

Sermon – 11/11/2007 am

God's Wrath in Seven Bowls

Study Text: Revelation 15:5–8

Looking into heaven John saw a great and marvellous sight. John was exiled on the prison island of Patmos when he had this vision. He was there for preaching the word of God and testifying to Jesus Christ. It was the Lord's Day and he was probably worshipping God when he had this vision. The vision was about things that would soon happen in this world. In fact it was about the end of the world.

Imagine if John had been busy doing his own thing on this Lord's Day. Imagine if he had not bothered to worship God on this day. He would not have seen the great and marvellous things which he saw. Those who absent themselves from worship on the Lord's Day miss out on seeing great and marvellous things. They miss out on the blessings of God. It is very easy to find excuses for not coming to church but remember God blesses those who come to him in worship.

John wrote down what he saw and sent it to seven churches in Asia. Did these churches bother to read his letter? They were having a hard time as Christians living in a pagan society. Some of their number were falling away. Were they so busy or so discouraged that they did not read this letter? We know what they would have missed if they had not read this letter. Indeed this letter actually promises a blessing to those who read it and pay heed to it. (1:3). How tragic that many are missing this blessing from God.

The prevailing philosophy in our society sees religion as a crutch. People depend upon themselves, and the government, and see no need of God. They are ignorant of the strategies and the strength of Satan – until Satanic based religion actually threatens their lifestyle. They are ignorant about the future, about what will happen beyond their well-planned retirement. It is just like the days of Noah. The Day of Judgment is fast approaching. John saw seven angels ready to pour out the seven last plagues of Gods wrath upon the earth.

Sanctuary

John saw through an opened door into heaven. He saw into the sanctuary of the tabernacle/temple in heaven. This is the temple on which the earthly temple was modelled. Moses was given the plans while on Mt Sinai where he was also given the covenant commandments. 'Tabernacle' means 'dwelling place'. God would dwell among his people. This was the tabernacle of witness/testimony, for it stood as a witness of the Lord's presence among his people. In Jesus Christ we have a living witness to God dwelling among us (John 1:14).

When Moses finished building the tabernacle a cloud came down and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. No one, not even Moses, could enter the tabernacle when this happened.

In the innermost room of this tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant. In this box were the stone tablets of the testimony of God, otherwise known as the Ten Commandments. The mercy seat above the ark represented the throne of God. Around the throne in heaven John

saw four living creatures (4:6f). One of these four living creatures John now saw giving golden bowls to the seven angels as they emerged from the tabernacle. It is clear from all this that the wrath that is about to be revealed is the wrath of Almighty God.

Seven Angels

The seven angels that came out of the tabernacle were clothed in pure bright linen with a golden band around their chest (15:6). To this extent their appearance was not unlike that of the Son of man whom John saw in his first vision (1:13). Emerging from the presence of God they reflected his glory.

These angels, like all angels, were messengers of God. They were sent out by God with the seven plagues. A loud voice coming from the temple, probably the voice of God, told them to *go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth* (16:1). As the bowls were poured out, devastation and death came upon the earth. The target was those who follow the beast or Satan, those who do not worship God according his command – you shall have no other gods before me.

The word plague reminds us of the ten plagues with which God afflicted the Egyptians in the time of Moses. In fact we will see that there are parallels between those Egyptian plagues and these worldwide plagues at the end of the world. Disaster after disaster hit that nation, but the king and people did not repent. They became harder and harder. They refused to humble themselves before the almighty God. In the end God destroyed the Pharaoh and his whole army in the Sea.

Today we see and hear of disasters happening around the world, including own nation and even in our own lives. But how many recognize the power of God and turn to him, repenting of their sin and believing in Jesus Christ. Many have become hardened in their sin and rebellion against God just like the Egyptians. To say this or that disaster happened because of climate change, or because of human error, conveniently avoids the sovereign power of God. Is not God in control of the climate? Is not God the maker of man and all creatures?

The seven plagues also closely parallel the seven trumpets of a previous vision. The seven seal judgments and the seven trumpet judgments both end with the final judgment, with thunder lightning and an earthquake being hurled upon the earth from the temple of God in heaven (8:5, 11:19). These seven plagues or bowls end with the same outpouring of thunder, lightning, earthquake and hail(16:18).

So it is not that these plagues come after the seals or trumpets but simply that they are another vision giving a slightly different perspective on God's judgment in the Last Days. To the extent that there is repetition in these it is for our benefit. How slow we are to learn spiritual truths. People are so ready to believe whatever they read in the paper or see on the TV. Yet here is the truth about our life in this world and about the end of the world. This is truth given to John by Jesus Christ, who was given it by God (1:1). He who has ears to hear let him hear.

Seven Bowls

‘The image of bowls comes partly from the Old Testament where bowls are mentioned in connection with the priestly service at the altar in the tabernacle. They were probably used to carry out the ashes and fat of sacrifices’. Pouring hot ashes on a persons head is symbolic of

vengeance and judgment (Romans 12:20). Such vengeance has no place in the life of a child of God. *Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay* (Deuteronomy 32:35). God promises to repay the wicked who bring harm to his chosen people.

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good is the teaching of the Bible (Romans 12:21). People without God and without hope in this world do not know that God will judge the wicked. Consequently they take revenge themselves. Almost every day we hear of some incident of road rage or of revenge leading to death. Did you hear about the man who was killed in an argument over water? Some people are driven by revenge. All they can think of is getting back on someone who has wronged them. The Christian knows that God will ultimately execute justice for all the oppressed. Christians can and must leave vengeance to the Lord.

These golden bowls link the prayers of the saints with the outpouring of Gods wrath. When John first saw golden bowls they were full of incense *which is the prayers of the saints* (5:8). Saints and martyrs pray for justice, for retribution on those who persecuted them for the name of Jesus. The golden bowls full of their prayers become golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever (15:7).

‘This emphasis upon the eternity of God is a reminder that although evil may seem to dominate affairs in human history; God is the eternal one whose purposes cannot be frustrated even by Satan and demonic evil’.

Smoke Filled the Temple

Seven angels came out of the temple with bowls full of the wrath of God. Divine judgment is ready to be poured out on the earth. Nothing can stop what God has determined and declared. The temple was now filled with smoke and *no one able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed* (15:8).

The time for intercession was over. Not even Moses could enter the sanctuary when it was filled by the cloud (Exodus 40:36). The priests were able to enter the temple at the time of its dedication by Solomon because of the cloud, because of the glory of the Lord that filled the house of the Lord (I Kings 8:10).

Smoke similarly prevents entry into the tabernacle – and even more so. Isaiah saw the house of God filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:4). Where there is smoke there is fire. Fire symbolises the judgment of God. God’s glory and his power filled the temple in John’s vision (15:8). The power of God is almighty power. There is no escaping divine judgment. Nothing and no one can stand against the fury of Almighty God.

God has set a day when he will judge all people by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). This was the flip side of the message Paul preached to the heathen at Athens. He preached the death and resurrection of Jesus, calling upon all to repent and believe in Jesus. He also made it clear that this same Jesus who died and rose again will come again to judge not only the living but the dead also (Acts 10:42, I Peter 4:5). Not even death will deliver from the wrath of God.

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