

All Things New: What Will It Take?

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Proverbs 28:13-14; Hebrews 3:7-15; Revelation 16

Our final Scripture reading today is Revelation 16. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. 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. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."

- “What will it take to get you in a new car today?”
 - We hear all sorts of pitches trying to convince us we want what we don’t want – or want it at the right price
 - Comparison shopper – you can convince me only when you’ve gotten to the bottom line
 - We go to great lengths with our kids to get them to eat foods they don’t want – cut off the crusts, put a toy in the box, play the plane is landing in the hanger
 - Even our jobs are the same way – we can be convinced to do something we’d rather not do if the price is right (it’s a bonus if we happen to love the job we do, or we take less money for that job)
- We also know the negative side of the pitch
 - Discipline – what is it going to take for you to do your chores – sometimes we bribe, sometimes we discipline
 - “You’re grounded” – start taking privileges away
 - Jail is the ultimate grounding
 - Even then, sometimes, nothing is going to get them to stop
- Today’s passage isn’t terribly unique from what we’ve read before, but a couple of things really stand out about it – one of which is the human response to God’s wrath – the question of, what does it take for you to repent? We’re going to focus on that today as we explore all that’s going on
- Revelation 16 has parallels to what has come before in the trumpet judgments – this may be a new set of judgments, but it’s more than likely a close-up view on what has happened – it may a reminder of the cycles of judgment leading to the final judgment of humanity
- What tells us that these may be a closeup is that they run parallel to the trumpet judgments – they are still extremely reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt – they follow similar patterns – all of the plagues were proof that the Egyptian gods had no power against the Lord, who is God of the universe
- A key difference in these plagues, one that we should note, is that the focus isn’t on death but on suffering – sores, no drinkable water (and then a lack of water), scorching sun followed by darkness (extremes), hail – like the people in Egypt, they live through the judgment
- In the midst of it all, an absolute statement of God’s justice, both from the angel pouring out the judgment and the martyrs gathered under the altar of God – the blood of the martyrs cries out for justice to be done back in Revelation 6

- We also need to note that many things tells us this passage is not literal
 - Euphrates is a symbol of the central waters of the world
 - Babylon has never been rebuilt, never again achieves greatness
 - Isaiah 13 predicts that Babylon will be destroyed never to be inhabited again – happened by 482 BC – it’s interesting that two people in history (Alexander the Great and Saddam Hussein) both tried to rebuild Babylon only to die before it could take place
 - Babylon the Great is the symbol we talked about a few weeks ago of the pinnacle of human decadence
 - Armageddon is not an event, but a place – Mount Megiddo
 - This was an important battlefield in the history of Israel – one place that Joshua’s army was supposed to conquer but did not – regular attacks from Israel’s neighbors mounted there – the last godly king of Judah, Josiah, died there in battle
 - It’s a traditional place to come against God’s people
 - Even now, it’s on the border with Palestinian lands
 - Some bits may be literal, but we should not get complacent because certain physical places don’t seem ready for God’s final judgment yet
- Two things really stand out:
 - An underlying factor in many of the final judgments is economic
 - The death of the sea creatures (perhaps marine life for food, but also metaphorically trade between nations), famine caused by heat, a lack of drinkable water, darkness (which implies a lack of heat), a collapse of cities
 - The bowl judgments systematically destroy humanity’s ability to care for itself, to provide for itself without the hand of God
 - By the sixth bowl judgment, the beast/dragon/false prophet spit out evil spirits in order to continue to deceive the world with miraculous signs – it shows the desperation of spiritual evil in the face of God’s hand of judgment
 - Why would the kings of the world come together to Mount Megiddo? They’re drawn together to try and fix the predicament they are in – to war against God’s might, to try and convince the world that they can overcome this
 - Remember there are cycles to judgment – we may be in one now, it may be final, it may not be – but economics behind judgment are real

- Pray that God holds back His hand, that we still have time to repent, that we might see His mercy
 - Blasphemy and unrepentance rule the day
 - What will it take to convince them to turn? Nothing!
 - The blasphemy shows that they know who God is – this is not an issue of knowledge but one of disrespect and conscious rejection of God
 - Three times men curse God; twice they refuse to repent
 - God gives opportunity, each punishment is another time for them to say, “Enough!” Yet they don’t.
 - This may be the hardest thing to believe in the passage – all these woes from the hand of God, that are seen as being from God, but no turning – just like Pharaoh in Egypt
 - As parents, we know there are levels of discipline and punishment
 - Take away the car keys, then the cell phone, then any access to the Internet – in our house it’s books
 - Has to measure up to the offense, and yet the reaction to the discipline also creates more discipline
 - God’s wrath keeps coming because there is no turning; no repentance – you can never turn over the car to someone who will never stop drinking; you can never let out of prison someone who will keep harming others
- What will it take for us to repent?
 - James 5:19 and 1 John 1:9, by different apostles, give us the same message – confessing our sins brings healing, forgiveness, and purity
 - Jesus said to His disciples that the tax collector who confessed his sins and asked God for mercy went home right with God, not the Pharisee who brought before God in prayer all his righteous acts
 - Real wounds require real attention from the master Healer – we hurt God and ourselves when we sin; hiding it only makes it worse
 - Confession and repentance must go hand in hand – not one or the other – those who do not sin do not need to repent – confession without repentance is guilt at being caught
 - The church is as strong as it is repentant, in a constant mode of turning to God
 - Delayed repentance is disobedience
 - The price for the sin of everyone who will believe has been paid; don’t wait for a better deal