

The Punishment of the World

Revelation 15:1-16:21

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The gods of the Romans and the Greeks were a frightful sort. They had enormous powers and unruly passions. It was a nasty combination of deity without character, without holiness. So humanity often suffered greatly. But these were myths. They were what man thought God was like having experienced the false gods of this world.

When we come to scenes of the wrath of God, we come to an angry God. His anger though is the passion of His purity, the justness of His holiness. It has been marked for almost seven thousand years by stunning patience. But patience is now at an end.

When we come to scenes of God's wrath, we must not think of innocents caught in the fallout. This is the Day of the Lord.

The Bible divides humanity into two classes: the wicked and the saved. There are no innocents. There is no one alive at this time who is not richly deserving of what will fall.

The Bible describes humanity as being in open rebellion. Even the so-called morally good unbeliever has turned his goodness against God. He may be good to people, but he has rejected God.

Somehow, we have to come to a point where we long to see people saved and embrace the wrath of God against them rejecting Him. Our text tonight will challenge us. May we have ears to hear and hearts to embrace even the hardest of truths.

The Preparation for God's Wrath

(15:1-16:1)

We come to the final outpouring of God's wrath. This is the dreadful Day of the Lord prophesied by Joel and Ezekiel. The saints have already been gathered in and taken to meet the Lord in the air.

¹ Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

The Scene

(v.1)

John is shown a sign that is designed to make the prophetic connection to the Old Testament. Two important threads are being picked up as they often have in Revelation:

We are reminded of the plagues of Egypt. God uses His wrath to show the stupidity and folly of man's idols. Even the mighty gods of this earth and heaven are unable to even defend themselves against God, much less protect humans from Him.

We are to see this period of time in the light of Joel and the texts connecting the Day of the Lord with the wrath of God.

Isaiah 13:9-13

⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

¹² I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

Ezekiel 30:2-3

² “Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: “Wail, ‘Alas for the day!’” ³ For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

Joel 2:30-32

³⁰ “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ³² And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Zephaniah 1:7

⁷ Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to

the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

We are being shown a time when God's patience is ended and His dreadful wrath is poured out.

The Saints

(v.2-4)

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!
⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship you,
For your righteous acts have been revealed.”

We are seeing our connection to Israel's passing through the Red Sea. It is a space surrounding the throne of God. It is usually seen as a sea of glass. It is usually clear as crystal. But now it is reflecting the mingled fire of God's fierce wrath. It is meant to remind us Israel passing safely through the Red Sea while the enemies of God were destroyed.

We are seeing our safety from God's wrath. We have been rescued from the wrath of God. While it is being poured on the earth, we are safe in the presence of God. We have gathered in, caught away and stand before the Lord.

We are seeing our victory over Satan and His lies. We do not merely escape the wrath of God but we see the destruction of the enemy of our souls and the enemies of God.

We are seeing our agreement with God's righteousness. We sing a song of praise. We agree with the God's justice. We have so been purified in our glorious state that we will rejoice in all God's righteous acts. We focus on God's justice but we glorify God for the righteous who have been redeemed.

The Sanctuary

(v.5-8)

⁵ After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶ and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ And 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 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from

his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The activity here is all designed to show that the wrath of God is majestic and measured. This is not God throwing a temper tantrum. There is a choreography to this, a dance of wrath and damnation. There is a solemn ceremony here as the bowls full of the plagues are passed to those who would finally deliver their steaming contents.

The Sending/Summons (16:1)

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

The voice of God sends the messengers of His wrath to pour out the steaming bowls of the fiery hot lava of His righteous wrath.

You can see them, can't you? Look over at the sanctuary. Emerging, marching in imperial procession, great and mighty angels, clad in all white, terrible is their visage and stately in their walk. In their hands held by the handles, are ladles filled with molten wrath. They walk up to the edge of the world, and pause until the voice rumbles.

The Pouring Out of God's Wrath (16:2-21)

What a dramatic picture of God's seven messengers with seven steaming bowls pouring out destruction and death upon the rebellious who are alive at that time. Just as we saw in the seven trumpets and mentioned early, notice the similarities to the plagues on Egypt.

The first set of bowls:

² So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

³ The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

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

Terrible Sores (v.2)

Kistemaker is helpful here:

The earth, which brings forth food for mankind and on which people depend for health and well-being, is affected by the bowl poured out upon it. The Greek literally reads that the angel "poured out his bowl *into* the earth." The import of this becomes evident when people consume the produce of the earth: they suffer from ulcers inside and outside their bodies. Their health is affected by the food they ingest, and they are stricken with disease. [Kistemaker, p.440]

Those who have followed and served the beast suffer the torments of painful, oozing skin eruptions that come from the earth, the soil being poisoned.

Salt waters turned to Blood**(v.3)**

The waters of the oceans are poisoned. They are turned to blood, or possibly, turned to a blood color. This is parallel to the second trumpet. The point is that the world's salt-water fish supply dies. Those who depend on the fish from the oceans for food face starvation. Plus, there will be stench that will arise when every living thing in seas, dies.

Fresh waters turned to Blood**(v.4)**

The waters of the continents are poisoned. They also are turned to blood or a blood red color. This is parallel to the third trumpet. While it does not say so, it is safe to assume that every living thing in the fresh waters die as well.

So now, all the waters of the earth are turned to blood. Go to the well, it is filled with blood. Turn on the faucet; out pours blood. Why blood? We find the reason the lyrics of the poems in verses 5-7.

Affirmation: The rightness of God's wrath**(v.5-7)**

⁵ 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.

⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”

⁷ And I heard the altar saying,

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

Here is the affirmation of the rightness of God's wrath. “It is what they deserve,” the angel declares. Down through the centuries, the wicked have spilled the blood of the saints and martyrs. Now, give them blood to drink. This is right because God's judgments are always true and just.

Sun scorches the Wicked**(v.8-9)**

⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

The fourth bowl is parallel to the fourth trumpet, but is its opposite. The fourth trumpet brought tongue gnawing darkness. The fourth bowl unleashes skin burning heat. Look at how it is both escalating and cascading. Skin eruptions, no seafood and bloody seas, no fish and bloody water to drink and now, there is unimaginable heat. All over the earth, it is like the hottest desert.

Do people repent? Do people throw themselves on the mercy of God? No, they curse and blaspheme God. They know that these dooms are coming directly from Him. He may be visible in the near heavens. And so they curse the One who is bringing their misery.

Darkness in the False Kingdom**(v.10-11)**

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 anguish ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

While the sun is scorching the earth, the place of the beast's throne is plunged into darkness. This is not the darkness of night. This is a total darkness – like a deep, deep cave. This reminds us the deep darkness that came over Egypt. It is a darkness that cannot be dispelled by artificial light. It is God handing over the worshippers of the beast to the darkness in the beast's heart. All they can do is chew their tongues in agony over their oozing sores and blindness.

Euphrates Dried up**(v.12)**

The significance of the Euphrates in the eastern world...

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.

The sixth bowl is not one of judgment itself, but rather preparation for judgment. The effect of the bowl's being poured out is to dry up the River Euphrates. This river is famous in the Bible. It bordered the Garden of Eden. It was thought of as the northern border of the Middle Eastern empires. Even, in this days of John this river was a natural barrier against the Parthians who wanted to invade and sack Rome.

Initially it looks like the drying of the river would be something bad for the nations of the Middle East. It was preventing the kings of the east of that day from invading. Not much is said about who these kings are. To the east of Israel would be Iran and Iraq. To the east of the whole of the middle east would be China, India and Pakistan. Maybe it is all of them. But the river is seen as a natural obstacle to keep the now weakened nations of the east from invading. The drying up the river opens the way.

Interlude:***The Satanic inspired gathering of the world's armies to war against God(v.13-16)***

¹³ And I 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. ¹⁴ For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ¹⁵ ("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!") ¹⁶ And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Now comes the surprise. Three unclean spirits are sent out from the unholy triumvirate. Doing signs and wonders, they gather all the remnants of the nations into the valley of Armageddon. These evil spirits convince the nations to use now open way into the middle east to gather there to make war on the King of Kings. The beasts do not realize that in doing so they are serving the purposes of God (or at least, they don't care.) Now

please remember that you are talking about humanity having been decimated by all of the preceding judgments of God. And now they are assembled in on locale.

Let the slaughter begin...

The Earth Convulses

(v.17-21)

¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. ²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

The second, "It is finished" now rings out. There was the first one at the cross when redemption's work was done and the wrath of God was poured out in full measure on the substitutionary sacrifice, the Lord Jesus. Now, the second rings out as the wrath of God is poured out on the remnants of humanity.

In language invoking the darkness, earthquake and lightening on the day Jesus died, the convulses in its final death throes. John sees a massive earthquake, greater than was ever know in human history. It shattered the great city, the city of man, Babylon the great. God tilts her head back and pours down her throat the full wine cup of His wrath.

Then as the mountains level and the islands and continents sink, massive hail stones fall to the earth And there, gathered by the beast, in the valley of judgment, God pours out His wrath. The sickle scythes through hapless rebellious humanity. The beast watches as his last great hope bleeds out in the valley. And still people curse God because of His judgments.

Reflect and Respond

Well, this sounds savage to us. Just as we did at the cross, here we see the horror of sin in the judging wrath it invokes. You want to know how bad sin is? Look at the cross and look at these scenes.

So here are two important questions for us in the light of such doom, destruction and damnation.

Do you rejoice that God has saved you and delivered from the wrath to come?

Do you believe that it is right and good that God punish the wicked like this? Do you believe that about people you actually know? Do you believe it about the lost in your family?

Careful, we are not to rejoice in this life in the destruction of the wicked.

Careful, we must align our affections with the truths of God. We must love all of God and all that God does more than we love our families. Otherwise, we may find that we do not love God at all.

It is a sad picture of the stare of the wicked. Watch their response to the wrath of God. Be reminded that it is the kindness of God that leads to repentance. The wrath of God, like the anger of man, never brings about righteousness. We may warn of wrath in the hope that God will grant grace, but people suffering under the wrath of God will simply escalate their rebellion.

I want to close with 2 Peter 3:8-13. In all this here is the final call for us:

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

May that day come soon.