

Seven Bowls of Wrath

Text: Revelation 16.1–21

Theme: Our sovereign God's righteous justice will come upon the world that has rejected Him

Introduction — Read Revelation 16 from God's perspective

- often, we just read Scripture from our perspective
- our needs, our longings, our hopes
- only occasionally do we think of things like sin or judgment, let alone wrath
- but if we read Rev 16 from God's perspective, it will change all that

Reading from a sinner's perspective makes all this seem rather harsh, doesn't it?

- I mean, how fair is it, the way people suffer in these seven judgments?
- surely, they can't be that bad, right?
- but our sinful, limited perspective is grossly inaccurate
- we're the ones being unfair...unfair to God
- we sit in judgment of Him, the Almighty Creator

God is perfectly holy, sin cannot abide in His presence

- He cannot have evil in His presence
- He created all things entirely good; it was a paradise, to be sure
- and man rebelled...and we, as Adam's descendants follow suit
- when God sent His One and Only Son to take care of this problem, what did we do?
- we killed Him by crucifixion!

Our song of Revelation is this:

- seeing our sovereign God's glorious justice and steadfast love strengthening us to live lives of worship and patient endurance until Jesus returns
- here, in chapel 16, we see that glorious justice coming upon the world that has rejected Him
- as we attempt to consider all this from God's perspective, we'll examine...
- the character of God's judgments
- the recipient's of God's judgments
- and the cup of God's judgments

Let's start by examine...

I. THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

- these judgments are very reminiscent of God's judgment upon Egypt
- when He poured out ten plagues upon Pharaoh & his people, God was perfectly just
- He would show there are no other gods beside Him
- He would display His glory and leave no doubt about who He is
- and He would deliver His people; He would save them
- the exodus becomes the pattern throughout the rest of Scripture

1. A visitation of God's wrath

- in the exodus, God sends plague after plague upon the nation oppressing His people
- God's wrath is not arbitrary; it flows from His righteous justice
- God, in His goodness and long-suffering nature, gives us sinners plenty of space to repent
- but finally, all that must give way to God's judgment and wrath
- and as each bowl is poured out, there is a sense of holiness and righteousness
- God's character must be upheld; He cannot change

2. Great and grave sin requires great and grave judgment

- what sin could possibly make these type of plague judgments righteous?
- but this is to see it all from man's perspective, with our own eyes
- let's flip it around and see it from God's perspective
- these judgments ARE absolutely righteous
- they are sent from the throne of a thrice-holy God
- so how great must the sin of men and women be in His eyes?
- remember: ALL have sinned and ALL fall short of the glory of God
- this is why we hear one of these seven angels say:
 - *And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"*

Revelation 16:5–6 ESV

- the response heard from the presence of God is in v. 7
- *And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"*

Revelation 16:7 ESV

3. Just and true

- to be just means that God's judgments are consistent with His righteous character
- the word true means these judgments accord with the ways we have sinned against God
- those who dwell on the earth will indeed be guilty of having killed God's saints & prophets
- to be just and true means that God's punishments will fit the crime

4. Our fair, true, and righteous Judge

- Jesus will be our Judge
- we will be judged by Him, not by a jury of our peers
- we could never stand before God on judgment day and say:
 - "Righteous God, I demand that a verdict be rendered by a jury of my peers"
- all that will come back to us is Romans 3:19
- *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

Romans 3:19 ESV

- but praise God, we will have a peerless Peer standing next to the throne of God
- He has faced our temptations; He resisted and never sinned, not even once
- we have given in to the lust of the flesh, the use of the eyes, and the pride of life
- but even when confronted by the devil himself, Jesus never gave in
- He is the only One who can stand and mediate for us
- only by God's grace thru faith in Christ Jesus can we stand with assurance before Him
- He is absolutely just and true: being in Christ means Jesus drank God's wrath for us
- He died in our place and He is there now as our Advocate

Now, let's see...

II. THE RECIPIENTS OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

- we saw last week, in Rev 15, those who avoid this judgment do so by conquering
- they overcame the beast and his image and his number
- but those who dwell on the earth, who worship the beast & take his number will suffer

1. Those who worship the beast & take his number

- v. 2—this is idolatry, pure and simple
- this is a blatant violation of the first two commandments
- You shall have no other gods and you shall not make an image of Me (or any other god)
- and the plague is similar to the sixth plague upon Egypt in Exodus 9
- the next three bowls of wrath poured out remind us of Exodus as well
- pay careful attention to v. 9

• *They... cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.*

Revelation 16:9 ESV

- God's sovereign and glorious justice is being measured out here
- and note one other thing about these bowls of plagues
- [these earth dwellers] did not repent and give [God] glory
- these judgments only hardened their hearts as Pharaoh's was hardened
- do not think for a minute that you will always have one last chance to repent
- there will come a day, when God will say
- "I have given you opportunity after opportunity and you wasted every one of them"
- "No more; justice has come, you have been measured and found wanting"

2. Judgment upon Satan, the beast and his false prophet

- we saw a pattern with the seals and trumpet judgments
- the first four were poured out upon those who dwell upon the earth
- then, the scene shifted to that of the spiritual realm
- it does the same here with the fifth bowl
- Satan opposes God the Father
- the beast is the anti-christ and opposes Jesus Christ
- the false prophet pretends to be like the Holy Spirit and is judged accordingly
- when this judgment comes, Satan's kingdom is plunged into darkness
- just like the Egyptians, living in total, palpable darkness while God's people were safe
- so too, we see the power of God's wrath and justice
- but what do we see again, in v. 11?

• *[they] cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.*

Revelation 16:11 ESV

3. Armageddon

- now we see the fierce reply of Satan, as if, in one last attempt, he might overthrow God
- they spew forth their demonic spirits, deceiving kings, presidents and world governments
- *And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

Revelation 16:16 ESV

- under their sway, these world governments gather for one last battle at Megiddo
- at least that is the best interpretation of a very difficult to translate Greek word from Hebrew

1) What is Megiddo?

- Megiddo is on a plateau overlooking the plain of Esdraelon
- many ancient battles have been fought there
- in the days of the Judges, Israel defeated Sisera, while Deborah killed Jael

2) Who will fight where?

- some have taken this as a literal battle at Megiddo
- some believe this will happen after seven years of tribulation

- others have said it will be a great war between Russia and the United States
- this last has no foundation in Scripture at all
- the text clearly says this will be a world war, not just something between two particular nations
- others have spiritualized this war as one between the gospel and the pagan world

3) Be ready in Christ Jesus

- there is no magic formula to determine the best interpretation of this final battle
- but there is plenty of clarity on this:
- repent of your sin, trust in Christ, join a church like Albion where the gospel is preached
- walk with God, know the Bible, read your Bible, study your Bible
- Jesus encourages each of us, as His followers, to stay ready
- (*"Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!"*)

Revelation 16:15 ESV

4. Where do you stand?

- war on God is futile; He cannot be defeated
- are you angered that God would judge the world with such wrath?
- or do you rejoice in knowing that one day, at last, God's holy righteousness will be vindicated?
- if you are still living in unbelief, then given what we have heard now...
- you are a fool if you do not trust Jesus, repent of your sins, and live for Jesus Christ
- you are simply and vainly living for a lost cause
- Jesus will come; He will bring a sharp sword of truth—His Word
- and He will stand in judgment over you and be perfectly fair in doing so
- if you have trusted Jesus Christ, though, are you living as a good soldier of the cross?
- do you rejoice that Jesus reigns in your mortal body, in your heart
- is there a delight for the very Word of God burning in your soul?
- then know that Jesus will still come as Judge, but you need not fear wrath or punishment
- know this: final warnings have been given to you
- God's power will be displayed one last time
- He has absolute power over land, sun, rivers, and oceans
- He will afflict the throne of Satan in this world and throw the prince of power of air down
- now comes the final bowl and all its terror included

5. Babylon gets her due

- the earliest Babylonians tried building a tower to overthrow God & take His glory
- later, Babylon and her king thought they were the god of this earth
- and always, Babylon loses
- this is why Babylon has always spiritually represented the kingdom of this world
- and opposing this is Jerusalem, spiritually representing the kingdom of God
- the two are like oil and water—they cannot be merged together
- here, in v. 19, this tension reaches its apex
- Babylon will drink the cup of God's wrath which is filled to overflowing against her
- note too the signs leading up to this
- same as in the seals and trumpets, but here, far more intense
- a great cataclysmic ending to this world is coming
- all creation's groaning awaits this day, knowing that then God will make a new heaven & earth

Finally, keeping with the theme of seeing from God's perspective, let's look at...

III. THE CUP OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

- we have seen idolatry and immorality as the focal points of God's judgments before
- here we have them again
- in v. 2, idolatry is represented by those who worship the beast & his image
- in v. 19, the fury of God's wrath is poured out upon the immorality inherent in Babylon
- idolatry and immorality walk hand in hand throughout Scripture
- when one seeks to become like God, part of the original temptation of Satan in the Garden...
- they practice idolatry
- and goodness knows we see it all around us today
- G.K. Chesterton once quipped, "When people stop believing in God, it's not that they believe nothing; it's that they'll believe anything."
- the idolatry of self is our newest god of the age
- we can self-identify as anything we want now; it matters not what or how God made us
- and when we exchange the Creator for the creature, we exchange the truth for a lie
- we seek to live for our own pleasure and self-expression
- immorality is simply God giving us over to our own depraved and wicked minds

1. God's wrath is earned and deserved

- we just saw in v. 9, even in light of part of God's wrath: they did not repent & give him glory
- v. 11 says again: they did not repent of their deeds
- the blasphemy just goes on and on and on
- do not ever say or even think that God's judgments are unfair or false
- the unrighteousness of the unrepentant heart is evident
- and God's judgment against this form of cosmic treason is justly deserved...and fair
- Romans 1.18 says:
- *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

Romans 1:18 ESV

- do you acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of God's saving grace?
- I pray you do, even this very day
- otherwise, God has more for you
- *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Romans 2:4–5 ESV

- why, oh why, would you store up wrath more and more by rejecting His offer of Jesus?

2. Come to the One who drank this cup of wrath for you

- Jesus drank this cup, outside the city, while dying on that cross
- the wrath of God poured out on Him so harshly, God looked away
- Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
- at that moment, He who knew no sin became sin for you
- Jesus bore the anger due your sin, the punishment so justly deserved to fall upon you
- but Jesus bore it: exhaustively, completely, finally, and forever
- this is the grace of God in Christ Jesus
- those who know it, trust it, and are in Christ even now rejoice to know the truth
- but please, please, oh please, do not fool yourself if you do not or have not
- come; today is the day of salvation; come to Jesus and be saved

Conclusion – Is God calling you to Himself through faith and repentance today?

- is He prompting you to deal with ongoing sin by means of genuine repentance?
- is He nudging you, who seem to keep coming back to that stove burner upon which you once burned your hand and touching it again and again
- is He nudging your heart by His Word and Spirit and saying, “Come; receive forgiveness”
- “Come, receive the power of Jesus’ resurrection over your sin”
- do not despair like Judas did; instead, look like that thief on the cross

One old divine said: One thief was saved on the cross that none might despair. But only one, that none might presume.”

- do not presume to put off coming to Jesus, dying to self, and living for Him
- now is the time
- open your heart to God!