

Derek Radney
College Director
Calvary Baptist Church
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Revelation 15.5-16.21

- I. Introduction:
 - A. We don't like to think of God as a God who judges. We don't like thinking about God's wrath.
 - B. We would rather think about God as love.
 - C. We need to see how the two relate to one another.
 - D. God loves his own glory/beauty. God is the most excellent being who created us to find our greatest joy in him. He loves us in that he shares himself with us so that we might enjoy him, which in turn reveals his glory. Our enjoyment of God reveals his glory in that when we delight in him, we proclaim that he is most excellent.
 - E. Sin then is a refusal to accept God's love. It is a rebellion that denies God's claim that he is the most excellent being. Sin seeks joy in created things rather than the created, which then proclaims that he is not excellent. This is why God punishes sin. He must seek his own glory. He must seek to preserve his name, his reputation. He cannot allow creatures to curse him and proclaim that he is not most excellent. For God to allow sin to continue forever would be to sin against himself.
 - F. All who hate God deserve His wrath because he alone is worthy of worship and to worship and delight in anything but God is to curse God.
- II. **Proposition:** Christians must understand and respond properly to God's final judgment.
- III. **Organizational Sentence:** This text tells us 5 truths about the final judgment and 2 responses we are to have as Christians.
 - A. Today's text makes up one of the 7 cycles of Revelation. Each cycle describes the church age with different perspectives and emphases. As Revelation progresses however, the parallel cycles progress in their themes, building on symbols and themes throughout.
 - B. Chapter 15.6-16.21 picks up on the symbols and themes that have come before it and adds to them.
 - C. Last week's text ended with the final judgment and a song of celebration by the saints who have become victorious over the wicked because of the work of Christ. This week's text emphasizes the finality of God's judgment, telling us about those who will be judged and emphasizing our response to His judgment of the wicked.
- IV. **Truth #1: God's judgment display's His glory. (15.5-8)**

Revelation 15:5-8 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.

 - A. This cycle begins with a scene from heaven. This vision contains many elements we have already seen: a sanctuary in heaven, seven angels, and plagues in bowls held by angels. The fact that these symbols are used in this cycle does not imply that this vision

describes events that will follow the events of the last cycle. Again, we must remember that this vision follows the last in John's personal chronology, but not in the chronology of history. This new cycle starts at the beginning again, but instead of describing the whole church age, this vision especially focuses on the final judgment.

- B. This vision begins with John seeing the sanctuary in heaven which is the tabernacle or dwelling place of 'testimony' or 'witness,' (v.5). This testimony or witness is a reference to God's Word and therefore to his will. In Israel, God dwelled among his people in the tabernacle and continually revealed his will to them through his Word. Thus, John sees God's dwelling place in heaven where he reveals his will to the saints in his presence and to his holy angels.
- C. It is from this innermost chamber where God dwells that the angels emerge to carry out God's will. One of the living creatures that we saw in ch. 4-5 hands the seven angels seven bowls of wrath containing the plagues that were mentioned in 15.1 (v.6-7).
- D. These bowls contain judgments on the earth that are expressions of the wrath of God. God is angry at rebellious humanity, and he is about to pour out his anger upon them. This God is the God who is eternal, who was not created, but is the alpha and the omega. This designation is significant because it gives credence to God's wrath. God is not some created being who whines because people do not worship him. He is not some self-centered child who is self-absorbed. He is the eternal God who is worthy of worship. He is right to be angry and he is right to pour out his wrath upon humanity through these plagues (v.7).
- E. John also notes that the sanctuary is filled with smoke from the glory of the Lord (v.8). This scene seems to be an allusion to Ez. 10 and Is. 6.1-4 where the glory of God shines bright as God in the temple announces judgment to come. The point of this scene that John records is to show that God's holy presence is so awesome in this expression of wrath that even the angels cannot stand in his presence. God's glory is so great, even in expressing wrath, that it overpowers everyone.
- F. **Application:**
 - 1. We must remember that it is not only God's love that makes him beautiful. This is often our tendency today. We like to think of a loving God because in some way, we think that to love someone is to make much of them. But, when it comes to God, for him to love us, he must make much of himself and little of us so that we might enjoy his vast wonderful beauty. God's love is beautiful, but it is not the whole of God's beauty.
 - 2. God is beautiful in his justice and in his power to carry out justice on all hostile powers. It is hard for us to imagine, but to see justice done when there has been a great travesty is a beautiful thing. All justice in this life seems unsatisfying because the loss almost always still exists even if the guilty pays for the sin. But, with God in his final judgment, not only will all be made right, but we will rejoice that it unfolded the way it did so that we can enjoy seeing God exercise his power.
 - 3. God's judgment displays his beauty. To understand this, we must recognize the degree of the offense. Once we understand and grasp that, the pouring out of God's wrath becomes a beautiful thing because we realize that Christ endured that wrath in our place. We deserve that wrath. So, as we watch God pour out his wrath on the wicked, we rejoice in their defeat, but we also rejoice in God's grace to us.

V. Truth #2: God will cease to pour out limited judgment. (16.1-4)

Revelation 16:1 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." 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.

- A. John then hears a loud voice from the temple, which probably is God the Father speaking. He commands the angels to pour out the bowls of the wrath of God.
- B. The first angel pours out his bowl and harmful and painful boils and sores came upon those who followed the beast. This is an allusion to Exodus 9.8-12 where we hear of the sixth plague which God poured out on Egypt. In Leviticus 26, God tells Israel the two paths before them as God's covenant people: 1) they can obey and be blessed, or 2) they can disobey and be cursed in which case God would send boils and tumors and scabs that he poured out on Egypt. The idea here is that those who receive the mark of the beast will receive the painful marks of judgment on their bodies.
- C. The second angel pours out a bowl which turned the sea into blood killing everything in the sea. There are two significant points here.
 - 1) Unlike the limited judgments in the other cycle where a fraction are killed or wounded, here the scope is total. Everything dies. This cycle clearly emphasizes the finality of God's judgment in contrast to the ongoing judgment of the reign of Christ.
 - 2) The nature of the judgment alludes to Exodus 7.17-21 where Moses turns the Nile into blood. This judgment seems to have an economic ring to it. Last week, an angel announced the fall of Babylon which led people to buy into its false economic security leading to idolatry. Here, the waters of the earth are turned to blood which would be crippling to Rome's economy. In Revelation 18.17-18, we see a lament by sailors of the fall of Babylon, and it seems that there is a connection. This judgment seems to be a judgment on world powers who control the economy of the world, offering safety and security at the price of turning from worshipping Christ alone. This curse destroys that false security. The fact that the water turns to blood is symbolic for death.
- D. The third angel pours out a parallel judgment with the same background and same intended meaning. The two together show that the scope is over all water systems of the earth with the result that all the life in them dies.
- E. The main point of these first three bowls of plague judgments is to show that God will not hold back forever. So far in Revelation, most of the images of judgment have been limited, but now the scope and destruction of God's judgment is total.
- F. **Application:**
 1. The fact that Christ is judging the earth even now but that his judgment now is restrained should lead us to repentance and faith in Christ (compare this to 2 Peter 3.8-10). Why? Some day Christ will judge completely and finally so that no one will escape. We must be ready for this day by repenting and turning from false gods.
 2. But, a more subtle application from these verses addresses our money. The judgment here is upon those powers that offer economic security to the world setting themselves up as gods but require that people sacrifice faithful exclusive worship to Christ. This is not that foreign to Americans today. Do you ever have to compromise your worship by paying homage to false gods or ideals in the workplace in order to keep your job? Do you ever have to be politically correct to the neglect of the truth in

God's word in order to get the right grade in class? When we feel pressured to join non-Christians in celebration of things that do not exalt Christ in order to remain popular or acceptable to the establishment, we must realize that following Christ exclusively is costly. If we compromise, we just might be forsaking Christ and accepting the mark of the beast. That security won't last.

VI. Truth #3: God judges because the wicked curse his name and refuse to repent. (16.8-11)

Revelation 16:8-9 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. 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.

- A. John describes the fourth plague poured out by an angel in verses 8-9. Here, the plague is described as fire which scorches people. The fifth angel pours out his bowl on the throne of the beast, plunging him into darkness. This darkness implies separation from the God of light. All who follow the beast will be cast into the outer darkness, separate from God. The gnawing of the tongue implies that there is severe pain in this darkness.
- B. John then tells us that the wicked will not repent when they experience the judgment of God, but rather, they will curse him. This helps us to get rid of any notion that if God would only show Himself to people, then they would believe. It is easy to think that God is really unfair to punish people who have never heard the name of Jesus, or even, that he is unfair to not give anyone any more chances once they get to hell. These thoughts are misguided because they do not realize that once people experience this taste of judgment at the end, it will not lead them to repentance and faith but to hardness and condemnation of God.
- C. God is therefore just and righteous to punish the wicked eternally for they will continue to curse God eternally.
- D. **Application:**
 - 1. Like last week, we must come to grips with the serious corrupting nature of sin. Unless we are reborn by the work of God through the Holy Spirit whereby he makes us new according to the choice of God in eternity past, we will never submit to and love God. Sinner will continue to hate God and curse him unless God in His mercy makes them new by grace.
 - 2. We must recognize that the root of all sin is a refusal to worship God and give him glory as the all powerful, holy, eternal God.

VII. Truth #4: God judges because the unrighteous plot to destroy his people. (16.12-14, 16)

Revelation 16:12-14 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. 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... ¹⁶ And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

- A. John tells us next that the sixth angel pours out the plague from the bowl which dried up the River Euphrates. This bowl contains double typology, meaning, this bowl describes a judgment in the terms of God's restoration of Israel and judgment of Babylon after the captivity which was described in the Old Testament in terms of God's deliverance of

Israel from Egypt through the drying up of the Red Sea (see Ex.14.21-22 with Is. 11.15, 44.27, 50.2, 51.1; Jer.50.38, 51.36). In other words, John describes God's judgment by using literal events that happened in Israel's history. In the case of the Babylonian exile, Cyrus of Persia diverted the Euphrates River in order to lead his army to defeat the Babylonians. Cyrus eventually issued a decree sending the Israelites home. These events were in the pattern of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt where the Red Sea dried up so that Israel could escape Pharaoh's army through the water.

- B. The kings of the east then are not literally kings that will invade Israel in the end days as Dispensationalists argue. Rather, this evokes Old Testament prophecy that spoke of deliverance for Israel coming from the kings of the east. Since Babylon represents the oppressors of God's people, John's vision contains typology for Rome and any oppressive power. God will overthrow these oppressors by 'drying up the river.' Drying up the river implies that the beast and the dragon are vulnerable to defeat.
- C. But, we also see that the dragon (Satan), the beast (the Satanic political system), and the false prophet (the religious support system for the political system), who are the three opponents of Christ and his people seen in Revelation 12-13, gather together to assemble an army against God's people. Each of these characters spits out an unclean spirit apiece. The fact that they are unclean implies that the purpose of these spirits is to continue to lead people into idolatry. These spirits are described as frogs partly to allude to the plague in Egypt but also because of the loud croaking noise which frogs make. This croaking probably is a commentary on the nature of their false teaching, loud and meaningless.
- D. These spirits go out to perform signs to lead people to gather together as an army for a great battle against God's people. They gathered together at the place that is called in Hebrew, Armageddon.
 - 1. Armageddon is a transliteration of the Hebrew Har-Magedon into Greek. Har-Magedon means Mount of Megiddo. Megiddo is a plain northwest of Jerusalem next to Mt. Carmel where Elijah killed the prophets of Baal. It is a vast plain which has led many to think a literal battle of the whole earth will take place there.
 - 2. However, the text says Mount of Megiddo, which, as far as we can tell, there is no mountain near this plain at all. Mt. Carmel is the closest, but it is not even right next to the plain.
 - 3. This problem, along with the fact that thus far in this passage as well as in the rest of Revelation rarely refer to literal geographic regions but the events associated with the region, has led many to interpret this as a symbol that finds its meaning in the fact that in the Old Testament, many important battles were fought on the plains of Megiddo (Judg.5, I King 18, 2 Chron. 35.20-25, Ez. 38-39, Zech. 12.9-14).
 - 4. Therefore, Armageddon stands for the place where those who oppose God face God's judgment and are defeated.
- E. The point of this judgment is that the enemies of God and his people will be destroyed for plotting to destroy God's people and oppose the true king, Christ. These three opponents, Satan, governments under his control, and the religions that support these powers, lead people with false signs to worship idols and to destroy the saints, but God will make them vulnerable to attack and defeat them.
- F. **Application:**

1. It is difficult to remember that anyone who is not with Christ is against him. Certainly, not all non-Christians are as bad as they could be, seeking to kill Christians and deceive people all the time. But, our sin is so deceptive that a lifestyle that rejects the exclusive redemption found in Christ does resist God's kingdom.
2. Even those who live according to Christian morals while still believing in the goodness and progress of mankind hate Christ's rule and God's people. We ultimately have to realize that we cannot be true friends with the world. We can love non-Christians intimately, but we must never forget the fundamental difference between us.

VIII. Truth #5: God's judgment will put an end to evil and those who follow Satan.

(16.17-21)

Revelation 16:17-21 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.

- A. Then John details the final defeat of God's enemies. The seventh angel shouts that it is done, this is the end. Again, like other cycles, an earthquake occurs here at the final scene of judgment. Thunder, lightning, and hail fall and lay the earth desolate. The Great City, which is Babylon, which stands for all governments that oppose Christ, is split into three.
- B. Babylon is then made to drink of the cup of the wine of God's wrath. This picks up on the symbols from last week where God's wrath was described as wine made from the blood of the wicked. Babylon is now drunk with judgment.
- C. Every island fled away, symbolizing the universal scope of this judgment.
- D. Hailstones are describes as being enormous so that their destructive capability would be tremendous. This is an allusion to the hail plague in Exodus 9.19-35.
- E. Again, the result of the judgment upon the wicked opposition is not repentance but cursing. The judgment is severe which hardens the wicked rather than helping them see the severity of their offense.
- F. The point of this final judgment is that God will put an end to it all. This judgment is complete and puts an end to all opposition.
- G. **Application:**
 1. We have seen this truth illustrated in a number of ways already in Revelation.
 2. The proper response to the truths is found in two places.

IX. We are to rejoice that God is giving the wicked what they deserve. (16.5-7)

Revelation 16:5-7 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!"

- A. As a response to either the third plague judgment or the first three, John sees another angel, who is apparently in charge of the waters, begin to praise God for his just judgment.

- B. For the second time in this passage, God is praised for being the holy eternal God, ‘Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was.’ John notes that the angel specifically points out that God is the one carrying out these judgments. God is active in his judgment of the wicked. He does not merely turn people over to their sin, but he actively pours out his wrath upon them.
- C. The angel also designates the reason for the judgment upon the wicked. Surprisingly, the angel does not say that it is the sin against God that warrants God’s judgment, although we cannot deny that this is the foundational offense of sin, but rather it is the persecution of the righteous saints that serves as the ground for their judgment. The followers of the beast have sought to kill the saints and the prophets and therefore, judgment is what they deserve!
- D. Other angels from the altar in the temple are also heard echoing the angel of the waters. They agree with the angel of the waters by acknowledging that the Lord God Almighty is true and just to judge the wicked thus.
- E. **Application:**
 - 1. Firstly, one must acknowledge that the bible speaks very clearly of God actively judging the wicked because they deserve it. One can either embrace this teaching or deny it and the truthfulness of the bible, but one cannot say they believe the bible but don’t believe in an angry God who judges. We must at least believe that God judges out of anger over sin simply because the bible says so. Surely, we find more reasons in other places that help us to see why this is just, but we must at least say that God is just to judge because the bible tells us right here.
 - 2. Secondly, and more difficultly, we must also realize that we too can and will rejoice in the destruction of the wicked who persecute us. Now this seems un-Christian because God tells us to love our enemies and to not judge self-righteously. This is of course true. But, it is also true that there is a place where celebrating the calamity of the wicked in getting what they deserve is good and right. The place for that however lies primarily in the future at the end of evil when Christ subjects all things under his feet. Until then, the normal response to the defeat of the wicked is sorrow over their lack of repentance.

X. We are to be ready for Christ’s return in judgment by being faithful. (16.15)

Revelation 16:15 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!")

- A. John throws in a parenthetical statement in verse 15 in the middle of the sixth trumpet. He uses the language of Jesus during his earthly ministry to call the reader to be ready for Christ’s return in judgment. John announces blessing upon those who are prepared for his return.
- B. John says three important things:
 - 1. Jesus’ return will be like a thief. This means that we won’t expect it. No one expects a home break in, which is why the thief is so often successful at night.
 - 2. We are to stay awake and not fall asleep. The image is of a person not taking off their clothes at night to sleep and thus being caught naked when the thief arrives.
 - 3. John tells us that we don’t want to be naked and exposed, which stands for feeling ashamed. This suggests that not being ready for Christ’s return will result in our shame. This shame is not the shame of embarrassment, but rather the shame of being an idol worshipper and not a believer at all.

C. **Application:**

1. Christians are ready for Christ's return, not just emotionally in hope, but in their lives. Christians are ready when they practice repentance, faithfulness, and righteousness.
2. To live in light of Christ's coming like a thief, we are to number our days and live with kingdom purposes, not lazily or selfishly. To live ready is to forsake the worldly values and goals, which are the trappings of the beast, and to remain faithfully relying on Christ for security.
3. To be ready for Christ's return is to forsake false teaching and to discern false prophets, holding to right doctrine and practice.