

Sermon – 22/04/2007 am

God Shakes the Universe

Study Text: Revelation 6:12 –17

When returning to Sydney it is always great to catch a glimpse of the harbour bridge out of the plane window. It makes you feel like your home. Not only in this a familiar structure, it is a magnificent structure. The Sydney Harbour Bridge straddles our city as a symbol of strength and greatness. It is a symbol of our glorious past, and a sign of an even more glorious future – so many think. But will it stand forever?

One day as Jesus was leaving the temple in Jerusalem his disciples commented on the architectural wonder behind them. It had taken King Herod 46 years to build. This temple stood as a symbol to the past greatness of the Jews and a sign of their glorious future – when free from the Romans! This temple they thought would stand for ever.

But Jesus said that this temple would soon be in ruins (Matthew 24:2). He knew that within 35 years the Romans would destroy this temple and the Jews would be without a home. They would be scattered all over the world. He warned his disciples not to trust in earthly things, even seemingly indestructible ‘bricks and mortar’ or ‘concrete and steel’.

We still find people living as if this earth is going to go on for ever. We have a new generation that are determined this will be so. Not only are they going to mitigate floods and droughts, they are going to stop such things altogether by changing the climate. Moreover, if any meteorite veers off course and threatens to destroy our earth they are ready to shoot it down.

It is amazing that many Christians get caught up in such arrogance and blindness. How easily we adopt the thinking of the world as we enjoy the things of the world. How often do we remind ourselves, let alone tell others, that Jesus is coming again, and that when Jesus comes again heaven and earth will be shaken and everything will disappear?

Cosmic Upheaval

What Jesus told his disciples was not new. The prophets of old spoke the same language. Isaiah in particular warned the people of God of impending judgment and destruction of the earth – *the foundations of the earth are shaken* (Isaiah 24:18), *the host of heaven shall be dissolved and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll, all their host will fall down as the leaf falls from the vine* (Isaiah 34:4). Another Old Testament prophet wrote *the earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars diminish in brightness* (Joel 2:10).

As John saw into the heavenly throne room and watched Jesus open the seals on the scroll he uses similar language to the prophets to describe the end of the world. Yes, here in the opening of the sixth seal we read of the final judgment. *The great day of his wrath has come* (6:17).

This Book of Revelation is not chronological. It is not a progressive revelation of events leading up to the end of the world. It is a series of visions, each of which leads to the final judgment. The seals, trumpets and bowls actually run in parallel, albeit with some intensification of judgment from one series to the next.

In vivid pictures Jesus showed John things that must shortly take place. In this book we see things from a heavenly perspective. God is in the centre of the universe not man. God created the sun, the moon and the stars and set them in the heavens. The sun is the source of light, heat, and physical life for us. The crops grow and we have food to eat because of the sun. If the sun goes, so do we! – unless we know the Son of God, the light of the world.

When the sixth seal is opened there was a great earthquake, the sun became black and the moon became like blood (6:12). Many people worship the sun or the moon. In all public schools in a state of India children and teachers were told to worship the sun at a particular time. Millions worship the sun, the moon and the stars. But one day these will disappear according to this prophecy. What then will happen to those who worship these things?

God has shaken the earth in the past and even the heavens for a time. As the people of God gathered around Mt. Sinai there was lightning and thunder and thick dark cloud. The Lord spoke and the people trembled. *They said to Moses let not God speak to us lest we die* (Exodus 20:19). Although the catastrophic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79 was more recent as far as John's readers were concerned, all Jews would be aware of the great day when the Lord shook Mt. Sinai.

The Old Testament prophets also spoke of the Lord shaking the earth and the heavens. Haggai (2:6) said *God will shake heaven and earth once more*, a prophecy which the writer to the Hebrews interprets for us. *Yet once more indicates the removal of those things which are being shaken, as of things that are made* (Hebrews 12:27). Things made by man, along with the very creation of God, will disappear.

Such shaking was signalled at the death of Jesus. *The earth quaked and the rocks split and there was darkness over the entire land* (Matthew 27:51). At the moment of Jesus' return the earth will be shaken again, this time universally and terminally. This is what John saw as the sixth seal was opened. The old corrupted earth must give way for the new heavens and the new earth and the holy city of God and the Lamb.

Earth Dwellers Hide

The martyrs cried out to the Lord to judge and avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth (6:10). They were told to rest a little while. Their cry, it seems, was answered when the next seal was opened. When the earth was shaken, homes and idols crumbled. When the stars in heaven began to fall, the 'earth dwellers' headed for the hills. They fled to hide in caves, and under rocks.

See how the mighty have fallen. The tyrant of Bagdad was once feared by millions. He had power to kill whoever he liked. One day a mighty army came and he fled. He was found hiding in a hole in the ground. He was judged and put to death. How quickly the tables can turn as we say.

The tables will indeed turn upon the tyrants who persecute God's people. *The kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men* (6:15). This is quite a list. The persecuted Christians in Asia would have understood who was included in this list. It was kings and rulers; it was the rich and famous that were persecuting them unto death. It was the state government in India that made the rule that all children to worship the sun. Most religious persecution is government sponsored. But the end of such persecutors is near.

These very same people are defeated by the victorious Jesus in a later vision. The birds of the air are told to feast upon the flesh of these earthly kings and captains (19: 18). It is not only mighty men but all people who reject Christ, slave or free, who will try to flee from the face of Jesus when he comes. They will cry to the rocks to fall on them in order to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. But there will be no place to hide on that great day.

The Old Testament prophets, the Apostles, and Jesus himself, both incarnate and risen, all tell us of the coming wrath of God, the great Day of Judgment. Hundreds of people fled from the beaches when the tsunami warning was given. Only a fool would think he could stop the mighty wave that was coming. How much more must we heed the warning of the coming judgment of God? This is not a false alarm. This is not fairy tale.

We have been told. All have been told to humble themselves before God and worship him. There is no excuse. The gospel has gone out into all the earth. All will hear and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14). God is just and the justifier. Those who reject the gospel and his offer of justification will face divine justice. They will try to hide from God just like Adam, but is no place to hide. They will even seek to hide in death, but death will not hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.

Great Day of Wrath

Clearly what John sees here is the end of the world. It is the Day of Judgment, the day of the Lord. The next seal, the seventh, sees silence in heaven before the next series of divine judgments – a parallel series.

The one who conquered through the sacrifice of himself is seen seated on a throne. The Lamb rules in this divine paradox. Let no one be deceived. This Lamb has all power and authority and comes to judge all human beings. *The Father has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honour the Son* (John 5:22, 23). Those who reject Jesus, those who despise the Lamb will not be able to stand before him when he comes in power and glory.

Who is able to stand? This is rhetorical question. Clearly no one will be able to defend themselves before him. Not with power, not with riches. Not with intellect, not with the legal representation of the world best lawyers. All stand condemned – unless the Lamb himself chooses to acquit. And who will be acquitted. Who will live while the rest die? Those who names are written in his Book of Life.

Books will be opened revealing all the works, all the secrets of every person who have ever been born. Nothing is hidden from his sight. *Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire* (20:15). Is your name in this Book of Life? How can you know you ask? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and you will have life in his name.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon