

# "Seven Bowls of Wrath"

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 March 2024

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Happy St. Patrick's Day parade for those of you who live in New Haven. We begin this morning.

I want to tell you something. Prince of Egypt is my favorite animated movie. If you haven't seen it, it's the story of Moses in the beginning chapters of Exodus, told in an expanded and fictionalized way.

And it's not a perfect movie. It doesn't reflect the whole biblical story in appropriate ways. But it opens with this amazing song called Deliver Us. And it depicts the people of Israel in slavery.

And musically and visually, it just shows how downtrodden and how beaten and how oppressed they are and how deeply they suffer at the cruel hands of their Egyptian taskmasters.

It depicts, I think, well, what Exodus 1, 13 says. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter and hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field.

[ 1 : 20 ] And in all their work, they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. And Israel cried out, deliver us.

Lord, deliver us. And of course, friends, this brings us to the book of Revelation and our series that we're preaching on this spring, finishing the book of Revelation.

If you remember, the book of Revelation was written to a church at a time when the church was suffering under similar persecution. Life as a Christian in Rome had become more and more difficult.

The rise of the emperor cult and worship was high, and the cost of abstaining would be significant. It was not only spiritual persecution, but also economic ostracization.

You would be excluded from the hallways of wealth and power. And of course, at times, the Roman Empire persecuted Christians mercilessly and terribly.

[ 2 : 30 ] And so in the first century, as this book was written, when the people of God were saying, cry, were crying out, deliver us, O Lord.

Of course, friends, we know this as well from Revelation 6, 9 through 11, which we've seen before. You remember this? In the midst of the seals, as Jesus is opening the seals, there's a picture of the saints under the altar crying out, saying, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

And friends, we know that the people of God have cried out throughout the ages with this same cry, Lord, deliver us. Lord, save us. Lord, will you come and make things right?

Well, today, as we look at Revelation chapters 15 and 16, we see God responding to this cry. And in it, we see a picture of God's rescue and deliverance, but also a picture of His judgment on evildoers, on oppressors.

And I will just say this morning and acknowledge some of us will struggle with this. We don't like a God who judges. We may struggle with revulsion at the idea that God would judge people, that God would be fair or good if He judged people, that a loving God would ever judge people.

[ 4 : 02 ] And I'm just going to punt. Go back to Nick's sermon last week, because he did a great job and spent about 10 or 15 minutes really unpacking this idea. How do we understand God's judgment and respond to it in a way that makes sense to us?

It's not something that our modern sensibilities easily adopt. But I'm not going to talk just about judgment this morning in the sense of just explaining it again and saying this is what God is doing. This morning, as we look at verses, or at chapters 15 and 16, I want to ask this question. How does God want us to respond to the truth of God's judgment?

What does He call us to do, or how does He expect us to respond? Because remember, this whole book of Revelation was written to churches who were suffering with a pastoral intent.

There was a goal, there was a hope that this book would minister to people and cause them to respond in certain ways. And so that's the question I want to ask as we look at this passage this morning.

[ 5 : 11 ] We're going to look at Revelations chapter 15 and 16. If you're following along in the Pew Bibles, it's page 973. So if you want to turn there, and just to remind you, if you're visiting or if you forgot from last week, which sometimes happens to us, chapters 12 through 14, right before this, we saw this picture that reminded us that the whole world is in a spiritual war, that there are those who are God's enemies that seek to destroy God's people and to resist His kingdom and to build their own kingdoms economically, spiritually, politically, and these stand up in rebellion against and excluding of God, and that this battle is fierce, but that in the end, God will have an ultimate victory.

And then we come to chapters 15 and 16, and as we'll see, it's a picture of judgment where you have seven things. And we've seen this before, haven't we?

In 6 through 8, we have had seven seals. In 8 through 11, we've had seven trumpets. And now we have seven bowls that depict God's response to this cry, deliver us, God's work of judgment on the earth.

So, the question, how do we respond to God's judgment? If you're taking notes, here's our outline this morning. First, we are to celebrate God's response of judgment.

Second, we are to tremble at God's response of judgment. And thirdly, we are to choose in response to God's judgment.

[ 6 : 59 ] So, let's look at these passages. We're going to walk through the passage together.

Hopefully, you will see why I think this is what God is doing and how He wants us to respond to His Word as we read this chapter.

So, Revelation chapter 15, starting in verse 1. Let's read this together. And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear, O God, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

After this, I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness, and heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, with gold 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. 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.

[ 8 : 50 ] What I want you to see in this first chapter, this first section that we're looking at today, is that we are actually called to celebrate in response to God's judgment.

Why do I say that? Well, let me walk through the passage, help you see it. Verse one is kind of an introductory section, and then two through four is almost like an interlude, and then five through eight finishes what we see in verse one.

And we see this picture of, in the heavenly temple, angels carrying bowls. And in verse one, it says these bowls are the plagues, which would remind us immediately of Egypt and God's judgment on Egypt, where he brought ten plagues in order to deliver the people of Israel from them, right?

So these bowls are plagues that then we will see later are full of God's wrath. Now, we've seen bowls before in Revelation. Perhaps you haven't remembered this, so let me remind you.

In Revelation 5, as we saw this grand picture of the throne room again, there were bowls. Jesus takes the scroll, and it says this, and when Jesus had taken the scroll, the four creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

[ 10 : 21 ] The bowls, which are now coming out of the temple with full of wrath, were the bowls that went into the temple, full of the prayers of the saints of God.

And I believe that the writer is pulling hard on the imagery of the Exodus so that we understand what's going on here. Just as in Exodus, the people of God cried out, and God heard their cries and

responded with plagues of judgment in order to deliver them, so also we see this picture of, in response to the prayers of the saints being lifted up to God in these golden bowls.

These golden bowls are now coming back filled with the wrath of God, the judgment of God against his enemies. Why else do I say this?

Because it makes sense of verses 2 through 4. Because 2 through 4 is a weird interlude in the middle of this, isn't it? Unless, as Nancy Guthrie so helpfully pointed out, this is a picture that's like the people of God.

Because you know the story of Exodus, right? God had delivered his people from slavery. They were on their way to the Promised Land. They were going towards the Red Sea. Pharaoh changed his mind.

[ 11 : 41 ] He said, I don't want to let them go. He sent his army of chariots after them. They were trapped between the army of Pharaoh and the Red Sea. And God miraculously opened a way through the Red Sea for the people of God to be delivered.

And then, just as miraculously, brought the sea back down when the army of Pharaoh tried to follow them through that path of deliverance. And they were destroyed.

And imagine, and this is where the movie does a beautiful picture of this as well. Imagine the people of God standing on the shores of the Red Sea as the detritus from Pharaoh's army floated to the surface of the Red Sea.

Maybe a cloth here, something there. Do you think they said, wow, God's wrath is really terrible. I don't know if I really want to believe in a God who would deliver people like that.

It seems really mean. No. No. Because in Exodus 15, what they did is they sang and they celebrated because they had cried out to God and God had answered their prayers.

[ 12 : 58 ] And He had done so in righteousness and in goodness. And He had freed them from slavery and oppression. And Moses sang a song of deliverance.

And this is what chapter 15 is about. The picture of this cry coming up and then God responding. But we're meant to hear this story so that we can take in what it was that Israel did when it responded.

Because this is what we see the saints doing in verse 15. With the same harps, with a song of Moses in their mouth, they sing praises to God.

Now, when I was a new believer and went off to college back in the 80s, there was a praise song that we used to sing. I will sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously.

The horse and rider thrown into the sea. It was really odd to me. I was a fairly new believer and I was like, okay, the Lord my God, my strength, my song has now become my victory.

[ 14 : 01 ] Anyway, I can keep going, but I won't. But it's Exodus 15 just put into a 1980s Maranatha praise chorus that you could do in three-part harmony in rounds, which is really cool.

But it was a celebration of God being the God who vindicates. Look at what they sang as you see in verses 3 and 4. Great and amazing are you deeds, O Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy and all nations will come and worship you because your righteous acts have been revealed.

God's judgment in the eyes of His people are meant to be seen as righteous acts that we celebrate. Now look, God does not rejoice in the death of the wicked.

Right? We know this in Scripture. We don't. So we need to be careful to not misapply this. But there is meant to be in the church a tone of celebration.

[ 15 : 06 ] We know that we are aligned with the God who will ultimately have the victory. And this is a good thing. And we in the West, when we sit in our comfortable churches without persecution and without cost and without suffering, can wrestle with, oh, does this seem good?

But I promise you that if you go to other parts of the world where the church is facing active persecution, they rejoice in the judgment of God. They rejoice in His suffering.

They know that their suffering will not last forever because God will hear their prayers and God will respond. And this is why we sing, church.

This is why we celebrate. Because we have a God who is worth rejoicing over. Now look, there's also time, there's time in our church to lament, to lament about the brokenness of our world, to lament about our own sin, and to confess.

And I don't want to eradicate that from the life of our church. But friends, maybe we need to sing a little more loudly the songs of celebration and triumph that God has won the victory.

[16:20] victory. But we sing the song of victory in the midst of this age, not the age to come.

We sing it when we haven't yet seen the fullness. And where we still need to cry out as well, God deliver us. God come in judgment.

Of course, this is the context of recognizing that God will come in judgment, is coming in judgment, has come in judgment in a fearsome way.

Because this is what happens in verse 16. After verse 15, which is this picture, right, of God responding to the saints, it is now, okay, what happens to those bowls filled with wrath?

This is what chapter 16 is all about. So in chapter 16, we see that we are to tremble at God's judgment. These bowls, then, are poured out sequentially.

[17:21] The first bowl, the second bowl, the third bowl. Let's read it together, and then we'll observe. 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. 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 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, for they have shed the blood of the 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. And the fourth angel pulled out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch the 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.

[18:49] People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its waters were 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 prophet three unclean spirits like frogs. They were, they are demonic for their 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.

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. And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, great earthquakes such as there had never been since man was on the earth so great was that earthquake.

The great city was split into three parts and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

[20:22] And every island fled away and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about 100 pounds each, fell from heaven on people.

And they cursed God for the plague of hell because the plague was so severe. So this is a picture of God pouring out his wrath.

I want to make a series of observations rather than going through them one by one and explaining. I want to make a series of observations about the overall effect of these things. First is that the judgment will come on those who do not worship God.

So we see in the first bowl those who have the mark of the beast, those who do not worship God but who worship some other God or who have the mark of the beast, who have set themselves in the binary either for God or against God.

They are in the against God category. Those who have worshipped another God, those who have compromised in order to fit in with the spirits of the world, the economic systems, the powers, and not faithfully stood apart for the sake of Christ.

[ 21 : 39 ] So judgments have come on those who do not worship God. They also will come on all of creation, both natural and human. You see the scope of it. The first one comes on the earth, the second one, the seas, this third, the fresh waters, the fourth, and we see finally in the air as well, we see that there is this upheaval of the natural order.

When you get to the seventh one, the world itself seems to be falling apart. The judgment of God will be so great that it will leave the earth in a place where only the renewal of God and the recreation of the world in the new heavens and the new earth could redeem it.

You heard the end of verse 21. The plagues were so severe, even the natural world was turned upside down in this way.

We see in the third bowl that there is a justice that is brought upon those who persecuted the church and God's people. When you look at that song that the angel in charge of the waters sing, right, the waters that were the lifeblood of the people who lived in a dry and desert area were turned to blood.

They had nothing to drink but blood. Symbolically picturing, right, this isn't real. It wasn't like all the water in the Middle East suddenly turned to blood.

[ 23 : 11 ] This is a symbol pointing to the fact that what they thought was life in their persecution of God's church now turns to death. And those who had been the purveyors of death now were receiving that death in just response.

We see that the powers that have set themselves up, the throne of the beast itself, will be plunged into darkness and overthrown.

We see in the sixth bowl being poured out the unholy trinity. If you go back, this is what we saw in chapters 12 through 14. The dragon and the two beasts, the one beast coming from the sea and then the other beast which is also here called the false prophet coming from the earth.

This unholy trinity is gathering people and people have wrestled a lot with what this means. They're gathering the kings. The Euphrates is dried up. It's probably an image that's picking on the fact that the eastern border of the Roman Empire was the Euphrates River.

And if that river dried up, the Parthians would have a clear road to invade the Roman Empire. And that's not what they were predicting would happen. They're saying, it is like that.

[ 24 : 28 ] Like the very barrier that kept you from your worst enemy is now going to be dried up and there is nothing to hide you. There is no barrier.

There is no safety for you in this place. And it seems that what's happening in the midst of that then, right, the enemies of God are gathering the kingdoms of the earth to a final battle against God, right, on the great day of God.

The kings of the earth will gather under the leadership of this unholy trinity and the three spirits, the unclean spirits that are like frogs that would be a stench to the world because of their smell.

this is the picture that we see in verse six. And of course, it ends in Armageddon, which of course, we have bad movies about.

We have all sorts of imagery. What Armageddon, this picture of this final battle. Lots of people have argued, have tried to argue, well, this is a real place and this is going to happen somewhere near the ancient city of Megiddo and on a plain that we're, but I don't think that's actually what this is.

[ 25 : 44 ] I think instead that it's a, it's another symbol of a place because Megiddo was a place where the enemies of God came and would battle against Israel and where this would be.

It was taking this up as a symbol to say there will be a final grand battle. We don't know where it will be. We don't know when it will be. Let's not look for Armageddon somewhere in the Middle East but let's recognize that there will be a final conflict that will come and at the end as we will see in chapter 20 there will be a complete victory and the enemies of God will be defeated.

Another thing I want to point out in this is that the judgments are total. If you went back and you looked through when you had seven seals that were broken they affected one quarter of the earth. When you had seven trumpets that were blown they affected one third of the earth. And when you come here when the bowls are poured out they are poured out on the whole earth.

There's no limiting no restraint. This is I believe what it means in chapter 15 verse 1 when it says these are the last plagues when the wrath of God is finished.

[ 27 : 09 ] Now we've been telling you that we believe that these are pictures that are true that were true in the first century that are true throughout the church age and that have a particular truth an expression that will still yet to come in the future.

And this is where we see this maybe most clearly because these plagues these judgments seem to be ratcheting up. The seals are bad the trumpets are worse and here the bowls are the most fierce and the most extreme and this is the fullness the picture of the fullness of God's wrath poured out in judgment upon the world and it will affect all and it is inescapable.

And I believe the proper response is to tremble. Do you remember when you were in high school was there a coach or a teacher that you never wanted to run into in the hallway because even if you weren't doing something wrong you'd be afraid that you were going to get in trouble because they were the ones who always came and brought the rules and made justice happen.

For me it was my lacrosse coach Mr. Diven. He wasn't in the hallways very much but man when you when you got sideways with him it was terrible. You just did not want to do that. Friends we need to recognize oh so so when we have those people we tremble when we see them coming we start to be afraid.

Oh no I'm in trouble. Friends this is just a taste. God's judgment will be immeasurably worse than what Mr. Diven could have done to me.

[ 29 : 06 ] And his judgment is fearsome and he has and he is and he will be judging the world and we are to tremble even as we are to celebrate it we are also to tremble before his righteous holy just power.

But as we see these things coming together then it is as trembling people that we see the third response in this text because I believe that the third way that we are meant to respond to this text is to choose.

we can either curse God or we can repent and trust in him. Now it may not be obvious in this because there is no call to repentance in this passage.

There is no clear sense in fact if anything there is more of a fear but one of the things you see is that the judgment of God clearly reveals our hearts and our choice our decision of how we will respond to the God of the universe.

Right? We see this in chapter 16 verse 9 and 11 where it says and they cursed God for the plagues and they did not repent. So the judgments revealed the hearts of those who were so hardened that they would not respond.

[ 30 : 38 ] And we see this of course with the echoes of the Exodus story. Right? Where God would bring a plague and Pharaoh would repent and then he changed his mind. And then he would repent and then he would harden his heart again and change his mind.

And so the echoes of the Exodus story come that these judgments are meant to call us to repentance but also it reveals the hardness of our hearts and how easily we harden ourselves against God and reject him rather than receive him.

How often we choose to love our sin rather than repenting of it. how often we will love the world rather than God himself. We also see this repentance theme coming out of chapter 14 that Pastor Nick preached on last week which was this grand reaping this grand there were two results coming out some will be gathered to God for this celebration and victory in this new life and others will be gathered for the most fearsome of judgments.

But I think verse 15 is the reason why I think most clearly there's a call to repentance in this passage. Did you hear it? It's so out of step.

It feels like an interlude. My Bible has it in parentheses and in red and almost set apart. Right? Why is verse 15 in there?

[ 32 : 11 ] Jesus saying behold I come like a thief. Why? It's there to remind us that this promise of the coming judgment of God will come when we don't expect it.

It will come in a surprising way at a surprising time. And the undergirding thought in that throughout the New Testament is therefore today while it is still day today while you still have a choice today while you can still respond because you know that that hundred pound hailstones haven't yet rained upon the earth and destroyed everything.

Today you have a choice to turn again to him. And we know that this book was written to a church that was meant to comfort them in the midst of the trials but also to call them to holiness and holy living and living wholehearted for them.

And just like there probably is today in those churches there would have been some who would have had to still think through where does my allegiance lie? Do I bear the mark of the beast or do I bear the name of Jesus on my forehead?

Where do I stand? Because at the end of the day the book of Revelation reminds us there are only two camps those who are in Christ and those who are not and those who are not in Christ will face this fearsome judgment without any protection.

[ 33 : 48 ] They will as it says in verses in verse eight or nineteen they will drink the cup of God's wrath. But friends we have one who has drunk that cup of wrath for us.

This is what Jesus has come to do. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane he asked to be spared this cup a cup that he did not deserve because he had no sin but he said not my will but your will be done oh Lord and so he went to the cross and he suffered and he died bearing the penalty of our sins bearing the wrath of God against unrighteousness that we have done when he died on the cross he did not shrink back but he went into the judgment and bore it for us and when he did so the signs that we see at the end of the seventh bowl thunder and lightning and skies growing dark and the earth shaking this is what happened to Jesus for us and at the end he cried it is finished

God drank this cup for us so that we won't have to on that day verse 17 it says in the final bowl it is done time will come when there will be no more choice friends we don't usually do this at Trinity but given this message I think it's worth doing today we don't want to be emotional but we do want to say that the gospel of Jesus Christ calls for a response today is the day whom will you serve who will you trust in will you confess that you are a sinner who needs rescuing from the judgment of God and that Jesus has done all that you need to be rescued from that and if you confess those things today and put your trust for your spiritual standing for God for forgiveness of sins and for new spiritual life today can be the day that you will know and face the day of judgment that's coming with confidence and celebration not in trembling and in fear

I was a little afraid to do this because some people think the whole book of Revelation is about you gotta make a decision you gotta choose but you know what today's the day today's the day to choose if you're here and you're wondering where do I stand implore you today choose Christ so let's pray together Lord as we come together before you Lord we this is a fearsome truth and you are a holy God and Lord we cry out deliver us from our sin deliver us from the darkness in our own hearts

Lord I pray for those now today who are here who have not trusted in Jesus Lord give them the grace to respond to you let them say now I believe in Jesus by his death on the cross he has saved me from my sin I believe that and Lord for those who have wandered from faith who have compromised and loved the world rather than following Christ today Lord give them strength to return to Christ in faith to stand in the grace of Jesus for all who have believed in him and Lord for those of us who today are trusting in you Lord fill our hearts with a song of celebration that you are a just and holy God who has and will work your work of redemption for your glory and for our good today

[ 38 : 43 ] Lord let today be the day that we respond to you with clarity and with faith we pray this in Jesus name amen