

The Seven Bowls

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[0 : 00] So our reading this morning is from Revelation chapter 15, starting at verse 5.

After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened. And out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen with golden sashes round their chests.

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. 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. 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.

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 worshipped its image.

[1 : 22] 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.

The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became like blood. 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.

They have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve. And I heard the altar saying, Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. 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. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness.

[2 : 44] People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

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.

And I heard, 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, for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole earth to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

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.

And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. 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.

[4 : 04] And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, hills of thunder, and a great earthquake, such as there had never been since man was on the earth.

So great was the earthquake. The great city was split in three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And God remembered Babylon the great to make her drain the cup of wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. 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.

Last Sunday afternoon, I had the privilege of meeting a refugee from Eritrea, who had just arrived in London two weeks previously, after a two-year journey across Africa and Europe.

He told me the most terrifying part of his journey was the first of four attempts to cross the English Channel. Halfway through the crossing, in a small boat, as you can imagine, the compass, which was on a smartphone, the battery of the smartphone, failed, and therefore they were completely on their own.

[5 : 33] He said they couldn't see land anywhere, they couldn't see where they'd come from, they couldn't see where they were going, they didn't know what to do. He said he was terrified. Eventually, after a total of eleven hours, they ended where they had started, in Calais.

Well, we've seen over these last few weeks, the book of Revelation was written to seven churches, churches in what is now Western Turkey. They're addressed specifically in chapters two and three of Revelation.

and the book acts as a compass, whether we belong to Jesus or not, to show us where we are in world history and where things are heading.

Now, I don't know if you're someone who gives thanks to God for his goodness and kindness, but one of his great gifts to us is the gift of understanding.

Now, that doesn't seem very exciting, is it? But actually, it is a wonderful thing to be able to understand our world, not simply on the sort of horizontal dimension, if you like, of things that we can see and things which are in the media all the time, but also on the vertical dimension, in other words, seeing our world in terms of how God sees it, understanding where the world is and where it is heading.

[6 : 58] Now, we started this series of talks three weeks ago, Revelation 12, 13, 14, and the beginning of 15, we see that until the Lord Jesus returns, the church is engaged in a spiritual battle as Satan uses political oppression and false religion to wage war on the church.

Do catch up online if you missed any of those talks. And now, in chapter 15, verse 5, we're starting a new section of the book which shows us where the world is heading. And we're going to see over these next few weeks, it is heading towards the final judgment day and the return of Jesus.

Now, I'm conscious this isn't the most obvious passage to preach on at a licensing of a church pastor. And it did, I did think to myself earlier on in the week, should I be preaching on something else?

But, this was in the diary before the licensing was. And of course, regulars will know our pattern here is simply to work through books of the Bible so that we don't just bang on about our hobby horses the whole time and nor do we ignore the difficult bits.

And today's passage is one of those difficult bits. Although, it's occurred to me, I think, over the last few days that actually there is much to say to us from this passage in the context of a licensing as well.

[8 : 19] Well, today the risen Jesus wants us to understand two things about the final judgment. And if you have a copy of the outline, you'll have spotted them already, otherwise they'll be coming up on the screen in due course.

Firstly, judgment is final. Judgment is final. Have a look chapter 15 verses 5 and 5 to 7.

15, 5 to 7. The Apostle John says, After this I looked and the sanctuary of the tents of witness in heaven was opened and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues clothed in pure bright linen with golden sashes around their chests.

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. Now the sanctuary, the tabernacle in the Old Testament was the place where God symbolically dwelt.

It was the heart of the temple and it was a witness to God's character. Both his holiness, no one was allowed to enter except the high priest once a day, once a year, but also his mercy because it was also the place of sacrifice.

[9 : 33] sacrifice. But here the apostle John sees the real sanctuary, if you like, opens, heaven itself, from where these seven angels come clothed in pure white linen dazzling in purity.

They're each given a bowl full of God's wrath, his righteous anger at human sin and rebellion because while God is a great saviour who wants no one to perish, it's why of course Jesus speaks so often of God's wrath because warnings are acts of kindness.

Yet also God is a God of holiness who will judge all human sin and wickedness. Now there have been cycles of judgment before in Revelation.

If you were with us last year, you'll have seen something of that. So the seven seals in chapter 6, the seven trumpets in chapter 8, and yet you may remember that each of those was only partial, but warnings of the final judgment rather than the final judgment itself.

And yet there's nothing here in chapter 15 and 16 to suggest that these are partial, which suggests that this is describing the final judgment day.

[10:53] I think that's confirmed back in chapter 15 verse 1 when this final cycle is introduced as being the last. 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.

And what's more, in verse 8, just that little thing, we're told that no one could enter the sanctuary. In other words, the time of sacrifices for sin is over.

There can be no more intercession, asking that God would relent and patiently hold back as he's been doing for the last 2,000 years. Because Revelation chapter 16 is going to describe the final judgment as each of these seven angels pours out the bowl full of the wrath of God.

And as Val read the passage, you probably noticed that the plagues, that the bowls of wrath, they echo the plagues that we are told about in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament as God brings judgment on Egypt.

So for example, verse 2, the painful sores, verse 4, the rivers become like blood, verse 10, there's the darkness, and verse 13, there's the frogs. As we said last week, it's picture language, and yet it's no less real or less terrible for it.

[12:19] The point being, this is the end. Verse 12, the six 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.

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 prophets, three unclean spirits like frogs, 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.

Again, the imagery from the Old Testament, so verse 12, the conquering armies that invaded Old Testament, Israel, tended to come from the east. In verse 13, there's the dragon Satan and the two beasts that we thought about in chapters 12 and 13.

And then in verse 14, the kings of the earth gather together, just as the prophet Zechariah in the Old Testament had said they would do as God gathered the nations together for the final battle of history.

Verse 16, and they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. Now, the actor Bruce Willis has done us no favors at this point.

[13:39] I don't know if you've ever watched the 1998 blockbuster film Armageddon, but if you, well, am I now to tell you the plot? I guess if you were going to watch it, you would probably have watched it by now.

So, NASA discovers that a huge asteroid the size of Texas is going to hit the earth. So, Bruce Willis and his team of miners are sent up into space to drill a hole into this asteroid to plant a nuclear bomb inside it so that it then explodes and disintegrates and disaster is averted.

The world is saved. Well, it's a work of fiction and, of course, it's not final. That's the whole point of the film. Whereas here in Revelation 16, it's not a work of fiction and it is final.

The word Armageddon literally means the mountain of Megiddo, which is a fortified hill town in Israel, which you can still visit today. In the Old Testament, it was a place, it's a significant place, significant in terms of a number of battles which were fought and won by God's people.

But there's no need, I don't think, to get out Google Maps. The name Armageddon is simply symbolic to show us that this is the final triumph of God over his enemies at the end.

[15:06] You'll have noticed there's no description of the battle here. We're going to have to wait three weeks or so before we get to that. Finally, the seventh bowl in verses 17 to 21, the end of creation itself.

There's the end of this fallen world, verse 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 drink the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

And then the end of this created order, verse 20. And every island fled away and no mountains were to be found to make way, of course, for the new creation which we'll see at the end of the book.

Now, it's very much headlines at this stage. Remember, this is the start of a new section. The details will be filled out for us over the next few chapters. But the point being that judgment is final. Secondly, though, judgment is fair. Judgment is fair. Now, as I read verses 5 to 7, notice how the focus is on the fact that God's judgments are just and true.

[16:20] And I heard the angel in charge of the water saying, Just are you a holy one who is and who was for you brought these judgments. for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve. And I heard the altar saying, Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments. Judgment is fair.

Verse 5, Just are you for you brought these judgments. Verse 7, Just and true are your judgments because of the way those who belong to Jesus are treated.

Now here's a question to think about. Clive, could we just go back one slide? Perfect. Thank you very much indeed. Here's a question to think about.

What's the most visible demonstration that we live in a world that opposes God? That as the Church of England's 39 articles put it, and I put the extract there on the outline, man is very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own nature inclined to evil and deserves God's wrath and condemnation.

[17:35] Now what's the most visible demonstration that people are like that? You can flip forward again. Now, thanks life. Surely it is the way that those who belong to Jesus are treated.

It was the Lord Jesus himself who said to his disciples, if the world hates you, know that it's hated me before it hated you. I mentioned at the beginning that refugee from Eritrea I met last Sunday. His father is a pastor and in prison. His mother has disappeared. He's had to flee the country. According to the Christian charity Open Doors, 340 million Christians worldwide suffer persecution and discrimination.

Last year, 4,761 Christians were murdered for their faith. 4,472 Christian churches and buildings were attacked. Last week, 140 Christian students were kidnapped in Kaduna State in Nigeria. The previous week, Open Doors presented a report to Parliament which spoke of the extreme persecution which Christians in India face. In the UK, we increasingly feel the pressure of living in a post-Christian society.

[18:55] The second most visible demonstration that we live in a world which opposes God is that people don't repent. I wonder if you heard the echo of that as Val read the passage for us earlier throughout the passage.

So verse 9, they did not repent and give him glory. Verse 11, they did not repent of their deeds. And verse 21, great hailstones, about 100 pounds each, fell from heaven on people and they cursed God for the plague of the hail because the plague was so severe.

I think it's very hard to preach on this because it is such a chilling insight into the human heart, just like those Old Testament plagues where Pharaoh didn't repent.

all of us by nature turn away from God, not towards him. I remember after the financial crisis in 2008, up in the city, lots of people would say to me, have you found that more people have come to church over the last year, that more people have come to faith and put their trust in Jesus?

[20:07] And I think the answer was no. Now, there is evidence that more people have come to church during COVID, that some have put their trust in Jesus, but I guess it's fair to say the numbers are tiny compared to the scale of the crisis.

Perhaps you're looking on the Christian faith. Perhaps you kind of mentally put off the day, so to speak, when you'll begin to follow Jesus or investigate Jesus. You know, when I'm older, when life's less busy, once I've had a chance to look into other religions.

In other words, we get used to saying no to God. Don't assume that you're more likely to say yes to him tomorrow than you are today.

The point is that judgment is fair and just. The verdict of heaven will be, verse 7, yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

Now, I don't know many Christians who don't struggle with the idea of judgment at times. But I think here in Revelation 16, the issue is, if we don't think it's fair, we will stop believing it.

[21 : 25] Or at least we'll so kind of put it to the back of our minds that we won't be ready when it comes. Now, I know that temptation myself.

I guess we all do. So I put a quote there on the outline, which I personally found helpful from Jim Packer in his book *Knowing God*. Let me read it for us. So far from the manifestation of God's wrath in punishing sin, being morally doubtful, the things that would be morally doubtful would be for him not to show his wrath in this way.

God is not just unless he inflicts upon all sin and wrongdoing the penalty it deserves. Judgment judgment is final.

Judgment is fair. Well, finally, so what? So what? One of the myths about the book of Revelation is that it's a book for Bible geeks who kind of love getting carried away with all the colourful language and the numbers and all the rest of it, but that it doesn't really have much to say on Monday morning.

And I hope that actually, perhaps over the last few weeks, if that was our assumption, then that myth has been truly busted. And the key so what? is there in verse 15.

[22 : 48] In fact, it's the only command really in this passage at all. Behold, verse 15, 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.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I see something in brackets as this verse is, I tend to think to myself, that's not very important. But it seems to me that actually what really should be happening here is that we should be getting out our yellow highlighter pens.

And I guess the printers weren't able to do that, so they put it in brackets. But think highlighter pen, okay, rather than something in brackets. Because the reason we're being told this about the final judgment is not to fuel expectation or fuel speculation, rather, about when it's going to happen and all that kind of thing.

It's very practical and down to earth. It is firstly so that we stay awake. In fact, this plea to stay awake echoes the words of the Lord Jesus.

If you have a Bible, keep a finger in Revelation chapter 16 and just flick back, if you will, to Matthew chapter 24. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[24 : 02] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let me read Matthew 24, verses 42 to 44. The words of the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Several years ago, a friend of mine fell asleep at the wheel of his car on a motorway.

He was lucky to survive. I guess we all know the dangers. I guess we've all seen those big signs by the side of the motorway, tiredness kills, take a break, and yet he ignored them.

He thought he'd be okay. Stay awake, says Jesus. Secondly, keep your clothes on, verse 15, or to put it more politely, keep your garments on.

[25 : 19] Throughout Revelation, the garments worn by those who belong to Jesus are the white robes that have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. they are the most precious things that the Lord Jesus gives to those who belong to him.

To be able to stand before God on the final judgment day, not wearing the filthy rags of our sin, but clean clothes, pure garments of his righteousness, and all at such great cost, his death upon the cross.

Take them off on that day, and you are defenseless, naked, and exposed. Keep them on, and you have nothing to fear.

You see, what would be the significance of taking those garments off? I guess it would be, wouldn't it, saying, I no longer belong to Jesus. I'm no longer on his side.

In the same way, if later on this evening, one of the England players took off their England shirt, I guess they'd be saying, wouldn't they, I'm no longer on the team? And yet Satan would love us to forget how valuable Jesus' garments are, to persuade us that other things are more precious.

[26 : 42] Perhaps you've got an item of clothing at home, an old jumper or something like that, that was given to you many years ago by a loved one, and you were delighted with it. You treasured it,

you kind of wore it all the time for a while, but now you hardly wear it at all, because other things have taken its place, and it's no longer precious.

In fact, next time you have a sort-out, it's going to go to the charity shop. So let me ask, I wonder what you're in danger of regarding as more precious than Jesus' garments.

Perhaps your career, or your reputation, or a particular relationship, or wanting to fit in with everyone else, or just wanting an easy life, going with the flow.

Stay awake. Keep your clothes on. I take it it's both a warning, and yet it's also an encouragement. If we're going to stay awake and keep our clothes on, we need to be convinced that judgment is both final and fair.

people. But as well as being a question for us individually, it's also a question for us corporately as a church, because remember, Revelation is written to churches, to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

[28 : 10] And in particular, what we've seen today would have resonated with the church in Sardis. Do look up Revelation chapter 3 later on. They're told to wake up. They're told to treasure Jesus' garments.

They're warned that, yes, they're a church with a reputation for being alive, but actually they are dead. Now, Simon sent me the words of the licensing earlier on in the week, and I've been grateful for the opportunity just to look through them before this morning.

And yet it's not solely the pastor, of course, who determines the direction a church goes in. It's why I'm grateful that Simon asked us corporate questions as well as questions of me.

We've been asked, would you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers? Would you persevere in resisting evil? And whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? I guess they're really different ways, aren't they, of asking. will we stay awake?

[29 : 24] Will we keep Jesus' garments on? Well, if we're to do what we promised we will do, we need to be convinced that judgment is both final and fair.

Let me lead us in prayer as we close. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

■■■■■■ we 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.

Heavenly Father, we praise you that you are indeed the one true living God. Thank you that you are just. We live in a world that cries out for justice, and we thank you that there will be this final day of justice.

Thank you for the Lord Jesus and his death on the cross for our sins. Thank you for the fact that those who belong to him can stand before him, clothed in his righteousness and forgiven.

And we pray, Heavenly Father, as a local church, please would you help us to stay awake and to keep those garments on. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

[30 : 51] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. finsing to the Internet.