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Revelation
What Holds the Winds Back?
(Taking a Step Back)
Chapter 7 vs. 1-3

Revelation 7:1-3: After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

So, we're going backwards. At times, I'm approached by different ones of you, and you have questions about some of the things that we're going through in the books. And

when I hear enough questions, I go, “Okay, we need to clarify that.” This is one of those, “Okay, we need to clarify this” moment. I sure appreciate that song, don't you? My Adonai. “Adonai” meaning “Master, Lord”. What a wonderful picture. And so, we call our Father “Master” because we willingly do that.

We come to Revelation 7. We've been in Chapter 8, so we're backing up into Chapter 7. But the reason why we are is to help you, hopefully, understand this a little bit better and not get lost in the imagery. The imagery is pictures, clearly, and the pictures are given to us that we might understand. And I know that sometimes you get lost in the imagery, and if you get too much into dissecting the pictures, then it does get complicated. But if you just take a step back with me, and you go, “Okay, those are pictures,” then it becomes simplified. A number of years ago, and I mean, actually a number of years ago, when I was in high school, a junior in high school, we had what was called driver's training, Driver's Ed. It was Driver's Ed. And you would sign up for Driver's Ed. If you wanted to drive, you'd have to take Driver's Ed class.

Now, these classes at our school, they had these trailers, and you would sit in these trailers, and you would do this simulation of driving for a little while, and then as time went on, they actually let you drive a real car. But that was a little bit later, because they weren't going to trust you with the car right away. So, we would go to these classes, and I remember in particular, not only the simulation and driving around the cones, and let me just say this, young people, you had to learn how to parallel park. So, you've got it made. In fact, I heard in Georgia where you could actually virtually take your test, you didn't actually have to go in. So, that was pretty cool. But we were just born too early. But one of the final things we had to do was to watch a film, and the film that we had to watch was what happens if you drive while under intoxication. And so, I don't know if they would show this kind of film today, but it was very graphic in the things that would happen, and they showed the people that had actually been in accidents and the cars as well as taking us to the hospital. And the movie was there to get you to be afraid to drive while intoxicated. And of course, that was their hope, that somehow, they would engrave in your

mind this mental picture, "I'd better not even go there." In many respects, that's the purpose of the Book of Revelation. It is God painting these graphic pictures, not that the church is going to go through the time of tribulation, but that the church might understand that there are forces in this world that are nefarious and malevolent and just mean, that are so destructive that it's almost incomprehensible. When things are covered up, it's hard to see them. So, the seven seals begin to open up and unveil, and you see these pictures, and you go, "That's horrible, that's terrible, that's horrific." And He goes, "I know. Now, don't let them come into the church." And that's the main purpose of the book, as it ultimately then will bring the church to cry out, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly." But the pictures that are being painted are such that it begins to reveal that. And as we've been going in Chapter 8 and seeing these angelic forces come and really display the judgment of the law upon the earth, you begin to realize, "Okay, that's horrible." And God goes, "I know. But that's the only thing that will stop the pain and the suffering that is on the earth." What's interesting is that there is a parallel between what is being said in

Revelation and the church specifically, and that's what I kind of wanted to talk about today. In fact, in this particular passage that we read today, in Revelation 7, it talks about the 144,000 being sealed, remember?

So, if you look in the passage again, we'll just, by way of remembrance, it says,

(Revelation 7:1) “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth...”

The malevolent forces of judgment that it has to come upon the earth.

And of course, if you look in Chapter 8,

(Revelation 8:6) “And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

(Revelation 8:7) The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”

Okay, now I want you to remember that.

Go to Chapter 7, verse 1,

(Revelation 7:1) “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

(Revelation 7:2) And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea.”

And of course, that's what you're seeing in Chapter 8, not only the destruction of the earth, the grass, the trees, but then the next angel that comes, the sea, and the next angel that comes as well, the rivers and the springs.

So, as we've been going through, if you look, something's holding them back in Chapter 7, and it says, for this reason,

(Revelation 7: 3) “saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

Now, what we know is, in verse 4, that was the number of the 144,000 that are going to be preserved during the time of the tribulation, more specifically, 12,000 from every tribe of Israel. And he actually lists the tribes here.

If you look with me in Chapter 14 of Revelation, you're kind of in the middle of the tribulation with this particular scene, and it says,

(Revelation 14:1) “Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion...”

Where is that? It's like in Israel, right? It's like in Jerusalem, right?

“... and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand...”

Well, there they are.

“... having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

(Revelation 14:2) And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

(Revelation 14:3) And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.”

It literally describes them in verses 4 and 5.

(Revelation 14:4) “These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

(Revelation 14:5) And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.”

Okay, so the point is, that they're sealed, therefore they're protected literally during the whole time of the tribulation, not touched. Why? What protects them? Well, what protects them is their obedience to the law of God. They are literally blameless, and God will protect them. Now, it's the power of the Lamb that gives them that ability, but their blamelessness is that mark that protects them. What's interesting is that the rest of the

earth, they're basically going to hell in a handbasket as you begin to read the whole tribulation. Everybody else is dying, but they are preserved because they're standing with the Lamb. So, their behavior is preserving them. Now, where we stand as a church is God is using the church to preserve the world right now. So, here's the point. The church is literally that force that is holding back the judgment of God upon the earth. Why? Because the church is not followers, unlike Israel, in Jerusalem, they were proclaimers of the law, and God was going to, through the law, display His righteousness through them. But through us, He's going to display what? It's called mercy, right? So, that's Romans 15. He has called the Jews to proclaim His faithfulness in the promises that He gave to His people. See, the Gentiles, He's using us to proclaim mercy.

And as James tells us, that those who follow, well, just turn there with me, in the Book of James. We've read the passage before, just a good verse to have as a way of reminder. You and I, what is clear in verses 8 through 12, cannot be perfect according to the Law.

But it says this in verse 12,

(James 2:12) “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.”

(James 2:13) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”

The church proclaims this. See, we proclaim the message of the grace of God. We proclaim that wonderful message. And it is the message of the grace of God that literally is holding back the judgment of the world. In other words, there are forces that are being held back. Now, in Revelation 7, God was going to hold back the final judgment until those that were going to be preserved were preserved. He says, “These have got to be sealed first.” But we're sealed too. Did you know that?

Read with me in 2 Timothy 2. What a great chapter in which God calls us to entrust the message of the glorious gospel of Christ to faithful men, and to remember the Gospel. Of course, it says that in verse 8,

(2 Timothy 2:8) “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel.”

He goes on and says in verse 11,

(2 Timothy 2:11) “It is a trustworthy statement:
For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

(2 Timothy 2:12) If we endure, we will also reign with
Him;

If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

(2 Timothy 2:13) If we are faithless, He remains faithful,
for He cannot deny Himself.

(2 Timothy 2:14) Remind them of these things, and
solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to
wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the
ruin of the hearers.

(2 Timothy 2:15) Be diligent to present yourself approved
to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed,
accurately handling the word of truth.

(2 Timothy 2:16) But avoid worldly and empty chatter...”

It says in verse 19,

(2 Timothy 2:19) “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of
God stands, having this seal...”

What's the seal? Here it is.

“... “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.””

When you and I come and receive Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, something happens. Our heart changes. The Spirit of God comes within us and the things that we used to want to do, we don't want to do anymore. In fact, the love of God, as Paul would say, constrains me. It makes me want to do the right thing. You know what that is? That's the grace of God in me. “For by grace, you have been saved through faith.” It's not a result of your works. It's not me going through the law. It's not me making a resolve. God has changed my heart, and it's the heart of Christ in me that causes me to love. It actually causes me to love. Now, what's interesting is, Romans will tell us that if you're walking in love, you'll fulfill the law. Love fulfills the law. Love won't do anything... Well, love won't covet, it won't steal, it won't kill, it won't... I mean, if you walk in the love of God, you fulfill the law. So, what God has done through the church is He's held back the judgment upon the earth by virtue of the church existing in the state of

love. It is us walking in the love of God that is staying the hand of judgment. And judgment can't, because judgment actually is done away with when mercy is proclaimed. See, judgment can't be in the world of mercy, and mercy, the Gospel, is the whole thing we proclaim. That's why it's so important that the church proclaim the Gospel, because it's the very thing that holds back the judgment of God. We don't get what we deserve through grace of God, through the mercy of God. He gives us far greater things than what we deserve. We deserve death, we deserve hell, we deserve the judgment of God, but God is holding back that because we live in that and walk in that mercy. So, here's the wonderful picture of the church that is kind of parallel to the picture of the 144,000. As they are walking blamelessly in the law, God will hold back judgment to them, but not the world, because we're now in the realm of the law, and now the world is getting the judgment of God because there's nothing there to hold back the judgment of God, i.e. the church, the walk of love that they are exhibiting.

And so, it's seen, if you look with me in 2 Thessalonians. Now, if you guys have more questions when I'm done with this, I'm going to be very upset. But I'll try to show mercy. But in 2 Thessalonians 2, we'll just start off in verse 1,

(2 Thessalonians 2:1) “Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

(2 Thessalonians 2:2) that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

(2 Thessalonians 2:3) Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”

Now, let me just stop here. How can the lawless one be revealed when love is reigning? As the church is existing and we're proclaiming the love of Christ, then lawlessness cannot exist because love fulfills the law, and the church has this seal that we abstain from ungodliness and it is

literally a protection at this juncture upon the world. God has allowed us to be a protection of the world. I know people say, “Well, I'm worried about the last times and how terrible and horrific things will be when...” Why are you worried? We're the source that holds it back. We're keeping back the judgment of God on this earth.

So, the passage goes on and says, in verse 5,

(2 Thessalonians 2:5) “Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?”

(2 Thessalonians 2:6) And you know what restrains him now...”

Well, what is it? It's the love of the saints that are abiding by the law of God, and we're holding back the judgment because we proclaim mercy, and judgment has no platform in the realm of mercy.

It goes on to say,

(2 Thessalonians 2:7) “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...”

Which we know that. We know that people are embracing it as well.

“... only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

(2 Thessalonians 2:8) Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth...”

But the point of what's holding everything back, if you drop on down, is that judgment is coming because, if you look in verse 10,

(2 Thessalonians 2:10) “and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”

Once again, what's holding back the judgment upon the earth right now? Well, the love of the truth that's being proclaimed and the church is literally that resource and that source as they begin to walk in love are holding back. When it says that in the last days, because lawlessness has increased, the love of many will grow cold, what it's basically saying is the love of Christ is already taken out. So, law is the only thing that keeps people with a sense of conscience. And once that begins to go, then there is no

love at all. There's no concern for anybody, and basically every man looks out for himself.

It goes on to say,

“and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

(2 Thessalonians 2:11) For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false.”

If you look in 1 Thessalonians 4, you have this wonderful picture of the saints being taken up. And it says that you and I really don't have to be afraid or worried or even concerned about those who have died before us.

The statement is,

(1 Thessalonians 4:13) “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

(1 Thessalonians 4:14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

(1 Thessalonians 4:15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

(1 Thessalonians 4:16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

(1 Thessalonians 4:17) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord...

I mean, this is where people get the word “rapture” from. Although, the word “rapture” is not in the Bible, “taking up” is basically what it's making reference to.

“... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

Now, there's an interesting point here, that this is text that is not saying that Christ is coming to earth. This is a passage that says we are meeting Him in the clouds. He is going to come to the earth, and He'll bring everything to

order at that time. But this is the moment in which we are taken up.

And if you look in Chapter 5, it says this,

(1 Thessalonians 5:1) “Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.

(1 Thessalonians 5:2) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

(1 Thessalonians 5:3) While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly...”

When will destruction come upon them? Well, that's the other guys. The “them” is the other guys. That's not to me. That's to them. I'm glad it's not to me. It's not to you either, I don't think.

“While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

(1 Thessalonians 5:4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;

(1 Thessalonians 5:5) for you are all sons of light..."

Which that would seem to take me away from depression and darkness and obscurity.

Okay, so you and I are sons of the light...

"... We are not of night nor of darkness;

(1 Thessalonians 5:6) so then let us not sleep..."

Let us be busy about the things to do, because we know that our Redeemer lives and He's coming for us. So, it's a whole different perspective when you're looking at those final days. God has called the church, not unlike the 144,000, to preserve and to hold back evil forces, judgment forces that are going to come. And so, the judgment forces that we're reading, the trumpets that are being blown, that are coming from the heavens, is the judgment, just deserts of the world because they had sinned. And you say, "Well, why isn't the world being judged now?" Because grace is reigning and God is holding back that.

Often, I think of that passage in Proverbs 24:11 where it says, if you see somebody being taken away into danger, hold them back. Well, who do you think is holding them back? The righteous person is holding back evil from taking somebody into destruction. Who is it that steps up to keep somebody back from being destroyed? Well, it's the godly. It's the godly that holds back. So, we're holding back the malevolent forces. The body of Christ, the church, is for that purpose. The very proclaiming of the Gospel is holding back malevolent forces.

It says in Proverbs 29:11,

“A fool always loses his temper,
But a wise man holds it back.”

Holding back. That's what we do. We hold back the hostility. The reason why Scripture says control your temper is because that's who we are. We hold back hateful, mean, terrible things. I know that sometimes you feel like just letting it all out, but we hold it back. We are the preservers of this world at this time, and God has called us for that wonderful purpose, and God has called us to do that in very specific ways. And so, when he writes

to the seven churches in Asia Minor, and he begins to talk about, “Okay, there's a trumpet that's going to be blown in that day, and judgment is going to come upon the earth, he's talking to the churches and he says, “But you're holding that back, right?”

So, let me give you an example. So, the first trumpet that blows is the angel that comes, and it says that the earth, the grass, and the trees, and it begins to talk about the third. We won't go into the details of that. But the point is that there's a judgment. What is the judgment upon? Well, if you remember, the focus of the judgment was that there's been a misappropriation of the resources that God has given us. Earth, to grow things. So, there's a judgment because there's a misuse. Man takes the blessings of God, and it's in Hebrews 6, and the only thing he grows is thorns. Well, that's a misuse. Jesus says, “I came that you might produce fruit and that your fruit would remain.” Something genuine, something real, something lasting, a lasting effect. We take the resources that God gives us, and we embellish ourselves. We go

after hurtful or harmful things that not only destroy our life but oftentimes destroy the lives of others.

One of the perfect pictures of this is the church at Ephesus. God has given the church at Ephesus the Word of God. Well, that's a wonderful thing to entrust. It's very clear in the Word of God what is right, what is wrong, and what actually brings you life if you just do what it says. The unfortunate thing is that oftentimes churches use that which they know is right and wrong as a club and start beating people with it. Well, that's a misappropriation of what God has given you. So, what he says to the church at Ephesus, if you remember as He's listing the different churches, what He says to them is, "Look, it's good that you have good doctrine, but you're not loving people. And the whole purpose of the doctrine is to bring them to grace and mercy and the love of God. So, you keep doing that, I'm taking your light out. I'm ending the whole thing." So, what we're seeing is a misappropriation of the things that was given to them, and by virtue of them misusing it, God was going to bring judgment upon their fruit, so to speak.

If you just turn with me to Galatians, this will probably clarify it even more. Galatians 6, if you turn there. Why has God given us the Word of God? Why has God gathered the church together? What does He want us to do? Well, He wants us to produce fruit. The indictment that's there with the first angel is, the only thing you produce is grass, and all flesh is like grass, and the beauty of the grass is temporary. It fades away. Jesus says, "I need you to take what I give you and produce eternal stuff with it." What a strange thought that you could actually, like, take a dollar bill, which is very tangible, and make it eternal. The moment the dollar goes from your hand to God, and I'm not just saying to Family Bible or a ministry to God. Scripture says when you give a glass of water in His name, you never lose the reward. You take something tangible, the moment it leaves your hand, it goes into the eternal. What a thought that is. Think about it. It just transcends from the temporary and the eternal, and you just produce real fruit. Why? Not because the water is eternal, but because the thought in your heart was, and you were producing what was called love. So, as you back up in Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit is what?

Love. Yeah, we're talking about fruit. We're talking about proper appropriation of what God has given you. So, are you producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control? Is that what you're producing? Because if it is, then it's not a misuse of what God has given you. But if you're producing self-glory, self-exaltation, if you're pointing to yourself, if you're saying how wonderful you are, if in fact you're doing something in such a way that is causing more harm, that it's not because you love somebody, but it's a form of manipulation, then that's of the flesh. That's you just trying to gratify yourself by the things that you do.

So, his statement is in Galatians 6,

(Galatians 6:7) “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

(Galatians 6:8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption...”

Well, what are you seeing in the first angel that is blowing the trumpet? What's happening to the grass? What's happening to the trees? What's happening to the earth? Corruption. There's no growth.

And his point is,

“For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

Well, look, a church can begin to hound people, haunt people, shake their finger at people, kick them in the knee or whatever they want to do, and tell them that they need to do the right thing. But if I'm forcing you to do the right thing, then that's me doing it in the flesh. But if I gather you around and say, “What does the Spirit of God say?” And I allow the Spirit of God to do the work in your heart, you know what will happen? You'll walk up to me, and you'll go something like this, “I need to change.” And I'm saying to myself, “Well, who told you?” And you'll say, “God.” Because it wasn't me, and we weren't forcing you to. We weren't telling you you had to. The churches are misappropriating what God has given them, and they're not getting any fruit. They don't know why there's no fruit. And when I'm talking about fruit, I'm talking about not multitudes, I'm talking about genuine, lasting. See, one of the things that we're seeing is a superficiality of

many. But that's not genuine, that's not real, and there's nothing lasting there. And it won't last during times of tribulation or hardship because there's no firm root in that. But you can produce real fruit when you begin to work in the realm of, "God, I believe You to change hearts. I trust You to move in this person's heart." See? That's a whole lot different than the way that the Ephesians were approaching it. One of the reasons why the Book of Ephesians is all about the love of God, and he'll even put it in the context of marital relationship, he'll say, "You know how the husband should love his wife more than he loves himself? Okay, this is going to be the Word of God that washes the wife." In other words, the husband doesn't make a better wife by going up to her and saying, "Submit, submit." It says, the woman submits to her husband really because she sees the Word of God lived out in Him that is willing to sacrifice for her. See, what transforms you? What transforms me? Well, we look at the cross and we go, "He loves me this much?" See, Christ wasn't pointing His finger at you, and He wasn't telling you to submit. What He was doing was He was showing you just how much He loved you, and that's

what made you want to call Him Lord. See, that's a whole different message. So, the indictment that you see in Revelation is a result of the fact that mercy and grace has been taken out, and that's what the world deserves. And in every case, that's true. The next one was the second trumpet that came was the indictment against the sea and the ships in the sea. And remember, the emphasis of that was man's greediness and his longing for things that go beyond. So, what is the church holding back today? Well, Scripture's actually showing you with these pictures what we're holding back. Not only the judgment, but that which creates the need for judgment, we're holding back. We're holding back that whole flesh mentality of trying to force people to do the right thing by virtue of proclaiming the Gospel, and we're holding back that legalistic mentality. What are we holding back with the second angel? Well, we're holding back the violence that comes from the world lusting for things that never can satisfy. When you go places and you don't recognize the limitations that God has placed on you, when the church doesn't preach, God's given you a limitation. He's given you a boundary. You ought to be content with what God

has given you. It doesn't mean that you don't aspire to do good things. But what it means is that there isn't this constant craving for more for your satisfaction. And so, the seas are that wonderful picture of the sky's the limit, and I've got to go beyond the borders that God has given me because they're a picture of borders. And God says, "I'm going to destroy the seas. I'm going to destroy the ships on the sea in your pursuits to go after these things." Why? Because those things create violence. Remember when we were talking about Satan as he was described, and it says, "Because of your abundance of trade," now listen, "you were internally filled with violence." What is it that craving for things, lusting for things that you can't have, going for more, always going for more, what does that create? Violence. A lot of people wouldn't put that together.

Let me show you what it looks like in James 4. Once again, you're familiar with the text, but James 4:1 reads this way,

"What is the source of quarrels..."

Why are you arguing so much? Why are you so upset?

“... and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”

(James 4:2) You lust...”

What's lusting? That's craving for what you can't have.

“You lust and do not have; so you commit murder...”

The church, when it preaches, “Jesus satisfies,” we're holding back violence, and the police will call me up and say, “We're going to have a meeting. We're going to gather together all the pastors in the city, and we're going to form this committee that is going to keep violence from happening.” The only thing you have to do to keep violence from happening is tell people that Jesus satisfies, proclaim the Gospel. If you'll do that, then people won't start looting. They won't start killing other people, going after things, because that never satisfied, creates a hostility. And so, Scripture says the day is coming when judgment is going to come upon the earth because they wouldn't recognize their borders.

I mean, the third trumpet was that the angel was sounding, and it was an indictment against the rivers and

springs, and it was an indictment against us going to other resources rather than going to God's goodness.

Remember us talking about the fact that you resisted the gentle flowing rivers of God and you went after the Euphrates and the Nile? You went after the things of the world. And what happens when you pursue the wrong things? Well, what happens is anxiety, and more specifically, what happens is a bitterness inside of you that creates this grief that is almost overwhelming. Where is depression coming from? Well, the church is holding back depression. We're holding back depression. We're holding back grief when we tell people, "Christ is the Prince of Peace."

Let me show you. You're familiar with it. Philippians 4. It tells you and me that we ought to be, well, not anxious about anything, but we turn to God for everything. If we would just preach this, we're holding back the bitterness of the souls of people, that, if you remember, what happens? The water turns bitter. That's part of the judgment. Remember the angel, the indictment against the rivers? It turns bitter. Where does the bitterness

come from? You've forsaken God. You've forsaken the goodness of God. It's right here, in Philippians 4. You can live in harmony.

(Philippians 4:4) “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”

(Philippians 4:5) Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

(Philippians 4:6) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Talk to God about it.

What happens, in verse 7? Bitterness? Peace.

(Philippians 4:7) “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Why is it that the world has no peace? Why is it that they're bitter inside? Why is it that they're grieved and anxious inside? Well, we can hold that back. We hold that back by proclaiming the news of God. So, God has placed this seal on us that we proclaim His name, and we're

literally holding back these forces. The day is coming, When God will hold back the forces long enough to seal His 144,000, that will be the testimony of the ones, the only ones, that are really going to be rescued through all this in the sense of being unscathed. And God is going to declare, if you'll do the right thing, you can still be saved, but it's going to be more you need to change rather than the grace of God and the mercy of God being proclaimed. And so, all these forces are really forcing people to bow their knees. And that's why Scripture says the day is coming when "every knee will bow, every tongue will confess." But we sing that song at the very beginning of every service. But we do this willingly today. We bow our knees willingly today. And because of that, God is holding back so many terrible and horrific things in our lives as well as the world.

Thessalonians says, there's going to be a day when those who love God and are walking in that love, that love will be taken out, and then that lawless one will come, and God will yet preserve the 144,000. What is He telling the church? And this is where you have to keep coming back.

He's saying, "Let's go see a movie." So, you're watching this drunk driver run into this car and all this blood and this gore and you're going, "Okay, so, what do I need to do?" He said, "Don't drink." So, Paul says to the Corinthians, "Stop sinning." He's telling the church, "Be different. Don't be like the world. The world can't hold back evil. They can't hold back anything. The world can't even hold back their temper." Right? But believers are ones that hold things back, and we're that preserving force and preserving nature that God has ordained during this time. So thus, He writes to the churches of these things so that they might be thinking right, because they're letting all kinds of things infiltrate. I mean, Pergamum and Thyatira are allowing tolerance to come in, and it's all about trying to fit in with everybody else. And He says, "Your holiness is going to spare you." So, how wonderful it is that God gives us this letter to warn us and to keep us from going there, and that's the purpose of the letter.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we give You thanks for the warnings that You give, for the message that You give, for the way that we see how these things can affect and are affecting and are even infiltrating the church in such a horrible way. Lord, keep us like the 144,000 in the midst of the trials and in the midst of the tribulation. Keep us pure, that we might be a beacon, as it were, a light in the world as you called us to be, set up on a hill that the world would see that somehow these people are not in fear; somehow, they're not in anxiety; somehow, they're not hateful and bitter, and somehow all these things that are penetrating the world are held back, even at their presence. Lord, let us be that wonderful light in this time of darkness. Lord, work in our hearts. And Lord, once again, we say as the end of Revelation ends, "Even so, come quickly." We can hardly wait to see You, and it just makes our heart long for You more and for the final consummation of these days that this will be done, and all of this hatred and bitterness and strife and all of this will be done. All liars and all cowards are no more, and every eye will be wiped clean, and all those tears and sorrow will be no more. We'll see You

face to face, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. You tell us to comfort one another with these words, and wow, is it comforting to us.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I'm just asking you to see the simplicity of this book. God is revealing to you and He's revealing to me that, look, the wages of sin is death. There's judgment that has to come. Sin cannot be allowed to continue on its course. It will consume everybody. It will consume the world. It is even the grace of God to bring judgment so as to cease it. But how wonderful it is that God is even using us at this day to hold back that judgment that men may be saved through grace. I'm going to ask you to pray a very simple prayer today, and look, God knows your heart, and He'll tell you exactly what you need to pray. But here's what God wants to do, I know this to be true, God wants to use you to hold back evil. And dearly beloved, it might be just holding back your temper this week. It's going to be a big part of that. It may be that you're going to hold back false teaching, but in such a way that it would be done lovingly, and the people would see the grace of God in that. We

are salt of the earth, and we are the preservative that God has called us to be. We need to devote ourselves to this until He takes us home.