



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text Revelation 16:1-21

Revelation

“Bowls of Wrath”

TRANSCRIPT

Our text this morning is Revelation 16. We’re going to look at verses 1 through 21. Last week we had a rather short chapter. Chapter 15 is 8 verses. We have 21 verses this morning, which cover the last series of judgments. There are three series of judgments in the book of Revelation. Chapter 6 begins the seal judgments. The first seal is broken in verse 1 of chapter 6, and that’s followed by the trumpet judgments.

And now we come to the bowl judgments, the most severe of the three.

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.

Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.

And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;

for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."

And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.

Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.

And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;

for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. ('Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.')

And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, 'It is done.'

And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this day, this Lord's Day in which we can come together as your people and worship together, and study together. And we thank you for this chapter in the book of Revelation, which is perhaps startling and puzzling at the same time, and yet it's a text that certainly sets forth your justice.

And I pray, Father, that we would come to understand the significance of it, and understand the lesson that you'd have us to learn from this text. Not only to understand your justice, but understand your grace, which is highlighted by this chapter. Help us to appreciate salvation that we who have believed in Christ have received by your free grace, and to give you the praise for it.

So Father, teach us. Teach us what this text is about. Give us the proper application. Help us to rejoice in the things that we will study and give praise to you. Build us up spiritually. We also pray for our material, physical needs; they're great. We're dependent upon you every moment of our life for everything we have. Help us to understand that, and to seek it from you.

Father, we do pray you'd bless us in the material things of life. We pray for the basics of life, and yet we know that when we pray that, we pray to a God who does exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask for. You give us far more than we ask for, and you give it to us in ways that we're not even aware of it. You bless us in ways that we don't realize you're blessing us.

And we give you the praise for that, because everything that happens works together for our good. Thank you for that assurance, Lord; help us to rest in it. But we pray for those that are in particular need. We pray for the sick. We pray for those who are facing perhaps surgery, or going through medical procedures. We pray that you bless them with health.

We pray for those that are facing difficulties of another kind – stress and challenges to their life spiritually and emotionally. We pray that you'd encourage them, comfort them. May they see your hand of blessing. But sustain them, keep

them from stumbling; do that for all of us, Father. We look to you to bless us and keep us from stumbling.

And we know that someday, by your grace, you will present all of us before you, whole and complete. We look forward to that day. Prepare our hearts for a time of study together. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] Samuel Johnson once told his friend Boswell, “Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is about to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” You would certainly think so. I suppose thinking like that is the reason when public executions were practiced in London, Psalm 51 was inscribed at the foot of the gallows. “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Along with that was the prayer of the Psalm: “Hide they face from my sins.” The hope, I’m sure, was that the mind of a man facing death would be concentrated wonderfully not only on the death, that hangman’s noose, but eternity that’s to follow. And hopefully, the thought was, be receptive to God’s mercy. Well, you would certainly think so, but it is not so.

When we read Revelation 16, and read the terrible judgments that are poured out on the earth, the response of men is not to repent, but to blaspheme. The chapter exposes the hardness of the human heart; even when faced with death, men prefer rebellion to submission. Man prefers death to the life that God gives. Now, the main purpose of the passage is not to expose man’s willfulness.

It’s about God’s justice, and his concluding judgments on the world. His judgment is just. It fits the crime. We see that indicated all through the chapter. It was the theme of chapter 15, which states that God is righteous and holy. His judgment is just. And because he is holy, his judgment is necessary. He must judge sin. The judgment is not God’s favorite work; mercy is.

All through the Bible, we read statements like that found in Ezekiel 33:11: “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways. Why then will you die?” Now, there’s great mercy communicated in that statement, and also logic in it as well – why die when you can live? And yet men are willful, hard of heart. They will suffer, even gnaw their tongues and blaspheme God, rather than repent.

So how is it that men do repent? Well, we have an auditorium here full of people that have repented and believed. How did that happen? How has it come to be? Well,

only by the sovereign grace of God. That must be obvious from Revelation 16 and the seven bowls of wrath that are poured out. Chapter 16 actually picks up where chapter 11 left off. In the middle of chapter 11 in verse 15, the seventh trumpet sounds.

But instead of judgment, there’s a shout of victory. Then chapters 12 through 14 are an interlude, or an intermission in the book, explaining the tyranny of the unholy trinity, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, and their persecution of the saints. Those chapters give us the background for these bowl judgments and the reason for them. Man is in rebellion against God, and he’s unrepentant.

And persistently unrepentant in the face of many opportunities to see his sin, recognize his guilt, and turn to the Lord, but he doesn’t. And so after protracted patience by God, judgment must come. This is the third and final series of judgments. The first were the seal judgments, as I mentioned during the reading of the text. Seven were broken. The contents of the seventh seal were the second series, the seven trumpet judgments.

The seventh trumpet has been sounded, and the contents of the seventh trumpet are the seven bowl judgments. Like the trumpet judgments, they resemble the plagues of Egypt. We’ll mention that as we go through the chapter. But these judgments are more intense than the judgments on Egypt, and more intense than the trumpet or the seal judgments. These judgments become increasingly intense and severe as things draw to the close.

Well, chapter 15 introduced them. John saw a vision of seven angels coming out of the temple, standing over the earth with bowls full of God’s wrath. Chapter 16 begins with the command for the angels to pour them out. John hears the command in a loud voice from the temple. Evidently that’s the voice of God that he hears. Everyone has been excluded from the temple. God’s the one who’s in the temple. No one was able to enter, we were told.

That’s how chapter 15 ended. Judgment is now inevitable. No one can enter the temple. No prayers can come to stay God’s hand. The judgment cannot be turned back. So the command is given, and in verse 2 we read that the first angel pours out his bowl on the followers of the beast, and they are afflicted with loathsome and malignant sores. Now, they don’t strike men in general.

This isn’t a plague that strikes all arbitrarily or generally, but only those who worship the beast. Those who are loyal to the Lamb, the saints who are alive at that time, will be protected from this. This tells us something. It tells us that the end time will be a

time that is very religious. Religion will not be optional. Everyone will have to declare his or her loyalties. We live in a time very different from that.

Today atheists are speaking out, men like Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins. They’re attacking religion. Mainly they’re attacking Christianity as harmful to society; that’s their argument against God, Christians and other religions, but as I see it, mainly Christianity is harmful to society. And they argue that it is a threat to progress, that it’s a threat to our very survival, and that faith is simply stupid.

They want to get rid of it. They are evangelistic in their fervor. They won’t succeed in getting rid of religion, first of all, because man is naturally religious. He or she is religious by virtue of being made in the image of God. The reformers spoke of that as “the seed of religion.” There is a seed of religion within the hearts of every one of us. Because we’re created in God’s image it’s natural for us to be religious.

So the atheist is really an anomaly; unnatural. The Bible says that the fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” It’s against nature, the way we are made, to not believe in God in some sense, or be religious in some sense. But also they won’t succeed because of what we see here with a glimpse into the future. And what we see here is religion will become universal. It won’t be any better than atheism. Like atheism, it’s an attack on truth and God.

It’s more rebellion and it will be man’s undoing, but the antichrist’s religion will flourish in that time. And not only will it flourish, it will reap angry sores. They want the mark of the beast, so God will answer the beast’s mark with these marks of his wrath. That’s the first bowl that’s poured out. And then the second angel in verse 3 pours out his bowl on the sea. It became blood, like that of a dead man, meaning that it coagulated and began rotting.

The result was all marine life died. The third angel in verse 4 pours out his bowl on the rivers and streams. They became blood. The second and third bowl judgments are similar to the second and third trumpet judgments back in chapter 8, but more intensive. They turn the earth into a ghastly scene. It’s hard to imagine what it would be like to live in a world like this. It is, as I say, a ghastly scene.

But then we read in verse 5 that John hears an angel give praise to God. In light of all of this, he says, “Righteous are you who are and who were, O holy one, because you judged these things; for they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets, and you have

given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” In other words, the angel praises God for making the judgment fit the crime – blood for blood.

He is righteous. This is the theme we saw last week in chapter 15, and God is righteous. As severe as this is – and it’s severe – but as severe as it is, it’s not excessive. You may read this and say, “Well, it sounds excessive to me. This is almost over the top, turning the seas and the rivers into blood.” But if that seems excessive to you, then you don’t understand the gravity of sin and the weight of guilt. It deserves this.

Sin and rebellion is that bad. It’s what sin deserves, and in a moral universe, a holy God must oppose sin. And so the angel gives praise to God for it; says, “Righteous are you.” And then in verse 7, the altar speaks, and it agrees with the angel and says, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments.” It’s unusual for an altar to speak. That’s an understatement. In fact, it’s unnatural for an altar to speak.

But then remember this is a book of symbols, and earlier in chapter 8, the altar was associated with the prayers of the saints. They go up from the altar. The smoke is a symbol of their prayers going up to God, and I think that’s the idea here. The altar’s agreement with God’s judgments show that the plagues are in harmony with the prayers of the saints, and they are, in fact, an answer to them.

This is not ruthless vengeance, but perfect, holy justice, that has only come after much patience by God, and after men of the world have rebelled consistently, persistently, and even slaughtered the Lord’s people. So the angels on the altar say what Abraham said; the judge of all the earth shall always do right, and that’s where we must always begin in our thinking. I stated that last week. I repeat it.

It’s very important that we begin with certain concepts, certain understanding, and one of those is that God is right. God is righteous. What he does is always right. It’s not for us to put God in the dock. It’s not for us to put God on trial so we can judge him by our own standard. We are always under him. He is the standard.

And so we must begin looking at this text and all that happens, and all that happens in life, under that presupposition, that God is righteous and true, and what he does it right. So they sing praise to him for this judgment. In verse 8, the fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun. When the fourth trumpet is blown back in chapter 8, the sun was darkened. Here, it is intensified, so that it scorches men.

They’re given fierce sunstroke, but they don’t repent. Instead, John writes in verse 9, they blaspheme the name of God. They know God is responsible for these plagues and

their pain. They’re not naturalists. They don’t say, “Well, this is just the way the world works. We’re in a bad phase. This is global warming, really intensified.” They’re not thinking like that.

They know that there’s a God. They’re theistic in their thinking, and they blame the plagues and their pain on him. So they know he’s sovereign over these matters, and they know they can’t stop them. They’re helpless. Someone said the only way to flee from God is to flee to God, but these people won’t do that. In spite of their pain, they won’t recognize their guilt and repent.

Instead, they blame God, which illustrates the numbing or blinding influence that sin has on the heart. The fifth bowl is poured out in verse 10, and the angel pours it out on the throne of the beast. The result is the beast’s kingdom became darkened, and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. Well, this is similar to the ninth plague on Egypt in Exodus chapter 10, when the darkness covered the land.

If you go back and read that passage, that chapter, you see that there’s something very unusual about the darkness that God placed upon Egypt. It’s described as being thick. So thick was the darkness that the text says it could be felt; that’s an unusual darkness. The Israelites in Egypt, they had light in their home, but the Egyptians didn’t. I don’t know all the significance of that, but I suspect that the darkness was so thick that their lamps would not light.

It lasted three days, and the people could not get up off their beds. Well, maybe it’s that kind of darkness referred to here – a darkness so oppressive that men will gnaw their tongues from the fear that it causes, the pain of their soul and despair that darkness can cause. Well, some have interpreted the darkness in a metaphorical way, so that it’s not physical but moral, and that may be the case.

It may be that this is a description of an afflicted conscience. That’s possible, but the plague of darkness in Egypt, which was literal, physical, which suggests that this is the same kind of plague; it is a literal, material, physical darkness that comes on the earth, the kingdom of the beast. Either way, this fifth bowl caused a great sense of dread all over the world. But again, we’re told in verse 11 that they blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

Dr. Johnson, the 18th century Dr. Johnson, said that the prospect of death concentrates the mind wonderfully, and that’s probably true, but it doesn’t lead to repentance. There’s a reason for that. It’s very simple. Dead souls can’t repent. Only

God’s grace that breathes life into sinners and opens hearts to respond to the truth can do that. Only they who are the subject of God’s grace can respond to it.

Well, these people who hate grace and reject the Lamb and persecute his people are left to themselves. There’s a judgment in that of just being left to yourself; being turned over to yourself and letting the natural course of things take effect. And that’s what happens here and their response is blasphemy. Really, that shouldn’t surprise us. The heart of man is in rebellion against God, and so what comes out of that heart naturally is rebellion. They curse God.

Now, in verse 12, darkness is followed by deception. The sixth angel pours out his bowl on the Euphrates River, which dries up so that the kings of the east can cross it. In verse 16, we read that they gather at a place called in Hebrew Har-Magedon, or as the King James Version translates it, Armageddon. There the hordes of the east will join the forces of the kings of the antichrist, and they will make war on the Messiah and his people.

Har-Magedon means “mountain of Meggido.” Meggido was a city on the southern side of the Jezreel valley; its ruins are still there, and if you ever go to Israel, you’ll probably take a tour of the city of Meggido. It was a great city in its day, and it’s on the south side of the Jezreel valley, which is a large plain, a great valley, there in Israel, that the Israelis today simply call *HaEmek*, the valley.

It’s one of history’s most famous battlefields, where campaigns have been fought from ancient to modern times, by Egypt’s Thutmose III in 1468 B.C. to Britain’s General Allenby in 1917. It was where Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera, where Gideon defeated the Midianites, and where King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho in battle. It will be the place where future armies will gather for a battle which actually takes place later, as we see in 19:11-21.

And there in 19:19, John writes that he saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assemble to make war against him who sat on the horse and against his army. Christ comes back on a white horse, a war horse, to make war on this people, and they prepare to do battle with him. That will be the climax of human history, when Christ comes and he defeats the enemy.

So this sixth angel prepares the way for that, prepares the way for the end, and the means that is used to achieve that, to bring these kings from the east to the kings of the west, to those aligned with the antichrist, the means that’s used is that of deception; deception by this unholy trinity, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. John writes in

verse 13 that he saw coming out of their mouths three unclean spirits like frogs, or demons, as he explains in verse 14.

Frogs are unclean animals according to the law in the book of Leviticus, in chapter 11, they’re unclean. Seem pretty unclean to most of us today, unless you’re 12 years or younger and you love frogs. But other than that, they’re not pleasant creatures, and so they’re a description here of the demonic influence that proceeds from the mouths of these people, the words that they speak. It’s unclean.

But also it’s been suggested that the frog describes it because a frog has a constant croaking noise. Sometimes you hear that at night, this constant croaking noise. It’s meaningless, and can be very annoying, but that’s what the frog produces. That’s its voice. That’s what comes out of its mouth. And so they represent these diabolical agents of propaganda, who are deceivers, who perform signs, John says.

Their speech is convincing, but the reality is it is unclean, and it is as meaningless as a frog croaking. Still, it will lure these kings of the world together for this final battle; what John calls “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” The idea here is similar to the lying spirit in 1 Kings 22:21, and that’s where God sends out a lying spirit to deceive King Ahab, and entice him into battle, where he will be killed.

Ahab has surrounded himself with false prophets. He likes to hear what they say because they agree with his plans, and what is explained to the king, and what he won’t believe, is that those prophets are lying prophets, because God has sent a lying spirit into their mouths to deceive him and draw him into battle, where he will face his just reward. He’ll be judged.

Well, the same thing is happening here, or will happen in the future. These kings will be enticed to follow the beast in a war against God, the Almighty, and they’ll meet their end. It’s pure insanity to fight against God, to fight against the Almighty, but they’ll be deceived into doing it. Now, in the midst of this prophecy of judgment, Jesus interrupts in verse 15 with a warning.

“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.” Now, that may be a warning to the tribulation saints to be steadfast to the end, and the encouragement is that when all these things start to happen, they should not despair. They should not be discouraged. They should not waver in the faith. God is with them, and he’s bringing things to a triumphant conclusion, even though it will be through great difficulty.

More likely, I think, this is a warning to the churches of the present day, of the present time. It’s a warning to us. It’s the warning that the Lord gave to the church of Sardis back in 3:3, and it is a warning to persevere; to use the statement of Peter in 2 Peter 1:10, to “make their calling and election sure.” Those who don’t, those who aren’t truly in the faith, who are not real believers, will not escape the judgments that are described here, or the judgment to come in this life. So it’s a warning to do that.

Well, the end comes with the seventh bowl, described in verse 17. It’s not really described, but it sounds something like a plague of smog. It’s poured out upon the air. This is the most pervasive of the plagues, and it affects the air that people breathe, and then when that bowl is poured out, a loud voice speaks from the temple. It’s the voice of God, and it says, “It is done.”

The seven plagues have run their course, and as one of the writers put it, “The human race stands on the threshold of eternity.” The climactic nature of this event is signaled by disturbances in the sky and on the earth. There are flashes of lightning and peals of thunder; then a great earthquake occurs. There have been earthquakes before in this book. One caused a tenth of Jerusalem to fall, back in chapter 11.

But this earthquake is different. Its severity is unparalleled. John writes in verse 18 that “as long as man has been on the earth, there’s never been an earthquake like this, it is so mighty.” Now, that’s impressive, because the world has been shaken by some terrific earthquakes. Some of the cities in Asia Minor to whom John wrote to the churches in those cities, those cities had been destroyed by earthquakes.

People of Asia Minor were very familiar with the danger and the threat of earthquakes. You see that today in Turkey. It’s oftentimes shaken by earthquakes. And there have been other earthquakes in the history of the world, some in more recent times that have been horrific earthquakes. That Lisbon earthquake in 1755 reduced the city to ruins in less than ten minutes, and nearly 100,000 people perished in it, and in the fire and the tsunami that followed.

But this will be far greater; this will be the mother of all earthquakes. It will shake the foundations of Babylon, the capital of the beast, and it will rock the Gentile world. Verse 19: “The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” This is the destiny of all of man’s great achievements. His

great cities and buildings, his culture and comforts will all collapse when God shakes the earth. God will pull all of the props from beneath this rebellious society.

All of the things that support it, and give it comfort and assurance, and fulfill its desires – all of those things will be pulled away. They’ll have nothing left when the capital of man’s rebellion, Babylon the great, is remembered before God. That doesn’t suggest that God forgets, and then it comes to mind. It’s a way of saying, I think, that God’s memory, or his mind will be focused in a special way on Babylon in that time, and this will come about.

He’ll remember the city. He’ll remember its sin. He’ll remember its rebellion. And he’ll bring about this terrible fall. Well, in the next two chapters, chapters 17 and 18, John gives us a detailed description of the fall of Babylon, on the religious aspect in chapter 17, and the political aspect of the city in chapter 18. God will remember it to give it the cup of his fierce wrath.

It may seem as though God doesn’t see evil, or that he forgets about these things; he forgets that his oppressed people are ground down by the world around them. God sees everything. God remembers everything. He knows what’s happening. He knows what’s happening right now. He’s not disengaged from the world, or from any aspect of the world, or from any aspect of your life.

And he’ll deal with everything, and he will judge in his time. In verses 20 and 21, John writes that every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. John’s using hyperbole, or overstatement here; this is an exaggeration to describe the great topographical geographical changes that will happen at this time, when God shakes the earth.

And then we read huge hailstones fall on men, weighing 100 pounds each. This is obviously unusual, 100 pound hailstones, but it’s not unprecedented. All of these things have happened to some degree in the past, during the plagues of Egypt, or during the conquest of Canaan. Seas and rivers were literally dried up. Deadly hailstones fell from heaven in the seventh plague on Egypt, and fell during the rout of the Canaanites in Joshua, in chapter 10 of the book of Joshua.

Darkness and an earthquake happened at the Lord’s crucifixion. That was all literal; actually happened, and it was appropriate for the occasion. And here, it is appropriate as well. What has been can be. That’s a statement that Dr. Johnson, our

Dr. Johnson, repeated frequently in his studies in the book of Revelation in dealing with the various plagues and comparing them with past plagues.

These things seem fantastic to us, but we shouldn’t be totally surprised. Should be somewhat surprised, because they are amazing things, but not think that they cannot be, because they’re so amazing. No. What has been can be. What occurred in the past can occur again in the future, and so this should be surprising, ’cause these are amazing things, but not unprecedented.

What it describes, though, in a surprising way, in a fantastic description, describes a unique period in history; the time before Christ’s return, the preparation for the end of human history. So catastrophic warnings and changes and events like this – they’re really, at least to my mind, absolutely fitting for a unique moment in history, the very end of time. We should expect great signs and wonders.

There’s nothing incredible about this. What is incredible, what is really hard to believe, is that again we read that men who have experienced a colossal earthquake and supernatural hail still don’t repent, but blaspheme God. And men blaspheme God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe. They’ve lost everything. They know they’re under the wrath of Almighty God.

They can’t escape. They’re helpless. Still they shake their fists at him; now, that’s madness. But is it more mad to do that than a man who studies biology, and sees the complexity of everything, and the order of everything, and the design of life, who then denies that there is a creator? No, it’s not more mad than that.

Is it more amazing than for a person to receive good things in this life every day – health, food, clothing, housing, cars, family, and friends – and then ignore the benefactor, and live as though there is no God, and we’re the ones who create our own lives as they are, and our own blessings? No, that’s no more amazing than what these people are doing in the book of Revelation.

If men don’t get it through beauty, or don’t get it through gifts, maybe some hailstones to the head will help. No, that won’t help either. It may concentrate men wonderfully, but their response is to blaspheme. Now, that’s the nature and the hardness of the human heart. If you want a good lesson on anthropology, on the study of man, if you want a good lesson on human nature, turn to Revelation 16. It gives it to us.

This is the human heart, and men glory in it. You can just see the ground shaking under their feet, and the hail falling on them, and hear them reciting “Invictus:” Under the bludgeonings of chance/My head is bloody, but unbowed. All of this is not the bludgeonings of chance, but the purposeful, precise outpourings of divine justice. It is deserved, as the angel said.

That’s true. It’s also true that we deserve it, too. We should never forget that. It was the Puritan preacher John Bradford who made that famous statement as he watched a man led off to the gallows back when London practiced public hangings. He said, “There but for the grace of God goes John Bradford.” And but for the grace of God, every one of us would find ourselves under bowls of wrath.

Every one of us would find ourselves cursing God just as these do, because you were dead in your trespasses and sins, but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ; by grace you have been saved. That’s the reason that you and I are different from this. Essentially, we’re the same; grace changes that.

Well, someday Babylon will be remembered before God; he will focus his attention and his judgment on that city, and on this world, and it will be judged. But you will never be remembered before God for your sins, always remembered before God for his grace and his love for you, because our sins have all been punished in Christ. And this chapter should remind us of that.

It doesn’t speak of those things here, but that’s the background for what we have received from him. We should see our lives against the background of this terrible judgment, because but for the grace of God, we’d be numbered among these as well. But God’s grace has delivered us from that. What might he still do, though, if you’re here and you’ve not believed in Jesus Christ as Savior?

Well, I think this tells us. It tells us what your future is, one way or another; if you have not put your trust in him, it’s wrath. But there is a way of escape, and that’s through Jesus Christ. He died in the place of sinners, and all who believe in him will be saved. God says, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.

“Turn back, turn back, turn from your evil ways. Why then will you die?” Great logic in that and a great plea for mercy and faith and repentance, so we ask you, why die? Turn to him. Now, some of you maybe are there, and you say in your heart, “Well, listen, I’ve been listening to everything you’ve said, and you’ve made the point

very clearly to me, and this chapter has made the point, that I can’t repent. I’m unable to.”

Well, that’s true, but God still requires it, and amazingly, all who do respond to the gospel, they do repent. There’s a great example of that in the gospels, in Mark chapter 3. I think it’s like a paradigm, an example of what is being spoken of here, of God calling us to do what we naturally cannot do, and yet we do it by his grace. And that’s when Jesus, the first part of that chapter, the first five or six verses of Mark 3, comes into the synagogue.

The synagogue has some of the religious leaders there, and they’re waiting to see if he’s going to do a miracle, and in so doing, work on the Sabbath, and they can have something by which to accuse him of being a sinner. He knows that. He looks around and he’s grieved at the hardness of their heart, because there’s a man there with a withered hand.

It’s withered; it’s dead; it’s just this limp appendage that can’t be used. He can’t do anything with it. It’s just there. It’s withered and dead, and Jesus says to him, “Stretch out your hand.” Well, that’s just the thing that he can’t do, but Christ commands it – “Stretch it out.” And the text says, “And he stretched out his hand.” Well, how did he do that?

He did it by the grace and the power of God that comes through the preaching of God’s Word, and when we hear it and we respond by God’s grace, we’re able to repent. I don’t know how that works. I can’t explain it other than that. I can see examples of it. Christ tells Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and he does – not because he had the natural ability, but because God communicates that.

And as he preaches the gospel to you, as it comes to you, respond, and you’ll find that you can repent, by God’s grace. So may God help you to do that. Turn to him, believe in him, and those of you who have – maybe it’s everybody here. I hope so – rejoice in the grace of God that’s given you the faith and the repentance to come to Christ and to escape the great wrath that’s coming.

It’s all due to his grace. We should give him all the praise and thanks. Well, let’s do that as we close in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this text, which is a text of judgment. It prophesies great wrath that will be poured out on this earth. That’s what history is moving toward. And yet you give hope; you give the gospel, and it goes out

everywhere, and the message is “Flee the wrath to come.” Flee God by fleeing to God, and receive forgiveness and grace.

You receive everyone who comes to you. We give you the praise and the thanks for that. Thank you for all these things in Christ’s name. Amen.