

The Seven Bowls of Wrath
Rev 15-16, Psalm 79:5-7

You know friends; you have to admit that it feels good and right when you're watching a movie and the bad guys get what's coming to them.

And it doesn't matter what kind of movie it is, a western, a cop drama, spy thriller, or an epic fantasy - the plot pattern for dispensing justice is the same...

The bad guys, e.g. the drug dealers, the crime lords, the evil sorcerers, or military dictators end up doing something despicable that personally affects the hero - such as kidnapping the his daughter, wife, girlfriend, or they hurt his dog...

Whatever it is they've done – this time they've gone too far. They've crossed the line with the hero and now it's personal.

And when the Hero learns about what they've done... the theme music starts and the hero starts preparing to take

vengeance. He trains, doing pushups, running, lifting weights, sparring, practicing his Kung-Fu and then he's putting on his armor, strapping on his sword and shield or loading up an assault rifle and holstering several pistols...

And then the camera pans back to show us the hero's face... grim, determined, narrow eyed, steel jawed - bad guys beware – I'm coming for you!

And then the assault begins –the hero attacks, and his fury is unstoppable and he delivers vengeance upon the bad guys and destroys them - they get what they deserved.

Friends, are you familiar with this plot pattern that I've described? If you're not, next time you watch an action movie look for it, and you'll start to notice it... and pretty soon you'll start to notice it occurs in almost every action movie.

And friends there are certain patterns that occur in the time between times as well, and the Visions of Revelation make us familiar with these patterns.

Now, we may not have noticed them before but if we start looking for them in the world around us we'll see these patterns – occurring again and again - in every era that has passed since the first coming of Christ, and we can expect them to continue until his return.

If you look, you will notice that again and again churches are established as lampstands - to be the light to the world, to shine in the spiritual darkness, to be the presence of Christ in this world. These are the real world events symbolized by the first vision of Christ and the Lampstands.

And if you look, you will notice that again and again churches and their members are subjected to persecution of all kinds – and they must endure the trials and challenges of life.

These are the real world events symbolized in the second vision of the seven seals.

And... if you look, you will notice that again and again God sends warning judgments upon the earth – in the form of

natural calamities, economic and social disasters, spiritual torment and wars, in order to prompt those who persecute the church to join it instead.

These are the real world events symbolized by the third vision of the seven trumpets.

And, again and again – if you look you will notice - the reoccurring conflict between the Church and Society, or Gov't or Culture, and reminds us that there is a continual, deeper, spiritual conflict going on between Jesus Christ and his followers and the Devil and his followers.

These reoccurring conflicts are the real world events symbolized by activities of the dragon and his helpers in the fourth vision.

So this pattern of; church established, church persecuted, world warned, and conflict with the Devil, is a repeating theme that exists in world history, in our present situation, and it will continue to occur until Christ returns, and it is in

line with what Jesus explained to his disciples as well - when He said:

⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Mat 24)

Sounds like a good summary of everything we've covered in the first four visions so far doesn't it...

So, if you start to look... you will notice these events are happening. This pattern is occurring all over the world, again and again in the time between times, just like it is outlined by the Visions of Revelation.

And this pattern reminds us to be ready and prepared - since the only further development of the pattern that we're still waiting for is the return of Christ and then God's plan for His creation will be complete! Amen!

So I'm hoping that you are starting to see how these parallel visions of Revelation are moving us towards a fuller, more complete understanding of the time between times? And please, if you have any questions about the Visions and details that we've covered, or you are having trouble following the development of these Visions - please let me know!

Ok – if you remember last week, the 4th Vision revealed the spiritual dimension to us which was previously unseen.

This week – the 5th Vision reveals another element of this reoccurring pattern which is “final judgment” – where, just like in the action movies, the bad guys get what they deserve.

And with the final judgment being introduced at this point in the pattern... everything shifts.

Prior to this God has shown Himself to be *slow to anger and abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion*” (Num 14:18) because He has said “*Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?*” (Ez 18:23)

But now we see that God’s patience is not indefinite. In the time between times God’s wrath is part of the pattern as well and it is poured out again and again in final judgment.

There is a line that is crossed by those who refuse to see the light of the gospel and continue to persecute the church... there is a point of no return for those who continuously ignore the warning judgments, who align themselves with the Devil...

And friends, the 5th Vision shows us that this point of no return can and does arrive before Christ does - God’s wrath does not need to wait until the 2nd coming to be delivered with finality upon those who deserve it.

Now this is a rather sobering and disconcerting message to hear, isn’t it!? Especially since we’ve become so focused on God’s love and forgiveness and patience that we’ve forgotten He will not put up with sin and rebellion indefinitely.

But before we look at the implications of “the final judgment” being a part of this reoccurring pattern - we need to see why it’s included in it in the first place.

So, as we heard about the Bowls of Wrath this morning maybe you were thinking – “where have I heard about these judgments before? Why does this sound familiar?”

Well – the Bowls and the Trumpets cover the same territory... if you compare them you can see that.

The 1st bowl is poured out on the land, the 1st trumpet releases hail and fire and blood upon the earth.

The 2nd bowl is poured out on the sea, at the 2nd trumpet something like a huge mountain is thrown into the sea

The 3rd bowl is poured out on upon the rivers and fountains, when the 3rd trumpet is blown the star Wormwood falls on the rivers and springs

The 4th bowl is poured out upon the sun, and the sun and moon and stars are struck when the 4th trumpet is sounded.

So far we're tracking pretty good right? Let's keep going.

The 5th bowl is poured out upon the Throne of the Beast and his Kingdom is plunged into darkness, at the 5th Trumpet demonic spiritual torture is unleashed from the abyss and the smoke from the abyss darkens the sky...

When the 6th bowl is poured out – it dries up the water of the Euphrates and demons go out to provoke the Kings of the world to make war against God, when the 6th trumpet is blown there are angels who have been held at the Euphrates who are released to incite the world to war.

Now as we get to the 7th bowl, I want to go back a bit farther and look at the 7th Seal

If you will remember the Lamb who was slain opened the seals on the scroll – which means that Christ implements the remainder of God's plan for the creation. When the 7th Seal was opened what happened?

There was silence in Heaven for half an hour because the 7th seal opens up into revealing God's judgment – which is sobering stuff... it leaves even the angels and the twenty four elders speechless.

So I want you to see how this tracks – 7th Seal opens and transitions into the next Vision and John sees the Heavenly

Temple and the altar and the prayers of the persecuted church going up before God and God hears and responds to these prayers.

So an Angel takes the Golden censor and hurls it down to the earth – symbolizing God’s judgment – and there are flashes of lighting, peals of thunder, rumblings...

Now whenever we read this phrase in Revelation – “flashes of lightning, peals of thunders, and rumblings” pay attention because it symbolizes God Almighty speaking or acting...

In fact the very first time John sees God Almighty on the Heavenly Throne he notes “from the throne there came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder”

So the 7th Seal immediately leads to judgment being hurled to the earth, accompanied by “flashes of lighting, peals of thunder, rumblings and an earthquake...”

And remember that the seven trumpets are really an in-depth look at the different aspects combined in this one action of judgment...

And when the “7th trumpet sounds - representing the final judgment, again we see “flashes of lighting, peals of thunder, rumblings an earthquake and... a great hailstorm”

Now – moving ahead to the 7th Bowl – when it is poured out into the air, what happens? There are “flashes of lighting, peals of thunder, rumblings and a severe earthquake - and a great hailstorm”

And to emphasize the distinction that this is no longer a warning trumpet – this is the final judgment the 7th Bowl gives us further descriptions on how complete and devastating the earthquake is “*no earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on the earth*” (vs18) and it describes how massive the hailstones are telling us they were “*about a hundred pounds each*” (vs21)

So – all the connectedness that we see between the visions shows us that we’re dealing with the same event – the final judgment – but from different perspectives... and what we learn from the perspective in the 5th Vision is that the final judgment can come to those who deserve it before Christ returns.

And this connectedness shows us that what is sent as a warning to some, functions as a final judgment for others.

So whenever God – in warning - removes the blessing that we receive from His creation – such as land and sea and sky... or whenever God allows some form of spiritual torment or wars, as we saw happening in the trumpets – for some it will be their final judgment – the bowls of wrath poured out.

Now when we speak of final judgment occurring for someone before Christ returns, it means that God withdraws any further opportunity for them to repent and seek forgiveness – and many times this happens because God has ended their life.

But this final judgment is more than death finding us before we’ve decided to turn to Christ - notice how often it is noted in this vision that people curse God because of the plagues of wrath and it says “they refused to repent.”

You see friends the worst possible punishment that we can receive for our sin is to be given over to it completely – to have any little bit of desire to repent and seek forgiveness be taken away – and God can do that.

Paul speaks of this three times in Romans 1: 24, 26, 28 He writes *“God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts.” “God gave them over to shameful lusts.” “God gave them over to a depraved mind.”*

So – we shouldn’t be too worried about the fact that we struggle with a desire to sin... we should be much more worried if we no longer have the desire to repent and seek forgiveness for our sins...

That's what happens to those on who God pours out his bowls of wrath. Through these plagues God gives people over to their sinful nature as final judgment – this is what it means to be damned – and the evidence of is that they curse God and refuse to repent!

They have experienced their final judgment.

So when Christ returns “like a thief in the night” – their final judgment will become a completed judgment – and we'll get more insight and understanding about this “completed judgment” in the 6th and 7th Visions in the weeks to come.

But now that we've looked at how this aspect of God pouring out final judgment is part of the reoccurring pattern that we can see going on in the world around us – now we need to ask what implications does it have for us?

So first we might want to ask “is this a warning for us?”

Is the 5th Vision of Revelation making us aware that we are in a precarious position of sinning one too many times and crossing a line with God so that He gives up on us and pours out his wrath upon us? That He gives us over to our sinful nature so we do not even desire forgiveness and salvation!

Friends, this is only the situation for us if we have not been sealed by God – those who have been sealed by God will not be lost – remember in the last Vision John saw the entire church with Christ, all 144 000. Not 143 999....

And this is the case friends, because to be sealed by God is to have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our substitute.

And part of that substitutionary work of Jesus was that through his sacrifice he paid for all the covenant unfaithfulness before him and his shed blood initiated a new unbreakable covenant for all the instances of covenant unfaithfulness we will yet commit.

So if we have been sealed by God and Christ is our substitute and the Holy Spirit is connecting our lives to Christ then we are not in a precarious position of encountering a damning final judgment like those who bear the mark of the Beast.

And friends if you need any reassurance that you have been sealed by God, ask yourself – are you willing to confess that you’ve sinned against God and repent and seek forgiveness in Christ for what you’ve done wrong?

So friends – believe the good news, trust in the work of Jesus Christ and in the grace and mercy of our God – and live by this faith!

Do you? That’s the proof that the Holy Spirit is at work in you, that you have been sealed by God.

And those who have been sealed by God friends face a final judgment that removes any last bits of desire that we have to sin.

At the beginning of the 5th Vision John sees a glass, or crystal sea – that is a very large basin... but instead of being filled with water to cleanse, it is mixed with fire. (15:2)

And next to this basin John sees all those who had faced and endured the persecution of the beast - which God had allowed – and this experience didn’t turn them against God and cause them to curse God.

Instead through these trials they have been purified, and now they are with God in heaven worshiping the Lamb!

You see friends this is another aspect of realizing that final judgment is a part of the pattern that occurs again and again in the time between times.

For those who are sealed by God all the calamities, natural disasters, spiritual opposition and wars are used by God to refine us, to burn away any impurities left in us.

This means that we can welcome the final judgment, and we don't need to fear anything really because now we really know how Romans 8:28 can say " And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

So what can we say the 5th Vision teaches us about God's judgment – that for some it warns them that they need to repent, that for others it removes their desire to repent, but for those sealed in Christ Jesus it removes the need to repent!

So friends, thank God that its part of the pattern, thank God that it will occur over and over again in our lives so that we are made complete when our Lord returns.

Amen.

Let's pray – when we get what we deserve that's justice, when Jesus got what we deserved that was mercy, so when we get what we don't deserve that is grace – amazing grace. Amen.