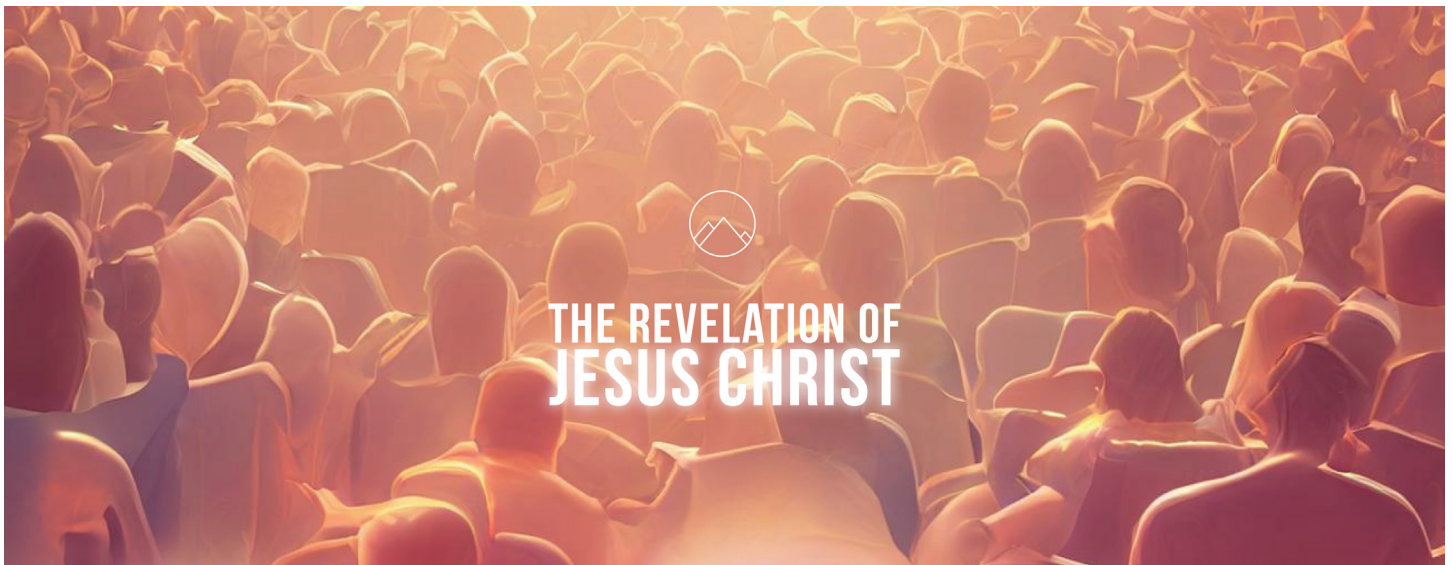




Sunday, April 7, 2024
Revelation 15 & 16

Revelation 15-16

'Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. 3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

"Great and marvelous are Your works,

Lord God Almighty!

Just and true are Your ways,

O King of the saints!

4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?

For You alone are holy.

For all nations shall come and worship before You,

For Your judgments have been manifested."

5 After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. 6 And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. 8 The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Revelation 16

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

First Bowl: Loathsome Sores

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.

Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

*"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who [d]was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For it is their just due."*

7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

Fourth Bowl: Men Are Scorched

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. 11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dried Up

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken

17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

Today as we step into the last two acts of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we will be revealing the seven bowls of the judgment of the final wrath of God. If you remember, the Book of Revelation highlights three levels of the wrath of God as we have seen so far. The First one was represented by 7 seals and in it we learn of God’s permissive wrath. That He permits humanity to choose to be their own gods knowing full-well that this choice will lead them to death and destruction. This actually allows us to view His wrath here as redemptive. For through this divine tolerance,

the hope for redemption would be found as humanity - in the depths of its despair - might finally realize that it cannot be its own god and therefore would be brought to its knees in hopes of finally surrendering to Almighty God.

The second set of judgments is represented by the seven trumpets which highlight God's partial, active wrath. In this section we saw fire from the altar flung to the earth and 1/3 of creation was destroyed. It's important to note however that 2/3 were spared. Again, 2/3 were given a chance to repent and choose to submit to God to avoid the final judgment. But now as we come to the 7 bowls, the judgment that we are about to see is final, total and complete.

The pouring out of these 7 bowls takes the perspective of God Almighty from His Throne ruling as the Righteous Judge. That His actions towards sin are righteous just as He is righteous. The word righteous here is the Hebrew word 'tsaddiyq' (sdach) and simply means to act in a: just, correct and lawful manner. Complete truth.

And so when God pronounces His judgment and wrath in this next section it is positioned towards the eradication of all evil and sin. Every ounce of it must be destroyed. God gave the chance for humanity to respond with His permissive wrath and then partial judgment but if humanity has still not accepted the blood of Jesus to be applied to the doorposts of their heart, then when His judgment comes they simply won't be able to escape it.

And so just before the angels administer the bowls of wrath, we see them coming out of the temple '...clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.' Now, if we go all the way back to chapter one, this was the exact same imagery that was used to describe Jesus. The point being that the wrath which the angels are about to pour out upon the Earth, is a pure and sinless act, just like Jesus. There is no spite, no hate, no sin at all in His response to sin.' It is just as just and correct and lawful as He Himself is.

And as the bowls are being poured out it's important that we understand that these are not seven literal bowls. Nor are the seals, seven literal seals or seven literal trumpets. All of this is symbolic and figurative language to showcase the nature of each level of wrath of God. And as we look at these seven bowls, I want you to notice that they are referred to as plagues and as such, bear striking resemblance to the plagues in Egypt. The plagues in Egypt were very literal events designed to showcase the finality of the wrath of God towards the unrepentant Egyptians, and so the imagery that is before us today is meant to point us back to the reminder of the finality and seriousness of the judgment of the Lord pronounced upon sin for those that choose not to repent.

This now moves us into chapter 16 where we see the first of seven bowls being poured out. And as this 1st bowl is poured out it releases a plague of loathsome sores which was geared specifically to those that worshipped the beast and were marked by his evil nature. There is a parallel here to the sores/boils that appeared all over the bodies of the Egyptians as the burning pain and itch associated with these boils would have rendered them incapacitated. Unable to care for even the basic necessities of life. A stark reminder for all that ultimately without God, even the most minuscule of tasks and abilities are futile. He is the Giver AND Sustainer of ALL life. Without Him you can do nothing. Without Him there is nothing.

The 2nd and 3rd bowls are linked together as they both deal with the corruption of the waters. In the second plague, all the salt water became blood and in the third plague even the fresh water became blood. All water was now incapable of sustaining any kind of life. Again, we see the parallel in Exodus don't we with the waters also turning to blood. And in Egypt's day, the Egyptian's believed that the god Osiris was the giver of life and because all life flowed from the Nile, they worshipped Osiris as the god of the Nile and therefore the god of all life. So we can clearly see, that by turning the water into blood, God was actually sending a strong message to the Egyptians that He alone had the power to give and take away life. That He and He alone is the Source. It's the same message in Revelation except that this blood is now being specifically described as being like a man's blood. Which is an interesting little detail because the blood of animals and the blood of humans generally looks the same. The implication being, that this little detail is meant to point us to the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for their sins. That as we read in Chapter 14 - is like a river that flows deep and wide and is big enough to cover all of the sins that have ever been committed and ever will be committed. But since they rejected it, that which could have brought them salvation, now speaks to their judgment.

The 4th bowl is a hot one - literally. The sun now is told to scorch humanity and as it does, humanity not only responds by not repenting but now they blaspheme the name of God as well. And although we don't see this exact same plague in Egypt, we do see the same reaction of stubbornness and blasphemy in that story as well. That even under the most horrifying of circumstances, instead of repenting, humanity blasphemes. It's one thing to reject redemption, but it's a whole other level to move from rejection to blasphemy. Blasphemy is a sign that the original sin of pride has gained full control of the heart and that heart has become so hard that resistance to the truth simply isn't enough as it moves to open defiance and hostility towards God. This is a very, very scary place to be.

The 5th bowl is now pronounced specifically on the kingdom of the Beast and its followers and in similar fashion to the last plague, as the darkness torments them, instead of repenting they turn to

blasphemy towards God.

The 6th bowl is perhaps the most challenging as we see judgment pronounced now upon the great river Euphrates. This means nothing to us, but to the first century people, it meant everything. What John is doing here is pulling from history past when the river Euphrates actually did dry up and because of that, Persia was able to capture Babylon. The Persians went far upstream and were able to dam the river and divert the water into a lake which resulted in a dry riverbed for them to travel upon. This new 'road' gave them the ability to breach Babylon's security and take the city by surprise. The point of this imagery being that the enemies may think they are coming to breach the army of God, but just like the breach of old caught the Babylonians by surprise, Jesus says He, '...will come like a thief (in the night),' and they will never see it coming as He declares victory.

And so now John sees an interesting scene as three evil frogs come out of the mouths of the evil trinity: the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Earlier on in the Book of the Revelation, we learned about the two beasts and how they get their power from the dragon. The beast of the sea manipulates political power in order to align with the dragon, and the beast of the earth manipulates religious power in order to align with the dragon (hence false religions). So since that is the case, then, the mention of the false prophet here is actually not a reference to a specific individual, but a reference to the beast of the earth who manipulates religious power leaving the mention of the other beast here to be that of the sea.

At any rate, as the evil frogs are coming out of their mouths, we read that their purpose is to seduce kings and leaders of the world to gather for war against Almighty God. Verse 16 teaches us that, '...they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.' The name Armageddon is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word 'Har Meggido' meaning the mountain of Megiddo. There is a place 60 miles north of Jerusalem, near Mount Carmel, known by the name of Megiddo which is in the Plain of Esdraelon. In ancient times, this specific region was known as one of the great battlegrounds of the world. This was a place where some highly significant battles were fought. It's the place where Barak and Deborah overthrew Sisera and his chariots; it was the place where Ahaziah died by the arrows of Jehu; and it was the place where King Josiah died in battle with King Necho. And if you were a student of Hebrew history at the time, you would have been well-versed in these events and the significance of this place as being a place where significant battles were fought.

And so by using the term Armageddon here, the intention is to point the readers to an event like that which happened at Megiddo on the plain of Esdraelon in ancient times. Armageddon is a spe-

cific event, not necessarily a specific place. It is described as a battle between Good and Evil, where the forces of the dragon will come together to wage war against Almighty God. We'll read more about that in Chapter 19, but interestingly - spoiler alert - if you read on ahead, you will see that the battle of Armageddon is actually never fought. That's right.

It doesn't happen.

The kings and dragon and the beasts may gather, but the battle is actually never fought. Jesus simply shows up, grabs them and says we're done with this.

Now the 7th and final bowl gives us a picture of the finality and totality of judgment by now being released in the air. The symbolism here is strong - that there is nothing or no-one that is exempt from the judgment of Almighty God. Just as the air touches every corner of the earth, so will the judgment of God. We all will have to account for our sin. And since Jesus already did it, for those of us that have accepted His provision, there is great mercy and grace. We have redemption. But for those that think they don't need it, it will be like trying to dodge giant blocks of hail - impossible. And it was the same way in Egypt. When the plague of hail descended it decimated the land. Everything in totality was completely destroyed. Nothing was left. Finished. Complete. It's the same picture of completion and finality here in Revelation.

Which brings us full circle to the beginning of Chapter 15 where John describes the wrath of God in these 7 bowls as complete... 'for in them the wrath of God is complete.'

It's interesting that the word used here for complete is the Greek word, 'teléo.' Does that sound familiar? It might because this is the exact same word that Jesus uttered as He breathed His last breath upon the cross.

'It is finished.' teléo

It is complete. It is total. The task set out to be done has been fully accomplished. The wrath of God had been poured out upon Jesus in totality and the price for sin was totally satisfied. And now the wrath of God that has been poured out upon sin here in the Book of Revelation is also complete. It is total. It is finished. Teléo.

Which, if you're paying attention, should raise an interesting question. Since God's wrath towards sin, was already poured out upon Jesus on the cross, and it was determined to be total and complete

(It is finished), why then is He pouring out His wrath again here in Revelation? Wasn't the first time enough?

Yes.

You see, the pouring out of God's wrath upon Jesus served as a means to deliver humanity from the wrath that was intended for the devil and his hoards.

But, if humanity rejects the price that has already been paid for their sin, then, when the wrath is poured out in totality on the devil and his hordes, then those who have rejected salvation, will ultimately get swept up in that as well. It is completely unavoidable - there's no escaping it. This is why the analogy of air is used here. It's like the air that reaches to the four corners of the earth - it touches everything.

You see, God is merciful and gracious and loving, so He does not force humanity to accept His love or salvation. They get to choose who will be their god. A.J. Packer says this: 'Nobody stands under the wrath of God, save those who have chosen to do so.' Which is a really interesting way to look at the wrath of God because this is exactly what we are seeing now in Revelation. The wrath of God that is positioned towards the devil, and his hordes, ultimately also targets those who have rejected the remedy for sin provided by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. And if that blood is not applied to the door posts of their heart, then judgement will ultimately come upon them as well.

And even in our reading today we read on numerous occasions that even after experiencing these plagues, humanity did not repent but chose to blaspheme instead. This tells us two things.
That they have outrightly rejected Almighty God and
That they were given opportunity to repent.

You see, again, in His grace and mercy, God gives opportunity to repent. Judgement is not pronounced without first the opportunity to repent. Again, nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so.

So what do we now do with this? Where do we go from here?

I can think of 3 things:

Repent. I'm really not sure how anyone who has been following along in this series can read these

words and visualize these events, and still turn their hearts from Christ. If you have not yet decided to repent and turn your heart towards the Lord of salvation then I strongly suggest that you wait no longer.

Don't stop repenting. For in repentance we learn to recognize sin and as we own our actions and understand the pain that it brings the Father, then the hope is that we will turn from our sin. This is why Jesus - so often in the New Testament - would tell people that He forgives their sin but that they should go and sin no more. That also should be our heart, to go and sin no more. But if it happens repent. And then go and sin no more. It might sound like a broken record, but this is the pattern we should embrace.

Do not be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ - for it is the power of God unto salvation for every one that believes. Shine bright.

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