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Series: For the Time is Near
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Prayers Touched by the Fire of Heaven
Revelation 8:1-6

With a deep breath, we go into the first six verses of Revelation Chapter 8. We have gone through quite a bit. We didn't start too long ago and now we're in the eighth chapter. We're going into this first section, which is the final seal that is broken on the scroll. Then next week we're going to begin to see when the angels blew the trumpets.

Let's start out by reading Revelation 8:1-6, and then commit it all to the Lord:

"When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."

The Seven Trumpets

⁶ "Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them."

[Prayer] *O, Father, we come to You this morning in great anticipation for understanding and learning of what is to come in the near future. We see how it is that the stage of the history of mankind is set for Your return and we ask that You would simply strengthen Your people, give us a boldness in the midst of persecution, and that we would stand with Your strength, with joy and with confidence looking forward to what is to come, that we may know that one day we will be in all of Your glory. That is wonderful to look forward to! May You help us to remain fixed on the Author and Perfector of our faith, Jesus Christ. May we be encouraged this morning as we study Your Word, as it is the Bread of Life, and it gives nourishment to us to continue to move on and do Your work, and to do it intelligently, knowing Your will for our lives. So we commit this time into Your hands, Lord, and ask for Your blessing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

The title of this morning's message is *Prayers Touched by the Fire of Heaven*. In Ephesians 6:12, the apostle Paul says: ***"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."***

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It's for this reason that the apostle Paul told us to put on the whole armor of God, not a partial donning of the armor, but putting on the whole armor that we **"may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."** [v. 13] We need the whole armor of God, not just the belt of truth, not just the breastplate of righteousness, not just the shield of faith, the sandals which are the preparation of the gospel of peace, not just the helmet of salvation, or the sword of the spirit, or just prayer. It all comes together and there's a reason why we are encouraged as people of God, as children of God the Most High to put on the whole armor.

We see before us that John is being given a tour of the heavenly places and shown what will take place at the time of judgment. So he's seeing everything and describing it as it's being revealed to him.

It amazes me to think that our prayers, as we read in those six verses and what I just read in Ephesians, enable us "to withstand in the evil day" these plans and works of the Devil that first happen in the heavenly places. Our battles are not fought and won here on earth, but rather there in heaven. It's amazing to think that our prayers reach and impact heaven and earth, but they do, as we will see this morning.

There is a fantastic and awesome moment **before** the seven trumpets are blown that the prayers of the saints make an impact in heaven and make an impact on earth and **then** judgment comes.

I don't want to just speed through this section, these six verses, and just gloss over them before we go into the blowing of the seven trumpets. I want to really get a good understanding of what we have before us. So we're not going to cover the first four trumpets first. We're going to cover prayer. We're going to cover what took place here before the throne of God with these seven angels, plus the one with the censer, and how the Lamb of God was there.

Now, just a quick snapshot looking forward, though. The first four trumpets are found here in this chapter, and then we have the fifth and sixth trumpets that will be sounded in Chapter 9, and we will not see the seventh trumpet sounded until Chapter 11.

But I need to remind you of the purpose of this book because sometimes we get lost in the awesomeness of what's happening at any particular moment, and we lose the purpose of knowing and understanding these things. The purpose of this book is to warn us of what must soon take place because ultimately the Lord wants us to be ready, righteous, and holy awaiting Jesus' return. It's not just for excitement, or awe, or anything like that. It has nothing to do with that, although we are going to feel all of those things as we read and as we study Revelation. It's not that we would remain there, but that we would be ready for His return, know His will, and worship Him as we understand that so many things have taken place to fulfill God's prophetic word up to this point, and that these things are certain to take place in the near future.

Revelation 22:6-7 says: ***And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."***

7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

So we begin with Jesus breaking open the 7th seal on the scroll that the Lamb of God is holding in His hand. It was at the moment that Jesus (Who is today sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding for you and I) stood up.

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The Bible doesn't say this, it's just me, but I believe it was just an awesome moment! We know that silence overcame heaven for 30 minutes. 30 minutes! If I were to stand here and just be silent for 30 seconds, let alone 30 minutes, it would be kind of awkward, right? But can you imagine in heaven there is unceasing praise and worship being offered to God, over and over without stopping, eternal, but for 30 minutes heaven was silent? It's awe! It's just this amazement that overwhelms all of heaven.

Sometimes as we go through the word of God there are those moments when you read it and you have to stop and go, "Whoa! Wait a minute. What did He say?" By the way, don't just read a prescribed chapter or verse. Read it until God does something, until God speaks to you. It's at that moment that He has your undivided attention that He's actually speaking to You. Not that He hasn't previously, but there's something for you when you read and spend time with the Lord that as you are spending time in fellowship with Him that He wants you to really have an ear for.

There are those moments as I'm reading through that I just have to stop. It's like "Wow! That is absolutely amazing! I need to go back and read it again! This is Him speaking!" Whether it's His grace, His mercy, His power, His love, His patience, something that displays and illustrates that in the Bible, or in someone's life where you see it right before you. That is absolutely amazing! It should be something that just leaves you speechless, something that leaves you in utter amazement. And if the word of God doesn't do that in your life then I tell you, keep reading and it will. Keep asking God to give you understanding and you will be in that place where you will have to just stop in amazement at God.

It was the scroll that was introduced in Revelation 5, as John wept because he saw that no one was worthy to break the seals of this scroll and open it up. But then those tears were stopped as the Lamb of God stood up and was the only one Who was worthy to break those seals and took the scroll in His hand.

The seals were broken in Revelation 6, but only six. There was a pause from the breaking of the seals in Revelation 7 as the 144,000 and the "great multitude" that came out of the "great tribulation" were revealed. This pause, this silence, this awe in heaven between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals. It's at this time that Jesus breaks the seventh and final seal on the scroll. Thus loosing the judgments that heaven was anticipating in silence.

Seven Angels (v.2)

² *"Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them."*

As we've learned before in the Old Testament, trumpets were used to sound the alarm for battle, to assemble God's people, and will one day be used to announce Jesus' return, but here they are used to sound God's dispatch of judgment, one by one.

So angel number one; trumpet number one; judgment is dispatched.

Another Angel (vv.3-4)

Angel number two, with trumpet number two, sounds and then the next judgment comes, and so on and so forth.

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But then there is this other angel, and we'll look at the judgments next week. There is this 8th angel that comes in verses 3-4 we read:

³ "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel."

He was summoned, brought forth to the throne of God with this golden censer that he may burn incense that the prayers of the saints may rise along with the incense before God. So the incense was not the prayers, but the prayers of the saints rose **with** the incense that the angel had in his hand.

The Psalmist said in 141:2: "***Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!***"

In the Bible we see that prayer and incense are commonly associated. Not all incense is pleasant, but most has a nice scent and attracts you. Incense rises and so it's many times associated in the Bible to the prayers of the saints. For the Lord, the prayers of the saints is a beautiful aromatic scent that fills His nostrils with the pleasant odor that expresses faith, and expresses most of all a relationship that trusts in Him. That's what is really beautiful!

God desires to hear the calling of His people upon Himself, just as a father knows that desire with his own children as they communicate with him. Can you imagine having children and they don't want anything to do with you, you're my child but you don't want to talk to me! But when a son or a daughter communicates with the father, that's the best thing in the world. You want to hear from your children. That illustrates this faith, this trust, this relationship that you have with each other.

Now, there are these prayers that were thrown down on the earth in verse five we see: ***⁵ "Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."***

There are some rumblings in our prayers that don't come from heaven, but listen to this: James 5:16 says, "***Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.***" [NKJV] I know oftentimes we just repeat the second portion of that verse, but let me tell you that it's not limited to the healing of the sick. It's not being limited to any one area of the Christian life.

The Bible also tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "***pray without ceasing...***". Why? Because it's effective! As you look at Ephesians 6 where we are told to don the full armor of God, it's the last thing that we're told to do. We're commanded to pray. Ephesians 6:18 says, "***praying at all times in the Spirit...***" There are prayers of praise and adoration, and there are prayers of petition and intercession. And there are other prayers that are cries for mercy and help, justice and peace, and so many other things.

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Sometimes it's just this quick prayer: "Lord, save me!" Peter said that as he was sinking, as he took his eyes off the Lord. That was his prayer! Prayer is communicating with the Lord, it's talking with Him, it's placing your trust in Him. All Peter said was, "Lord, save me!" And He did.

Turn back with me to Revelation Chapter 6. I was thinking of what prayers would precede the judgments of God? Are we always praying for God's judgment to come, or for mercy to be handed out? No, we don't, right? We have other things, other prayers, but what specifically was it that came into the presence of the Lord in this specific time and preceded God's judgment that came at the sounding of the seven trumpets?

We already went through this, but I want to remind you of it. Revelation 6:9-11: ⁹ ***When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.*** ¹⁰ ***They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*** ¹¹ ***Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*** This is the Cry of the Martyrs.

Remember I told you that any communication with the Lord doesn't have to be, "O, Lord; my God; Father..." However it is that you want to start out your prayer is fine. It's not just those prayers that reach Him. It's those that are directed to Him. You can start out by just saying, "I surrender!" "Help!" "I'm done! Take over!" And if they're directed to Him it's a prayer that reaches His ears. It doesn't have to sound holy. It doesn't have to be preceded or even bookended with "in Jesus' name". It really doesn't. I know that we are in the habit of doing that, and we start out a certain way, especially when we're in a group, but listen, wherever there's two or three gathered in His name, there He is in the midst. He's right here, right now. You may be praying right now for something. Something may be on your heart, but I'm telling you that God will listen to you no matter if you bookend it with certain phrases or not. It's just directed to Him.

This was directed to Him. This is absolutely amazing as we contemplate, as we think about these things.

Thomas F. Torrance said, *"More potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth."*

There is nothing that can stand to a prayer that is given to the Lord, according to His will, touched by His throne, and cast back down to earth. Nothing! Talk about opening a door that can't be closed, or shutting a door that can't be opened. That's exactly what happens is we align ourselves with God's will and we're praying according to it. It's amazing!

These prayers that arose along with the incense were cast down to earth with the incense, and the same aroma that was pleasant to God, is the unpleasant aroma of death to those who don't believe. It brings judgment. The same message that brings life also identifies with death to those who don't believe. It's foolishness to those who are perishing. But there's a reason why it's offensive.

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It's not just, "Well, you know that your belief and this is mine." The moment you say, "Jesus", they're already thinking, "Oh, I understand salvation. I understand that you believe that there is only one way and I'm going to hell." It's offensive! As a Christian, you're offensive if you go into a room of unbelievers, if they remain rebellious, if they don't have an ear inclined toward the Lord.

It was the prayers of these saints that were touched and filled with the "fire from the altar." They were thrown back down to the earth with the power of God and effected judgment, as they were spoken according to God's will.

When we pray, our goal is to know God and thus to know His will in order to pray according to it, that His "will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We pray in this manner when we know His word as it is the will of God revealed to us.

I've heard it said, "Pray the Scriptures". Hopefully, I have been already! It's good to do that, but hopefully, we know the word of God and as we pray, we're already praying the will of God according to the Scriptures, for that is the will of God revealed to us. Not contrary to them, but in line with them. The moment our prayers align with God's will, we're able to see them worked together joining God and His perfect plans.

Let's say for instance, in your marriage, you start praying, "O God, fix my spouse. He just doesn't know what would really truly make me happy? Would you speak to him?" When all the time he's desiring the same thing for you! If you understand God's will, if you take a look at Scripture, you understand how we glorify the Lord in our marriages. Not, "Hey, make me happy with someone else because this just isn't working out." But rather, truly being a disciple of Jesus Christ and saying, "I'm going to go ahead and deny myself, pick up my cross, and I'm going to follow You." Self set-aside, I'm going to pray according to God's will. I'm going to demonstrate my love for Him by following His commandments, just as Jesus said in John 14:15 ("***If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.***").

And so we follow that prescribed word. It's amazing what happens, it truly is, when both people come together and are praying according to His will; and then that turns into action; and then you see things happen that you haven't seen happen before. All of a sudden you have this love for each other. It's a restored relationship. Then your confidence is built up and your faith is built up. Then you're like, "Wow, God! You are so awesome!" He's always been awesome! You've just now figured it out that He was right the whole time! When we know His will and pray according to it, and act according to it, our faith is built up because we see it working right before us.

This is what the saints were praying for, but they were simply joining in God's perfect plan. And it was an awesome thing that happened when the prayers were thrown down on the earth and the seven angels prepared to sound the seven trumpets. It was awesome!

Before we go into what happens when the angels do sound the trumpets (next week), I don't want you to miss the significance of prayer that we see here in these first few verses before the trumpets sound. Because if there is anything that we neglect as a church, it is praying. And when we do pray, do we pray according to His will, or ours?

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We may be like that widow before the judge. "I'm going to keep praying until I get my way." Well, but is it according to God's truth, is it according to His will? You may be praying for your will to be done, not His. You want to be completely surrendered to His will and not ours. Our will should be to do His will. How then should our prayers be?

Here are some prayers in the Bible that lined up with God's will:

Abraham prayed for a son: Genesis 15:2, ***"But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"***

Sarah remains barren, and he was praying for a son. He was praying according to God's will. We know Abraham received the son of promise, Isaac.

The Centurion for his servants: Matthew 8:5-8: ***"When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to Him, appealing to Him, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." And He said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed."***

He understood what it was to have a person of authority give the command, and then it's done as He wills. So the Centurion had this amazing faith. He says, "Hey, You don't even have to come. I know that all is under Your authority. You just say the word, and I know it will be done." He was this humble servant, but he prayed according to God's will.

Fellow Christians for Peter: Acts 12:5, 12-17: ***⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*** Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. It wasn't like here, it was in someone's home, but it was the church, nonetheless. They were all praying, and Peter was met by an angel who broke him out of jail, and then he showed up at this prayer meeting.

¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

That's just a funny scene, altogether, right? "Rhoda it's me!"

"It's you!!" Boom! Gone!

"Um, Rhoda? Rhoda, they're after me. Rhoda!"

¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

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I share this with you because prayer is truly effective. As it is aligned with God's will, answered prayer draws your attention to God and His love for you as you see His perfect will come about in your life. But sometimes we act like these people. We laugh at this scene, but sometimes we pray and like Peter's knocking at the door: "You prayed for something to happen and here I am knocking at the door."

And we're like, "Wow! That is amazing!" You go and tell other people, "That's amazing! Good one! I'm happy for you!" Even though we use the Christianese on the surface to say, "Yeah, that's great!" We fall into unbelief. I'm telling you that it's effective! It's truly amazing to hear stories in your own lives of what God has done. Those are truly miracles! No short of what God did here in the life of Peter. In the midst of a prayer meeting that was taking place. He's doing that even today!

Knowledgeable, surrendered prayer brings peace, assurance, and confidence in the Lord and strengthens your faith. An unassuming prayer submits itself to the Lord's will, trusting that He knows best. You're just coming to the Lord. "I have this before me, but I am not going to place myself before You with my will. I'm going to leave it all up to You."

A person who prays little has little faith. What does that say for someone who doesn't pray at all? How's your prayer life?

We understand that we always need to improve in our prayer life, but again going back to the relationship between a father and his children. Where there's more communication and a petitioning, and an asking, isn't there more trust on display? More confidence in the father? Absolutely! When there's little reference to the father and it's all going to the mother, there is a lack of confidence in the father. Okay, men, rise up! I know to many guys today that's true. You need the father to be that person that is being communicated with.

For us in prayer that is how we display our trust and confidence in Him. By speaking with Him, listening to Him, and trusting everything to Him. That is how. Why? Because we have great faith in Him. When a person understands the access that is possible through Jesus Christ to the Father, they never leave His presence and prayer truly becomes unceasing. As 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "**Pray without ceasing.**" Everything is before Him. You're thinking about something, you're putting it through the filter of the Word of God, you're giving it to Him. "What do You think of this? What do You think of that?" You may not be saying it, but you're thinking it. And that's your life.

Speaking of *Prayers Touched by the Fire of Heaven*, there is one last prayer that I want to leave you with. There was one last prayer that Jesus heard as He hung on the cross that was according to God's will. Luke 23:42: **And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** That was an unassuming petition from a man who had confessed his guilt before a guiltless Savior and simply asked that the King would remember him. That's all he said. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom. I'm acknowledging Your kingdom. You are King and I am acknowledging that if You remember me, then I am Your subject." It's a beautiful prayer! It's just very simple.

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Now I know that we are led in the Sinner's Prayer, but sometimes salvation comes this way. "I'm Yours, I surrender all. King; Lord; God Almighty I am Yours!" That's it! Done! You just surrendered your life. You've acknowledged your sin before Him. Your littleness before a great and awesome God. That's it! It was like Peter crying out, "Lord, save me!" You're acknowledging that He is an authority that is able to save you. And then, fruit comes from that life.

I just wanted to share with you that last prayer and Jesus's response. Luke 23:43: ***And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*** He didn't have to do anything else. For those of you that say that, "Well, you have to be baptized in order to be saved." Or, "You have to do these works...", so on and so forth. Here's just one example. Enough said.

2 Peter 3:9 says, ***"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*** Was this prayer in accordance to His will? Absolutely! His wish is that not any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. We all have that opportunity as we come to know that Jesus is the Savior. That there truly is no other way. Those are the most loving words that you could ever hear! Jesus said, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** [John 14:6] He is the Good Shepherd, He is the Door, anyone who jumps over or goes about it any other way is a thief and is false. It's through Jesus Christ that you are saved and will know eternity in all His glory. That's it!

This was a prayer that was touched by heaven and was answered on earth in this thief made clean by God's grace through faith – belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Out of all the prayers that one could utter there is not one that is not more pleasing to God than confession of sin and a request to be forgiving and to know a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Not one! There is nothing more beautiful to the Lord than to hear the words: "Forgive me, Father! I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I believe in Him. He is my Savior and my King." Everything else, you can say, is secondary and comes as a result of.

So I ask you this morning as we look at these first six verses, as we understand the importance of prayer and it's effective work in-line with God's will. How are we as a church in prayer? How are you, personally? I can say for all of us, we need work. We really do. We can pray more. I encourage you church to get on your knees more. I encourage you to seek Him more. Talk to Him, get into the Word of God because you only know His will through the Word. And aligning your prayers with Him, you will see things happen, you will see things done, and it will strengthen your faith and your confidence in Him, and you will speak to Him more often as you do that.

We're all coming before the Lord. We have access to The Throne Room of Grace and we can find help and mercy in time of need. We're in desperate need at this time for strength and for endurance that we would run this race in such a way for His glory. I'm going to pray for all of us as far as prayer is concerned.

If you don't know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I encourage you to spend some time with the Lord. If you have any questions, whatsoever, we'll be up here and answering any questions, praying with you. If there are any prayer requests, please come up and let us come alongside you. But don't leave this morning without knowing

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Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior because there truly is no day that is promised, and so why put off to the next moment what can be done now? If the Lord is really tugging on your heart and He's doing a work, you know that. I don't have to explain that to you. Respond to that. Don't leave this morning without responding to that in the affirmative. For all of us, let's go before the Lord.

Father, we come to you, we thank you for Your patience. We thank You that we can trust You. I pray that You would help us to speak to You more often, to listen to You, to know Your Word that our prayers would be in line with Your perfect will. That we wouldn't be given over to our own ways as the people in Romans 1 were. I pray Lord, that we would desire to please You in everything. If there is anything in our lives that needs to be taken care of, I pray that we would confess those things to You and that we would be committed to the things which bring You glory in their stead. We thank you, Lord, and we praise You. It's amazing that our prayers can do anything at all, but they do, and You desire them. I ask that You would help us this week to pray more than we've ever prayed before, seeking You above all. In Jesus' name, amen.