



**Date: October 23, 2022**

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**Unveiling Hope – Revelation 15-16**

Good morning London! It's a wonderful privilege to be here and share with you today. If this is your first week with us, whether you are here in the room or joining us online, then I'm sorry. This is a tough message to jump into on your first Sunday, but God has brought us all together for such a time as this. No one in the room or online is here by accident - we believe God has a purpose for everyone here today. Amen? Amen.

For the last six weeks, we have been going through the book of Revelation in our teaching times in a series called Unveiled Hope because hope is one of the major themes of this often misunderstood book of the Bible. Today, we are going to look at the seven bowls of God's wrath. So I'd like to invite Paul to come up and preach this instead. Or Matt? Or Trish? Or Barry? Josh? Jordan? Wanda? Melanie? Somebody else, come do this!

Well, since none of them are coming up, I guess I'll do it. But this is a challenging passage! We talk a lot in church about God's love but rarely speak of God's wrath. I wonder if too many soap-box or fire-and-brimstone preachers have soured us from this topic? But it's in our Scriptures, so we must wrestle with it and understand it. In fact, it's a theme throughout ALL of our Scriptures. You can see it in the psalms and the prophets, that Jesus talks about it in the gospels, and Paul's letters also talk about it. It's everywhere throughout the Bible, and even though we may not like talking about it, we need to. What I hope to show you today is that the wrath of God is actually good news. That's hard to believe, isn't it? Well, let's start by reading Revelation, chapter 15, starting in verse 5.

### **Revelation 15:5-8**

*Then I looked and saw that the Temple in heaven, God's Tabernacle, was thrown wide open. The seven angels who were holding the seven plagues came out of the Temple. They were clothed in spotless white linen with gold sashes across their chests. Then one of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. The Temple was filled with smoke from God's glory and power. No one could enter the Temple until the seven angels had completed pouring out the seven plagues.*

In our passage, each of the seven angels receives a bowl filled with the wrath of God. So before we get into some observations, I have of this passage and of chapter 16, where they pour the bowls out; I think it's vital that we understand what God's wrath actually is because I don't know about you, but when I think of wrath, I think of the Incredible Hulk losing his mind and smashing everything. I think of rage and revenge when I think of wrath. How about you? What do you think of when you think of wrath? As I was studying this passage this week, I came across this definition of the wrath of God from Biblical scholar and author Leon Morris:

**“The wrath of God is God's strong and settled opposition to all that is evil.”**

The wrath of God isn't an uncontrolled, violent explosion like it is in so many of us. From God, it is a controlled and measured response to the evil that humanity has done and continues to do in the world. So with that definition in mind, here are three observations about the outpouring of God's wrath in revelation:

**One** - God's wrath comes from His character. In the Old Testament, the temple symbolized God's presence. When Moses and the people of Israel wandered in the desert, the temple was a special tent they took wherever they went. After Israel was established as a nation under King David, his son Solomon built a temple to be a symbol that God was with Israel permanently. But the temple on earth was always a copy, a shadow as the book of Hebrews puts it, of the temple in Heaven, where God dwelt.

So in our passage in Revelation, we see the angels carrying bowls of God's wrath out of the temple - out of the character and presence of God. This means that the wrath of God comes out of God's character. Well, what is God's character?

Thomas Jefferson said, "The Christian god is a being of terrific character - cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust." Author Richard Dawkins says, "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." Are they right? Is that how God is? In Christianity, we believe strongly that our God IS love:

**1 John 4:16**

*We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.*

So everything about God flows from His love. Our salvation in Jesus flows from His love. His creation of all life flows from His love. And His just judgment against evil flows out of His love for His people. He loves us so much that He cannot abide injustice forever. He holds back His judgment for a time so we can repent and experience His mercy, but because He is just and He loves us, He executes justice against evil in this world.

See, I told you. The wrath of God - His measured response to evil- is good news because we all like justice. How many of you - show of hands - have been passed by a crazy speeder who gets caught by the police or stuck just one car ahead of you behind a slow-moving semi? And how did you feel about that? You feel this sense of triumph and satisfaction, don't you? And if you haven't been passed like that, then you're probably the one passing others, and you need to slow down.

We love justice, don't we? Well, we love justice for everyone else. We despise it when it's against us. But this is the good news of our faith. God shows His people mercy through their faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and He executes justice against all who oppose the way of the Lamb

and who do evil in our world. My first observation is that God's wrath flows from his loving character. My second observation is that God's wrath isn't capricious - it's just.

**Two** - God's wrath isn't capricious - it's just. To show you this, let's now read about the first four bowls that are poured out in chapter 16 of Revelation

**Revelation 16:1-9**

*Then I heard a mighty voice from the Temple say to the seven angels, "Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God's wrath." So the first angel left the Temple and poured out his bowl on the earth, and horrible, malignant sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse. And everything in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs, and they became blood. And I heard the angel who had authority over all water saying, "You are just, O Holy One, who is and who always was, because you have sent these judgments. Since they shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is their just reward." And I heard a voice from the altar, saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just." Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, causing it to scorch everyone with its fire. This blast of heat burned Everyone, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over all these plagues. They did not repent of their sins and turn to God and give him glory.*

Notice in this who are the recipients of the first bowl of God's wrath - it's those who have deliberately chosen to take the mark of the beast and worship him. It's those who maliciously and knowingly rejected the Lamb who was slain for the sin of the world and now worship this evil impostor. And in the second and third bowls, all the water on earth turns to blood, which is declared a just act by an angel because its recompense for how evil people have killed God's holy people over the centuries.

They spilled the blood of God's children, so God gave them blood to drink. It's not capricious or mean; it's punishment for evil. And in the fourth bowl of God's wrath, the people still reject the mercy of God and refuse to repent, even though they know that these plagues are from God. Instead of submission, they choose to double down on their obstinacy.

Whenever God exercises His wrath, it is not because He enjoys cruelty. Despite the protests of some people who view God's interactions with humanity as evil, the truth is that God always acts lovingly and has set morals and laws for us to follow out of His love for humanity. When humanity violates those morals and laws, just like when we violate the speed limit and suffer the consequence of a ticket, there have to be consequences for our sins for there to be justice. We've seen that God's wrath flows from His loving character and that it isn't capricious - it is just because humanity turns its back on God. The third thing I noticed in our passage is that God's wrath targets his enemies. Let's finish reading chapter 16.

### **Three** - God's wrath targets his enemies

#### ***Revelation 16:10-21***

*Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. His subjects ground their teeth in anguish, and they cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores. But they did not repent of their evil deeds and turn to God. Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies toward the west without hindrance. And I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs leap from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They are demonic spirits who work miracles and go out to all the rulers of the world to gather them for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God the Almighty. "Look, I will come as unexpectedly as a thief! Blessed are all who are watching for me, who keep their clothing ready so they will not have to walk around naked and ashamed." And the demonic spirits gathered all the rulers and their armies to*

*a place with the Hebrew name Armageddon. Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. And a mighty shout came from the throne in the Temple, saying, "It is finished!" Then the thunder crashed and rolled, and lightning flashed. And a great earthquake struck—the worst since people were placed on the earth. The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble. So God remembered all of Babylon's sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath. And every island disappeared, and all the mountains were levelled. There was a terrible hailstorm, and hailstones weighing as much as seventy-five pounds fell from the sky onto the people below. They cursed God because of the terrible plague of the hailstorm.*

The fifth bowl of God's wrath is poured out on the beast's throne, who has set himself up as a false God to be worshiped and affects his kingdom and his subjects. And in the sixth bowl, we see the evil spirits from the dragon, the beast and the false prophet - an unholy Trinity enters into human leaders to wage war against God in a battle called *Armageddon* - a battle that never actually happens.

Many people think of *Armageddon* as either a bit of a cheesy movie with Bruce Willis and Ben Affleck or as a military event that plunges the world into a nuclear wasteland. But *Armageddon* is an event where evil will gather as a last stand against God before the coming of the new creation. Amazingly, chapter 19 of Revelation tells us that the battle is never fought. Jesus shows up, and it's all over. One person, the Lamb who was slain, shows up on a white horse and wipes out this great army of blasphemous God-haters with a word.

God's true enemy is Satan; his two beasts and bowls are poured out on them and those who follow them. Just like what Matt preached last week, this passage is also a great reminder that everything in our lives is rooted in the spiritual battle that rages around us. This passage re-enforces what Paul writes in the book of Ephesians.

### ***Ephesians 6:12***

*For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

When we look at the wrath of God, Church, let us not despair or be fearful because God's wrath is reserved for His enemies - Satan, his two beasts and all who follow them. Like every other sermon any of us have done in the book of Revelation, there is so much more we could unpack. But before we close, I want to take a quick look at three takeaways I think the seven bowls of God's wrath teaches us.

#### **1. God's wrath gives us a reason to worship**

When injustice happens, people lament. And I think many people are in a constant state of lament because they see all the injustice in the world. But when people see justice, they rejoice. Through the book of Revelation, and specifically in our passage today, we, the followers of Jesus, get to experience an apocalypse - a peek behind the curtain - and see that one day, God's justice will be complete, His people vindicated and His enemies defeated. And that is a reason to praise God. We can declare with the saints who overcome the beast:

#### ***Revelation 15:3b-4***

*"Great and marvellous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed."*

The wrath of God is good news to those of us who crave justice because it says that God will never allow evil to have the last word.

#### **2. God takes sin seriously. So should we.**

One of my favourite things in the gospels is when Jesus has dinner with Levi and his tax collector and prostitute friends. It reminds me that if Jesus can love those on the extreme fringe of society who were socially, religiously, and emotionally cut off from their people and who definitely did things that broke God's commands and displeased Him, then He can love a sinner like me as well. But the book of Revelation has reminded me that although Jesus

loves everyone, He does have moral standards that He calls us to live out and that choosing to rebel against those standards has brutal consequences. The seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls remind me that God takes sin seriously, and so should I. And so should you. God loves you as you are, but He also calls you into a new way of living - a way that emulates Jesus. So put aside all those things in your life that you know violate the morals, the commands and the heart of God and instead live out the way the Lamb.

#### **3. God makes a way out of judgment**

There is a phrase, or at least variations of it, that pop up all over the book of Revelation. It says something like: "They did not repent of their sins and turn to God." The book of Revelation, and in particular His judgments, are God's last-ditch effort to draw as many people to Himself as He can before there is no more time. He is constantly calling people back to Him. Because we see that the wrath of God is poured out only on those who oppose God - those who follow the dragon, the beast and the false prophet - He offers a way out of experiencing these judgments. And the way is through repentance.

To repent means to change your mind or change your direction. You were going in one direction, and now you have new information, so you go in another direction because of that information. What is the new information that we now have?

It is finished. John heard it in his vision when the seventh angel poured out the last bowl of judgment. Jesus said it on the cross when he died. What is finished? Everything that needs to be done about sin is finished. The payment for sin is made, the penalty for sin is served, and because of the cross, the judgment of the sin of those who follow Jesus makes way for God's mercy. The way out of the wrath of God is to throw yourself on the cross because the One who sends forth the seven angels is the One who also so loves the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, will not come under God's judgment, but will have eternal life.

## **Points to Ponder**

### **Unveiling Hope – A Study of the Book of Revelation**

#### **Revelation 15-16**

##### **(The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath)**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Why do you think the angels worship God before pouring out his wrath (Rev. 15:3-4)?
2. What do you think the significance is that the angels come out of the Temple (Rev 15:5)?
3. In what ways do we see the wrath of humans expressed in our world? How does it differ from God's wrath?
4. How does the pouring out of God's wrath give you hope?
5. What does this passage teach us about God's nature? What should our response, as Christians, be to that?
6. What does this passage teach us about humanity's nature? What should our response, as Christians, be to that?
7. What is Revelation 16:15 challenging us to do? Why?
8. This passage challenges us to repent of our sins, proclaim the gospel, and worship our God for his holiness and justice. Which of these is the most challenging for you to do and why?

#### **Prayer and Action Item**

Pray for the world to flee the justice of God through repentance and faith in Jesus. Worship God for his holiness and justice. Practice sharing the gospel with each other, so you will be ready to share with others.