

## Sermon – 24/06/2007 pm

### Trumpet of Torment

Study Text: Revelation 8:13-9:12

What a tragic story appeared in the press recently. A 61 year old woman was attacked and killed by her own dogs in her own house. She took in these stray dogs. She fed them and cared for them. The other day they turned on her and now she is dead.

‘Sin is crouching at your door’ the Lord told Cain (Genesis4:7) . ‘He is ready to devour you’. *Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5:8). Too many people think he is a cute and cuddly cub, but then find he turns into this devouring lion. When he does his evil work the outcome for those who were seduced by him will be much worse than for the lady mauled to death by her dogs. Abaddon, Apollyon, Destroyer is the name given to him in this passage.

### Woe, Woe, Woe

With the sounding of the first four trumpets John saw environmental disasters. One third of the earth, the sea, and the sky were destroyed or polluted. With the following trumpets human beings are targeted. These three woes are *to the inhabitants of the earth*. The text is the same as that in 6:10; those who dwell on the earth or ‘earth dwellers’ as we are calling them. These are the people who reject Jesus and actually persecute the people of God.

The three woes refer to the last three trumpets. What do these woes mean for the earth dwellers? What is the source of these woes? As the fifth angel sounded his trumpet John saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth. He was given the key to the abyss/’bottomless pit’. He opened the shaft and out billowed smoke like that out of a great furnace. The smoke blocked out the sun and everything went dark.

I remember a bushfire on the farm many years ago. I got home from school to find thick smoke blanketing the whole farm. My father was out fighting the fire so I and my brother had to do the milking. Where were the cows? We could not find them, and they could not find their way to the dairy. We had a terrible time getting the milking done that day.

As if the smoke was not bad enough, out of it came swarms of locusts, locusts that were like scorpions (9:3). Do you know about scorpions? They are horrible looking creatures when they raise their large stinging tail. We would often see them in our bathroom in India as they like dark wet places. Thankfully our children did not get stung.

Locusts like scorpions. We only ever saw the odd scorpion. To see them in warms like locusts would be terrifying. That of course is what this judgment is all about. The Lord had brought swarms of locusts in judgment upon Pharaoh in Egypt. The land became dark as they covered the face of the whole earth (Exodus 10). The Lord also brought a dreaded locust plague upon Israel in the days of King Joash. *Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming* (Joel 2:1). A great army of men on horses was coming to destroy the land. The Lord was judging them for their sin.

## Given the Key

What does this star fallen from heaven represent in this vision? Most likely Satan – as we suggested with the third trumpet. Jesus said ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’ when the disciples reported how they cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Jesus went on to say *I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you* (Luke 10:19). It is only the unsealed who will be hurt by the plague of locust-like scorpions.

The fallen star was given the key to the abyss (9:1). He was not in absolute control. Someone gave him the key? Who? Presumably it was the risen Jesus, the Lamb upon the throne, the same one who gave power to the apocalyptic horsemen. He unlocked the abyss and out came smoke and these horrible locusts.

These were not normal locusts. They did not eat vegetation. They were very strange looking locusts. Normal locusts look weird enough but the apocalyptic locusts John saw were very weird looking. They were huge like horses prepared for battle. They had faces like men but with women’s hair. They had teeth like lions, and tails like scorpions. It was the tail that was scary and which they used to torment earth dwellers.

Who was king of these weird creatures? The same angel that released them, the angel that fell from heaven, the evil angel called the Destroyer (Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek). He is none other than Satan, the prince of demons. These locusts symbolize Satan and his agents inflicting pain and suffering on his own followers on the earth. Their rejection of God, their evil deeds will come back to bite them, not by some law of nature but because Jesus gives Satan the power to afflict his own followers.

## Given Power

The locusts were *given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power* (9:3). Notice they are ‘like’, not literally scorpions. But we are to understand the dreaded nature of this judgment. The sting from the tail of a scorpion is excruciating.

Notice again this word ‘given’. The angel was given the key to the abyss. The locusts were released and were given power. The power they were given is limited in three ways.

**Firstly**, as we have seen, the elect of God, the sealed saints, were not to be harmed (9:4). Clearly these saints are still on the earth – otherwise this limitation would be redundant. But they are protected because they have the seal of God on their foreheads (*cf.* 7:3). There is no indication that any earth dwellers repented and so escaped this judgment. On the contrary they did not repent (9:20). The sealed people were sealed by God long beforehand. There will not be any last minute rush into the kingdom of heaven!

God who had sealed his servants is powerful to protect them against all attacks of the evil one. Satan appears to be the ruler of the world. He does wield great power over mankind. But all his power is given to him. There is a greater power. Jesus won the victory at the cross. In this world you his disciple will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33).

**Secondly** these locusts were given limited power over the earth dwellers – they were not permitted to kill them (9:5). They were only allowed to torment or torture them. This torture will be excruciating; so much so that *men will seek death but will not find it* (9:6).

What will this torment be like? Will it be physical pain or mental pain? It will be like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man – so will be physical. But there will also be fear, and mental and spiritual anguish. The very sight of these weird creatures will strike fear into the hearts of men! One of the curses the Lord announced upon those broke his holy covenant was madness, blindness and confusion of heart (Deuteronomy 28:28).

People might seek death in order to escape from this torment, but there will be no such escape. This is the great deception of the devil. Death is no escape. Once they are dead they are eternally his and he will torment them for eternity. Remember the story about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was not living happily in hell; he was in torment and crying out to God; but it was too late.

We might reflect on the place of pain and death in our society today. Physical pain can be relieved with the powerful drugs administered to the body; but what about mental pain and anguish? Most suicides are not because of physical pain but mental pain. Tragically suicide is on the increase in our society. Why? And then there is the call for assisted suicide or euthanasia.

*In those days men will seek death* said John. But what does he then say, *death will flee from them* (9:6). Most suicide attempts are unsuccessful. Death is not the solution to the problems of pain and suffering in this wicked world. There were those protected from the torment of Satan – those sealed by God, those whom God calls his own. God does not desire the death of the wicked but that they should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

**Thirdly**, the locusts are given power for a limited time. They were allowed to torment the unsealed for five months (9:5, 10). The life span of an adult locust is up to five months, but this number like others in Revelation is symbolic. Five months is a short time in the context of Revelation. A short time it may be, but it is a terrible time that will come upon the unsealed or unbelievers when Satan is allowed to do his dirty work in the last days.

Many want to play with this prince of demons, this king of the abyss. They are just like Toto playing with the vultures. They are just like that woman keeping her cute and cuddly dogs. Satan tempts them, he deceives them, and he lures them into his lair. Titillation will turn to torment. Satan's luxuries will lead to lament. Who will warn them of this terrible torment to come when the trumpet sounds?

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*