

Sermon – 18/11/2007 am

First Four Bowl Judgments

Study Text: Revelation 16:1–9

Do you despise the riches of God's goodness, tolerance and patience not realising that God's kindness leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Romans 2:4-5).

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome outlining the gospel this is what he wrote. He warned the people about the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment would be revealed. John's vision is of this same day, the day of God's wrath. God desires that all people hear the gospel; that they repent and believe in Jesus Christ (I Timothy 2:4). The gospel includes warnings for those who refuse to repent. Only a fool thinks he can escape the righteous judgment of God.

Idolaters

The seven bowl judgments only come upon those who worship the beast and upon the beast himself. The fifth trumpet judgment, in which people were tormented by horse like locusts with scorpion tails, only affected those not having the seal of God on their foreheads. The sealed saints were divinely protected from this plague of locusts (9:4). The people of God were also protected from most of the plagues that God sent upon Egypt.

Only idolaters, only those worshipping the beast, were afflicted with the terrible sores that came with the bowls being poured out. These idolaters chose to worship the created things rather than the creator. Although they knew God they did not glorify him as God. Do you know anyone who fits this description?

There is hardly anyone in our society who does not know about the true God and Jesus Christ. I was surprised the other day when on a radio quiz show the question was asked 'how many decks were there on Noah's ark'. The Bible, the word of God, is freely available, with at least one or two copies in most bookstores. In many homes there is a Bible already – often in pristine condition because it has never been read. The point is that no one has an excuse for not believing in God. Remember that there are only two types of people here – those having the mark of God and those having the mark of the beast.

The bowls judgments are further aimed at those who persecute the saints and the prophets (16:6). From the very time that sin entered the world faithful men and women have been persecuted by the wicked. Cain murdered his brother Abel because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his. And so it has continued to this day. Servants of this beast or Satan, so called atheists and all idolaters, continue to harass and persecute the saints and even kill them.

Divine justice may not be seen in this life or even in this world but this vision reveals that it will surely come. The prayer of the saints and martyrs is heard, and the wicked will be judged.

Bowl Judgments

The first four bowls are poured out on the earth, the water and the sky. When God made the earth he gave it to men to inhabit and manage for his glory. God watered the earth; he made the sun to shine and the plants to grow for our food. The sovereign God of creation will disrupt these elements as he brings judgment on the world. Moreover he will afflict the body of man with dreadful pain.

The first bowl poured out on the earth brought terrible sores on idolaters (lit. bad and evil sores). In one of the plagues that God sent upon the Egyptians they all broke out in boils (Exodus 9:10). God later declared to the Israelites that if they broke his covenant he would curse them with the boils of Egypt, with tumours, scabs and itch (Deuteronomy 28:27). Jesus came healing the sick as a sign that the kingdom of God was at hand. By the same token he, or Paul could afflict the enemies of God in their bodies (Acts 13:11).

The second bowl was poured out on the sea turning it to blood (16:3). The first miracle of Moses was to turn water into blood – all the water in Egypt. The Egyptians went crazy digging for water to drink. Moreover the whole land stank as the fish and other sea creatures died. The sea is full of life which we depend upon. When in the wrath of God the sea turns to blood everything in it will die.

Some scholars think that this refers to a disruption of sea trade leading to famine – on the basis of chapter 18. But there is no direct indication of this here. This is all a vision that is full of symbols of course, yet visions which portray horror and death as the wrath of God is poured out on the ungodly.

The third bowl also changed the water into blood, this time all the drinking and washing water (16:4). A whole city can be quickly brought to its knees by a little poison in the drinking water supply. There is a parallel here with the third trumpet in which water in the rivers and springs became unfit to drink – and in fact man died from the water (8:11). But with the trumpets only one third of the waters became blood. The bowl judgments were more extensive – indeed they were total.

The fourth bowl affected the sun causing it to give off great heat that afflicted followers of the beast. We depend on the sun for light and heat and our food. Because the sun so controls our life, many worship the sun. Pharaoh claimed to be an incarnation of the sun god 'Ra' that was worshipped by the Egyptians. Hindus worship the sun, as do many other people.

The sun can also burn our body and cause cancer as we know today. In India one of our children suffered heat stroke and was in a coma for four hours. The power of the sun is beyond measure. God will unleash the power of the sun he created upon all idolaters in this world in the last days.

In the end the sun will completely burn up and darkness will descend upon the wicked. There will be no sun in the kingdom of God for his own glory is brighter than the sun. The saints will not suffer from the scorching heat of the sun. They were promised the sun would not strike them nor any heat (7:17).

All these afflictions brought no change of heart in the idolaters. They did not repent and give glory to God (16:9). Rather they cursed and blasphemed the name of God. Their hearts were hardened just like the heart of Pharaoh. The time for intercession will soon be over. Now is

the day of salvation, now is the time to repent. Tomorrow may be too late for one day tomorrow will not come.

Just Judgment

A cry of 'it's not fair, what did I do to deserve this' is anticipated from the idolaters of this world when God's wrath is poured out on them. Rolling on the ground in terrible pain from sores and the scorching heat they will claim to be innocent and ignorant of what God has declared in Jesus Christ. But the angel of the waters, supported by a cry from the altar, probably another angel, will defend God in his judgment. You are righteous O Lord, just and righteous are your judgments (16:4, 7).

Just as there was an angel with power over fire (14:18) so now is one with power over the waters. This angel refers to God as infinite and eternal, as the one who is and who was. He also maintains that God is just in all his ways (*cf.* 15:3). What was happening to those having the mark of the beast was just retribution. They had shed the blood of the sealed saints of God so now God was giving them blood to drink (16:6). This may refer to them fighting among themselves and killing one another as often happens among the wicked (*cf.* 17:16).

They were getting their just dues. You reap what you sow. God will not be mocked. God will not be silent in the face of injustice and persecution. God hears the cry of the poor and he will act to vindicate them. He may not act as quickly we think he should but he will surely act one day, and will act with truth and justice.

*I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh
And they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine
All flesh shall know
That I, the Lord, am your saviour
And your redeemer (Isaiah 49:26).*

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