

MERCY IN THE TRENCHES (Rev. 8:2-9:21 January 12, 2003)

When I was a very young Christian, I read a novel – *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti. It was a ripping good read and I loved it – *until* the pieces started coming together.

The book dealt with a group of Christians who were battling demonic forces out to destroy their town. But the book's basic premise was that the good angels, the angels of the Lord were virtually powerless to intervene *unless* the Christians prayed. Unless they named the demons and prayed against them.

That book was the start of a whole movement – known today as Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare – with Peter Wagner as the main proponent.

The book did me some good. I was encouraged to understand the spiritual nature of the battle around us and the power of prayer.

But there was a real problem with the book. The spiritual battle seemed to be between men and demons with the Lord almost pictured as a passive bystander.

I can understand why some might think this. This world does seem to be in the grip of the devil. Christians do seem at the mercy of the evil one. Even good angels seem powerless to intervene. It isn't easy to see the hand of the Lord in this fallen world.

But, the picture this book paints is in no way reality. That is not what the Bible says. The Bible teaches us that this world, and every man in it, as well as Satan and the demons – all are completely under the control of the Lord. Satan and his hosts can't even scratch without divine permission.

The hand of the Lord is in fact involved in every single aspect of life in this world.

The Lord orchestrates the spiritual battle and the battle has been fought and won on Calvary. Satan has been utterly defeated.

But for a time the Lord delays His final judgment and while he delays Satan can roar about like a lion – **but** and this is a huge but that the spiritual warfare group often neglect – he is a caged lion with severe limitations. Everything he or his angels do is under God's control and more than that he has been judged and doomed on Calvary.

There has always been a fascination with Satan and demons. But much of the hype is more myth than reality.

The truth is that we have little clear Scriptural teaching about the origins of Satan and his angels or about their workings in this world.

I have a close friend who did his Masters Thesis on the origins of Satan and he concluded that we just don't have enough evidence to say if Satan fell or was always evil, or if he was a special class of angel or not, nor even when he was created or fell.

And he is right. Despite the hype, we have only fragments of information about Satan and his demons.

There are some passages that give us insights into the dark workings of demons – and the passage we are going to look at today is one of those passages.

But right up front I have to say that in some respects this passage raises more questions about demons for me than it answers. But, the reason for this is that this passage is **not** primarily about demons – it is about the Lord.

The point here is not to understand the inner workings of the demonic hoard. The lesson here is about the sovereign hand of God *even* over the demonic hoard.

We are in the book of Revelation looking at the seven trumpet judgments of God. Last week I told you that:

Trumpets 1-4 tell us that judgments from God are affecting this whole fallen cosmos.

Trumpets 5 and 6 tell us that the purposes of these judgments for unbelievers are both judicial and a call to repent.

Trumpet 7 tells us that any who refuse to repent will be judged eternally.

But over and above and through each trumpet there is a bold banner – **God is Sovereign.**

God is completely sovereign. He has orchestrated each event. He controls each player. He works all things together for good.

He commands the angels as to when they may sound off. The judgments come from His throne. He sets the limits of the judgments. He is totally sovereign.

The Christians of John's day were suffering persecution. Evil seemed ascendant. But, that is not the case. Evil has never been in control. Even the sinful workings of men and demons are somehow in the tapestry God weaves.

God is in control over every aspect of life in this fallen world. God is sovereign over life and death, judgment and redemption, men and angels.

So with this thought before us we move on now to look at trumpets 5 and 6.

We begin in chapter 8 verse 13:

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

It is at this point that the focus shifts from the judgment on the whole fallen cosmos to the specific judgment on unbelievers. Those who dwell on the earth is a term used in

this book for unbelievers. In chapter 9 verse 4 the locusts are commanded not to harm those with the seal of God. They are only permitted to harm the unbelievers.

Three times in Revelation we find a bird or angel flying in the midheaven and each time the announcement is one of doom for the lost.

Revelation 14:6-7:

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, ... and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come."

Revelation 19:17-18:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

This eagle announces the three woes – trumpets five, six and seven – judgment on unbelievers.

Trumpet 5 Revelation 9:1:

Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.

The fifth trumpet is a notoriously difficult section of Scripture with a number of interpretive questions. A star falls from heaven and he has the key to the bottomless pit – literally – the key to the shaft of the abyss. And he releases a plague of locusts that attack unbelievers.

Before we can make sense of this passage we have to attempt to answer a few questions.

The **first** question is this – Who is this star?

There are a number of views about who this star is, but the two major ones are that this is an evil angel – probably Satan himself or he is a good angel and what he is doing is performing the work of God.

Some claim that it is Satan or an evil angel because he **fell** from heaven to earth. Falling is indeed used in Scripture to describe judgment on the wicked supernatural forces.

In Isaiah 14:12 speaking about the fall of the King of Babylon we read:

How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!

You have been cut down to the earth,
You who have weakened the nations!

In Isaiah, there seems to be some sort of demonic power behind the Babylonian King represented by a star that falls.

Even more to the point, in Luke 10:18 Jesus said:

I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

This symbolism of wicked angels falling is picked up in Revelation. Look with me over to Revelation 12:7-9:

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

So the fact that the star **falls** leads many to conclude that this is probably Satan or possibly an evil angel.

But, there are a few reasons why this simply *cannot* be Satan or an evil angel.

First, throughout this book the term star is used for angelic beings who do the will of the Lord.

Revelation 1:20:

As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand ... the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

Nowhere in Revelation can star be clearly shown to represent a demonic being. But again and again it is used to depict angels who do the will of the Lord.

Second, the fact that this star falls from heaven to earth does not necessarily mean he is evil. In chapter 10:1 strong angel comes down out of heaven – and this angel is certainly an angel in the service of the Lord. Good angels clearly do come down from heaven.

Thirdly, turn with me over to Revelation 20:1-2:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss.

This angel also comes down from heaven – he is clearly not an evil angel but one doing the will of God because he binds Satan. Again, coming down from heaven does not necessarily mean the angel is evil.

This is a very similar passage to Revelation 9. There is little doubt that the star who has the keys to the shaft of the abyss in chapter 9 is the angel who has the key to the abyss in chapter 20.

But here in chapter 20 he lays hold of the dragon – Satan – and seals him in the abyss. This angel is not Satan. This angel binds Satan.

This star is not an evil angel because he would not bind Satan. He is an angel of God acting at the behest of the Lord.

A **second** question is when does this fifth trumpet take place?

Some have linked this opening of the abyss with the releasing of Satan from the abyss in Revelation 20.

In Revelation 20 verse 3 Satan is sealed in the abyss for a thousand years. Then in verse 7 he is released for a time.

They say this releasing of Satan at the end of the thousand years is what is happening back here in chapter 9.

But this cannot be. The locusts can only torment for a short time and not kill. Satan kills. In Revelation 13:8 – Satan slays and kills.

And the death knell to this view is that in Revelation 20 verse 9 the released Satan attacks the saints. Here in chapter 20 the locusts attack unbelievers and are **not** permitted to attack the saints. You can't reconcile the differences. These passages are **not** describing the same event.

Others have said that these blasts of the trumpet occur in a final great tribulation just before Messiah returns.

But, chapter 9 is not an end time judgment.

The fifth and sixth trumpets do not describe the final judgment. The judgments are limited. The locusts sting lasts only five months and does not kill. The plagues only kill one third of mankind. They fall short of the final devastation that will come.

And notice this difference. In chapter 6 verses 15-17 – in the sixth seal – the final judgment – the unbelievers were quaking in fear at the judgment to come. They cried out for the mountains and the rocks to fall on them.

But now look over to chapter 9 verses 20 and 21. These unbelievers who survive the fifth and sixth trumpets are not fearful – they are unrepentant. They continue in their idolatry, murder, immorality and theft. Trumpets five and six cannot refer to the final judgment.

Instead – it must refer to life right now – life in this fallen world.

So this angel is sent from God to the earth with a key. And what he does is described in verses 2-3:

He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

What do these locusts do? Verses 4-5:

They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

Locusts were the eighth plague sent on Egypt. And the symbolism of smoke and fire and darkness is used again and again for judgment.

Obviously they are not literal locusts. Locusts eat grass, plants and trees. These don't. Proverbs says locusts have no king – these ones do.

So what are these locusts?

Almost certainly these locusts are some form of demon.

The Scriptures describe demons as being either free or bound.

In Ephesians 6:12 Paul speaks of life as a battle against the powers of darkness who are free.

But, Jude 6 describes demons who are kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. In Luke 8:31, the legion of demons Christ drove from the demoniac implored Him not to send them into the abyss.

So the abyss seems to be a place where the Lord confines some of the demonic beings. This makes it very likely that these locusts are demonic beings. As well the description of these beings fits them being evil angels.

However, some have questioned whether they are demons because these locusts only attack unbelievers. They ask – “Why would demons attack unbelievers? It makes no sense?”

Of course none of those who make this point can come up with sensible ideas about what they are. Hal Lindsay thinks these locusts are Cobra helicopters – I'm sure John's readers would have known this instantly.

They are demons. But the fact that demons attack unbelievers is very significant.

In verse 3 power is given to them by God. They have no power without God giving it to them. In verse 4, the Lord commands them as to what they can and cannot harm. In verse 5 they are told they cannot kill and their torment will only be temporary – five months.

How much clearer can you get. This world is not Satan's. God has given him some limited scope – but he is on a leash – and God gives him limited reign and God can jerk the chain at any time.

The great problem with all the spiritual warfare teachers is that they overplay the freedom of Satan and underplay the intervention of God.

Yes, Satan is powerful and not to be taken lightly. But the believer is not to spend his days preoccupied with him. Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.

Remember the book of Job? Satan wanted to harm Job – and he had to come and ask the Lord for permission. And initially he could not touch Job only his family and possessions. Then later after another session of pleading, God allowed the evil one to afflict him – but *not* kill him.

The power of the devils, their limitations are set by God and they cannot exceed the leash God has put upon them.

Here, these particular demons are forbidden from harming the saints – all they can pour their hatred upon are the unbelievers.

God is in such sovereign control – that at His command, the angels of Satan attack the people with the mark of Satan.

This passage is meant to tell us who is in control of this world. The ultimate control is completely in the hands of the Lord Himself.

The spiritual warfare movement does remind us of the spiritual nature of the battle that is this life. But it fails to tell us that God is in total control – not us, not the demons, not the angels.

Demonic influence is allowed only within set limits. And they cannot touch the saints.

But, there is another point to this passage that must not be missed. Turn to 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. This is a very instructive passage:

If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people – *in other words, if I send judgments* – then, if My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

The fifth trumpet is locusts, the sixth is pestilence.

Notice that these judgments are not just judicial. They are also a call to repentance.

Rebellious men and women are supposed to see the effects of the fall and realise that only repentance and turning to God can save them. We are supposed to see this judgment of sin, realise the seriousness of sin and seek the mercy of God.

Whether it is the devastation of war, or natural disasters, or disease – we are meant to see that the creation, the cosmos is groaning under the weight of sin – groaning because of the fall and rebellion against God the creator – and the only answer is repentance.

We must never forget that as well as being holy, God is merciful. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us:

The Lord ... is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

God desires the repentance of rebels. Among the elect are some who are presently rebels. And God is patient while he calls in those who are His. He has sent many messages to this world telling the rebels to repent. He has sent Christ, His Spirit, His prophets, His Word.

But He has also sent this message in judgment.

Under the sovereign hand of God, these demonic locusts burst forth and their fury falls on unbelievers. But they cannot kill and the torment is limited.

The judgment of God is restrained. The full wrath is yet to come. This is but a foretaste of the horrors to come. And one reason for this judgment is for unbelievers to repent.

Verse 6:

And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.

I have never been stung by a scorpion, but I am told that there are few experiences more painful.

Here they long for death – but death escapes them.

What is going on here? What does all of this refer to?

If you look down to verses 20 and 21 – we find that these unbelievers were involved in demon worship, idolatry, murder, sorcery, immorality and theft.

And the fifth and sixth trumpets were supposed to cause them to repent of these sins.

It seems that the torments of the demons involved in the fifth and sixth trumpets deal with the influence of demons and the consequences of sin.

Demon worship – the occult – false religions – these are not innocuous. They are associated with demon possession, immorality, drug use and every manner of evil.

Serving Christ leads to blessing. But Satan does not bless his servants. Their reward is bitterness and pain. The things of Satan lead to such pain that men long for death.

Listen to the description of the demoniac in Mark 5:3-5:

He had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.

This is the sting of the demons. This is the fate that leads men to long for death.

Sin is not the painless, joyful life many would like us to believe. The lusts of the devil are not the satisfying romp that they seem. God created us to reap the greatest joy from obedience and worship and the greatest pain from disobedience and rebellion.

I'm sure you saw the footage this week as notorious child rapist Dennis Ferguson was released from prison on Thursday. He looked a very unhappy and tormented man. His sins are immense. But there are consequences – 14 years in prison, media scrutiny, whatever conscience he has. I doubt he sleeps the sleep of a man at peace with the world.

Lord Byron who lived a life of wine, women and song wrote this at the end of his life:

The worm, the canker and grief are mine alone.

Jay Gould, one of the richest men of his day knew lamented:

I suppose I am the most miserable man on Earth.

The evil one has his flaming arrows. Doubts, temptations, torments, possession. He leads men and women into sins that have consequences. They live as shadows. Miserable. Tormented. Haunted.

They do not know the peace that passes all understanding. They do not know the love of God. They live as dead men walking. And they long for death but death does not find them.

The world, the flesh and the devil may glisten – but it is bitter gall to the taste.

But, remember, for the believer – such stings cannot harm us. We have the Spirit of God within us, the armour of God to protect us and the Word of God to guide us. We need not fear the evil one and his angels. They can only have power over us *if* we turn from Christ and turn to sin.

While we put on the armour of God and walk in the power of the Spirit – we are safe.

Verses 7-9:

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.

To understand this passage turn with me back to Joel.

In Joel 1 verse 4 we are told that a judgment that will come upon Israel and it will be a locust plague.

Then in Joel 2:1 – the judgment is introduced by a trumpet blast. The locusts cover the sky like dark clouds. Each point the same as in Revelation. Then look down to Joel 2:4-5:

Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like war horses, so they run.
With a noise as of chariots

If you look at the face of a locust it looks a little like a horse's head. If you every hear the thrum of a plague of innumerable locusts the noise is like the noise of chariots in battle.

Joel 1:6 has further descriptions of these locusts:

Its teeth are the teeth of a lion,
And it has the fangs of a lioness.

All these points are found in Revelation. But these demonic locusts also have features that go beyond those of real locusts. They have features that reflect the lusts and desires that draw men from the paths of the Lord.

The lust of conquest and fame in battle.

The lust of crowns for power and wealth.

The lust of ruling men

Sexual lust for women.

The lust of harming others.

Gold, glory and girls.

All of the types of lusts and desires that draw men from the Lord and His ways are given to these demons. And they use them. Verse 10:

They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.

These lusts don't satisfy – they hurt. They hurt so bad you want to die. The sins of the world lead to bitterness and pain. But the hurt is not eternal – it is here in this world. The fact they can only hurt for five months shows that this is a temporal not an eternal judgment.

And the reasons for these judgments are drawn from Joel. The reason for this plague of locusts is judicial – punishment for the sins and apostasy of Israel.

And the locusts are meant to cause this hard-hearted sinful people to repent. Joel 2:12-13:

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
“Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;
And rend your heart and not your garments.”
Now return to the Lord your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness
And relenting of evil.

And this whole entreaty to repent continues until Joel 2: 32:

And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered.

The purpose of these judgments and their hardships and pain is that men are supposed to realise their sin and their affront to the holiness of God and repent.

Revelation 9 verse 11:

They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

Abaddon is a Hebrew title for Destroyer. Apollyon is a Greek title for Destroyer.

The angel who commands and directs this demonic host is called Destroyer.

The question is – who is this angel?

There are three views. The first is that this is Satan. It is highly unlikely that this is Satan. In my understanding, Satan is not introduced into the drama until chapter 12 – and each time we find Satan he is clearly identified as Satan or the devil or the dragon.

Others see this as a demon who leads the locust hoards. And this is possible.

But the third view is far and away the most likely. The angel of the abyss is the angel who has the key of the abyss in verse 1. The one who let the locusts free and the one who directs them.

The point of this verse is that the angel of the abyss acts on the orders of God Himself. And this God appointed angel commands, directs and leads the demonic hosts as they vent their destruction on the unbelievers of the world.

God is totally in control and sovereign over every event. Not Satan, not demons, not men, not angels. This world and every event is under the control of the Lord.

Verse 12:

The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

The vision that was the first woe has finished but two more visions await.

Trumpet 6 Revelation 9:13-14:

Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

The sixth trumpet sounds and four angels who are bound at the Euphrates are released. Again, the order comes from the throne.

These angels may be fallen angels but more likely they are the Lord's angels. Again and again in Revelation we see four angels doing the will of God. In chapters four and five we saw the four living creatures around the throne. In chapter six we saw the four horsemen. In chapter seven the four angels holding back the winds at the four corners of the world.

These angels are at the great river Euphrates. This is a designation of the area from which the godless forces came to attack Israel. And it is here that the demonic host is assembled.

Verses 15-16:

And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

Again notice the divine control. This plague was prepared and the day and hour were set by God. He is in control. The demons cannot get out until the Lord says so.

Notice as well they are permitted to kill only a third of mankind. God limits the judgment. It is a foretaste of the judgment to come. It is meant to punish and to warn.

And the number of the armies of horsemen was two hundred million – literally double-myriad myriad or double-ten thousand ten-thousand.

In chapter 5:11 we find the designation myriads of myriads to describe the unnumbered host of those before the throne. Here, this designation – double-myriad myriad – is meant to highlight the countless number of demons released to work their harm upon the earth.

Verse 17:

And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the colour of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

Like the locusts, these are clearly demonic beings. Horses but with lions heads breathing fire and brimstone. Riders dressed for warfare and judgment.

Verse 18:

A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.

The breastplates of the riders reflect the three plagues of these demonic beings – fire, smoke and brimstone. The imagery is found throughout the Bible. Fire, smoke and brimstone are used for judgment on rebellious unbelievers leading to death. The classic example is the judgment that God wrought on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Verse 19:

For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

Like the locusts they have power in their tails. Unlike the locusts their heads also do harm.

If the locusts and the horses are demons afflicting the unbelievers of this life, then what is the difference between the fifth and sixth trumpets?

Notice that in the fifth trumpet the demons were *not* permitted to kill. They tormented without death.

Here these demons do kill.

The picture here is of demons involved in death. From the moment Adam took the forbidden fruit – death has been a reality in this world. Death by famine, disease, war, old age. And death is meant to be a sign that this world is fallen.

Here the demonic host are involved in death. We are to think of death such as in Sodom and Gomorrah. Death that comes from rebellion against God.

All death is a product of the fall. But much death is a direct product of human sin. War, immorality that leads to disease, corruption that leads to famine, murders and the like.

It is not that believers are immune from death. It is not that they don't die from sin. But death in this fallen world is meant to be a sign to unbelievers that they must repent.

BUT, verses 20 and 21:

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

There is no one in this world who is unaware of the fifth and the sixth trumpets. The death and the consequences of sin are obvious to all. But the hardness of man's heart is beyond imagining.

If you pick up a burning coal – the pain tells you to drop the coal.

The pain of this world is meant to tell men that this is a fallen world – it is not the way it should be. We are meant to repent and turn to God. But man is so hard hearted.

Pharaoh saw the ten plagues – but his heart was hardened.

Israel had the prophets, the warnings, the judgments of God – and still she persisted in her sin.

I find Ezekiel 8 to be one of the most amazing chapters in Scripture. Ezekiel was transported by the Lord from Babylon to Jerusalem. And there in the Temple of the living God he saw – idolatry, animal worship, pagan fertility cults with the associated ritual prostitution and worship of the sun. And it was the priests and the leaders of Israel who led this worship.

Remember, Judah had been warned by a succession of prophets – particularly Isaiah and Jeremiah that the judgment of God was at hand. Judah had seen the ten northern tribes punished for their iniquity. They had seen Nebuchadnezzar come and cart off the nobility into captivity.

They saw judgment. They knew the hatred of God for sin. They were warned very clearly. And instead of repenting in sackcloth and ashes – it merely seemed to harden their hearts and fan the flames of sin.

When we hear of September 11. When we hear of war with Iraq. When we hear of paedophiles. When we see death and disease around us. We should remember that our God is a holy fire who hates the sin and rebellion of this world.

If we – those who love Christ – if we have sin that entangles us and we refuse to deal with it and live for Christ – then we must not be surprised if the sting of this world harms us.

But if we live holy lives, dedicated to Christ – then the pain of this world is but a momentary light affliction with no power over us.

And when an unbeliever sees the horror of this world, he should cry out – Oh God – what must I do? Forgive me! Save me!

When your unsaved friend asks you – where is God when war is occurring or famine is killing or disease is maiming? Then you must answer – God is there. These are the judgments of a holy God on a rebellious world. And you must also answer – but God is also merciful – and on Calvary – He opened a path of forgiveness for every rebel – even for you.

Judgment shows the holiness of God and the mercy of God.

History is a tapestry of the judgments of God on sin and the restraint of God while mercy calls in the lost.

We live in the days of the fifth and sixth trumpets. We live in the time when men may still repent. May we never cease to urge them to repentance.

And may we never forget that everything in this world is a part of the divine plan, the sovereign drama that the Lord controls and directs.

We are not those who live in fear. We are those who live in the triumph of the Lamb.

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe
His craft and pow'r are great,
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

And tho this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure:
One little word shall fell him.