

God's fair warning judgements

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[0 : 00] Scorching fire, darkness covering the land. Is it just me or does this describe like an average day in Cape Town?

I say that tongue-in-cheek, but what if these cycles of judgments that we read in Revelation are actually just describing, in symbolic language, but just describing an average day on planet Earth? Because these things that we read of, these judgments of these earthquakes, these fires, all these kind of things that are going on in Revelation, actually are happening in some form somewhere in the world.

And I think that's what these cycles of judgments that we're reading in Revelation are. I think they're highly symbolic descriptions of the problems that we see in our world today.

They're not necessarily talking about some future cataclysmic event like we see in the movies.

These are actually, if we go down into them and we read about these judgments, these are manifestations of God's wrath on the world.

[1 : 08] These issues that we read about in the newspapers, that we suffer, Revelation puts them in these terms to help us to realize these are, in fact, signs that God is angry.

They're signs of God's wrath on this world. Romans 118 says, very interestingly, it talks about the problems of this world and the condition that we're in in this world.

And it says these words, it says, the wrath of God is being revealed against all the ungodliness and wickedness in the world. Is being, present tense.

You know, we always think about the wrath of God being something in the future on Judgment Day. And oh, yes, it will be. But the Bible also says in a very important way that we need to understand this morning, the wrath of God is currently being revealed on the world through the issues and through the problems that we see around us.

You know, these things that we prayed earlier in the litany that God would spare us from. It's not like God is desperately trying to fight the bad stuff happening in this world and doing his best to keep us away from it.

[2 : 22] God is sending that stuff. We've seen that in Revelation already. And us asking him to spare us from it is us asking him not to send it particularly to us. But he is the origin of it.

He's not, it's not like his power is against the devil's power and they're equal. He is the one in control of these things. And as we come to this important final cycle, remember, if you've been with us in Revelation so far, we've seen that there's these three cycles of seven things.

Remember that? We started back in chapter 6 with the cycles of the seven seals as the Lamb was opening the scroll. And then we read about the seven trumpets. Well, here we're reading about the final cycle, the seven bowls of wrath.

And some weird imagery, isn't it? Frogs and boils breaking out on people's skin and hailstones, all kinds of weird things.

But if we know our Bible and we put it through our Old Testament decoder, which is what we need to understand the symbols in Revelation, what we start to see is that each of these plagues are describing and using language from the plagues back in Egypt.

[3 : 38] Remember in Exodus when Israel came out of the land and God and Pharaoh and the Egyptians were enslaving the Israelites, God's people, and they wouldn't let them, they wouldn't release them.

And so God, one after another, sent these plagues, these different plagues of increasing intensity to warn the Egyptians to not mess with him.

That's what the plagues in Egypt were about. They were messing with God, they were messing with his people, and so God was showing them that they can't mess with him. He was helping, there

were wake-up calls to help the Egyptians to see who's really in charge.

And in the same way, the problems in our world, the issues that God sends and allows to happen in our news that we read in the newspaper, are all in an important way wake-up calls, just the same as they were for the Egyptians, to help us to realize who's really in charge.

And it's certainly not us. And that's really, as we look now at chapter 15 and 16 in your Bibles, chapter 15 starts with God's people singing out a song in response of all that he's done so far.

[4 : 46] About his power and his glory, especially his saving acts. But then, as they're reflecting on all that God has done in judgment and salvation, in the middle of their song, in verse 4, they say, Lord, who will not fear you and glorify your name?

It should be obvious by now to the world who's in charge. Who will not fear you? And yet, we look around in our world today and we see people don't.

It's still a valid question. Why don't people? And here in chapter 16, as God's wrath unfolds, we see this description of it.

But we also see the sad reality of how the fate of Egypt back in Exodus and of Pharaoh is also going to be the fate of those who continue to insist to ignore the wake-up calls that God sends today.

And so there's two things that I want us to see from these bowls of wrath as we seek to understand them. And by the way, to get into the details, we won't have time for this morning.

[5 : 58] That's what our growth groups are for during the week. So if you're not part of a growth group, I encourage you to join so that you can dive into this passage even deeper and discuss it with other Christians. But for now, all I want us to see is two things from chapter 16.

The first thing that we see, the first major lesson as we read these descriptions, is that God's judgments on the earth today should result in repentance. They should cause people to wake up and see what's going on.

And that is the point of God's judgments on the earth. It's to warn people to change. You know, thinking back again to the Egypt plagues, I'm sure you know the Egypt plagues.

Even if you're not a Christian, you were probably through Sunday school as a kid. I hope you went to Sunday school. You probably heard about the plagues of Egypt. And we think when we read about those plagues that God sent, the darkness and the hail and the boils and the frogs and the locusts and stuff, we think God was being quite nasty.

He was being quite harsh. I mean, sure, he had reason for it. But we think of this kind of vengeful, angry God. But he did send those things.

[7 : 12] And he was angry with Egypt. But those were actually him being merciful. Those plagues, if you read about them, were him holding back his anger to warn the Egyptians to do something, to release his people.

And he gave Pharaoh ten chances to listen. And the same applies to the problems in our world. They are warning shots. You know, when an armed army or security guard or a policeman comes, and he's confronting someone who's not listening to him, sometimes he'll fire a warning shot into the air.

It's designed to miss, but it's designed to get the person to sober up and listen. Well, the problems that we read about here, that God is allowing on the earth, are warning shots to get us to sober up and listen to him.

Before, he sends much worse and justified wrath unto the world. And so, these judgments, the judgments in Egypt, the judgments we read about here, what we've got to realize is they are actually signs of God's patience with us.

The fact that he is still, to this day, holding back, bringing his complete and righteous and good judgment to do away with all evil and sin and to remove from his world everything and everybody who doesn't belong in it and who still insists on living life their own way.

[8 : 45] When he comes to do that which is good, it's going to be terrifying for those who still resist him. And so, over the years and the generations, he's given opportunity after opportunity and warning after warning.

He is so patient. He is so long-suffering with humans that he continues to give us these warnings. And that's what they are.

They're warning shots before final judgment. And what do those look like? What are the warning shots that God gives us into the world? Let's get practical. Well, look in your Bibles at chapter 16.

Let's look at the first four symbolic judgments that John describes in the vision that he has and see what they're talking about. So, from verse 2, the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth and severely painful sores broke out on all the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped its image.

Verse 3, the second poured his bowl into the sea. It turned to blood like that of a dead person and all life in the sea died. Verse 4, the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of the water and they became blood.

[9 : 57] Then skip over to verse 8. Read about the fourth. The fourth angel poured his bowl onto the sun. It was allowed to scorch people with fire and people were scorched by the intense heat.

So, they blasphemed the name of God who had the power over these plagues. So, I think these are symbolic, graphic descriptions of natural disasters.

These are all the things in the first four plagues are all naturally occurring things. They're either things with the environment, problems with the environment, or problems, sicknesses in our own body. I think that's what they represent.

And, if you think about it, natural disasters, earthquakes, floods, sicknesses, the coronavirus, things that just year after year go wrong in our world should make it, when the natural order is not working properly, when our bodies are not working properly, when nature is, we can see it's broken, it's malfunctioning, all of that should make it glaringly obvious that we have a problem with our Creator, right?

When the creation is broken, when the creation is malfunctioning, it should be obvious to people, there's something wrong here, right? There's something wrong between us and our Creator.

[11 : 19] And He's making it obvious. In creation, it's like creation is shouting out to humans, guys, can't you see this? Can't you see what's wrong? But instead, what happens?

Instead, instead of humans doing what they should do and go, okay, we get it, God. We need to fix this. What must we do? And come humbly before God.

What do they do instead? Look at verse 9. People were scorched by the intense heat, so they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues.

And so, in today's world, instead of humbly taking God's warnings to heart, people will either curse Him and blaspheme Him or just assume that He doesn't exist.

Don't you see that? You know, David Attenborough and Richard Dawkins, they look at the problems in the world and instead of going, we should really humble ourselves before our Creator, they go, our Creator doesn't exist.

[12 : 18] There must be no Creator if there's so much suffering in the world. Obviously, there's no Creator. So, they curse the name of God rather than take His warnings on board. But here's the thing.

God's judgments are not just here to warn us. That's one of the important things they do that we see. The problems in our world that we suffer are not just here to warn us that something is wrong. They also, we go on to see, show the weakness of our idols. Now, that's exactly what they did back in the Old Testament. They showed up the weakness of the idols of the pagan nations around Israel and Israel itself.

Now, you think, well, I don't worship idols. I don't have a little gold figure in my lounge that I bow down to. But what about money, security, entertainment, all the things that we look to to make our life better and to save us from the brokenness of the world?

Those are our idols today. And God's judgments, He sends mercifully but seriously to warn us just how powerless those idols are to make our life better. Just the weakness of idols.

[13 : 28] Look at verse 10. That's, I think, what the fifth bowl is representing. The fifth poured out His bowl on the throne of the beast. Remember, the beast is the one that the people of the earth worship.

They look to for salvation and happiness. and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. So, the beast itself, the throne of the beast was judged.

God was showing these people who worship the beast that the thing they worship is powerless, actually, to help them, to give them light. Same as in Egypt.

You know, the interesting thing about the Egyptian plagues is that if you study the plagues, the nature of the plagues themselves, the boils, the frogs, back in Egypt, right?

The darkening of the sun. Each plague, you may not have known this, was a deliberate attack at one of the Egyptian gods. So, the Egyptians worshipped dozens of gods.

[14:28] They had a god of the sun. They had a god of agriculture. God of fertility. All of these different gods. God of the river Nile. And each one of them, God used this plague not just to warn the Egyptians to listen to him, but to show the Egyptians how powerless their gods were as opposed to the real God.

And God does the same thing today. Think of COVID. Think of this virus, this pandemic that we've been going through for far too long. What is God doing through that?

Well, not only is he warning us that there's a problem between us and our creator, but he's showing us that our gods of money and security just have no power, right? I mean, a tiny microscopic virus and the stock markets of the world just plunge.

What we think is secure and safe and what we think is going to improve our lives, God just, with a tiny virus, just shows us how powerless those are.

God today is doing the same thing as he did in Egypt. Do you see that? He's using judgments, warning judgments to undermine our idols so that we listen to him and we stop relying on those things.

[15:43] You know, just you think of history in the beginning of the 20th century, just as the West was becoming modern, so modern in its thinking that it thought it didn't need God.

We don't need God anymore. Look at all our technology. Look how far we're advancing. And this international security they had at the beginning of the 20th century and what happened?

They were plunged into two of the worst world wars we've ever seen. God uses the problems of this world to show us just how powerless our gods are, our idols, our money.

And so God's judgments are merciful. They express his mercy to wake us up. They're warning shots but they won't last forever. And that's another thing we see in Revelation and we see in this cycle of judgments.

Each cycle, now we've had two before this, right? And each cycle I think are describing the same things but in increasingly intense descriptions.

[16:51] judgments. The first cycle affected a quarter of the population. The next cycle affected a third of the population, more people.

This last cycle is affecting everyone on earth. And so each cycle we read, we read about this progression and this intensity of God's judgments on the earth. And what we read here is that they will end.

These warning judgments will end. Look at verse 1 of chapter 15 actually. In this introduction to these warning judgments, then I saw another great and awe-inspiring sign in the heavens.

Seven angels with seven last plagues for with them God's wrath will be completed, will finish. You see, there's a point, there's a terminal point of God's warning judgments on the earth.

He won't continue to be long suffering like this forever. God will call time to this stage in history. And the only reason He hasn't yet and allowed it to continue like this is to give us a chance to repent and come back to Him and continue to give people a chance to repent and come back to Him.

[18:02] But the next thing we learn in this series of judgments is that people's ongoing unrepentance will eventually result in final judgment.

So just as God's judgment should result in repentance, for those where that doesn't happen, eventually this ongoing stubborn unrepentance and refusal to listen to God will eventually result in final judgment, in final doom.

So as these descriptions intensify, let's look in chapter 16 again. As the descriptions of God's judgment intensify, so equally people's opposition to God over time, people get more and more hard-hearted against God.

Look for example in verse 9, the fourth poured his bowl out into the sun and was allowed to scorch people with fire. Sorry, that's verse 8. Verse 9, and people were scorched, they blasphemed the name of God.

We've seen that. But it goes on, verse 11, the fifth poured out darkness and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores.

[19:11] And they did not repent of their works. And down verse 21, right at the end, you'd think they'd get it by now. Enormous hailstones fell from the sky and they still blaspheme God for the plague of hell.

There's this increased stubbornness, this hardness of heart. The Bible describes the searing of the conscience. It's quite an interesting illustration.

Searing, I don't know if you like steak, if you like cooking a steak, but what you do to make a good steak is that you'll burn the outside, you'll sear the outside so that the juices stay in, right, with some intense heat.

Well, the Bible talks about people searing their consciences, searing their own consciences. So, burning their consciences more and more so that repentance can't come out.

And that's what we see happening in these judgments. As God continues to send warning judgments on the earth, for those who don't respond to them and take them seriously, for those who continue to write them off as, well, God not existing, or just, you know, this is just natural disasters, they don't see God in it, they will continue to harden in their resistance to God.

[20 : 30] It's exactly what happened to Pharaoh in Egypt, isn't it? You remember Pharaoh's hard-heartedness? The more the judgments came on Egypt, the more he was stubbornly refusing to let the Israelites go to listen to what God had to say.

But not only as we read on, do we see people's hardness of heart increasing in this world as they face the problems of this world that God sends, but people start to actively oppose God and His people.

Look at verse 14. There are demonic spirits performing signs who travel to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for battle on the great day of God, the Almighty.

Verse 16, So they assembled the kings at the place called in Hebrew Armageddon. So here, John has this vision, sees this picture of the world mustering, assembling to fight against God.

God. Interesting thing, this is described three times, this is the first time it's described in Revelation, and what I discovered this week is every time these people assemble for battle against God, the battle never happens.

[21 : 46] They want to fight God, they never get the chance because He wipes them out before they even can. Each time, He brings His judgment. God just laughs them off when people try to oppose Him.

People don't even get the chance to oppose Him. And so it's not called the battle of Armageddon by the way, it's the mustering of Armageddon. There's no battle. And I don't think this is talking about a future event.

Again, people think Armageddon this is some future event, movies with Bruce Willis and stuff, this is, you know, it's all going to happen in the future, this great battle, but I think it's happening right now, I think it's been happening from the beginning.

In fact, that's what Psalm 2 tells us. Psalm 2 says these words, Why do the nations rage? This was written hundreds of years before Jesus even came, and yet it was happening.

Why do the nations rage? And the peoples plot in vain, the kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and His anointed one. Let's tear off their chains and throw their ropes off us, they say.

[22 : 50] It's been happening right from the beginning. Why did Rome violently persecute the peaceful Christians in the first century? Why, to this day, do Islamic nations pass death sentences on Christians who have done nothing to harm anyone?

Why do the woke liberals today get so vehement against the church and against traditional Christianity? Well, you know what? Revelation 16 tells us exactly why.

The reason is because in every age, demonic forces assemble people and leaders against God, whether that's Muhammad or Marx or Dawkins, that is what is happening in every age.

People and leaders and nations and cultures are being assembled to fight God. And it's because of that, and because we live in a world that is naturally opposed to God, those who don't repent and take God's warning signs on board and come to Him in repentance, will be more and more opposed against God.

Those are the two types of people you get in the world. There's no middle ground. You either take Him seriously and come under His rule, or you will be increasingly hard-hearted and stubbornly opposed to Him.

[24 : 07] And when the world around us, and boys and girls, when your friends at school, or your friends on the internet or whatever, outside of school, speak against Jesus, and speak against Christianity, and say it's silly to believe that, and when the world makes it illegal, in many countries it already is, to preach clearly what the Bible says, then we're going to be tempted to back down,

aren't we?

We're going to be tempted to shut up. We're going to be tempted to make a truce with this world, and say, okay, just don't be so mean to me, I won't be so obvious in what I believe, I'll keep it to myself.

And so that's why the very next thing we read in Revelation, as we're reading these cycles of judgments, as we're reading about the resistance that the world is going to give to God's people, there's a pause, and we hear the words of Jesus himself, and he says these words in verse 15, look, I'm coming like a thief, blessed is the one who is alert and remains clothed, so that he may not go around naked and people see his shame.

It's a warning from Jesus. Kids, imagine your parents went away and they left you in charge of the house, and you invited all your friends over, and there's this wild party that starts, and actually, it goes far beyond what you ever expected to happen, and people are swinging from the chandeliers and setting fire to the couch, and all kinds of things, it's totally out of your control, you obviously invited some seedy people over, they invited some dodgy people over, and it just goes wild, this party, but imagine you knew your parents are coming home at midnight, what are you going to do, are you going to party with those people?

No, you're going to go outside, you're going to wait for them to come, you're going to try phone them, you're going to disassociate yourself from what's happening there, right? You're going to distance yourself from it. Well, in the same way, Jesus is telling us that we need to realize that we must distance ourselves from the accepted norms of this world, the party that it's in, the values that are promoted in media and in society today, we need to realize, and I think that's why we have this chapter in our Bibles, we need to realize this society that is so tempting is under God's wrath.

[26 : 45] This society that's promoting all kinds of things that go against the Bible and go against following Jesus, and they say, no, it's fine, it's free love, it's all good.

Realize they are under the wrath of God, and God is warning us time and time again that this world is under His wrath. So don't be tempted to be absorbed into that society, when you watch those movies, when you listen to those songs that are promoting the stuff that society thinks is good, but actually we know it isn't.

Don't be absorbed into it, and don't align with it because, and I know, I've been to school, I've been a kid, and it's not just kids, it's adults as well. We don't want to seem weird, do we, to our school friends who aren't Christians, or our work colleagues.

We don't want to seem old fashioned. We definitely don't want to seem un-woke today, and so we'll be tempted to absorb and camouflage into the world. Jesus says, don't let that happen, don't do that, because He will come like a thief, He says.

And what does that mean? It means He will come without announcing Himself, without warning. You don't get a phone call on Saturday night at eight o'clock. Hello?

[28 : 04] Hi, I'm just planning to rob your house tonight at one in the morning, I just thought I'd give you a heads up. Oh, thanks very much, I'll make sure the doors are open for you. But we don't get a warning by a thief, right?

Have you ever heard of a thief phoning ahead? No, Jesus isn't going to phone ahead. He will come like a thief. And those who are standing apart from this world when He comes are going to be the only ones ready for Him.

And then as we conclude and we see how these bowls of wrath conclude, when He comes, His judgment will be total, inescapable and unstoppable.

No amount of people assembling against God to fight Him will succeed when Jesus comes back. You know, people today look at Jesus, the world looks at Jesus and they laugh, they chuckle, they use His name as a swear word.

What other religion do people use the name of the religious leader as a swear word? You don't hear people going, oh Muhammad. No, because Jesus is the one that we've been reading, Satan and the forces of the world are turning people against.

[29 : 15] Why do people subconsciously want to blaspheme Jesus' name and no one else's? Well, they don't even realize it's subconscious, but it's demonic. It's because the evil forces of this world are doing their utmost to turn people against Jesus.

But when He comes, those people, they're going to be very regretful for how they misused His name. Do you see how many people blaspheme Jesus in these judgments?

They keep on blaspheming, they keep on making a joke of Jesus. But it will be no joke when He comes. His judgment will not be escapable. It will not be preventable.

And it's then that the time of warning will be over. look at verse 17. Then the seventh, this is the final judgment being described in these symbolic ways.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple and from the throne saying, it is done. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder and a severe earthquake occurred like no other since people have been on the earth.

[30 : 22] So great was the quake. The great city split into three parts and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered in God's presence. He gave her the cup filled with the wine of his fierce anger.

Every island fled and the mountains disappeared. Enormous hailstones each weighing like a hundred pounds fell from the sky on people and they blasphemed. They still blaspheme in God for the plague of hell because the plague was so extremely severe.

Do you notice that even when God's final judgment settles on the earth, when He calls time, even then, the unrepentant will still be unrepentant and they will go on refusing Him and they will go on making God's final judgments totally just in light of their continued hard-heartedness and stubbornness, at which point they will be beyond saving.

And this is very scary and I say it with a heavy heart that one day when God's wrath comes finally to this earth upon the people who continue to ignore Him and refuse Him in the world that He's made, it will no longer be correctional.

It will no longer be judgments of warning like it is now, but it will be terminal. And so this vision of the seven bowls challenges us to see the world out there and the problems of this world in the right perspective.

[31 : 47] it challenges us to learn to see what's going on in this world and the problems that we suffer, whether it's fire going out of control on the mountain or whether it's load shedding and a lack of resources or in our case, corruption causing problems, whether it's the coronavirus, whatever it is, we need to see these things as not disconnected from what God is doing.

But all as signs of His coming wrath, as warnings that things are wrong, that there are serious problems between us and our Creator. And this challenges us, calls us all not to ignore that, but if you haven't yet, to find the reconciliation that Jesus came to earth to bring between you and God. That's why He died. That's why He went to the cross. Willingly, deliberately, so that He could die for your sins, that He could reconcile you to God.

Don't ignore that. When you see how God is giving warning sign after warning sign, and His judgments have a time at which they will come to a final conclusion, you've got to grab hold of Jesus before it's too late.

Stop ignoring God. Stop living as if you're in charge. Stop worshipping the idols that can never save you. And obey Jesus, follow Him, trust in Him, and live a holy life set apart for God, so that you can be ready when He comes.

[33 : 26] I want to close by reading 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. You can turn there if you want in your Bibles, or you can just listen. 1 Thessalonians 5.

This is Paul writing about these very things, and about the end, about God's final judgment coming on the earth. Not in symbolic language so much, but he's talking quite clearly, and about how to be ready for it.

He says these words, And about the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you, for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

When they say, peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark for this day to surprise you like a thief.

For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then, let us not sleep like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled.

[34 : 40] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love and a helmet of the hope of salvation.

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, as you are already doing. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your warnings upon this earth throughout history to wake us up and to bring us to the realization that your judgment on this world and on sin is on its way.

And help us, we thank you for helping us to see that the idols that we put our faith in are so powerless to save us. Lord, I pray for those who are still clinging to idols of whatever it is other than you to save and to make them who they should be, who you've made us to be.

Lord, we know that only through Jesus and through the forgiveness of our sins and through the Holy Spirit can we become the people who you've made us to be. And we pray, Lord, that you would help us to be ready for his return and to be living in a way that marks us out as citizens of the kingdom.

[36 : 19] Help us, Lord, not to shy away and be intimidated by a world which is against Jesus by and large. Help us to continue, Lord, to wear self-discipline and love and holiness as our clothes so that we will be ready when Jesus returns.

And help us, Lord, to warn others and snatch others from the fire. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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

Amen. Amen.