

Pastor John Marc Wiemann, Cornerstone Community Church

**04/10/22 “The Seven Bowl Judgments”
Revelation 16:1-21**

Welcome...

A common phrase that we use, that is meant to comfort one experiencing affliction, but in effect demonstrating a lack of compassion, is the saying, “It’s not the end of the world.” We say something like, “I am sorry you are going through that, but look it’s not the end of the world.”

Today we will study a prophecy of the end of the world, and it reveals in detail what the end of the world will be like. It is a weighty and sobering thing and difficult for us to grasp.

Today we see and experience the world around us — blue skies, warm temperatures, trees, flowers and shrubs are blooming, sunshine on the beach and life in the ocean, there are mountains and islands. It is difficult to grasp in our minds that someday the ocean will turn to blood and all sea life will end and the mountains and islands will no longer exist. This world will be destroyed by the wrath of God because of human sin. That is the impact of Revelation 16.

The end of the world will be worse than we can imagine. It will be worse than any movie can predict, worse than any film director could produce.

Let’s read Revelation 16:1-21...

Now to set the context, what will follow this chapter in Revelation 17, 18, and the first part of Revelation 19 provide a parenthetical descriptive insight into the wickedness of the world called Babylon the Great, which is the reason for the destruction poured out from the bowls. Babylon is the world system that is described as a harlot with whom the kings of the earth commit acts of immorality. She is described as riding on a beast and as a big city with commerce and trading. Revelation 19 celebrates Babylon’s destruction, and then describes the Second Coming of Christ.

So, the seven bowl judgments of chapter 16 are the last events on earth right before the Second Coming of Christ. In Revelation 16, we come to the end of God’s patience waiting for sinners to repent.

My sermon outline for Revelation 16, has seven points. Each point being a bowl judgment that is described for us.

My prayer for you this morning is that if you don’t know Christ then you will heed the warning of Hebrews 4:7 “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” My prayer is that you will repent and know the joy of forgiveness and salvation in Christ.

And for Christians, Revelation 16:15 applies to us when it says “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.” We need to remain focused and occupied with God’s work in the world in the time that He gives us. Our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. Blessed are the faithful and vigilant.

I. The First Bowl Poured On the Earth

Notice with me Revelation 16:1 begins the bowl judgments with a command from God...

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These seven angels are identified in Revelation 15:5-7. They come out of Heaven, receiving from the living creatures these seven bowls of the most toxic spiritual substance ever seen, the wrath of God that will be poured out on the earth.

Some may ask, why would God judge the world? Why pour out wrath on His own creation? But the real question is why is God so patient with us? It is not because He does not care about sin or because He is not holy, or because He is weak. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 2:4-5, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

God was patient with Paul as he was punishing the church, hardening his own heart, dragging off Christian brothers and sisters, throwing them in prison, breaking up homes, seeing that people were executed for faith in Christ.

Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

In Romans 9, Paul writes of the astonishing level of patience God shows to vessels of wrath who will never repent, even in the end. In Romans 9:22-23 Paul writes, “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory.”

God is patient with objects of vessels of wrath to teach us how gracious he was to us in Christ. God is an amazingly patient God. The Scripture reveals this again and again. God’s patience is immeasurable and matchless but not endless. Revelation 16 describes the day in which God will judge the earth for its sins.

Some writers see these bowl judgments as repeating the seal and trumpet judgments. There are similarities, but many more differences, especially in the degree of devastation. The fourth bowl has no parallel in earlier judgments. No personal suffering accompanies the first four trumpets, but the bowls bring torment from the very start. The bowls are universal, and they increase in intensity culminating in Armageddon. In Revelation 15:1 they are called “the last” judgments, showing they do not go back in time to repeat earlier plagues.

Revelation 16:2...

The angel does not hesitate as he pours this poisonous bowl on the land, resulting in a direct assault on human bodies. One translation says “... loathsome and malignant sores.” The Greek word is tied to the English word for ulcer — disgusting, ulcerating, bleeding, running sores on the skin, bleeding, like Job had when he scraped his skin with shards of pottery.

Who is judged? Everyone who receives the mark of the beast (the Antichrist) and worships his image.

The saints — those who believe in Jesus during the tribulation — are excluded. They do not experience the sores.

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2 Peter 2:9 says, “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.”

God rescued Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah; he rescued Noah from the flood; He is able to make a distinction between the wicked and the redeemed. With the first bowl of wrath, everybody will begin to realize that though the Antichrist had been briefly allowed to wreak havoc on the saints, the tide was about to turn.

As the sores continued to bring misery and pain to the afflicted, the second angel arrived with his bowl and poured it upon the saltwater seas. In John’s symbolic vision, the water immediately became “blood like that of a dead man.”

II. The Second Bowl Poured On the Sea

Revelation 16:3...

Some commentators try to link this to red tide, a common name for harmful algal blooms occurring along coastal regions. This is far worse than any red tide ever seen, in that the oceans turn to blood and every single living creature in the sea dies. That is absolutely mind-boggling.

We have no idea how many living creatures are in the sea. Billions? Trillions? Think of all the fish, shrimp, krill and plankton; the Great Barrier Reef, said to be the largest single living entity, if it is indeed single; all the beautiful tropical fish that swim in schools through the clear water of the Caribbean; all the stingrays and sharks and orcas. Biologists estimate 50% to 80% of all living creatures live in the sea — that is a wide range. How could they possibly give a more precise percentage? We do not know what is in the depths of the sea, but they will all die because of human sin. Let me intensify, because of our sin, they will die. It is incalculable and unimaginable.

They did not die in the flood of Noah’s day; in fact, they prospered. But at the end of history, they are the first creatures to die. After the sea dies, we die. This must be the end of human history. There is no way to survive if the ocean is dead. From the sea we get 70% of our oxygen and 83% of our rainwater. Billions of people cannot survive long without that level of oxygen and rainwater. As the wicked inhabitants of the earth reel at the realization that their lives were being torn apart, they turned inland toward the rivers and lakes. Yet just as they were about to console themselves, the third angel poured his bowl on “the rivers and the springs of waters,” turning them to blood.

III. The Third Bowl Poured On Rivers and Springs

Revelation 16:4...

This is an expansion of the third trumpet judgment, which polluted a third of the fresh water and turned it into wormwood. This bowl affects all fresh water — all rivers and springs of fresh water in the world are turned to blood.

The destruction of what is left of the earth’s fresh water will cause unthinkable hardship and suffering. There will be no water to drink; no clean water to wash the oozing sores caused by the first bowl judgment; no water to bring cooling relief from the scorching heat that the fourth bowl judgment is about to bring. The scene will be so unimaginably horrible that people will wonder how a God of compassion, mercy, and grace could send such a judgment. Perhaps you are asking that question even now.

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What kind of God would do this? Do these people really deserve these extreme judgments? So, it's fitting that the angel immediately answers our questions in God's defense in verses 5-6...

Notice there is no hesitation, no queasiness, no vacillating, but just clear vindication of God. The angel does not shrink back or question what God is doing. Instead, he celebrates what God is doing. "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One..."

Why would the angel be so sure that God is right? Two thoughts come to mind. First, everything God does is right, because He is righteous. He is the standard of justice and righteousness. If I take a measurement in inches or feet and my measurement is off even by a little, it is not the Bureau of Standards and Measurements that is in error.

The problem is my measurement. People who accuse God of being unfair just don't know how messed up our standard of righteousness is. How can we judge God who is perfectly just? His character proves the justice of His action. There is no standard of righteousness or holiness above God that He obeys. When Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah, he said in Genesis 18:25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The judge of all the earth is right, and everything He does is right.

Second, God created angels and humans alike with minds and hearts to evaluate God's actions and our own. We actually can see a rightness in what is happening. It lines up with justice. The angel says in verse 6, "For they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."

There is a rightness to it, like when Haman was made to hang on the gallows he made for Mordecai and the Jewish people.

This is the Old Testament principle known as "lex talionis" meaning that the punishment fits the crime. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but in this case, it is a life for a life. These blood-thirsty killers will be given blood to drink; it is what they deserve.

Revelation 16:7 says...

The altar is where the martyred saints from the fifth seal are, crying out. Back in Revelation 6:10-11 we read, "The martyrs cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

The number of Christian martyrs is complete now. The full number of martyrs is in, and it is time for judgment.

After this brief doxology, the fourth angel looked down upon the earth, where the marked men and women waited expectantly for rain to quench their thirst. Instead, we read about:

IV. The Fourth Bowl Poured On the Sun

Revelation 16:8-9...

The bowl is poured on the sun. The sun is in the hand of God, and He can do whatever He wants with it. The sun has served the earth since the fourth day of creation. It gives us light and heat, which we need for living. All life depends on sunlight because of photosynthesis. Every second the sun puts off the same amount of energy that our

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human race would consume in 500 million years. The surface of the sun, the outer corona, is 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The core is estimated to be 27 million degrees.

The sun is 93 million miles from the earth, positioned exactly where it needs to be to sustain our fragile life and our fragile ecosystem. Do you see the precision with which God has set up our world? God will not turn it way up or we would instantly die. A minute adjustment will create a searing heat, made more miserable because of lack of drinking water. That will genuinely be global warming. The ice caps will melt and the oceans will rise, meaning the death contained in the seas will flood the coastal cities, bringing unimaginable disease and suffering. Talk about global warming!

You would think that after a series of four consecutive judgments, which bring wicked humanity to its knees, human hearts would melt. One might expect that the next verse would describe how all those sore-inflicted, starving, thirsting, burning men and women of earth will raise their hands and cry out to God for mercy. But instead of humble repentance, we see nothing but increased hardness.

In response to judgment, notice verse 9 says... They will refuse to give Him glory.

V. The Fifth Bowl Poured On the Beast's Throne Revelation

Verses 10-11...

God plunges the world into darkness. Light and darkness are metaphors for good and evil, but we also know that God declared light itself good. When He takes light away, it is a tremendous judgment on us, lining up with our spiritually dark hearts. John 3:19 says, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." It makes sense that the bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast, plunging the dark kingdom of the Antichrist into darkness. The people are powerless to stop it; there is nothing they can do. It will be like hell on earth.

Joel described this time of judgment in Joel 2:2 as "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness." In Joel 3:14-15 we read, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness."

Zephaniah described the Day of the Lord as "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" Zephaniah 1:15. In Mark 13:24, Jesus declared in His Olivet discourse that "in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light."

The cumulative effect of the painful sores, fouled oceans, lack of drinking water, intense heat, all engulfed in thick blackness, will bring unbearable misery. Yet, incredibly, the wicked, unbelieving people of the world will still refuse to repent.

Notice at the end of verse 10 it says they gnawed their tongues (literally "kept on chewing") because of the most intense and excruciating pain, yet with those same tongues they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they did not repent of their deeds—the ultimate act of defiance by those hopelessly engulfed in Antichrist's satanic system. This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. The first five plagues were God's final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments.

VI. The Sixth Bowl Poured On the Euphrates

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Revelation 16:12-16...

Unlike the previous five bowls, the sixth has no specific assault on humanity but prepares for what is to come. When his turn came, the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates. The Euphrates appeared earlier in Revelation in connection with the sixth trumpet judgment (9:14), when two hundred million demons who were bound near it were released.

God's drying up of the Euphrates is not an act of kindness toward the kings from the east, but one of judgment. They and their armies will be entering a deadly trap. The evaporation of the Euphrates provides a clear path and will lead them to their doom, just as the parting of the Red Sea led to the destruction of the Egyptian army.

Like something out of a horror movie, John "saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs." From the mouth (symbolizing the source of influence) of each member of the unholy trinity (Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet) came a foul, unclean spirit resembling a frog. Frogs were unclean animals (Leviticus 11:10, 41), but these are not literal frogs. John identified the froglike apparitions as spirits of demons.

These demonic frog-like spirits go out performing signs and wonders to get them to come, and the Antichrist and all the armies will be there. Joel 3 details how they will be gathered to the valley of Jehoshaphat ("the Lord judges"). He will judge the nations on every side, multitudes in the valley of decision. When they are gathered there, God will pour His wrath out on them.

For Christians, God gives us a final warning in verse 15...

Like a thief comes, Jesus will come quickly and unexpectedly. But unlike a thief, He will come not to steal but to take what is rightfully His. The imagery of Jesus coming like a thief appears elsewhere in the New Testament.

In the Olivet discourse Jesus said in Matthew 24:42-43, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into."

The apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 that "the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night" - a truth that Peter also affirmed in 2 Peter 3:10. Jesus' sudden, unexpected return will bring fear and dismay to His enemies, but it brings hope and comfort to His people.

But Revelation 16:15 is not a call to watch for visible "signs" of Christ's return but to maintain conduct that is godly and faithful, because God has promised that justice will prevail in the end. The imagery of clothing in verse 15 is used to refer to holiness given to us freely by the Lamb's sacrifice for us, a holiness that we live out in consistent faith and obedience toward God. It is a call to be faithful to our mission to know Christ and make Him known.

VII. The Seventh Bowl Poured On the Air

Revelation 16:17-21...

The seven bowls are poured out onto the land and the sea, the rivers and springs, the sun, the throne of the beast, the River Euphrates, and into the air. All the realms are covered; everything is touched. God is judging the universe — the end has come.

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The seventh bowl sets the stage for the Second Coming of Christ. Verse 18 says there will a massive earthquake, the likes of which has never occurred, is a judgment on all the great cities of the world. Every city on earth, especially Babylon the Great, will split apart and fall.

Do you remember where you were on the morning of December 23, 2003? I remember being with my family around our kitchen table on the morning of December 23, 2003 when the San Simeon earthquake hit... estimated 6.5 magnitude shook the Central Coast of California. Being from Maryland, I had that you were supposed to get under a table. But when it happened I started running around yelling, "It's an earthquake get under the table!" Then I heard, "We are under the table! Now you need to get down here."

Even a smaller scale earthquake is terrifying. But this earthquake in Revelation 16 will shake the whole earth. In addition to the earthquake, 100-pound hailstones fall from the sky. Even small hailstones the size of a marble can cause damage, but these massive ones are killing people.

Physically, the worst part of these bowl judgments is that they are cumulative. Spiritually, the worst part is they do not produce repentance.

In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus tells the parable of a rich man in hell and a poor beggar named Lazarus who is at Abraham's side in heaven. The rich man cries out, "I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

I want to close with a couple points of application:

First, justice in this world will always appear distorted.

Adrian read from Psalm 73 at the beginning of the service. Turn there with me and look at Psalm 73:12-14 with me, "Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning."

In other words, life is often a raw deal. You work hard at school and make a hard-earned B+, but a fellow student cheats or cuts corners and not only gets an "A," he is granted a scholarship. Your wicked coworkers get promoted by flattery and slander, but you follow the rules and lose your job. You maintain insurance on your car, but somebody without insurance hits you and leaves you with the bill.

How have you experienced unfairness? How have you expressed your frustrations about the injustices inherent in this fallen world system? Do the words of the psalmist resonate with you?

Second, escaping the reality of God's judgment is impossible.

The same psalmist, coming to his senses and looking at the world from a divine rather than human perspective, continues in Psalm 73:16-19: "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight. Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!"

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Just as the tribulation rebels will be held accountable for their wickedness, so every person will be held accountable for his or her life. It is impossible to escape judgment. Reminding ourselves of this fact will help us come to terms with the brutality of the present world and the injustice that seems to reign. One day the tables will be turned and justice will be served.

How are we to live? Don't just look at life horizontally, but look up vertically like the Psalmist in Psalm 73 who went on to pray in Psalm 73:25-26, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Let's pray...