaks of a world accountable to God. And expresses himself in this way. So that every mouth may be silenced.

And the whole world held accountable to God. And does that not describe the day that is spoken of when the seventh seal is opened?

Every mouth may be silenced. And the whole world held accountable to God. Today is not that day. Rebels and renegades chatter incessantly.

[24 : 35] But not on that day. There was silence in heaven. A silence that befits what is taking place. Let me just suggest one third truth that is communicated by this silence.

We say that the silence confirms what is taking place. The silence that accompanies or precedes this monumental act of judgment.

The silence confirms. The silence befits what is taking place. But the silence also warns us about what is taking place. Or rather, the vision.

What we have here is a vision. A vision revealing to us this future silence. And it serves as a warning and a challenge concerning what will take place on that day. The vision is speaking about what will happen in the future.

Not saying that that was what was happening at the moment that John saw the vision. The vision communicates what is going to happen when that seventh seal is opened or when that day comes.

[25 : 41] And so, in that regard, it serves as a warning for us who live before that day dawns. In the vision, John is told about this silence.

The silence of heaven was a future event, and it still is. We live in the last days. That's our understanding of that expression in the New Testament. The days marked by the opening of the first five seals.

But the sixth and the seventh seals are yet to be opened. But as the vision reveals the silence, the silence serves as a warning and a challenge.

We might call it a three-fold challenge, especially directed to, really to all, believer and unbeliever alike. Though the nature of the challenge will be different depending on where we stand.

The three-fold challenge we could describe in this way. It is a challenge to prepare yourself, a challenge to praise God, and a challenge to preach, to proclaim the good news concerning Jesus.

[26 : 46] First of all, and very evidently I would have thought, a challenge to prepare yourself. And so, the question for all of us and the question for you this morning is this. Are you ready for that day? For that day when there will be silence in heaven preceding the last great day of judgment.

Are you ready for that day? What will the verdict be for you? How can you be ready? Who will stand on that day? Well, that's the answer that we were answering or that the Bible was answering for us last Sunday morning when we considered chapter 7.

And let's just remind ourselves of that dialogue in heaven between the elder or one of the elders and John who's being granted this vision. Chapter 7 and verse 13 we read, Then one of the elders asked me, These in white robes, who are they and where did they come from?

I answered, Sir, you know. And he said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

That is how you can be ready. That is the only way you can be ready. By washing your robe, by washing your life in the blood of the Lamb, by trusting in Jesus and in his finished work, accomplished as he died on Calvary and rose again triumphant from the grave.

[28 : 02] That is the only way you can be ready and prepared for that day. So the silence serves as a warning. But warnings need to be heeded.

We can receive a warning and ignore the warning. I remember several years ago I studied for one term in a seminary in Lima in Peru, and I was just doing a couple of elective courses.

And one of them was elementary Greek. And the teacher, the professor, liked to occasionally give us tests, just little tests on grammar, vocabulary.

And he would normally give us one or two days warning. And so on the Wednesday, say, he would say, Well, on Friday we're going to have a test. And then he would say something, and it was an expression in Spanish, but I'll translate it.

Well, for those of you who speak Spanish, I'll say it in Spanish first. Guerra avisada también mata gente. Which lucid translated is, Declared war also kills people. What was he saying to us?

[29 : 06] He says, I've warned you about the test. But some of you will still fail. Even though I've told you, some of you won't study, and some of you will fail. And isn't that true?

Declared wars, announced wars, still kill people. And so the Bible warns you about this day. That you'll be there, and you will be judged, and the only way you can be ready is by trusting in Jesus.

And yet, sadly and solemnly, declared wars still kill people. So the silence serves as a warning. But the warning will only be of any merit if you heed the warning.

Prepare yourself. But also praise God. If you are ready, if you are trusting in Jesus, if you have sought refuge and safety and found it in Jesus, well, that is only by the grace of God.

Praise Him. Live your life in grateful service to Him. Prepare yourself. Praise God. But also preach the good news. The news of salvation.

[30 : 12] Of escape from that day. Of safety on that day. Not so much escape from it, but safety in it. You see, when heaven falls silent, it will be too late to repent.

Today is the day to share with others the good news about Jesus. The one in whom we can enable sinners to stand on that day. And so we have an urgent task to share this good news with a world sleepwalking to a lost eternity.

The silence warns us about what is about to take place. When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the truth that it contains. And we acknowledge that it is and can be uncomfortable truth for us.

We pray that we would not be so foolish as to close our eyes to that which we find unappealing. And to imagine that all is well when all is not well.

[31 : 24] Help us to take heed to the gracious warnings that we are given. If we are given these warnings about this solemn day, these warnings themselves are evidence of Your love and of Your grace.

And of Your invitation that has been extended to us. To repent. To trust in Jesus. To be saved from our sin and from a lost eternity.

And so we pray that You would help us by Your Spirit to heed the warnings. To put our trust in Jesus. To live lives of praise and gratitude to You.

And lives where we share with others this good news. This urgent news. Concerning a day that is appointed. And a day that will come. A day where we will all stand before the judge.

To be judged. And we pray in His name. Amen. Amen. Amen.