



gracefellowship

Revelation
April 7, 2019
Bowls of Wrath

:: Revelation 15:5-8 & 16:1-21

Recap: When we began this teaching series this winter we looked at only three verses together. In Revelation 1:1 we discovered that this book is the revelation of Jesus Christ- not the revelation of the future, or the revelation of secret things, or the revelation of mysteries- but this book is specifically designed to help us understand more fully who Jesus is.

Then in Revelation 1:3 we saw that John promised a blessing was in store for the one who reads the words of the prophecy aloud, as well as a blessing for all who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. The blessing doesn't come if we understand everything, or if we agree with everything; the blessing comes simply by reading it, hearing it and taking to heart what is detailed in the pages of this book.

I wanted to remind you of that this morning because for several weeks we have been looking at really difficult passages in this book. And I have to be honest with you, sometimes it doesn't feel like a blessing to be reading it or hearing it! For several weeks we have been talking about the judgments of God against sin through the breaking of 7 seals, which impacted $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth. Then we saw more of God's judgments in the form of trumpets, which impacted $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth. Next we watched as John described the enemies of God, described as a dragon and two beasts- one out of the earth, the other out of the sea- who want nothing more than to destroy the work of God in the world and set up their own kingdom with Satan (the dragon) as the head of the kingdom.

The good news in all of that is God prevails over Satan and we are promised to rule and reign with Him forever in His eternal Kingdom.

However, before we get to see the introduction of God's Kingdom on the earth we still have to deal with one more series of judgments and watch the fall of Satan's empire on the earth in the last days, days known as the Great Tribulation Period.

While this may not be the most fun topic to cover, today we will see the ultimate outpouring of God's wrath against sin and Satan's kingdom, showing us the power Jesus has to bring final justice to the earth. Two weeks ago, when we last looked at Revelation, John said he saw a great and marvelous sign in heaven:

seven angels with seven last plagues- last because with them the wrath of God is completed. Let's pick up in Revelation 15 this morning to see what comes from these angels.

:: Revelation 15:5-8

5 After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened.

6 Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.

7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

In Revelation 11 we saw the 7 trumpet judgments and three “woes” pronounced against the earth and the followers of the anti-christ. With the 7th trumpet there was actually never a judgment, only a declaration of victory and angels pronouncing that the Kingdom of God had come. With that 7th trumpet John reveals something he saw in heaven.

:: Revelation 11:19

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within His temple was seen the ark of His covenant.

John takes that image and ties it into the Bowl Judgments by once again describing the temple in Revelation 15. So, we need to ask ourselves, “What does God want us to know about these judgments that tie into His temple?” John calls it the “tabernacle of His covenant law.”

Answer: The judgments of God are in line with His covenant promises. God has continually made covenants with His people with the highest promise of the covenant being: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” The desire of God is to live with His covenant people in perfect relationship, just as He originally created with our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

Life cannot go on as intended under God's design until evil is driven from God's creation.

To accomplish that task 7 angels are given 7 bowls filled with the wrath of God to pour out against the evil in the world during this final days under the leadership of the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet.

Notice quickly what happens with the temple in heaven as these bowls are being emptied:

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels

were completed.

In the Old Testament Moses set up a Tabernacle of meeting in the Israelites camp and when the glory of God came to the Tabernacle His power was so strong that Moses and Aaron could not go into the tent because the glory of God filled the Tabernacle. When Solomon build the first Temple to God in Jerusalem, the glory of God descended on the building when they held the dedication of the Temple and the Priests were not able to enter because of the glory and divine power of God filling that space. Now, in heaven John describes the same thing happening: the glory of the presence of God fills the temple and because of His power no one could enter the temple until the 7 plagues were completed.

Let's read Revelation 16 together and see what God has in store for the final judgments against sin and evil.

:: Revelation 16

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were;

6 for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

7 And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire.

9 They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony

11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.

13 Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

15 “Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!”

18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.

19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.

20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.

21 From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

In previous judgments we have seen God limit the scope of His punishments to $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth. But what we find in these final judgements is that everything is impacted and there is complete devastation.

God systematically completes His judgments in this final series of Bowls before introducing His Kingdom in full.

The 1st Bowl is poured out on the land.

Result: Festering sores on the bodies of those who follow the beast.

The 2nd Bowl is poured out on the sea, turning it to blood.

Result: Every living thing dies.

The 3rd Bowl is poured out on the rivers and springs (fresh water).

Result: They become blood.

(Note that in certain places in Revelation John will use the word “like” to attempt to describe a reality he can’t exactly nail down with words. This is not the case here- he says the water became blood.)

At this point in the judgments the angel in charge of the waters speaks out:

5 “You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were;

6 for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”

7 And I heard the altar respond:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

The angel who speaks gives us perspective for how to feel about these horrible judgments God pours out. For anyone who has any measure of compassion it is difficult to think of God pouring out extreme judgments, such as these. And yet, the angel tells us that God is not just powerful enough to do this, but He is just in His judgments. Then he tells us why:

Throughout history and especially in the kingdom of the Anti-Christ, the people of God are targeted, persecuted and murdered for their faith in Jesus. The wicked have shed the blood of the saints of God and now his just response is to give them blood to drink.

The martyred saints around the alter also call out: "...true and just are your judgments." In chapter 6 we saw the prayers of martyred saints calling out for God to act and bring justice against those who killed them. Finally that prayer is being answered and God is completely right to do this.

Illustration: As a parent handing discipline down to my kids is a pretty normal occurrence. However, I don't always have the right information about what happened or who started it or why there was a problem to begin with. At the beginning of Spring Break we were at Heather's parent's house for one night before leaving the kids there and driving to the beach for a few days of complete bliss! We were standing in the kitchen talking to my in-laws when all of a sudden we could hear the voices of my kids through the surround sound system in their living room. My kids were outside on the driveway, but I could hear them plain as day...and they were arguing! Then I turned around the TV on the wall of the living room was showing my kids in the driveway arguing! My Father-in-law had put up a new security camera system that also had audio which allowed us to hear every word crystal clear, even though the boys were outside the house! It was great, because I spied on the kids and listened in to everything that was going on! I knew exactly who had done what, said what, and who was at fault! Now I could make a just decision about how to handle their argument! That system is going on my Christmas wish list!

God knows everything that is going on in the world. He sees and hears all the wickedness that is taking place against His people. He even knows the thoughts and attitudes of the heart! When God brings judgment against the world, it will be just and true. The unbelieving world will hate what happens, but God will be proven right in how He judges because of how the world has treated His people.

George Eldon Ladd has said,

"God's judgments are not arbitrary and capricious but are true and just. In the end, God's acts of judgment will be completely vindicated."

- George Eldon Ladd

Let's look at the remaining Bowls the angels have yet to pour out.

The 4th Bowl is poured out on the sun.

Result: 1. People are scorched with fire.

2. People curse God but refuse to repent.

I know global warming is a big topic of debate in our day, and most people are claiming it is the result of human action causing the problem. When this bowl is poured out, Global Warming will look like a Spring Day at the park! And people will recognize that God is the cause. John says the people curse God because He had control of the plagues. Yet, rather than turn from their sins and run to the One who can save them, the people dive deeper into their hatred of God.

The 5th Bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast.

Result: 1. Supernatural darkness on a global scale.

2. People gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed God, but refused to repent.

I would probably interpret the throne of the beast to be the entire world, in reference to his kingdom, but it could also mean the capital city of his empire. A third way to think of this is that God is not judging individuals based on their personal sins, but is judging the demonic civilization of the last times.

The 6th Bowl is poured out on the great river Euphrates.

Result: A path is made for the kings of the east to join the Anti-Christ in a final conflict against God.

John also says...

13 Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

These “frog-like” demonic spirits come forth from the unholy trinity of the Dragon, Anti-Christ and False Prophet. They perform miraculous signs to assemble the nations of the world to join forces and fight against God. John says they come from their mouths, repeating that phrase 3 times, which probably indicates their chief weapon is not military in nature, but demonic rhetoric and propaganda to deceive the nations and call them to war.

That moves us to the 7th and final Bowl.

The 7th Bowl is poured out on the air.

Result: “It is done!”

This reminds us of Jesus’ statement on the cross as he defeated sin on our behalf: It is finished! On the cross Jesus yelled out and announced the completed fact- but life still goes on and sin still has a grip on humanity.

With the final judgment God's power is on full display as John tells us there are flashes of lightning and peals of thunder and a severe earthquake unlike the world has ever seen. The capital city of the Anti-Christ's kingdom is split into three parts- literally meaning it is completely destroyed as civilization drinks the full cup of God's wrath and fury.

John even says the results of the earthquake are that every island fled and every mountain could not be found. As if that were not bad enough, huge hailstones, weighing 100 lbs. each fell on people and again, they cursed God because of His judgment on them.

At the end of the 7th Bowl judgment, "it is done," announces a completed fact, and in the next three chapters we are going to see the details of the events surrounding the fall of the Anti-Christ's kingdom, the final battle against God and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. John has given us the big picture at the end of this chapter, then he is going to back up and give us the details for how the story ends.

So to close this morning, I want to back up for one last quick reminder for us as followers of Jesus and how to live in light of the things we have heard today. In verse 15 Jesus breaks into the middle of these judgments to speak to His followers.

15 "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

Christians are meant to live in the expectation of Jesus' return.

To the rest of the world Jesus coming back will happen like a thief in the night. But for disciples of Jesus, we should be constantly watching, always awake and clothed for His return. Nakedness symbolizes shame, guilt and liability to judgment.

Ask yourself: If I stood before Jesus today are there things in my life that would cause me shame? If so, what do I need to do to submit to the Holy Spirit to change that in my life?