

Revelation 15:5-16:21 Destruction  
Tim Anderson 6/9/20

This wasn't a passage I had originally chosen to preach, when I wrote the preaching roster last year.

I really wasn't excited about preaching three judgement cycles in one sermon series: the seals, the trumpets and now the bowls.

There is a lot of similarity.

I always think to myself,

"How am I going to find enough new stuff to say?"

Of course a preacher with stronger faith would say,

"God wouldn't have put three judgement cycles in Revelation if he didn't want you to preach three judgement cycles.

He will provide you with things to say."

And look, he's even given me a perfect sermon illustration.

6:2 speaks about the outbreak of ugly festering sores, and here's one we prepared earlier.

Couldn't ask for more than that, could you?

And I also trust that he's given me a bunch of new things to say.

But you guys can be the judges of that.

Well, John's vision doesn't start with judgement on earth.

It starts with a view of heaven. 15:5

"After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple - that is the tabernacle of the covenant law - and it was opened."

As he so often does,

John has a vision of heaven and what he sees are pictures from the OT.

What did John see?

He saw the tabernacle.

That was the place where some special things were kept.

The two stone tablets with the 10 commandments written on them were kept in the ark of the covenant.

It's the tabernacle of the covenant law

because the commandments given by God on Mt Sinai shaped his relationship with nation.

"I will be your God and you will be my people."

And this is how you be my people.

You follow these commandments.

But the tabernacle was also called the tabernacle of the testimony.

If Israel's relationship with God went wrong, then those commandments would testify against them.

This is the law you failed to keep.

Now of course there is more added to the testimony.

As well as the testimony of the ten commandments, we have the testimony of Jesus.

In Revelation he is called the faithful and true witness, Rev 3:14.

He has shown us how to be God's holy people.

He taught us and he showed us by doing it himself.

And so the heavenly tabernacle bears witness.

The judgement of God emanates from the temple in heaven.

That's not necessarily a comfortable thought.

But there's no denying that's the picture we have here.

Angels dressed as priests come out of the heavenly temple.

They emerge carrying seven plagues.

They are given golden bowls full of the wrath of God.

Golden bowls were what was used in Old Testament times for the priests to carry various things around associated with the sacrifices in the temple.

That was the only thing golden bowls were used for.

They didn't have gold paint back then.

A golden bowl meant a bowl made of gold.

They were only for use in the sacrificial rites in the temple.

Even the King didn't eat his dinner from golden plates and bowls.

But there has been one use of golden bowls so far in Revelation.

Back in 5:8, the prayers of God's holy people have been presented to him in golden bowls.

So God's people cry out to him in prayer,  
crying for relief from oppression and injustice.  
The bowls full of their prayers go in to the heavenly temple.  
And then here seven angels come out of the heavenly temple,  
and they are given golden bowls full of God's wrath  
to pour out on the earth.  
The bowls of God's wrath are the answer to the prayers of the saints.  
We pray, "Lord, rid this world of injustice and tyranny."  
I guess when we pray that,  
most of us are thinking,  
"Lord please cause the unjust people  
to reconsider their ways and treat people fairly."  
In God's grace, that happens occasionally.  
But to rid the world of injustice and tyranny  
and bring in the new creation,  
the bowls of God's wrath must be poured out.

15:8 "The temple was filled with the smoke of the glory of God  
and from his power,  
and no one could enter the temple  
until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."  
Basically there's a no entry sign on the heavenly temple  
until the judgement of God is complete.

You want a baby.  
You have to go through childbirth.  
You want a new creation.  
You have to go through the judgement of God on this present world.

And so we get to the pouring out of the seven bowls.  
But before we get there,  
you might be asking the question about the relationship  
between the trumpets and the bowls.  
We did the trumpets a few weeks ago.  
As the last trumpet was sounded,  
it looked like that was the end of history.

It was judgement day.

So how come we are another 8 chapters further on,  
and the whole process seems to be starting again?

Some people have tried to draw up detailed maps of history.

They've tried to equate the opening of each seal,

the sounding of each trumpet,

the pouring out of each bowl,

with a particular event.

But that's kind of mistaking the kind of literature that Revelation is.

It's not a car manual

where every page refers to some specific bits on our car.

This is a vision.

It's like you have a dream

and you wake up in the morning and can remember it,

so you write it down.

You wouldn't expect that your dream would necessarily have  
a completely logical and sequential flow.

Or you could think of it like a symphony.

The music starts off on one theme.

Then it goes off and does something different.

Then it comes back to the first theme,

but it develops it adding some new colour and interest.

But as the piece moves on, it is moving to a conclusion.

So what is the relationship between the bowls and the trumpets?

Well at the very least some new characters have been introduced  
between the trumpets and the bowls.

We've met the dragon in chapter 12,

the beast and his sidekick in chapter 13,

and Babylon the Great in chapter 14.

So this time when the judgements of God are described,

we'll see how they affect those characters as well as the rest of us.

And because this is the last recapitulation

of God's judgements before the end,

We are moving towards the conclusion of the prophecy.

Things are now a bit more fierce than in the seals or the trumpets.

So let's now move to the bowls.

The first bowl is poured out and people get ugly, festering sores.

Here are some I prepared earlier.

But No. This can't be them.

Because these sores are for those who have the mark of the beast.

But I have the name of the Lord Jesus and his father  
written on my forehead.

And it's not if a sickness has ugly sores like shingles

then it is a judgement of God

but if it's not got any sores like coronavirus

then it's just a normal sickness.

That's not it at all.

The point of the descriptions is not for you to look around you  
and try to find things in the world that match.

It's for you to look in the Bible and find things that match.

What matches with ugly festering sores?

Well it's the plague of boils in Egypt.

We already spoke about the similarity of many of these judgements  
with the plagues of Egypt when we looked at the trumpets.

I won't go through the details again.

But what were the plagues of Egypt?

They were God judging people

who worshipped idols and oppressed his people.

These judgements in Revelation are same thing  
just painted on a larger canvas.

People worldwide are being judged

because they worship idols and oppress God's people.

The next two bowls are judgement on the sea, the rivers and the springs.

If I didn't read the commentaries,

I would have had no idea what that represents.

It's judgement on commerce.

You see they had no trucks in those days.

The easiest way to get your goods to market was my boat.

Up and down the major rivers.  
Across the seas.  
Nature's highways.  
And if you wanted to make a good profit,  
you sold people exotic stuff they couldn't get locally.  
Not too different now.  
Mangos and avocados are cheaper in Queensland.  
If you read on into chapter 18,  
the sailors are mourning the fall of Babylon,  
"Woe! woe to you, great city,  
where all who had ships on the sea  
became rich through her wealth!"  
Even back in the first century,  
the greatest idols were not of stone and wood,  
people worshipped and served money instead of their Creator.  
And so that is where God's wrath is poured out.  
And I can't help thinking we are about due  
for a dose of these bowls in our world at the moment.  
The sight of the stock market making all time highs  
while millions are out of work,  
and millions are sick,  
and millions are starving.  
There's something slightly obscene about it.  
Not to mention some detachment from reality.  
And politicians who measure their success  
solely on the basis of whether the stock market is rising  
seem to be clearly making it an idol.  
It wouldn't surprise me in the slightest  
if we see a bit of bowls 2&3 in the not too distant future.  
It does seem to be when a particular type of idolatry gets extreme  
that the judgement of God falls on that area.

After the first three bowls are poured out,  
we have an affirmation of the rightness of God's judgements.  
16:5 "You are just in these judgements, O Holy One,

you who are and who were;  
for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets,  
and you have given them blood to drink at they deserve."

The imagery of bowls two and three is of water becoming blood.

The sea, the rivers, the springs, they all turn to blood.

Well this is only appropriate

for those whose crime is the shedding of blood.

The punishment must fit the crime.

But given that the pictures of judgement are imagery

but the crimes of shedding blood are real murder,

how will God make the punishments fit the crimes?

Here is a thought.

Bowls two and three are judgements on economic crimes.

What are some of the great economic crimes in our world?

Surely they are making people slaves by using debt.

I remember the story of a lady working 6 days a week in India,  
crushing rocks in a quarry with a sledge hammer.

She was in debt, a debt her husband had left her in before deserting her.

And the money lender had calculated the interest on her debt

and the amount that she earned for crushing rocks,

so that she would be out of debt just in time for her 100th birthday.

It cost a couple of hundred dollars to buy that lady out of slavery.

Or you can think about the Asian women brought to Australia  
with promises of work.

They get here, their passports are confiscated,

they find out the work is in a brothel,

and they have a debt to pay off by working in the brothel

which will take them many years to pay off.

It's making people slaves by using debt.

How will God judge the crimes of these slave masters?

The punishment must fit the crime.

They shed blood, they must have blood to drink.

The crime of those who enslave others with money

is often that they are enslaved by money.

They can't enjoy the things normal people enjoy:

loving relationships, relaxing with children or grandchildren,  
 the scent of a rose, because all they can think about is money.  
 What they used to enslave others has enslaved them.  
 The punishment fits the crime.

We move swiftly through the fourth and the fifth bowls,  
 judgements of fire and darkness.

One thing to notice.

There is a refrain:

"They refused to repent".

Just like in the plagues on the Egyptians,  
 the people subject to God's judgement refuse to repent.

God chastises believers for their benefit.

He grows us in the fruit of the Spirit  
 by giving us painful trials to endure.

But the same trials produce no benefit  
 in those who have the mark of the beast.

It doesn't bring them to repentance.

They just become hardened in their sin.

They 'curse the name of God.'

They 'curse the God of Heaven'.

It's very sad.

But you see it all around you.

Things that should be a wake up call.

And instead, the person is embittered against their Creator.

The sixth bowl.

The 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.

What does this mean?

I read it

and I started thinking about drought in the Murray Darling Basin.

But the key is to find connections in the Bible  
 not in your own experience.

Forget the Murray Darling Basin, go back to Isaiah 11.

"The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian Sea,  
with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River.  
The will break it up into seven streams  
so that anyone can cross over it in sandals."

What's going on here?

God's people were being oppressed and in captivity by the Babylonians.  
So God sent Cyrus the Persian to deal with Babylon.

How did Cyrus get in to Babylon?

It's pretty hard to get an army across the Euphrates River.

He did a bit of a canalling and engineering project  
and diverted the water.

And his soldiers marched across with their sandals on.

God's people were released and their oppressors were put to the sword.

The sixth bowl is judgement coming  
on those who oppress God's people.

But who are those who oppress God's people?

16:13 "Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs;  
they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast,  
and out of the mouth of the false prophet."

The dragon and the beast we've met before.

The dragon is the devil.

The beast is the political system that opposes God's people.

But the false prophet is new.

This is his first mention in Revelation.

The false prophet is religious support  
for a political system that opposes God's people.

You can think about the German Christian Church  
that Adolph Hitler started.

You can think of the Three Self Patriotic Movement in China.

Or perhaps more subtly any religious organisation  
that makes a pretence of worshipping God  
and speaking on God's behalf

but actually is a mouthpiece of the government

and encourages worship of the nation.  
So we have the dragon, the beast and the false prophet,  
and they all have frogs coming out of their mouths.  
Frogs are an animal that represent deception.  
There's some Egyptian background there.  
Frogs coming out of their mouths.  
Deceptive words.  
The devil, the political system and its religious arm  
speaking out false words to deceive people.  
And look you have to be on the alert to avoid being deceived.  
There are scams a plenty out there.  
Everyone wants to suck you in.  
But the greatest scam of them all  
is the devil trying to suck you in to worship him.  
And so Jesus says, 16:15  
"Look I come like a thief!  
Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed,  
so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."  
Jesus is coming at a time no one expects.  
It would be terribly shameful  
to be exposed as someone worshipping the beast when he comes.  
And not everyone does this consciously or knowingly.  
The false prophet will try to convince them  
they are actually worshipping Jesus.  
He can dress patriotism up in all kinds of religious language  
to make it sound like true religion.  
But actually the aim is to get people to worship the political system  
and not the Lord Jesus.

Well we are up to the last bowl.  
16:17 "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air,  
and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying,  
"It is done!"  
The voice comes from the throne, so it can only be God's voice.  
And with the pouring out of the last bowl,

his verdict is clear.  
The time for the judgement on the world and the devil  
is being wrapped up.  
It will take a few more chapters of Revelation to be fully described.  
But we are now finally at Judgement Day.  
Maybe that's why there are three cycles of God's judgements:  
the seals, the trumpets and the bowls;  
so that the readers will long for Judgement Day to finally arrive,  
like God does.  
He wants to bring all things to their rightful conclusion  
in the new creation.

Those words, "It is done!"  
Do they remind you of anything?  
Jesus' words from the cross, "It is finished".  
There God's judgement poured out on his Son  
for the redemption of his people is completed!  
Here God's judgement on the world opposed to him is finally complete.

Well, next week we will look at the destruction of Babylon the Great  
in some detail.  
So I'll skip over the last couple of verses.  
But let me leave you with the words of Jesus.  
"Look, I come like a thief!  
Blessed is the one who stays awake."  
There are those who will try to deceive you into worshiping things  
other than the one true and living God.  
Don't be deceived!  
Stay awake!