

“FIRST FOUR BOWLS OF WRATH.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 16:1-9

Introduction.

For decades, no for centuries, no for millennia believers in God have cried out in their misery and suffering, “How long?” That question has a very long history.

Psalm 13:1-2 How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

“How long?” has been the prayer of those in sickness and exile, of refugees and slaves, of those in bondage and addiction, of those suffering staggering losses.

Hurting people cry for relief, bullied and oppressed people want fairness, the pushed down seek dignity. How long do they have to put up with the arrogance of the mighty, the meanness of the strong? How long do they have to endure man’s inhumanity to man?

This world is filled with injustices, small and great. Every child has an instinctive moral sense when something is not fair. Every delay deepens the frustration and despair. How long?

John’s first answer was not what anyone expected.

Revelation 6:10-11 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

How much longer? A little longer.

Chapter 16 is John’s vision of when the how long is finally answered. This vision depicts what happens when God’s promises and God’s warnings are repeatedly ignored. When the wicked ignore the signs and seals, when they ignore the trumpets, when they harden their hearts against God, they bring on themselves the just judgment of God.

All three of the series of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) depict events that have occurred repeatedly throughout history between the first and second comings of Christ. The

first six of each of the seal and trumpet and bowl judgments have occurred and will continue to occur until the end of human history when the final judgment occurs

These seals, trumpets and bowls are not chronological or sequential. Rather they are examples of God's ways on the earth at different times and places and with different intents and purposes. They can come in any order and intensity.

Waves of trouble sweep over our earth again and again and again all through history. Whenever suffering happens it is warning and when the warnings are ignored final destruction happens.

The seven bowls closely parallel the seven trumpets. You will recall that the trumpet judgments were all partial in nature, while the bowls judgments are full in nature. When we ignore the trumpet warnings and our hearts become hard, we bring upon ourselves the righteous wrath of God.

So when a disaster happens on the earth or in the sky or on water, it can be at the same time a trumpet warning for those who survive (8:8) and a final bowl of wrath for those who don't survive (16:3).

The tsunamis in India (2004) and Japan (2011) were warnings to survivors and final judgment to those who died.

When these events happen to Christians, afflictions of the flesh or any other kind of suffering, they are not God's judgment for sin (remember Job) but God's testing, refining, purifying, building character and endurance. They are expressions of God's love and care and ways in which He manifests to us His mercy, grace and power.

Last week we saw the temple open and seven angels came out with seven bowls full of the wrath of God. Together these seven bowls represent the fullness of God's just judgment of the earth.

The loud voice from the temple tells us that what is about to happen is coming from God and according to His will, His purpose, His plan.

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.

The first four bowls are on the four major regions of the earth, land, oceans, rivers and sky.

The First Bowl: The Earth is Stricken (16:2).

“With the first trumpet there was hail and fire mixed with blood thrown to the earth; a third of the earth, trees, grass burned (a third indicates a partial or limited judgment). With the first bowl all the earth and the unbelievers are afflicted with sores” (Sam Storms).

All who are not marked and sealed as followers of the Lamb, belong to the beast. In this judgment all of them, not just some of them, suffer.

The mark is not a literal or physical mark but rather those whose thinking and actions are governed by sin, evil, Satan through anti-Christian governments or regimes or tyrannies.

Revelation 13:16-17 It causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, 17 so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

They took the mark to get what they needed or wanted. What they find out is that the mark doesn't protect them or take care of them in the end. There is something worse than not having the basic necessities of life and that is the wrath of a holy God.

If we trust anything other than God we will suffer for it, it will not bring satisfaction in the end.

This is a very brief description with very little detail. This isn't meant to be taken literally. This simply reveals that God unleashes pain and suffering on those who worship the beast.

This could be any kind of physical or psychological or emotional pain or torment.

We all have had the experience of having some painful affliction in our body, even a sore, that we can hardly stand and hardly wait for it to go away. Like a kidney stone or an abscessed tooth. The painful sores refer to anytime God uses sickness or disease to remove people from this life. There are several examples of this in the Bible.

Remember the plagues of Egypt or in I Samuel 5 when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and God caused an epidemic to fall on their land.

Acts 5:4-5 Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” 5 When *Ananias* heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

Acts 12:21-23 On an appointed day *Herod* put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. 22 And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” 23 Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

For believers in Christ physical afflictions are not a sign of God's wrath or punishment, but rather a dispensation of grace as all things must work for our good.

The Second Bowl: The Sea is Stricken (16:3).

“With the second trumpet a third of the sea becomes blood and a third of everything in it dies; a third of the ships are destroyed (again, note the partial extent of the judgment). With the second bowl the sea again becomes blood, but now everything dies (indicating the full, or universal, expression of this judgment)” (Sam Storms).

Remember the news report of all the fish at the fish hatchery in Bellingham dying because of the warm summer. Now imagine that on an ocean wide scale.

Throughout the time between the two comings of Christ, God sometimes partially and sometimes more widely sends trouble or affliction or disaster. From small local troubles to continent wide troubles like a great plague or famine or drought or earthquake.

This is not the failing economy or worsening environment of the trumpet judgment, this is final and fatal. This represents all the times God used the sea to end the lives of the wicked.

When God acts through weather or oceans events how do people respond today? Everyone bows to the gods of the weather and climate change. They try to appease those gods with new policies and initiatives and government programs and laws. Imagine trying to control the weather by human means.

We must bend our knees to God, to the one who created the world and the land and seas, the one who rules and reigns and controls.

The Third Bowl: The Rivers are Stricken (16:4-7).

“With the third trumpet only a third of the rivers, springs, and waters become bitter and many people die from drinking them. With the third bowl there is no limitation placed on how much of the rivers, springs, and waters are affected. Many people die from drinking” (Sam Storms).

This represents all the times God used inland waters to bring a final judgment on lives. Sometimes in an accident, sometimes in a great flood.

Both the sea and river bowls are sometimes thought to represent economic disasters or collapses, a massive disruption of commerce. Perhaps something like the massive explosion in Tianjin, China. One way God brings judgment in our world is to remove all blessing from economic prosperity produced by the earth or water.

The ocean was one thing, but to lose all the clean water, that is much worse. Clean water is one of God’s greatest gifts to mankind. Clean water is a reason to praise and worship God and give Him thanks. For all that gives life and sustains life we should show great gratitude to God.

This bowl is *accompanied by a response from the angel*. There is no anguish or pain, no fear or panic. He celebrates the righteousness of God, that God is in the right. He acknowledges

God is the Holy One. He acknowledges just and true are the judgments of God. This is worship for the divine attribute of wrath. This is the work of the sovereign God who does whatever He wills.

The angel and the altar voice approval of the vengeance of God as it represents His righteousness and justice.

The wicked poured out the blood of the righteous, so now God pours out blood on the wicked. The punishment fits the crime. As the angel says, "It's what they deserve."

The last mention of the altar was in Revelation 6 when the fifth seal was opened and the martyred saints under the altar crying for justice.

God answered that prayer first with the trumpets of warnings and now the answer is complete, God answers with the bowls of vengeance. The souls under the altar are being avenged. Their desire for justice is being satisfied.

The Fourth Bowl: The Sky is Stricken (16:8-9).

"With the fourth trumpet a third of the sun, moon, and stars are smitten and there is darkness (again, a partial judgment). With the fourth bowl again the sun is the focal point, but it instead of bringing darkness a worse judgment is inflicted: they are scorched. Sinners who wouldn't repent when the sun was darkened are now punished by the sun" (Sam Storms).

This represents those times God used sun or sky related disasters to visit His judgment on the unrepentant. This could be air disasters, falling objects, or scorching heat and long droughts. Could this also be climate change? The climate is controlled by a holy God who does as He pleases and sends what He wills.

This could be economic hardship resulting in thirst and starvation.

Notice it was allowed. God is the one allowing, God is the one in control.

Are you shocked by the response of the wicked? Despite the severity of the suffering they refuse to repent. Instead of repenting, instead of seeing they are powerless against a holy God and doom and surrendering, they curse God.

People will refuse to repent because they will refuse to see the hand of the living God in the judgments that come, they refuse to acknowledge God as the source.

Isaiah 66:15-16 "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For by fire will the Lord enter into judgment.

Malachi 4:1 For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

Implications and Application.

These four bowls show God's absolute power and control and authority over all the earth. The false gods and false religions are powerless to do anything or to stop God. The false gods and false religions cannot save anyone from the True God. Either repent and worship the only one true God, or face unavoidable judgment.

Stewardship can become worship. Today some worship the god of the environment, Gaia. Some worship animals and plants, whole organizations and movements devoted to saving animals and trees and parts of the earth.

Some worship the god of healing, of medicine, like those who worshiped the sun. In Greek mythology Apollo was the god of the sun and the god of healing.

One day all the things, all the gods people worship today will be crushed and destroyed and shown to be utterly impotent before the holy God.

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Consider Jesus' warning in Luke 13:

Luke 13:1-5 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

We need to read the headlines from a spiritual perspective and with an eye to the hand of God in our world.

You may have heard about the devastating typhoon that hit the island of Taiwan a week and a half ago. Brian Bunn had flown into Taipei the day before but his return plane couldn't come in so Brian rode out the typhoon in his hotel. He said they boarded up the lobby and left one single door open. That went out under the carport and watched the tree limbs and debris and torrents of rain rush by. Brian's hotel room was on the leeward side of the building opposite the wind and rain and he said in his room he could hardly tell there was a storm going on.

So it is with us and the wrath of God. We are on the leeward side of the cross and are not buffeted and destroyed by the fierce wind of God's fury toward sin and evil.

Thanks be to God who in His great mercy and love has saved us from the wrath to come and has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.