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THE SEVEN DEADLY DRINKING CUPS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION
REVELATION 16:1-9
NUMBER 26

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REVELATION 16:1-9 "And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory."

We have already seen a relationship between these seven plagues which will come at the end of the Tribulation and the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt by the hand of Moses at the time of the Exodus. Many of these plagues are very similar in nature.

REVELATION 16:1 "And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." This is an announcement which shows that the end is near, that God has delayed his judgment to the final limit, that the harvest is about ripe and the Second Coming of Christ is very near. The word vial here merely means container or drinking cup. Just for clearer understanding I am going to use the word drinking cup where this word vial appears in the text.

REVELATION 16:2 "And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image." This first drinking cup is here poured out and it is a picture of divine judgment on all those who were unbelievers and who followed the system of the Dictator of the Revived Roman Empire. We have already seen this figure before, when Christ died on the cross the figure used was the drinking of a cup. Christ had asked the disciples if they were able to drink of the cup and they said they were. But they didn't understand what they were talking about, for no one was able to drink of the cup except Christ. This he did when he hung on the cross and he paid for the sins of the whole human race. The principle here in this verse is that these have rejected the price Christ paid for their sins, and instead they are standing on their own human good.

But many people will not accept Christ except under extreme pressure. Under pressure some will switch from negative to positive volition and be saved. It is an unnatural and terrible way to be saved, but here we are seeing evangelism by fear and pressure. Just before the end God is going to the very extreme in order to get people to be saved. This is the most unusual kind of evangelism but this is the purpose of these seven drinking cups. God has designed this plan to hit the world with maximum pressure at the end of the Tribulation to wake them up and make them realize their condition before it is too late. You have to remember that the seven drinking-cup judgments are poured out on all those who are religious. These are the most difficult people of all to reach

Illustration-- When people reach God-consciousness they either go on negative or positive signals. If they go on negative signals it creates a vacuum in the soul and into this vacuum is sucked religion. The most awful people in the world are religious people. Saul of Tarsus was the most wicked man in the earth because he was the most religious. He found Christ under maximum pressure, you recall.

So here in our study of these seven drinking cups we are to remember that this is pressure evangelism. These are people who can only learn the hard way. These are hardheaded people who will not learn any other way. Volition is involved in both phase 1 and phase 2. In phase 1, which is salvation, volition is involved. It simply means "Believe and be saved". Then in phase 2, which is the Christian life after you are saved, volition is measured by your desire for knowing Bible doctrine. In the Book of Proverbs the five most dangerous men in the world are discussed, and one of the most dangerous of these is the man who refuses to learn doctrine and then gets clobbered so hard with discipline that he actually believes that he has not been saved. Doctrine is the problem-solver in life. The believer minus doctrine is just like the unbeliever. You can't get doctrine when pressure hits you unless you have had doctrine before. These seven judgments were all addressed against the ecumenical religious crowd. They are so hardheaded that it is necessary to clobber them with catastrophe before they will consider the claims of Christ and even then quite often they won't believe. Three times it says, "They repented not". This is called extreme evangelism. The time of the second advent of Christ is their very last chance. It is the end of the line for them. In other words, they've had it. The seven drinking cups are evangelism by catastrophe. There is nothing worse on earth than to be religious. The more religion you have inside your mind the less opportunity you will have to ever understand the Christian life. If there is religion in your mind you just simply can't make it with Christ. The religious man must get rid of his preconceived ideas of religion before he can accept Christ by faith. You cannot learn doctrine if your mind is filled with religion. We can't earn or deserve anything from God. You can't buy God's favor with church attendance, or tithing, or any other kind of human works. But religion so often distorts the Word of God. But you don't get spirituality as a result of something you do. Salvation is by grace and spirituality is by grace. Both are gifts from God.

Now these seven drinking cup judgments are all against religion and they are terrible catastrophes. So we have these seven deadly catastrophes right at the end of the Tribulation period. It is God's last great attempt to get people to believe. Here are seven attempts to evangelize the religious people of the world.

The first drinking cup represents the loss of health. This is against those who had the credit card of the dictator of the Revived Roman Empire. "Noisome" means very bad, and "Grievous" means a cancerous sore. It is not designed to kill them immediately but to make them realize that death is just around the corner and to cause them to turn and believe in Christ. This is designed to wake them up, to shake them and cause them to repent before it is too late. It is an attempt to get them to see the folly of depending on material things. This loss of health is so widespread that it makes them realize they are under discipline from God. So this is evangelism by catastrophe and it takes them right back to the point of negative volition when they went on God-consciousness.

REVELATION 16:3 "And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea." The second drinking cup deals with the loss of food. This cup was poured out on the sea. There are many people who live by what comes out of the sea. Shrimp, fish, lobster, oysters, etc. Animals and fish were all destroyed. This is to awaken them to realize they need something other than food.

REVELATION 16:4 "And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood." The third cup is a water shortage. You can survive many days without food, but you can't survive over three days without water. This plague is on the fresh water supply of the earth.

REVELATION 16:5 "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shall be, because thou hast judged thus." This angel given charge of the water supply is possibly a very high ranking angel. Every member of the human race must have water to drink so this makes water of universal importance. So this elect angel must guard the water supply of the earth. After the flood, God promised that he would never again destroy the world by a flood. The water table of the earth is declining but there will be enough water until the end of time.

Illustration--Too many of us take water for granted. To be able to turn on a faucet and get clean, pure water is indeed a great blessing. To have pure and clean drinking water and to have sufficient water for drinking and bathing and the other essentials of life is one of our greatest blessings.

So water is a gift from God and is an expression of God's grace. So here is a plague against water, which is one of the absolute essentials for survival.

An Explanation of "THOU ART RIGHTEOUS"

1. When this angel says, "Thou art righteous", he means that these judgments are an expression of God's perfect character. These judgments were perfect and not unfair in any way.
2. Mankind is prone to criticize God for his judgments because man never does have all the facts and because man does not understand the essence of God. Down through the ages man has been very critical of the judgments of God. But criticism is quite easy for all those who do not have all the facts.
3. Man minimizes sin and disobedience to the plan of God.
4. Mankind fails to see sin as man's failure to meet the standard of God's character.
5. The true character of sin can only be understood by the cross and what it cost Christ to go to the cross and die for our sins. God, as the judge, had to judge sin, and when Christ took our sin, then the judgment of God fell on his own Son. It cost the Father everything to judge his Son and what the Father did in judgment helps us realize just how really significant was the death of Christ on that cross. On the cross salvation was wrought out for us without sacrificing the character of God. Every false doctrine insults the character of God, yet his righteousness never changes.
6. For those who reject Christ and accept religion instead the essence of God must express itself. Here it expresses itself in these seven drinking cups. These drinking-cup judgments are designed to awaken the religious crowd and call them back to God-consciousness.
7. The love of God is rejected when Christ is rejected. The alternative to the love of God is judgment.

ROMANS 9:13 "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." The difference is that one would be a believer and the other would not. The word for "Thou art" is the verb "eimi" and means eternal existance. God is righteousness now, but he has always been righteous and he will always be righteous. He can't be anything else for this is his character.

Who then is at fault here in the administration of these drinking-cup judgments? Certainly not God. The whole human race is at fault and especially the religious crowd.

Saul of Tarsus was saved in this manner. He was hit by catastrophe on the Damascus Road and immediately he believed. This is the quickest salvation we have on record. His was conversion by catastrophe. He said, "Lord" and used the same word as the dying thief used on the cross when he called on Christ to save him. When Christ said, "I am Jesus" and immediately Saul knew the whole plan of salvation and in less than a second he was converted. What Stephen had said in his dying testimony all came into focus in the mind of Paul and he was converted in a second. When this verse says of Christ "Which art" it is referring to the eternal existence of Christ and refers to the truth of his resurrected humanity. "And wast" refers back before he became human and tells us he had always existed even before he was born. Now he is the God man, the unique one of the universe.

Now this angel realizes who Christ was and is and realizes that Christ is going to place angels below men. He recognizes the fairness of Jesus Christ and realizes that angels are going to be superceded by raised humanity. "Because thou hast judged" is a purpose clause and means it is God's purpose to turn men to himself by his judgments.

REVELATION 16:6 "For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy." Shedding the blood of saints and of prophets refers to the fact that millions have been killed in the name of religion. Saints and prophets is the terminology of the Jewish Age and the Tribulation is a part of the Jewish Age and that is why this language is used here. So he gives them blood to drink since they have shed so much blood. He always makes the punishment fit the crime. This teaches us that we are to keep our mouths shut about other people's sins and leave that to God. Don't try to help God discipline someone else. He is capable of giving judgment. You get a double judgment when you judge others. You get judged for judging them, then you receive the discipline that God was planning to dish out to them. You can earn judgment but you never can earn righteousness and justice and salvation.

REVELATION 16:7 "And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments." This "Another angel" is the angel in charge of the golden altar of incense. He is in charge of all the prayers being made by the Tribulational saints while they were being tormented. But they put their case in the Lord's hands as instructed in Romans 12:19-20.

When you have someone who has it in for you, don't retaliate and don't react. Don't be bitter and don't strike back. 1 Peter 5:7 and Psalm 55:22 tell you what to do. When you trust things into the Lord's hands, then the Lord takes care of you.

REVELATION 16:8 "And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire." This is the weather catastrophe. All these things occur in a very short period of time just before Christ comes back. Pouring out the plague on the sun has a vital connection with the weather. The sun controlled a great part of our weather pattern. So here is extreme heat and cold and this causes great suffering on the earth.

REVELATION 16:9 "And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory." Here men are scorched with great heat. It is not hot enough to kill them but hot enough to give them great physical pain. Notice that through all of this God never violates a man's volition. They blaspheme the name of God. Blasphemy is only possible where the truth is known and rejected. There is no brain damage here. They can think and speak and they have their own volition but even in this disaster appeal, they will not change their minds. Repent here is the word "Meta noieo" and it means to change your mind. These people did not change their minds about Christ. "To give him the glory" is a technical term meaning to believe in Christ.

So in these first judgments we have had the loss of health, the loss of food, the loss of water and weather disasters. God will do most anything, short of tampering with volition, to get a man to turn and believe in him. But God is too much of a gentleman to violate a man's will in order to get him to be saved.