

13. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?'

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[0 : 00] Now, before we look at Revelation 16, let's have a moment of prayer. God our Father, as we approach this truly awesome passage, I pray that your gracious Holy Spirit will take these words that long ago you gave to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos, and you will show us that you are still speaking by your Spirit to our hearts and minds, and leading us to Jesus Christ, the first word and the last word, in whose name we pray. Amen.

So if you could turn please to page 1037. I want you to imagine a scenario which I hope would never happen.

You may think it's a rather ridiculous one. Imagine you are walking along the street, and you see that your neighbour's house is on fire. It's late at night, and instead of raising the alarm, you decide, well, my neighbour needs his sleep, so I'll just leave him.

Now that is so absurd that you can hardly imagine it could possibly happen. One thing that would not be the case if that ever were to happen, you certainly would not be saying, oh, what a nice guy that is.

He's let his neighbour sleep, instead of raising him in the dead of night. Indeed, such a person, if it were to be known what they had done, would probably be prosecuted, or perhaps sectioned, because it's such an absurd thing to do.

[1 : 46] The reason I'm saying that is, when, however, people warn to flee from the fire of the wrath of God, to flee from the wrath to come, these people are regarded as alarmist.

They're regarded as cruel. They're regarded as heartless. They're regarded as bigoted, because they are preaching the judgment of God.

Now, if it were simply people's opinions, if a preacher were to say that God is angry, God will judge, God will punish, and have no authority, other than their own feelings, to do that, then that would be wrong.

But the point is, the Bible writers, with one voice, and it's particularly in a passage like this, say the fire of judgment is dangerous, it is coming, and you need to get out of it, while there is still time.

That's what a passage like this is saying. There is no question, but that God will judge the world. And we've noticed before, how so often in the book of Revelation, in this vivid poetic imagery, in this kind of, often compared to a picture gallery, you go around this picture gallery, and you see these vivid pictures of the anger of God.

[3 : 05] So if you like saying in poetry, what a lot of the Bible says in prose, Paul in Athens, God has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world, by the man he has appointed.

Now John, is saying that as well, except he's saying it in this series of vivid pictures, and vivid images. And when people, dislike, and criticise, the preaching of judgment, behind that lurks the idea, that they are really kinder than God.

That if they had the world to run, if they had the world to judge, they would do it differently. That's why I've given the title this evening, I've taken the title, Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What is Just?

These are Abraham's words in Genesis 18, when he's pleading with God to save Sodom and Gomorrah, the wicked cities. If you go, and if you read that passage, you'll find the long-suffering, the compassion of God, who says, no, I'll spare the city, as Abraham, as the numbers decrease. No, God says, I won't destroy it, even if there are ten, and in the event, there weren't even ten. Time for repentance, but then time for judgment. And one of the things you get in the prophets is there comes a time when it's too late to repent.

[4 : 24] The time is over. Read the last chapters of Amos, where God says to Amos, don't plead any longer. Judgment day has come.

The fire is raining from heaven. The bowls are being poured out. These are the last seven, the seven angels of the seven plagues glenns across the page at 15, verse 1, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

Now, we've had three series of judgments. The judgment of the seals, when the lamb opens the seals. The judgment of the trumpets. And now the judgment of the bowls.

But I've been arguing that these judgments happen all throughout history, particularly in the last days. That is the days between the first and second coming of Christ. But these pictures intensify. They are parallel, what I would call a kind of progressive parallelism. The judgment will become more severe, and the judgments bring us here, right to the brink of the final judgment.

[5 : 31] We don't reach the final judgment until chapter 20. But here, we're being showing that once again, the course of history, God judges in history, in other words, before he pronounces judgment on history.

That's what we're going to look at then. Let's look at the thought as it develops. There's no inter... In the other judgments, there are interludes. But there's no interludes in this. The judgments proceed right to their appointed end.

And first of all then, in the first four plagues, the Creator judges his creation. That's verses 1 to 9. The Creator judges his creation.

In other words, the one who judges is the one who has a right to judge, because he made it. And not only did he made it, he sent his Son to redeem it. The judge, after all, is the Lamb who died and took the fire, the full judgment, if you like, of the seven bulls, so that no one else need suffer that. So, the Creator judging his creation. And there's many, many echoes here of the plagues poured out on Egypt. As showing us that God is consistent.

[6 : 43] You hear last week, remember we looked at the great phrase in chapter 15, verse 3, they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. This is the same God, right from the beginning, the one who was and is and is to come.

And in a sense, this is developing the song of Moses and the Lamb, just as Moses, under God's instruction, called down the plagues on Egypt and on Pharaoh. So it's happening.

So the first four bulls, the Creator and His creation, and the first bull shows the corruption of the human heart. Verse 2, harmful and painful sores.

J.B. Phillips translates these vividly loathsome and malignant ulcers. Now, remember, this is picture language. This is metaphorical language.

By the way, pictorially and metaphorical language doesn't mean it isn't real. It's a vivid way of showing reality, of showing us reality in technicolor, if you like, showing us reality in vivid and memorable ways.

[7 : 51] The corruption of the human heart, evil exposes itself. Ultimately, evil is ugly. That is why, when the Bible talks about sin, it deglamorizes it.

We look at next week and the week after at the passage on Babylon, the spirit of the world, and we'll see how the glamorization of sin and the glamorization of the evil of the human heart is exposed for what it is.

That's why 2 Peter talks about false teachers as a dog returning to its vomit because ultimately, heresy, false teaching is ugly.

It is not beautiful. It's not liberating. It doesn't build anyone up. It converts no one. It simply leads to corruption and evil.

Evil exposes itself and the sea turns to blood, the pollution of the earth. Now, we've seen in all these judgments, I want to mention it again. When God judges, his judgment is deserved because people get, in the long run, what they deserve.

[9 : 00] Verse 6, it is what they deserve. It's not that God arbitrarily decides to judge. This pollution of the earth, it's almost as if God is saying, right, you've polluted the earth, let it be polluted.

Compare the flood story, the flood, the earth was corrupt. Therefore, God says, I will destroy it. And the word corrupt and destroy are part of the same verb. The earth has self-destructed.

So says God, I will destroy it. The pollution of the human heart, the pollution of the earth, the curse, and we cannot but hear the terrible, divine hands-off of Romans 1.

God gave them over. God gave them over. God gave them over. She's talking about exactly the same thing. And you see the same thing in the fourth plague.

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, recalling the plague of darkness in Egypt. They were scorched by the fear seat. They cursed the name of God.

[10:01] It's a mistake to imagine that when people get into real trouble that they'll turn to God. Some people do and some people don't. Here there is no turning to God. God is simply blamed as the author of the problems.

So the creator judges his creation. He judges his creation because of its corruption and because of its curse. That of course is why the world will be judged.

Because the world is sinful, the world is fallen, the world is evil. But you'll also notice in verses 5, 6, and 7, not exactly a parenthesis, but it's a striking commentary on the creator judging his creation. There's a striking parallel between this and the song of Moses and of the Lamb in chapter 15, verse 3, Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. The other reason for judging is the holiness of God, the sinfulness, the corruption of the human heart, and the created order, and the holiness of God.

[11:13] The cruelty, notice the cruelty of they have shed the blood of saints and prophets. Right, you've shed their blood, well here's your own medicine back to you.

You've got to remember this, that when people ferociously, savagely, deliberately, and malignantly persecute God's people, they will be judged. And he who sits in the heavens laughs.

It's a terrifying thought. You have given them blood to drink, it is what they deserve. And as we'll see next week, it's not just their cruelty to God's people, it's the cruelty of humanity towards each other, man's and humanity to man, which is such a feature of human history.

The holiness of God, the Lamb who offered the perfect sacrifice for sin. But notice also verse 7, I heard the altar saying, now the altar has been associated particularly with the prayers of the saints. The altar, if you like, is the corporate voice of the saints who have prayed for relief, who have prayed in the words of the psalmist, how long, O Lord, how long before you rise and avenge the earth.

[12:29] So the creator judges his creation and he judges his creation because of its corruption and because of its holiness and ultimately because one day he will have a new heaven and a new earth where there is righteousness.

That new heaven, that new earth cannot exist, cannot be brought into being, cannot flourish for this corruption is still there. So in the first four plagues we really go back right to the beginning, the creation, the fall and the necessary, if you like, the necessary judgment that must take place before the new creation can come in.

Then in verses 10 to 16, the king, the sovereign, judges history. Just as the creator judges creation, so now the sovereign, the king, judges history.

Of course, there is not a rigid division between history and geography, if you like, but there is a special emphasis here on the way that God judges the evil powers which have operated throughout history.

Notice verse 10, the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. Now the beast here is the first beast of Revelation 13, the beast of militarism, the beast of persecution, the beast of destruction, the tyrannical beast who has caused so much misery throughout history.

[14:03] His kingdom was plunged into darkness. Now once again, that's got a progressive sense in the sense that every time a corrupt, wicked, evil tyrant falls, the throne of the beast is plunged into darkness.

Because these tyrannical rulers who rage over the earth and cause such misery, these are ultimately energized by the dragon and by the beast.

It's not just merely human wickedness as we know is pretty bad, but there is this evil malignant power in human history. Difficult to explain something like the Holocaust without actually bringing in demonic powers.

Hitler was undoubtedly an evil man, a godless, evil, ruthless man, but we know that Hitler consulted with black magicians and spiritists and so on as he carried out his evil work.

And we cannot but doubt that this is an example of the beast. Where some commentators in Revelation get it wrong is trying to identify this with a specific ruler who lives at a particular time, although that does not mean that there will not be an end.

[15:14] This is, I say, the judgment throughout history, but of course one day at the end of history, all corrupt, wicked human power will be destroyed and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

Evil powers bring nothing but misery. As I've said, it's not just the persecution of God's people. Regimes like Stalin, regimes like Hitler, the corrupt regimes throughout the earth, Zimbabwe, other regimes, Pol Pot and others, Chayichescu and other such dictators.

Nobody apart from a few cronies flourished. It caused nothing but misery, nothing but agony, scorched by the fear. Sorry, people gnawed their tongues in anguish.

There is no freedom for anyone under a regime like this and yet there is no turning to God. God judges these evil powers and yet people do not turn to God.

And it is further defined by this curious passage on the sixth bowl which is one of the very cryptic passages in the book. Six angels poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east.

[16:34] Now, I want to ask all this about. I think the answer to that is going to come in the next two chapters. The great city of Babylon stood on the Euphrates. The city of Babylon becomes the symbol of the beast of anti-God powers in every generation.

The time when the apostle John writes, of course, it is Rome but throughout history these demonic regimes have risen and the name Babylon has been given to them all.

This is the haunt of demonic spirits controlling the evil powers. And this is made very plain in the book of Daniel.

If you read chapters 10 to 12 of the book of Daniel you'll see how the rise and fall of nations is controlled in the spirit world. The prince of the kingdom of Persia and the prince of the kingdom of Greece who is not the emperor of Persia or Alexander the Great of Greece but the evil powers who are raising these regimes.

obviously there is probably a specific reference here to the earlier fall of Babylon to the Persians who came from the east and later on of course a much later age in 410 the city of Rome was to fall under the onslaughts of people like the Goths and the Vandals and the Visigoths who of course came from the east from the steppes of Russia.

[18:01] Another way of showing that this is not simply one incident this is a continuing battle going on throughout history but anywhere here we have once again the unholy trinity remember how we saw the unholy trinity back in chapter 12 the devil himself the dragon parodying God the beast the first beast the persecuting beast who parodies Christ because he has a fatal wound and comes to life again and the second beast the dangerous beast of propaganda and false teaching that beast which has been so active and is so active in our own day and in our own culture this beast is now from now on called the false prophet this beast is being unmasked he is the false prophet so here we have the beast of persecution and destruction and the beast of propaganda and deception and three unclean spirits because Leviticus tells us in chapter 11 that frogs are unclean and not to be eaten

I've never been tempted to eat a frog but anyway the frogs here the unclean spirits the false prophets and the persecutors we need to fight these some of our brothers and sisters are fighting with the savage beast of persecution I don't think we realize often enough how much we need to fight this false prophet who is so active in our culture in our church and in our day and they are the battle throughout history verse 16 well known name they assemble the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon subject of films and so on and of sensational thrillers Armageddon is the hill of Megiddo that's what the Hebrew word means Megiddo was a strategic place near Mount Carmel and between that and the coastal plain where many many battles were fought back in the book of Judges

Deborah and Barak destroyed the Canaanites there indeed in the first world war Lord Allenby won a decisive battle in that very place this is a place where evil will be defeated now I'm going to talk a bit more about this when we come to because we won't actually come to the battle here we don't come to that until the later chapter so I'll talk about it then but remember once again what we've got here is the persecuting power the deceptive power throughout history which God judges throughout history but will one day totally judge so the sovereign Lord judges history remember these are the

two great themes presented at the beginning of the Bible God is the creator of the Lord who made heaven and earth he's also the Lord of history and these come together in this final book and then in verses 17 to 21 the seventh bowl the Lord judges the unrepentant seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and a loud voice presumably the voice of God from the throne saying it is done it is finished that recalls something very significant doesn't it all the words that the Lord

Jesus Christ said on the cross it is done it is finished as he took upon himself if you like to use John's language the seven bowls of the anger of God as he stood in our place so that we did not need to have that anger poured out on us the loud voice we notice as well back in chapter 14 the everlasting gospel the wine press was trodden outside the city it was outside the city that Jesus died and took upon himself that on that cross as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied so that no one else need to suffer from it shall not the judge of all the earth do right now the great city flashes of lightning rumbles peals of thunder and a great earthquake once again once again the phrase has never been since man was on earth that's said about the plague of hail in the book of Exodus this is the same

God and thunder lightning earthquakes throughout the Old Testament prophets are seen as symbols of the approaching day of the Lord as the creator appears in his creation to judge to purify and eventually to remake and the great city which is Babylon the great which will be the subject of the next two chapters the great city was split into three parts the three suggesting the completeness of the judgment maybe going a wee bit too far as some commentators say to suggest the judgment on the three evil creatures the dragon the beast and the false prophet but anyway three suggest the completeness of the judgment the total disintegration of human civilization one of the things we'll look at as we come towards the end of the book is that we have some images suggesting the total devastation disintegration of the earth like what you have in 2 Peter the heavens and the earth melting with a fervent heat we have other passages that suggest the more gradual merging of the new heaven and the new earth look at these when we come to it and then this terrifying plague of hail also foreseen by Ezekiel in chapter 38 of his vision but still there is no repentance

[24 : 11] C.S. Lewis in his book *The Problem of Pain* says at one point I would do anything to save someone from hell and then he says what a foolish and ignorant thing to say God has already done everything he can that's why he said at the beginning let's not try to be kinder than God shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right what about verse 15 the verse you thought I had forgotten behold I am coming like a thief blessed is the one who stays awake keeping his garments on that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed God is still speaking by his spirit and after all the preaching of judgment is one of the signs that God is still speaking by his spirit there is a way of escape there is a way back to God from the dark paths of sin and here it is behold I am coming like a thief the words of Jesus himself in the gospels telling people to keep awake once again coming back to what I said at the beginning this is a wake up call this is an alarm call after all back in the passage

I have taken my title from Lot and his family were told get out of Sodom before the fire falls hurry don't look back and we know of course Lot's wife did look back now don't imagine that means she cast a hurried glance over her shoulder I think what that means is she stood and gazed longingly at Sodom and refused to move refused to escape from the judgment keep awake keeping his garments on now what are these garments the garments of Christ's righteousness we're going to read about them again in chapter 19 it was given to the bride to be dressed in white garments the righteousness of the saints then we're back in chapter 3 remember once again that this book is addressed this book the whole book is the letter to the seven churches the church in Laodicea and their complacency and pride are described as naked and blind here are the garments to wear back in chapter 6 another foreshadowing of the final judgment who can stand well here is the answer the one who can stand is the one who stays awake and keeps their garments on the gospel still sounds the judgment the bulls have not yet been poured out in all their terror

I wonder if all of us have taken that way of escape if we have come to Christ taken from him the robe of righteousness which alone will save us in that day when the judgment falls I pray that it may be so for everyone in this room this evening let's pray Lord how powerful these words are from the apostle on the island of Patmos they are powerful not just because the apostle had a vivid imagination but because you threw aside the veil and showed him the terrors of the last judgment and yet at the same time showed him the way of escape the way back to God from the dark paths of sin I pray that may be the way taken by all of us this evening in Jesus name

Amen