

Rev 26-04-12b

In Revelation chapter 16, we see the pouring out of the bowls of God's wrath. This is the last thing to happen in the progress of what you might call normal human history. In all of the preceding generations, decades, centuries, eons of time, starting with Adam and Eve as they leave the garden and all the way to this culminating point, God has been patient, God has been gracious.

There have been brief expressions of judgment, the flood being signal among them, but the totality of that judgment was 14 months. It was necessary and ended up being a blessing because the malignancy that had spread across the face of the earth was removed. And there was a fresh start for humanity with Noah and his family and never again would things rise to that level with angelic interference and so on.

And it was a mercy. It was like a major surgery that results in longevity and good health. But most of the judgments of God are brief and there is opportunity during the judgment, there is hope after the judgment.

In this final phase, having established this long historical record of dealing with mankind in blessing and in judgment, revealing himself in nature, revealing himself in the sky, revealing himself throughout creation, now God is revealing the side that has been largely held in reserve. God has placed his own people in captivity, has both delivered them from captivity and placed them into captivity, always looking at their response. What is their attitude? Delivered them from Egypt, but they took things for granted and that generation didn't enter the land.

The generation that did enter the land, enjoyed victory, possession, began to be fruitful and fill the land, but by incomplete obedience, not God's will done on earth as it is in heaven, not fully eradicating the idolaters and their idolatry, they were slowly corrupted once again. And you have this back and forth throughout the Old Testament. We observe that there is the revelation of God's character, both in the positive and in the judgment side.

We are looking at the judgment side and as harsh, as totalitarian, as painful, it almost causes us to cringe looking at the severity and the universality of these judgments. It is important to remember, like wiping out the Canaanites, they had a chance. They were warned.

Remember again that there is an angel in chapter 14, verse six, there is an angel flying in the midst of heaven. This is where the angel realm is. This is where the trumpets blow and so on, flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, every tribe, every tongue, every people, saying with a loud voice.

Can't ignore a loud voice. It's unmistakable. It's clear.

It is through the heavens. It is traversing the face of the earth. Fear God and give glory to him for

the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.

It doesn't mention Jesus Christ. It doesn't mention the blood of the cross here because again, as we said last time, what is the basis for salvation in the Old Testament? It isn't what they taught me in seminary, which is personal faith in Jesus Christ prior to Jesus Christ ever appearing, being named or having done his work. It is Hebrews 11, six.

If you come to God, you believe that he exists, that he is. And when you say he is, he is the God of the Bible. He is the God of grace and mercy.

He is also the God of justice and judgment. He is the God revealed in creation. He is the God revealed in scripture.

He is the revealed by the Holy Spirit who convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, sin and righteousness. These are your choices. Which one do you choose? Which one do you want? Which one do you practice? Is the one you would like to escape from? I don't like a well-regulated world.

I want to be a rebel without a cause and go do my own thing. I don't like rules. I want to color outside the lines.

I don't even want to color. I'm going to rip up the coloring book and rip branches off of trees. There are people who don't want God, the things of God, the character of God, or the grace of God.

They spitefully resist and rebel. They have a satanic attitude. They have a demonic cast of mind.

And there is nothing you can do. Human history is a demonstration. I suspect that the angels who have been previously condemned, Satan and the third of heaven that followed him in rebellion against God, said, why can't we just do our own thing apart from you? Why do you have to destroy us? Why don't you just give us some space and let us do our own thing? History is a demonstration of why.

You corrupt everything around you and you ultimately destroy yourself and everything else. But for the unfallen angels, for believers of every age that are going to go into the eternal future, we don't have to wonder. I wonder what it would be like to separate myself from God.

I wonder what it would be like to walk out of the Garden of Eden and try my hand at farming. I wonder what it would be like to express my anger by killing the object of my wrath. You bother me.

You annoy me. So Cain slays his brother Abel. We don't have to wonder.

This has been a revelation and a demonstration of that. And part of that revelation is in the revelation. And it is this extremely harsh judgment.

It is coming. It is certain. Some of the particulars, we're not real clear on where does metaphor leave off and reality set in.

Does the actual ocean water turn to something that resembles the blood of a dead man? Or is this a metaphor for what comes out of the sea is either dead or kills those who partake of it or come in contact with it. And dead man's blood is a graphic picture of death itself. I don't have to know.

What I do have to know is, how should I then live? This is my Heavenly Father. I am on the side that is going to execute these judgments. And I need to understand them and not shrink back to perdition because I don't understand what God is doing or why He is doing it.

We have to have understanding. With that understanding, we can then look at ourselves. And in the much more moderate, loving exercise of discipline that God manifests toward us, I understand that whatever He does, if He chastens me and if I feel the touch of the scourge, this is God doing something for benefit.

It is for good. No chastening seems good when it's happening. But it afterward yields, as Scripture tells us, the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Jesus talked about this in John chapter 15, I'm the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me, you will bear much fruit. If you're in this growth and production mode, my Father will prune you.

If plants could actually have feelings, have you ever done this? You go out there with a pole saw or a chainsaw or one of the chainsaws on a stick they have now, which I love, and you start sawing away branches and the branch is saying, hey, look at me. I'm green. I'm putting out leaves.

Why are you pruning me away? What did I ever do to you? Thankfully, trees don't have a consciousness and branches aren't talking to you while you're sawing them off and stacking them to be burned. But these things that are products of the tree in some cases need to be separated from the tree and removed so that the tree itself becomes more healthy and that which remains is strengthened. Remember that? Lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees.

Strengthen what remains. Sometimes God will prune things out of our life and we think there wasn't anything wrong with that. There was no sin.

I enjoyed it. There is a purpose in God's minor judgments just as we see the purpose in his major judgments. And this goes back to faith.

I don't understand why this person or this relationship or this opportunity or this whatever it may be that was a seemingly enjoyable and productive part of my life has suddenly been removed. It's no longer viable. It's not a prudent or productive option.

And my efforts, the stewardship of my time and energy is redirected into that which remains. There doesn't have to be something wrong with an element of our life for God to remove it. And we have to trust that he knows what he's doing when I don't understand why he did that.

What I do understand from Revelation and from the other examples in Scripture is God is channeling his grace, his divine power, and my stewardship of what he has granted to me into what remains. Don't cry the blues about what's left. Focus on maximizing the implementation and the exploitation of what God has given us in the areas that remain.

I can't do that anymore, but look at what I can do. Let me take the time and energy and resources that used to go there and redirect those so that I can do these remaining things even better. This is a principle of application from the book of Revelation.

God is cleansing the earth of the things that are slowing it down and holding it back from being a productive place for believers to live and exploit his grace. Practice the principles of his word and his will. Learn more about the Lord Jesus Christ, who is going to come back and be visible not for three and a half years of public ministry, but for a thousand years.

What an opportunity! But there are some things that have to go. There are people who have to go. There are situations and conditions that have to be removed.

Not all of them are evil. The evil people have got to go that are unrepentant. But what's the matter with the Why does everything in the sea have to die? Why is a third of that which grows on the earth burned up, and eventually everything is scorched by the sun and burned up? I'll give you three letters.

G-M-O. Genetically modified organisms. God is not going to start the millennial kingdom for his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, with a bunch of humanly modified and corrupted DNA.

This is a judgment on the works of man. Do you know how far this GMO stuff has spread? You cannot find a crop. Even people that have, what do they call it? Not archive, but old seeds that they've preserved.

Ancient grains, but there's a name for it. It's like archival. You'll figure it out or you can look it up.

Anyway, even when people try to plant those and try to grow the old wheat, the old barley, the old oats, you can't stop pollen and pollinating insects. There have been lawsuits by people who have engineered a better kind of grain. Their stuff escaped their fields and went over to Farmer Joe.

Farmer Joe has now got some of that modified stuff in his field, and the corporation is suing them,

winning, and taking Farmer Joe's land because Farmer Joe is not allowed to grow this patented kind of crop. It is corrupt. It is evil.

It is insane. It's man deciding that man can solve man's problems by man's ingenuity. Why do you think the entire earth, to include the sea, the dry land, all of the grass crops, stuff that is in the water, all of the chemicals that go through somebody's body and is flushed into the toilet, much of the druggage that people take, whether for actual legitimate purposes or recreationally or when they really don't need to, I want to alter my mood.

There's nothing wrong with my mood. I just want to be happy. A lot of that travels straight through the body, goes into the water supply, gets into the crops, gets into the plants, gets into the animals.

The stuff that they use to try to prevent disease in animals, the vaccinations, the hormones, the vitamins, the antibacterial stuff they put in there stays in the organism. So why am I covering all of this? These judgments, especially when you get to the bowls, these are the harshest judgments that have ever hit the planet. Even the flood could not do what these judgments are going to do.

You can wash something with water. You haven't necessarily cleansed it. If God sent another flood, you're still going to have plastic beads at the bottom of the ocean.

You're going to have sea life that has survived. You're going to have plant life. The seeds can float around for however long, come back, land on the dry land.

Remember the dove comes back with an olive leaf. So stuff survives a flood. Nothing is going to survive these judgments.

We'll see eventually that after Armageddon and the inception of the Millennial Kingdom, it's going to take seven months just to bury the dead. And these are the sterilized, what do they call that thing where they sterilize surgical instruments? They bake them? Yeah, the autoclave. God is basically going to autoclave the earth.

They will find remains, but they're sterilized. There's nothing that none of the broken, corrupted DNA is going to survive. This is my take.

I think this is why some of these judgments are so harsh. They are earned and they are deserved, but creation has to be judged because man has corrupted it. He's corrupted his way.

He's corrupted his environment. And God has to autoclave the planet to begin the Millennial Kingdom. And an environment where as these animals and things come back, you will have snakes, but they don't have venom and don't harm children.

You're going to have carnivores, but they don't threaten humans. It is truly the peaceable kingdom. This is an altered, much improved, not perfect, but vastly improved.

It's like rebooting your computer. On some of these devices, like on an iPad or whatever, there's a thing that says, I want to go back to square one, reload everything, wipe out everything I've done. I've got all kinds of stuff on here I don't want.

Reset this thing to the way it was when I got it out of the box. That's what God's going to do. Partially through these judgments and partially through the alterations he makes just prior to the inception of the kingdom.

We'll get there, but you remember, there's geological activity. There are faults that split. There are new rivers that form.

There is alteration in the landscape that is going to reestablish the beneficial divine design. These judgments are a part of that. They are multi-purpose.

What is the application of all of this? One thing, it gives us a wonderful period of human history to look forward to. Won't it be great to not turn on whatever form of news there is and hear about the evil, the duplicity, the corruption, the fraud, waste and abuse, the selfish, insensitive man's humanity to man that is perpetrated every single day, wiped clean, sterilized away. And when it does begin to manifest, it's like I worked on a boat.

I need to do it again. But I worked on a boat and it had sat out, covered in mildew, just deteriorated in many ways. You go out there and you scrub that thing clean, polish it to a high shine, replace the decals, and then put protectant on it.

And it's like new again. That which is old is new. We do this with all kinds of things.

You take antiques, you take things that have sat and put anything in the loft of the barn here. And when you get it back, you're going to have to do some work on it. But you can restore it.

It's not perfect, but it's way better than it was. If it's got a little bit of rust, that rust is not spreading. If it's got a little bit of damage, that damage is not leading to flaking paint and damaged materials.

That's what the Millennial Kingdom is going to be. When we get to the new heavens and new earth a thousand years later, that's going to be a complete recreation. But this is a very fine restoration.

A part of that restoration, and if you've ever watched restoring shows, they have the repair shop that they do over in the UK, wonderful program. People bring in this stuff that is just decrepit and you think there's no way they can fix that. They restore it.

It's not always like it's new off the shelf because people say, this artifact from my father or my mother has lived a life and some of this is where that my loved one put on it and I don't want that removed. But they will restore it to full function and it's beautiful and it's admirable, but it's still got some signs that it's lived. And then there's a whole range of degrees of that.

God is going to restore creation. It won't be perfection, but very close. And what happens to it across a thousand years is what the continued presence of fallen man is going to do despite perfect government.

And it is a reminder that you cannot let evil continue to exist. And at the end of that, the great white throne, that'll all be taken away. Then we have the new heavens and the new earth.

So the application here is sometimes God has to purge us pretty harshly and remove some things that are slowing us down, not evil or sinful in and of themselves, but with God's complete knowledge, he knows that we are going to be more useful, better stewards, better able to exploit what he's given us and accomplish his purposes for us without some of the baggage. This is writ large in our portion of Revelation here. The second thing I want to point out, and I am sure that this is the only time you'll ever hear this.

It's not going to be in any commentary, nobody that's ever written a book on Revelation anywhere else. And so you can take it for what it's worth. This is me.

This is my opinion. This is what I think. I want you to notice that when the trumpets begin to sound, when the bowls begin to be poured out, the angels don't have to go and get a trumpet.

They are given these trumpets and they possess them. John sees them and they have these trumpets. Possessing those trumpets, they are then given instruction on when to blow them.

With the bowls, remember, one of the four living creatures takes these bowls of the wrath of God and hands them to the bowl angels. And they hold those bowls until they are instructed to pour them out. In particular, and I think the most impressive example of this, is the material in chapter 14.

You remember the menorah structure is so clear there. You have the first three angels, one of which proclaims, the first of which proclaims the gospel that we just saw. Then in verse 8 of chapter 14, another angel.

The first one proclaims salvation and opportunity. The second one proclaims judgment and Babylon is as good as fallen. It hasn't fallen yet, but again, in God's perspective, when he issues the command, he's the hero walking away, not looking over his shoulder.

Babylon, there's no coming back from that. There's nothing they can do. Nothing they can say.

The glory has filled the temple. There's no appeal. There's no coming back from it.

Nothing's going to happen until all the bowls are poured out by way of remediation or appeal. Babylon is fallen. It's as good as done.

Then the Lord is pictured here and you have the one like a son of man in verse 14. He is the

fourth figure on his head, a golden crown, and in his hand, a sharp sickle. Now notice, here's the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have no other information except John looks and here is the son of man seated on a cloud and he is sitting there and what does he got in his hand? It's not the seven-sealed scroll. It's not a shepherd's staff. It's not a sword.

It's not a spear. It's not David's sling with five smooth stones. It's a sickle.

With no prior preparation, the Lord Jesus already has what he needs when another angel in verse 15 comes out of the temple crying with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, thrust in your sickle and reap for the time has come for you to reap. Harvest of the earth is ripe. You look at these angels.

They are equipped by God with their trumpets. They are handed from God these bulls and the Lord Jesus Christ himself already has a sickle and God sends an angel to him. He could have sat there for an indefinite period of time with his sickle.

The provision is made. The preparation is accomplished. It reminds me of military commands.

Anybody that marches troops knows that there is a command of preparation and there is a command of execution. Eyes. That's a command of preparation.

Right. Snap your head to the right. Ready.

Command of preparation. Front. Snap your head back forward.

Right column march. Left column march. Mark time.

March. All of these prepare the troops. They know what's going to happen.

You can say eyes and you can wait 15 seconds before you say right, but you're prepared. Here's the point of application. When we are called upon to do something in the service of God in our spiritual life, we have to make decisions.

We have to provide support. We have to do what it is that defines the will of God in our life. At this particular time, God essentially comes to us speaking in general terms, and we know that it is time to do a thing, to stop doing a thing, to redirect our energy, whatever it may be.

When it's time for the Lord Jesus to reap, he already possesses the sickle. When it's time for an angel to sound, he's already got a horn. When it's time for judgment to be poured out, the angel already has the bull.

When God calls upon you and me to do a thing, we already have what we need. We're not given a command to do something, and we don't have the wherewithal to do it. Moses tried to make this

argument at his first visit to the burning bush.

Sinai, go and speak. But I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. God says, who do you think made your mouth? I wouldn't be telling you to go and speak to Pharaoh and to the people if you didn't have a mouth that could do it.

There are so many examples. You think of David to be the first real king of a united Israel. His preparation, 1 Samuel 16, he is a shepherd.

He is keeping sheep. He tells Saul in 1 Samuel 17, 34-37, I have learned how to defend the sheep from enemies. I've defended them against a lion and against a bear.

And this Philistine that is out here blaspheming the God of our fathers, the God of Israel, is not going to stand before me. I've already got the preparation. I've faced the lion.

I've faced the bear. So then when you get to 2 Samuel 5, verse 2, God tells David, you shall shepherd my people Israel. You've already got the skills.

I'm not calling you to be a king, and you don't know how to do it. And if you want to see David talking about this, go to Psalm 78, verses 70-72, where he makes that same connection, shepherding the sheep, shepherding Israel. You think of Moses a bit earlier.

In Exodus 3, he goes to Midian, and he is shepherding Jethro's flock. He learns about supply lines. He learns about provisions.

He learns about organization and guidance, and he learns the landscape. Much of the coverage that he is going to experience in moving these flocks around, this is going to be where Israel ends up dwelling during the 40 years before they enter the land. Psalm 77, verse 20, makes this explicit, talking to God.

You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses, who is an experienced shepherd. When God needs a great leader for Israel, he gets a shepherd. Moses, shepherd.

David, shepherd. The Lord Jesus, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

So enduring solitude, hardship, finding a way to subsist in the wilderness for yourself and those for whom you are responsible. You look at Joseph, preparation to be the administrator of all Egypt. He wasn't just shot up to be second only to Pharaoh in a rapid fashion.

You look at Genesis 39. He is overseeing Potiphar's house. He learns about all kinds of business connections.

Where do you get things done? How do you get things done? Where are the resources? How are they managed? What is the price of things? Who do you know to move things around? Who can

you trust to store and so on? He learns all that, administrating Potiphar's house. Later on in that same chapter, he is administrating the prison, the underside of life in Egypt. So then in Genesis 41, in verses 40 through 44, now he is over all Egypt.

God gives him the experience. He says, I don't want to be a slave. I don't want to be subject to that life.

Without those skills, he could not have fulfilled God's purpose for him later on. This is where our faith really kicks in. We are in times of hardship, difficulty.

We think there can't be any possible purpose for this. You could imagine Joseph in his situation, going from bad in Potiphar's house to worse in prison, unjustly so, undeserved imprisonment for years. But look at what he learns.

And he exploits that knowledge in the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose. Peter and the disciples, Peter, Andrew, James, and John certainly were fishermen. Matthew chapter 4, 18 through 22, you find out about their life as fishermen.

It's alluded to in many other places, including after the Lord's resurrection. But Jesus tells him in Matthew 4:19, I will make you fishers of men. Not just can you catch fish, can you net fish, but all of their dealings with the public, learning negotiation, learning to read people and know what is persuasive for them, know how to communicate with them, know how to interact with those around you in a productive way.

They learn that. And it's a framework for their apostolic mission. Elisha learned how to be a prophet in the shadow of Elijah.

You go back to 1 Kings chapter 19, 2 Kings chapter 3, Elisha poured water on the hands of Elijah. He was in a subservient role, 2 Kings 3:11. But then in 2 Kings 2, 9 through 15, he gets the mantle and he essentially replaces Elijah, but he learned that by following Elijah. Joshua, he's the military aid to Moses.

He ends up being the conqueror of Canaan. You see this throughout Exodus and he's the faithful spy when you get to Numbers 13 and 14, along with Caleb. Then you see the first chapter of Joshua, he exploits all of that experience.

Daniel, an exile trainee who eventually becomes an imperial advisor. He doesn't cry the blues about being taken away with his friends. He exploits the training and rises to the top in that situation.

The apostle Paul, his training as a Pharisee, his life as a tent maker serves him well when he becomes an apostle. He's got this vast Old Testament knowledge and he can support himself in the doing it. God gives us what we need and we draw upon it in the fulfillment of his plan and

purpose for us.

So if we find ourselves faced with a challenge, we don't need to look around for new resources. Look for what God has already built in. Sometimes when you're facing options, you say, well, I could do this or I could do that.

The key is what has God resourced me to do? What have I already mastered? What do I already know how to do? This is going to require a whole new kind of provision and training and experience. I'm already good right here. Let me see if this isn't the way the Lord wants me to go.

Wonderful, fruitful observation from the book of Revelation in the midst of judgment. Where does the son of man get the sickle? Where do the angels get the bowls? Where do they get the trumpets? Why are they assigned in the rivers? How do they know how to manipulate the rivers and the winds? They have experience, been there a long time. And when God calls upon them, they know exactly what to do and how to do it.

And they have the wherewithal to accomplish it. If you look back, you can see this as well in the seven churches, a separate study unto itself. Well, fruitful things to chew on for our own personal application.

And the bearing of fruit, understanding that God will prune us so that what remains can be put to even better use. That which he has given to us can be put to its best use. It's a fruitful line of inquiry as we analyze our own particular situation and opportunities.

We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the revelation in your word that is so manifold, so multifaceted, and so helpful for our own application. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us see clearly what these passages and these principles mean in our lives so that we can exploit to the maximum the potentials that you have given to each one of us, both individually and collectively as a group.

May we reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus now, in the days to come, and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.