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The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath
Revelation 16

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SermonAudio Blurb: God is closed up in His Temple. The Triune God, alone in His holiness, His righteousness and His wrath. The seven angels are ready to do His bidding. And in this chapter John chronicles the pouring out of each bowl in quick succession, all culminating with the seventh and greatest plague. Yet in this you see not only the holiness and wrath of God but also the sustaining grace of God for those in the midst of this time of wondrous horror. Let the reader and hearer understand.

I. Introduction.

- A. In 2004 as people were vacationing on various islands in various locales, deep in the Indian Oceans an earthquake let loose and the result was a tsunami that was estimated to have the power of 23,000 atomic bombs. It swept over islands and beaches and destroyed in a moment over 200,000 human souls.
 - 1. It did not matter if they were rich or poor. Nor if they had done a lot of good or a lot of evil. It was unstoppable and utterly terrifying.
 - 2. It was a horrible event and it showed to the world the sheer helplessness of humanity in the face of a true exertion of power. Keep that image in mind as I continue to preach.
- B. We come again to Revelation and today I will unfold for you chapter 16.
 - 1. There is nothing funny or casual about this chapter. It is a hard one and I simply do not know how to make it anything but hard. In fact, I think I would sin and be found unfaithful as a preacher and pastor if I sought to soften the words even a little.
 - 2. Judgment is hard and there is no way around that and it is why I spent two weeks speaking about the cause of God's wrath (our sin) and the cure for God's wrath (Jesus and His work on the cross).
- C. But judgment by God is very different from judgment by any human.
 - 1. We often are not interested in truth or justice. Many other underlying factors affect our judgments.
 - 2. But the judgment of God is always right and always based upon His person and character. He is truth and righteous and therefore so are His judgments.

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- a. The consequence of God's judgment is wrath. Like that tsunami breaking over the Sumatra Islands, so shall the wrath of God be released over all humanity.
- b. Currently it is held back by God's mercy. Not our goodness nor our lovability, but only the sheer patience and mercy of God.

Hear a small story from the bible that illustrates God and His wrath:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent. (Leviticus 10:1-3)

Aaron is a broken man, his sons dead by the hand of God and Moses comes and speaks to him. Hear, I beg you, hear his words. "Didn't you listen to God's words? He spoke them plainly." God said it so clearly, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored." No one comes to God on their terms and in their manner. They approach Him only as He demands and expects. They will show Him honor and they shall treat Him as holy.

Beloved, if this is what He demands of His people and how He responds in wrath and judgment to those who are His; how much more shall it be done to those who simply ignore Him or seek to worship Him in their own way and by their own standards?

Notice also what Aaron, who just watched his two boys get killed by God, does. He shut his mouth. Why? For there was nothing he could rightly say. His boys treated God as a plaything, something to be experimented with. And God dealt with them as only a truly holy and righteous God can do.

Do you believe in God's judgment to come? Do you believe His wrath is vaster than the deepest ocean? Hear then the Word of the Lord:

D. **Read chapter 16.**

E. The flow of the chapter is simple and very linear. Seven angels with seven bowls containing seven plagues.

1. They are divided into two distinct affects:
 - a. The first four affect individual people through affliction of some type.
 - b. The last three are more of an international scale. This is important for it leads to an eventual confrontation.
2. Second, notice how all of creation is used by God to bring about His judgment and wrath.

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- a. First bowl falls upon the earth, or land.
 - b. Then comes the sea, the rivers and finally the sky.
 - c. In all of this what happens is that everything humanity depends upon and assumes their existence, essentially becomes their enemy.
 - d. No part of the land is safe from the sores. The waters that are so vast and life-giving become death. And the sun that is the foundation of existence now destroys.
- F. This is a key transition point in the book of Revelation.
1. This is the end of the time known as the Tribulation.
 2. There is the front part of a massive shift from the kingdom of Satan and his henchmen to the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 3. And it begins with God, shut up in His heavenly temple, now commanding the angels to do their work.

II. Seven Bowls of God's Wrath.

1. The first bowl brings oozing ulcers upon those who worship the beast. The same kind that afflicted Job.
 - a. Terrible pain with open sores. This is a time of great and terrible misery. No place to escape. Not like now in the days of famine over the centuries, where you might flee to a land that is not affected.
 - b. Notice how specific it is about to whom is affected. All who have the mark of the beast, defined as people who worship him.
 - c. But by implication there are those on the earth who have not taken that mark. They are followers of the true God and they are not afflicted. Much in the same way as Israel was not affected by the plagues in Egypt.
2. The second bowl brings death to all living creatures in the sea and the third angel does the same to the fresh waters of the earth (3-4).
 - a. Notice it is blood like a dead man, foul and vile. It is congealed and thick.
 - b. Now you have to have seen much blood and old blood to appreciate the image this brings up. It is nasty of nasty.
 - c. Notice the effect of it. Everything in the sea dies. Wrap your mind around that for just a moment.

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- (1) This is not some layer of blood but deep beneath is water. It is just congealed, rotten blood.
- (2) Some try to use this event to show that it is merely repeating again the earlier judgments of Revelation. Common on those who take the book as primarily symbolic and we should not see it as a literal event.
 - (a) Note however in Revelation 8:8-9 only a portion of the sea was affected and a third of various things were killed.
 - (b) Here it is done in totality.
- d. Note carefully the perspective of heaven regarding this whole thing (5).
 - (1) No pity. No mercy. No sorrow. No shame and no embarrassment.
 - (2) Notice it is framed in the person of God as the eternal One.
 - (a) Everything and everyone else is finite and are part of His creation.
 - (b) As the prophet Isaiah put it, He is the potter and we are the clay. We have no say in this event. And we have no right to complain.
 - (3) God is declared to be holy and as a result He is also righteous in His judgment. It really is that simple.
- e. But there is more, the angel also gives the rationale (6).
 - (1) They have poured out the blood of God's people.
 - (2) Now they get to drink that blood.
 - (3) Vengeance is God's and it is coming now.
 - (4) Just think of the horror behind those words, "They deserve it." And consider the grace of God upon your life.
- f. And finally notice the affirmation in vs 7.
 - (1) What is happening here?
 - (2) Possibly the altar is simply being personified. It is often connected in Revelation with judgment.

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- (3) However, I think it is speaking specifically to something we saw in 6:9.
 - (a) Those countless souls who died in the most horrible of ways. They were burned, flesh torn away with hot pincers, slowly strangled, starved, scourged, hung, drowned, drawn and quartered, beheaded, crucified, and sawn in two. They now speak.
 - (b) And they say, “Yes, yes you are right in doing this.”
- 3. The fourth bowl is upon the sun, giving it the ability to burn mankind (8).
 - a. The construction of this verse is such that it emphasizes that it is God who is behind this. He is directing the sun to function differently.
 - b. The ones affected by this are the same as we already have seen. Those who are afflicted by these open sores and who have blood to drink.
 - c. If you can’t get the sense of misery try to remember a time you burned yourself fairly badly and then a few minutes later the burned area came into contact with heat.
 - d. The response by the people is given but I want to deal with that at the end.
- 4. The fifth angel brings disarray to the seat of human power at that time (10).
 - a. The throne of the beast and his kingdom speaks of the center of the authority at that time.
 - b. 13:2 speaks of Satan giving the beast the throne. We learned that this is the person we call the Anti-Christ.
 - c. There is no reason to make the darkness merely a moral or spiritual darkness—mankind is already in possession of that. It seems to mirror the Egyptian plague, but this is even greater since the beast’s kingdom is worldwide.
 - d. So now the sun is in complete rebellion toward us.
 - (1) It first scorches and burns.
 - (2) And now it will not shine.

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- e. What I want you to see is how in each of these plagues everything we take for granted is removed.
 - f. Again, I want to deal with the response at the end as it is the point of this chapter.
5. The sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates (12).
- a. What was the purpose of this?
 - b. To prepare for the kings of the East. Literally ‘from the rising of the sun...’
 - c. This river was first mentioned in Genesis 2:14 and the last is here. In was one of the key boundaries for both the Roman Empire and the land promised to Abraham
 - d. The purpose is the joining of these kings and their armies with the rest of the armies.
 - (1) Here we have the preparations for what is known as the battle of Armageddon.
 - (2) Here is a brief summary of what that will entail, though I can’t get into it today:
 - (a) March of the Kings of the East (Rev 16:12)
 - (b) Destruction of Babylon (Rev 16:19; 17:16–17; 18:1–24)
 - (c) Return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings (Rev 19:11–16)
 - (d) Christ’s feet touch the Mt. of Olives and it divides (Zech 14:4)
 - (e) The judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:9–17)
 - (f) The occupational movements of the house of Jacob (Obad 17–20)
 - (g) Christ’s judgment of Edom (Isa 63:1–6)
 - (h) Judgment at Armageddon (Rev 16:12–16; 19:17–21)
6. vss 13-16 is simply an expansion on what is going on in the sixth bowl.
- (1) They explain how the kings were all gathered.

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- (2) “out of the mouths. . .” may be literal or simply emblematic of false words, “doctrines of demons.” I take it to be literal due to vs 14.
- (3) They are being gathered to go against God’s people (cf Joel 2:11; 3:2; Zechariah 14:2-3).
- b. Vs 15 is another call of perseverance and preparedness.
 - (1) Do you hear it? Will you heed it?
 - (2) Can you not even now hear the armies gathering?
- c. Vs 16 is where the kings and their armies gather.
- 7. The seventh bowl is the destruction of Babylon (17-21).
 - a. It actually extends all the way to 18:24.
 - b. What do you think is meant by “it is done?” Probably speaking of the fact that this is the end of all of the plagues and judgments that came out of the seven seals.
 - c. It is upon the air and the results is a massive storm and earthquake beyond what anyone has ever seen. The one mentioned that caused that tsunami was around 9.1.
 - d. Three “cities” are mentioned as being affected by the earthquake—the great city, gentile cities, Babylon.
 - (1) Great city is Jerusalem, divided physically into three sections.
 - (2) Massive destruction on the cities of the earth.
 - (3) Then turns attention to Babylon, where the Anti-Christ is present.
 - e. Massive hailstones coming down in the mist of flashes of lightening in a dark world. How utterly terrifying.

III. Conclusion.

- A. First, this chapter is a statement of how seriously God takes sin and rebellion.
- B. Second, it is unashamed in showing how dangerous God is and how He will take vengeance on those who harm His children.
- C. But notice three times in this chapter the hearts of those who are suffering under His judgment:

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1. Vs 9.
2. Vs 11.
3. Vs 21.

D. Notice also how the first two speak of repenting but not the final one.

1. Even in the midst of this time of judgment mercy was available, they only had to repent.
2. But by verse 21 it is was done. The offer was removed. Their fate is sealed.
3. In fact the term “repent” is not mentioned again in Revelation.

E. Let the hearer be warned. Let the sinner repent.

IV. Benediction/Doxology.

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Small Group Questions

- What is the common idea of justice today in our country and how is it different from what this chapter describes?
- How do you balance the reality of this impending judgment with our need to speak to those who do not know Jesus?
- Think about passages like Nahum 1:2-3; Luke 21:22; Romans 12:19-21; and Hebrews 10:23-31 and discuss what stands out in them.