**War and Wrath**

Revelation 8-18

Listen to the prophecy of Joel in the Old Testament about the Day of the Lord:

“Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!” Joel 2:1-2

Joel described a coming **judgment on Israel** - a judgment of locusts and of war. Listen to how he describes the coming army:

“Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run.” Joel 2:3-4

***Is this an army of people or of locusts?*** It’s hard to say. Probably the locust plague became a forewarning and foreshadowing of the coming Babylonian army that laid waste to Jerusalem in 586 B.C. As the locusts consumed all of their crops and left the land utterly desolate, it was a warning from God, spoken through Joel, of a greater judgment for their idolatry and rebellion. ***That greater judgment was Babylon*** - but even that was a warning and foreshadowing of the ultimate judgment that would come from God on **the Day of the Lord**.

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” Joel 2:30-31

Yes, Joel said, judgment is coming and the world will be unmade. But that is not how the chapter ends - ***it ends with hope and a call to repentance and faith!***

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.” Joel 2:32

***Joel’s message was a call to repentance.*** It may have coincided with the reign of a king like Josiah, who led a time of renewal in Israel that delayed the exile of Judah into Babylon. But in the end, **Judah did not heed the warning**. The locusts consumed the crops. Then Babylon came and destroyed everything, carrying the Jews off into slavery and exile.

Brothers and sisters, friends - hear this. Just as the people of Judah had an opportunity to repent and avoid the coming judgment, so people today have an opportunity to repent and avoid the coming judgment. Because **Judgment Day is coming** - the actual Day of the Lord prefigured by locust plagues and the exile, described in Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and most of the other prophets, plus the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation, which is our focus today.

Here is a **visual overview** of Revelation 8-18.



Yes, it’s complicated. But the structure is clear. Jesus opens seven seals on scroll and when that scroll is open the first trumpet is sounded and the wrath of God begins to be poured out. ***7 Seals; 7 trumpets; 7 bowls***. With these **three cycles of seven** the wrath of God will be complete. That’s what the sevens mean - ***completeness***. There aren’t seven Holy Spirits - there is just one Spirit of God. But He is presented as the seven-fold Spirit of God or the seven spirits of God in Revelation to show His complete power and perfection.

What I want you to see in this slide is that all three cycles of judgment end the same way - with a cataclysmic event involving an earthquake, thunder, lightning, upheaval in the heavens and on earth. In other words, ***all three cycles*** - seals, trumpets and bowls - **end with the Day of the Lord** - the END of the World from a Jewish perspective.

Think of this as a movie or ***TV show that shows you the final scene*** and then cuts to “three years earlier” or “six hours earlier,” and tells you the story that led to that final incident. Revelation does this three times. The sixth seal jumps to the end, the Day of the Lord. The seventh trumpet and also the seventh bowl jump to the Day of the Lord as Jews expected it in Joel, Isaiah and the other prophets. And what that conveyed to Jews was one word: **JUSTICE**. Finally, justice.

***The Jews have been the most consistently and systematically oppressed and persecuted people group*** on earth throughout history. It is truly a miracle of God that the Jews have survived all that they have been through. But God sustained them through the Old Testament days with Psalms and Prophets who gave them a vision of the Day of the Lord - the day when God’s people would finally be vindicated and God’s enemies would finally be punished - when JUSTICE would finally be done.

We read Revelation and come to thunder, lightning, earthquakes and mountains being uprooted and we feel fear. The Jews did not - they felt excitement, joy, anticipation - they felt **FINALLY! JUSTICE!** They felt what ***Cubs fans*** experienced in 2016 - finally! Justice! Joy! Fulfillment! They felt what ***Bucs fans*** experienced last year and will again in February - victory! Celebration!

Our outline today is grim - and the imagery in Revelation 8-18 is terrifying. But we need to feel this the right way. In the end, on the other side of the scary stuff, it will be joy. Because in the end justice will be done! Here is one preview of where we are headed. **The third bowl judgment turns all the rivers and springs on earth into blood**. Imagine that. Picture the Hillsborough River completely blood. The Bay would already be blood from the second bowl. Red tide is nothing compared to the second and third bowl judgment. Listen to the angelic pronouncement at that point:

**The Day of the Lord = Justice. Finally.**

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!” Revelation 16:5-6

As the wrath of God is poured out in the trumpets and bowls, the wrath of mankind and the fury of the devil and his false trinity will also be unleashed - and many, if not all, ***Christians on earth will be slain***. But they will come to life and reign with Christ for 1,000 years in the millennium. And the enemies of God will have nothing but blood to drink as they await their final reckoning with the Lord Jesus at the Great White Throne. Justice. Finally, justice.

With that backdrop of the Day of the Lord as justice finally and fully given, let’s walk through ***the four stages of the final judgment***, which set up the full and final division of people. The first stage is:

**Stages of the Final Judgment:**

1. The Sin of Man **Unrestrained**

“And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.” Matthew 24:7

This is the stage we are in right now - the birth pains described in Matthew 24, also pictured in the first four seals that Jesus will open in the end. Right now it’s ***INACTIVE, intermittent labor***. Those 4 horesmen released in the **four seals** will turn braxton hicks into active labor, with the sin of man increasing in frequency and intensity, along with more natural disasters - famines, earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis. Here is the third seal:

1. The Sin of Man **Unrestrained** - to prove the **Depravity** of man

“And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.” Revelation 6:4

As bad as wars are now on earth; as bad as ***human evil and violence*** has been in the last century - ***it will get worse*** when the birth pains turn into active labor; when this horseman is released. This rider was given a GREAT SWORD.

But notice the phrasing there - he **WAS GIVEN** a great sword. Who gave him that sword? Obviously, the answer is God. We’ll see this phrase throughout Revelation. An angel is given a key. Demons were given authority. Everything that happens in this book - which means everything that happens in all of history, right up to the very end, happens at God’s direction, and under His authority. The devil and all his demons will be unleashed, but all they do remains under the sovereign direction and authority of God.

The final judgment of God is God letting go - releasing restraints. That’s the first stage of the final judgment - God lets go of the restraints on human evil and violence. And it will be truly terrible.

Nik Ripken writes about ***Somalia in 1991*** in his gripping book, The Insanity of God. He described it, quite vividly, as hell. Eight tribes warred for years until finally the strongest two literally destroyed everything in Somalia. Hospitals blown up; police stations and military posts destroyed; farms, roads, grocery stores - burned down. Literally nothing was left after the war except land mines. Children couldn’t walk across the street without risking being blown up. It was hell. And most of the population starved to death after the war because Somalia had literally torn itself apart.

God has given us little ***glimpses of hell on earth*** in wars like this. But mostly such wars are restrained by good government and peacekeeping forces like the U.N., and efforts like the U.S. involvement for 20 years in Afghanistan. Now that the U.S. is out of Afghanistan, they are experiencing more of the hell of human sin and violence without restraint.

Now make this personal. Think right now of ***your worst sin***. Maybe it’s just a desire and you don’t act on it, but think of that temptation that - if you were suddenly unrestrained, you would pursue. An adulteress affair. A violent murder. A theft of millions of dollars. Child abuse. War.

By the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit, our sin is strongly restrained. But the average non-Christian has far less restraint. And imagine the devastation when even government restraint is removed. Imagine the mobs, the looting, the chaos. That’s just stage one of the final judgment. The sin of man unrestrained. It’s the Romans 1 whirlpool of death applied across the whole world. Stage 2:

**Stages of the Final Judgment:**

1. The **Wrath** of God poured out

“The first angel blew his trumpet and hail and fire, mixed with blood were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up.” Revelation 8:7

What does this remind you of in the Bible? Hail, fire, blood, burning things up… It’s ***Egypt and the plagues***; it’s ***Sodom and Gomorrah***; it’s ***Joshua against the Amorites*** and giant hailstones fall from heaven crushing the enemies of God’s people. It’s the whole Old Testament - all the mighty acts of God against the enemies of God - mashed into these trumpets and bowls.



The first four trumpets and the first four bowls are similar in their Old Testament judgment feel and style. And you can see the progression - first judgment on the ***earth, then the sea, then the rivers and then the heavenly bodies.*** The difference is in severity. The seals destroy one quarter of things. The trumpets destroy one third of things. The bowls destroy EVERYTHING.

1. The **Wrath** of God poured out - to prove the **Supremacy** of God

“The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died.” Revelation 16:3

**The first plague on Egypt** turned the water of the Nile River into blood. Why was that the first? Because the Nile River was LIFE to the Egyptians! They depended on that river for everything - fresh water, fish, plants. The Nile was actually one of their prominent gods. Those ten plagues, in fact, were demonstrations of God’s supremacy over the gods of Egypt.

The last one was on **the firstborn** - specifically the son of Pharaoh. They honored Pharaoh as god, and his oldest son would follow as Pharaoh after him. So killing the firstborn of Pharaoh was a direct sign against “the son of god” in the Egyptian belief system - the son of their divine king.

The ninth plague was darkness for three days. Why darkness? The most prominent Egyptian god was the sun god Ra. **YAHWEH blotted out the light of Ra** for three complete days. This was not an eclipse - it was ***total darkness, utter blackness***. Look at the fifth bowl judgment:

1. The **Wrath** of God poured out - to prove the **Supremacy** of God

“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast and its kingdom was plunged into darkness.” Revelation 16:10

***The beast is the antichrist*** - the parody of Jesus in the false trinity. A servant to the dragon of Revelation, the devil, the beast fakes its own death and claims to be resurrection. He has a false prophet who proclaims him as divine and the antichrist and false prophet are both enabled to do miracles as a “great delusion” to lead astray all but the elect.

**The antichrist will have great power** during the great tribulation. From a worldly perspective he will have total power. But from God’s perspective, the antichrist only has the power that was given to him, and it is within limits and for a set period of time. Most likely 3.5 years of relative peace; and 3.5 years of terrible war.

Just as God showed **His total supremacy** over the god of Egypt and the god of Canaan, so God will prove His absolute supremacy over all gods - including the devil, the antichrist and the false prophet, as history comes to its grand finale. That’s what the darkness represents here - a judgment on the beast, the antichrist. Come back next week for the return of Christ and His total victory in that moment. “The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him, one little word shall fell him.”

On to the third stage - brace yourselves. First the sin of man is being unrestrained. Then the wrath of God will be poured out. And at the same time this third judgment:

**Stages of the Final Judgment:**

1. The **Enemies** of God unleashed

“The fifth angel blew his trumpet… He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit… from the smoke came locusts on the earth…” Revelation 9:1-3

***These are no ordinary locusts.*** They come from the abyss - the bottomless pit. They rise with smoke as from a huge furnace, reminding us of Shadraq, Meshach and Abednego and Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. They have stingers like scorpions. And the stings of these locust-scorpions will torment people with terrible pain so they will want to die but not be able to die.

But this is a very important point. Notice **WHOM the locust demons torture**:

1. The **Enemies** of God unleashed - to prove the **Cruelty** of the devil

“They were told not to harm the grass… but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Revelation 9:4

***Usually locusts devour grass***, fields and all plants. But in this case, these huge scorpion-demon-locusts are not allowed by God to eat the few remaining plants on earth. They are unleashed to sting and sting and sting the people on earth who have chosen not to believe in Jesus, in spite of all that has happened already in the unveiling of the glory and power of God.

So these are ***demons sent out to torture the people who are on the devil’s side!*** These are the followers of the antichrist, not Christians, who will suffer under the sting of these terrible demons. This is proof of ***the cruelty of the devil - whose mission is to steal and kill and destroy.***

The sixth trumpet is similar, but this time instead of locust-scorpions it is horse-dragons. For five months the locust-scorpions torment the non-believing earth-dwellers. But when **the sixth trumpet** is sounded, the horse-dragons begin to kill.

As with all the trumpets, ***one third is the number killed***. And again, it is not believers who suffer this judgment, it is non-believers, because look at the response in verse 20.

1. The **Enemies** of God unleashed - to prove the **Cruelty** of the devil

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons.” Revelation 9:20

This is the tragic refrain of Revelation - ***STILL THEY DID NOT REPENT***. Only in one place is there a possible sign of repentance - in Revelation 11 after the resurrection of the two witnesses in Jerusalem, when they ascend into heaven with a huge earthquake people “were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” But terror and honor are not necessarily real repentance or conversion.

There may be some people who repent and believe during the great tribulation - but that is definitely not the emphasis of the book of Revelation or the purpose of the tribulation. What we see instead is ***the stubbornness and idolatry of mankind*** pressed to its most gruesome and terrible end, even as the demons they worship are revealed as the dark and horrifying torturers they are. Still they did not repent or stop worshiping the very demons that were tormenting and killing them.

Isn’t this a picture of **sin and the activity of the devil** we see in a small way right now? The alcoholic who is being destroyed by his drinking but just won’t give it up. The workaholic who sees his family falling apart but just won’t stop working. The gossip who knows she is damaging relationships with her words but won’t stop talking about people. The nagging wife who knows her words are tearing her husband down, not building him up but she won’t stop pointing out all the ways he fails. The negligent husband who knows he is not loving his wife well or leading his family well, but he won’t meet with a Christian friend to get the help he knows he needs.

**Life is war.** It’s a spiritual battle. Even Christians who are armed for the battle struggle and fail sometimes. Which is why we need each other so desperately! Don’t walk alone - don’t try to fight this battle alone! Every soldier throughout history has known ***“we stand together or we die alone.”***

One more stage of the final judgment. Sin unrestrained. God’s wrath poured out. God’s enemies unleashed.

**Stages of the Final Judgment:**

1. The whole World **Unmade**

“A loud voice came out of the temple… ‘It is done!’ ...The cities of the nations fell… And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.” Revelation 16:17-20

Here is **the seventh bowl** - the final end. Here is the voice of Jesus shouting, “ENOUGH.” “It is done.” “Stop.” Lightning, thunder, earthquake - cities collapse, hailstones fall, islands and mountains trade places. This is the Day of the Lord. This is the end of the world. It’s over.

The seals destroyed one quarter of the earth. The trumpets destroyed another third of the earth. The bowls destroyed all that was left. What’s the point? Everything people trusted in - ***everything people loved apart from God is gone***, up in smoke and ash.

Revelation 17-18 expand on this by picturing ***Babylon as a prostitute*** riding the beast. The city of Babylon was known to the Jews as the anti-Jerusalem, the great threat to their whole culture - and the place they were carried of to in the exile.

1. The whole World **Unmade** - to prove the **Futility** of idolatry

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! ...For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” Revelation 18:1-2

Revelation 18 is ***a lament of the sinful, idolatrous earth-dwellers***, for their whole world has been thrown down. The merchants have nothing to sell, the kings have no one to rule and no kingdoms left intact. The sailors will have nothing to transport. The entertainers will have no one left to entertain.

The unmaking of the world and the unveiling of the beast as a terrible beast and of Babylon as an insatiable prostitute reveal the **FUTILITY of IDOLATRY**. As Solomon said 3,000 years ago, “It’s all vanity - a chasing after the wind.” You can chase money and sex and business and applause your entire life and in the end what you will have in your hand is WIND - nothing. Emptiness. Futility.

That’s all the world can give you in the end - ***nothing***.

**My friend who runs a thrift store** said, “Give away as much as you can because in the end, it all ends up in my store.”

These are the stages of final judgment:

**Stages of the Final Judgment:**

1. The Sin of Man **Unrestrained**
	1. To prove the **Depravity** of man
2. The **Wrath** of God poured out
	1. To prove the **Supremacy** of God
3. The **Enemies** of God unleashed
	1. To prove the **Cruelty** of the devil
4. The whole world **Unmade**
	1. To prove the **Futility** of idolatry

It starts as ***a slippery slope***, descending with the birth pains into active labor in the Great Tribulation. Then, halfway through the Great Tribulation the Antichrist announces himself as God and demands to be worshiped. As God’s wrath is poured out on sinners, the wrath of the Antichrist comes in full force against the saints.

In the process of that war, finally the world is unmade and Jesus comes back to say, “Enough.”

The stages of final judgment reveal the final division between all people and the justice of God to act based on this clear division.

There are only **two kinds of people** in Revelation:

**Reality of the Final Division:**

| **Saints** | **Sinners** |
| --- | --- |
| Martyrs with white robes, praying144,000 servants of God sealedMulticultural multitude in white robes, worshiping around heavenly throneBold witnesses who testify and die (but rise again) | Those who dwell on earth, wearing the 666 mark of the beast, who refuse to repent or stop worshiping idols, cursing God from the smoking ruins of the earth, deceived by the devil and devoted to the antichrist, fighting against the people of God |

**The book of Revelation** itself is a prophetic call to all people everywhere to bow before King Jesus and become a part of His holy people. It is the call to earth-dwelling sinners to repent and not be led astray by the coming deception and the evil empire to come led by the antichrist.

There may be a shred of ***hope that some people will repent*** during the Great Tribulation, but mostly what we see is that the division between people being revealed, not changed in these terrible years. If people love the earth and love themselves, during the tribulation they will most likely continue to love the earth and love themselves. If they worship, love and trust idols now, they will continue to love, trust and serve idols then. Here is the summary statement of the final division:

“The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” Revelation 11:18

***Which side are you on?*** Are you among the servants of God, the prophets and saints, the ones who fear the name of Jesus? Or are you among the nations who rage against God and are destined for the wrath of God when judgment finally comes? The day is coming for “destroying the destroyers of the earth.” All sinful, evil people who have warred in their hearts against other people are “destroyers of the earth.” And that destruction they planned for others will come upon them.

Brothers and sisters - friends - **the Day of the Lord is coming** - a day of darkness and fear, of judgment and wrath. It is a day of JUSTICE to be celebrated as the enemies of God are fully exposed for their cruelty and evil and when all people will get exactly what they deserve.

***Jesus came the first time to announce the year of the Lord’s favor*** - the days of grace and mercy when everyone who calls on His name will be saved! When Jesus comes back, it will not be with mercy and grace but with justice and wrath - that will be the Day of vengeance of our God.

Just as there was time in the days of Noah for people to get on the ark - but one day the door was closed and there was only the coming judgment, so right now the doorway to salvation remains open and people may come in and be saved!

Here is how Paul says it in 2 Corinthians:

“We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, ‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Do not delay another moment. Do not put this off until tomorrow or even later today. Bow your heart before King Jesus right now - for NOW is the day of salvation - NOW is the favorable time!