

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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“The Final Act Begins”

July 12, 2009

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Sermon Text:

Revelation 15:1 – 16:21

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 13

Introduction

The following account is taken from the preface of The Stolen Village, by Des Ekin, Fall River Press, 2006.

“Shortly before daybreak on Monday, June 20, 1631 a joint force consisting of 230 elite troops of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and pirates from the Barbary coast of North Africa stormed ashore at the little port of Baltimore, West Cork (Ireland), and spirited almost all the villagers away to a life of slavery in Algiers. The victims were mostly women and children – altogether 50 youngsters – ‘even those in the cradle’ – were abducted, along with 34 women and nearly two dozen

men. It would go down in history as the most devastating invasion ever carried out by the forces of the Islamist jihad on Britain or Ireland. Although the attack was part of the endless jihad or holy war waged against the Christian nations of northern Europe, the man who led it was not some Turkish general from Constantinople, but a fanatical Dutch renegade with an agenda all of his own.

Viewed in context, the catalogue of over 100 names transforms into a roll-call of personal tragedy on an almost unimaginable scale. Down through the centuries, every single line, every single name, cried out its own tale of heartbreak and loss. A Mr. William Gunter had been left devastated by the abduction of his wife and all 7 sons. John Harris had lost his wife, his mother and 3 children. Robert Chimor – his wife and 4 children were torn away from him. Stephen Boradbrook had lost his pregnant wife Joane, and his two children and, of course, his unborn third baby. Entire families had vanished into the gaping maw of the Barbary slave machine: John Ryder and Tom Paine, each with his wife and 2 children; Corent Croffine with his

wife, daughter and 3 male servants; Richard Lorye with his wife, his sister and 4 children. Altogether a total of 107 slaves were stuffed into the hold of the pirate vessel and shipped off to Africa like so many cattle.

These were families very much like our own. They were ordinary folk who had been quietly getting by as best they could when, in the calm of a midsummer night, their lives had been shattered forever.”

This present life is filled with the uncertain and unexpected. Each day that dawns has the potential of being a day in which our life is changed forever – for good or evil. Not a single one of those Irish villagers (most were actually English) went to bed that evening knowing or even dreaming that before dawn broke they would be in a slave ship bound for Africa, never to return home again.

This world, our Lord tells us, is like that village.

ESV Matthew 24:37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, **39** and they were

unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Here in Revelation 16 Christ Himself reiterates His warning –

“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!” (16:15)

As we arrive this morning at the last part of chapter 15, we find ourselves “seeing,” through John’s eyes, the final act on the stage of human history. It is, in terms of the Apocalypse, the 7 bowl judgments – the bowls full of the final wrath of God to be poured out on a rebellious world.

“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.” (15:1)

It is because of this imminent outpouring of the full and final wrath of God that we have heard the saints in heaven singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, praising the Lord’s work as just and righteous and holy.

I. 7 Bowls of Wrath 15:5-8

ESV Revelation 15:5 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.

Here is God in all His holiness opening the doors of His holy of holies to the world. And what proceeds from the sanctuary of His heavenly presence is *wrath*. This is a picture of what any man can expect when coming into the presence of the Lord without Christ. And it is all in response to the prayers of the Church.

Psalm 18 is lengthy, but we are going to read it right now because it is an Old Testament picture, in the experience of King David, that surely points us forward to the very thing we see here in The Revelation. God coming to judge the earth to vindicate His Son

and His people. Psalm 18 is a song of the people of God praising Him for His glorious, righteous, intense and burning wrath. It is a Psalm that surely must be very, very similar to that being sung on that Day of the final bowl judgments -

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD rescued him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:

ESV Psalm 18:1 I love you, O LORD, my strength.

2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

3 I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

4 The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me;

5 the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.

6 In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

7 Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry.

8 Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.

9 He bowed the heavens and came

down; thick darkness was under his feet.

10 He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.

11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water.

12 Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

13 The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

14 And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.

15 Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

16 He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.

17 He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.

18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support.

19 He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me.

20 The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.

21 For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

22 For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me.

23 I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt.

24 So the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

25 With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;

26 with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.

27 For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

28 For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.

29 For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.

30 This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

31 For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?—

32 the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless.

33 He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.

34 He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

35 You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.

36 You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.

37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and did not turn back till they were consumed.

38 I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet.

39 For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise

against me sink under me.

40 You made my enemies turn their backs to me, and those who hated me I destroyed.

41 They cried for help, but there was none to save; they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them.

42 I beat them fine as dust before the wind; I cast them out like the mire of the streets.

43 You delivered me from strife with the people; you made me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me.

44 As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me; foreigners came cringing to me.

45 Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses.

46 The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation—

47 the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me,

48 who delivered me from my enemies; yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me; you rescued me from the man of violence.

49 For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.

50 Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever.

What do you think of this? Man the sinner hates all of it. But the holy, intense, wrath of God is right and beautiful – it is something the creation has been crying out for ever since the

fall. It is a Day all of Christ's people can look forward to.

Bowls

The Old Testament very often speaks of God's wrath in terms of bowls that the wicked WILL drink fully and completely –

ESV Psalm 75:8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

ESV Psalm 11:5 The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

6 Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

7 For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

ESV Isaiah 51:17 Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.

ESV Jer 25:15 Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me:

“Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. **16** They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.”

17 So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it:

[Also see Rev 16:19 & 18:6]S

Now, lest we think too highly of ourselves over and against the unbeliever, let's be careful to recall WHY WE will not drink of those bowls –

“It is because, and ONLY because Someone else drank that cup dry FOR us.”

ESV Matthew 26:39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Did you ever consider what this “cup” was that Jesus was speaking of? It is nothing less than *the cup of the wrath of God against US*.

And now you can begin to understand why we have waited to come to the

Lord's Table this morning. *We must understand, each time we drink from this cup of the New Covenant, a cup of blessing – it is a very, very different cup than what we would have tasted if it were not for Christ.*

ESV Matthew 26:27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, **28** for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

We drink this cup because HE drank that one for us.

ESV John 18:11 So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

There are 7 of these bowls and each one us FULL, all of which tells us, as in 15:1 – *for with them the wrath of God is finished*. Here we have the full and unrestrained wrath of God unleashed finally and fully upon – not just 1/3 of the earth – but upon the entire earth.

II. But When?

We have been learning that The Revelation doubles back upon itself – *recapitulation*. It replays the tape of the entire church age from the cross to the Second Coming of Christ. But we are seeing something else here in these bowl judgments. *The judgments increase in intensity and scope*. In the bowl judgments, the entirety of God’s righteous wrath is expended and executed.

Therefore, we naturally ask the question at this point – *what is the timing of the bowl judgments in relation to the seals and the trumpets?* Are they still future entirely or have they begun now?

Well, to help answer these questions, listen as we read chapter 16, taking note in particular the *nature* of these bowl judgments –

ESV Rev 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.** **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!”

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.

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. 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.

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.

Now, what does all of this bring immediately to your mind? It is another theme we have seen so often in The Revelation – *the plagues of the Exodus*. Only this time it is on a global, cosmic scale. It is *final*. The LAST Exodus of God’s people out of the ultimate Egypt – the world. This time it is not just Pharaoh’s army that is lured out to the Red Sea for destruction, but it is all the armies of the Beast’s kingdom. All of the Old Testament Exodus imagery points ahead to this final event.

To answer our question then – *God’s wrath is right now being poured out on the wicked. But only in part, not in its full finality. One Day though, what we only see precursors of now will come in its terrible and holy fullness.*

Listen to Dennis Johnson comment-

“As believers wait for God to turn His promises into the joyful reality of blessing, so God waits to turn His threats against unbelievers into the grave reality of judgment. Abraham will not take possession of Canaan in his day; but his descendants, after 4 centuries of slavery, will return to receive the land of promise. The delay-the gap-is not only because God calls Abraham and his children to live by faith, not sight. It is also because the land’s current occupants have not ‘filled to the brim’ their quota of wrath-deserving wickedness (see Gen 15:16 – ‘for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete’).

God has, as it were, a vessel of justice into which the Amorites are pouring their evil, idolatry, and violence, until the foul brew reaches the bowl’s brim and overflows in a flood of divine wrath. Jesus uses the same analogy in addressing His Jewish contemporaries, who hypocritically distance themselves from earlier generations’ murder of the prophets... ‘Fill up then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers’ (Matt 23:32).

God will fill believers’ cup of blessing to overflowing only when the wicked have filled their bowl of cursing to overflowing.”

Johnson reminds us that there is a correspondence between the spheres of the first 4 trumpets and the first 4 bowl judgments. The earth, the sea, the rivers and springs, and the sky are the spheres. However, there is an important difference. Listen to him again –

“In the trumpet judgments, however, devastation is limited to 1/3 of each sphere, whereas destruction is comprehensive when the bowls are poured out. The similarity between trumpets and bowls shows that providential disasters, whether natural catastrophes or those caused by human evil, are not random events but restrained expressions of God’s righteous wrath and that they are previews of coming, comprehensive judgment. The escalation in the scope of destruction reveals that the bowl cycle portrays history’s end, when God’s patience will wait no longer and His common grace will be withdrawn from all who persist in unrepentant rebellion.” [The Triumph of the Lamb]

NOTE: God promised and ultimately brought about the same kind of escalating judgments against Israel in the 26th chapter of Leviticus.

Still another valid question you might be thinking about right now is –

“If the seven seal judgments and the seven trumpet judgments, as we have already maintained, cover the entire church age – then how do these final 7 bowl judgments relate to these 2 earlier series?”

Here are two possibilities –

1. The first 5 bowl judgments are a recapitulation of the first 6 trumpet judgments so that the first 5 bowls cover the time between Christ’s resurrection and His Second Coming. The last trumpet and the final 2 bowls are narrations of the last judgment. (Beale)
2. The 7 bowls are contained within and elaborate upon the 7th trumpet and the 6th seal. (Dennis Johnson)

Whatever the details might be, we certainly must understand that – since the wrath of God is fully and finally poured out in the bowl judgments – there has to be some aspect of them *that are still future.*

“However terrible these judgments are, it is a Day in which the Church rejoices. It is a Day of her final deliverance from bondage in Egypt. It is the Day of final and full destruction of the enemies of Christ – forever and ever and ever.”

III. The Nature of the Bowl Judgments

Now, the plagues that God brought upon Egypt were *literal*. It really did turn dark. Frogs really did cover the place and the Nile did turn to blood and so on. So does this mean then that the language of these bowl judgments is to be taken literally? That is to say, are we to assume that Revelation 16 is an actual “photograph” of these judgments that are coming?

The pattern of Scripture is this –

OT Physical Types →
NT Spiritual Reality

Notice the word “*reality.*” We do not for a moment believe that The Revelation is talking about judgments that turn out to be so figurative that they do not represent any reality at all! *Spiritual does not mean Not-real!*

But we should not be surprised if we find out that the OT plagues in Egypt portray for us in a symbolic/typological form, judgments that are greater and more spiritual than the symbol or type itself. Canaan in the OT is a type of a REAL spiritual Promised Land – New Heavens and New Earth. Eating literal manna bread in the wilderness points to the greater Bread which is Christ. And so on.

Wooden literalism in interpreting The Revelation most often leads to an unworthy, small idea of a greater, more magnificent, eternal, and far-reaching work of God.

- A. Harmful and Painful Sores Upon Worshipers of the Beast
- B. Sea Turns to Blood
- C. Fresh Water Turns to Blood
- D. Sun Scorches With Fierce Heat
- E. Darkness in the Beast's Kingdom
- F. Euphrates River Dries Up – Deceiving Frog Spirits Gather the Nations to Armageddon
- G. Earthquakes, Babylon Destroyed Hailstones

Instead of attempting uninformed specific speculation, let's simply make this observation about these plagues that we know is made on solid, scripture ground.

“God’s judgment of plagues upon the Egyptians in Moses’ day was a mighty demonstration of the Lord’s power and deity, and a humiliating dethronement of every one of the idolatrous, false gods of Egypt. The Sun, the Nile River – all the so-called

gods the Egyptians revered – were shown to be nothing. And so it is here in these 7 final plagues.”

Whatever their precise form – and be assured that they are very, very, real – these plagues will demonstrate to all of creation that God is God and there are no other gods. The idols of the peoples will do them no good in that Day.

ESV 1 Chronicles 16:23 Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day.

24 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

25 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods.

26 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

27 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place.

28 Ascribe to the LORD, O clans of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

29 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him!

Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;

30 tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established;

it shall never be moved.

31 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!”

32 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it!

33 Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.

34 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

35 Say also:

“Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and deliver us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory in your praise.

36 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!”

Then all the people said, “Amen!” and praised the LORD.

All of these final plagues then are the greatest, “Grand Finale” demonstration of the glory of God to all men. This is the Big One – The Final Act.

And we, as Christ’s people, must not fear it. There is no need. In fact, we look forward to it in great anticipation.

Right in the middle of this vision of the bowl judgments – as the Lord is

showing these terrible plagues to be brought against the wicked – something very amazing happens. Did you notice it? It is as if, thundering His holy threatening against the wicked world, the King pauses for a moment – looks down toward the people seated off to the side of the audience, and says to them –

“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!” (vs 15)

This is, of course, Christ’s personal word to His own people to encourage them to persevere. He comes as a thief – to the world – but not to us. Clothed in His righteousness, His Church is ready to meet Him. Are you?

ESV Luke 12:35 “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, **36** and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. **37** Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. **38** If he comes in the second

watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! **39** But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. **40** You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”