

Sermon

November 16, 2014

Title: Egypt Defeated

Text: Revelation 15:5-19:10

A Thief in the Night

Early Warning?

What would you do with 30 seconds' warning before an earthquake struck? Earthquakes aren't much of a nuisance here in Vermont – although every so often we feel the ground shake. But if you live in a place like California, it's a different story.

Scientists tell us that more than 4000 occur in the United States every year. Of those earthquakes, 6 are 6.0 or greater on the Richter Scale. And all it takes is *one* ruin your day (or night). What's more, unlike hurricanes or tornados, earthquakes come without long-range warning. The ground starts shaking, things start falling off of shelves, roads split in half, buildings collapse. For those caught in the middle of a massive earthquake it must seem like the end of the world.

With this in mind, Early Warning Labs has partnered with the U.S. Government to create an app that will give up to 30 seconds' warning of an impending quake. So maybe you would be able to come up with a 30 second strategy for an earthquake.

Seven Bowls:

John's vision of angels pouring out seven bowls of judgment culminates in a gigantic earthquake – signifying the completion of God's judgment of evil in His world. But before the quake come 6 other plagues, all intended to convey a warning to a world gone drastically astray.

The cycle begins with angels coming out of the Temple in Heaven carrying the golden bowls. The bowls represent God's judgment of sin and evil. As they are poured out upon the world they unleash plagues like those God brought upon Egypt when Pharaoh refused to set Israel free. Each plague was in a sense a part of God's "early warning system." Also, it has been pointed out that in a sense Creation itself afflicts the humans that have refused to worship their Creator. In fact, the bowls are given to the angels by one of the 4 living creatures – the representatives of Creation that surround God's throne.

Just as we saw with the vision of the 7 Trumpets, however, mankind refuses to repent. When the sun punishes them with its heat, John says:

Revelation 16:9b NIV

...they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Likewise, when the Beast's empire goes pitch black, with the population suffering from the first bowl's judgment of festering sores:

Revelation 16:10b-11 NIV

People gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

Like a Thief in the Night:

And then, just before the final bowl, with its massive earthquake, John interrupts the sequence with these words:

Revelation 16:15 NIV

"Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

With those words John is reminding his readers of the Exodus Story. Remember how just before the final plague, God gave His people instructions to prepare themselves for a rapid departure? He instructed them on how to avoid the devastation of the plague. They were to make unleavened bread – no time for letting the bread rise. They were to wear their traveling clothes to bed. Most of all, they were to be ready to pick up and head out of Egypt at a moment's notice.

When the final plague struck, it was just as God had warned them: no time to start packing; just enough time to get out of town!

Exodus 12:31-32 NIV

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. ³² Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me."

Now John is saying that God's People must be ready for their New Exodus. God's final judgment of this world will come without warning. All you can do is be *ready*.

Jesus said exactly the same thing when He spoke of His return:

Mark 13:32-36 NIV

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Knowing What to Look For

Babylon:

The 7 bowls of judgment serve a common purpose: to expose and unmask Satan’s counterfeit kingdom as a fraud. They do the same thing that the 10 plagues in Exodus did to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was considered to be the physical presence of the Sun God. He was thus responsible for bringing peace and prosperity to his realm. In other words, he took credit for things that he was utterly incapable of doing: like making the sun come up every morning or causing the Nile to flood each year. The 10 plagues that God unleashed upon Pharaoh and his realm exposed Pharaoh to be a complete fraud – utterly helpless and unable to make the natural realm do his bidding.

In the same way, God unmasks the reality of the empire that ruled the world in John’s day. John refers to it by the name “Babylon.” Ancient Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem and burned its temple to the ground. The Romans had just done the same thing only 20 to 25 years before. Rome now claimed for herself the same power as had Babylon and Pharaoh.

“Come, I will show you the punishment...”

The 7th bowl brings total destruction upon “Babylon.” Then, an angel comes to make clear – to reveal – to John and his readers what this means for them. He says:

Revelation 17:1 NIV

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters.

The ultimate expression of Rome was the goddess Roma. She was depicted as a beautiful and dignified woman, sometimes depicted as seated upon the Seven Hills of Rome. The picture that John is given of her is a biting and ironic contrast!

Revelation 17:3-6 NIV

Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten

horns. ⁴ *The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.* ⁵ *The name written on her forehead was a mystery:*

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

⁶ *I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.*

The angel explains that the beast she rides is one and the same as the false christ Satan brought from the sea. She sits on seven hills – thus assuring that she is indeed Rome.

The angel goes on to tell how Rome/Babylon will fall:

Revelation 17:16-17 NIV

¹⁶ *The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.*

Babylon's fall will come from within. Evil eventually self-destructs. It becomes the victim of its own chaos and corruption.

Knowing what to look for:

Rome embodied the ultimate presence of Satan's kingdom in John's day. With its military might, its immense luxury, its propaganda machine and its total domination of popular culture, it must have seemed invincible. Why not just give in and "drink the Kool-Aid"?

The same thing happens in each generation. Humans erect a system of political and cultural power in an effort to rule the world. John's message to us is that each and every one of these false kingdoms is nothing but a tawdry parody of God's Kingdom. It may gussy itself up, but it is no more than a debauched prostitute sipping sewage from a goblet. Behind the pomp and propaganda are mere humans who will fade into history like all who have come before.

We are called to serve a higher King and be citizens of a higher Kingdom. As Paul writes:

Philippians 3:20-21 NIV

²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,* ²¹ *who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Egypt Defeated

The Exodus Moment:

We have seen how John has retold the Exodus Story in this cycle of visions.

- First, he gives the warning to be ready to move out at a moment's notice, just as Israel was commanded to prepare for a hasty and immediate departure from Egypt.
- Second, he unmask the kingdom of the beast in the same way that God unmasked the kingdom of Pharaoh – showing it to be an utter fraud.
- Now comes the moment of truth: the command to move out and leave Egypt behind to her fate.

An angel announces that Babylon has fallen and has become the haunt of demons. A second angel then issues a command to the People of God:

Revelation 18:4-5 NIV

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

*“Come out of her, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;
⁵ for her sins are piled up to heaven,
and God has remembered her crimes.*

There it is: the command to march, to join the Exodus Journey. Stay behind and you will surely get caught up in the unraveling of the false kingdom. Move out and you take the journey to the Promised Land of God's New Creation. It's as simple as that.

Funeral or Wedding?

I remember a very strange beginning to our family vacation. My dad and mom packed all of us kids and our stuff into the car for the trip from Philadelphia to upstate New York. But on the way dad had a wedding to perform – as well as a funeral! The funeral came first. Then we drove to a church for the wedding. I still remember us kids getting a kick out of putting a sign that read “Funeral” in the windshield of the car while we sat in the little parking lot, waiting for my dad to finish up and take us on our way!

The visions of this cycle end with much the same contrast. First comes a lengthy description of the funeral dirge for Babylon. Kings, merchants and sailors all sing their lament. As they do, we get a picture of just how seductive and powerful the kingdom of the beast was – and is.

But the cycle ends with a wedding.

Revelation 19:6-9 NIV

⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

*⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.*

*⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”*

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

⁹ Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

The Exodus Journey ends in the Promised Land of God’s New Creation.

Egypt Defeated:

Each one of us confronts the same “Exodus moment” that John described in these visions. God is calling each one of us to be ready to respond to His command to move out, to change, to repent. He is calling each one of us to look with His vision, as it were, at the systems of this world. And when we’re in danger, He gives the command: Move out now!

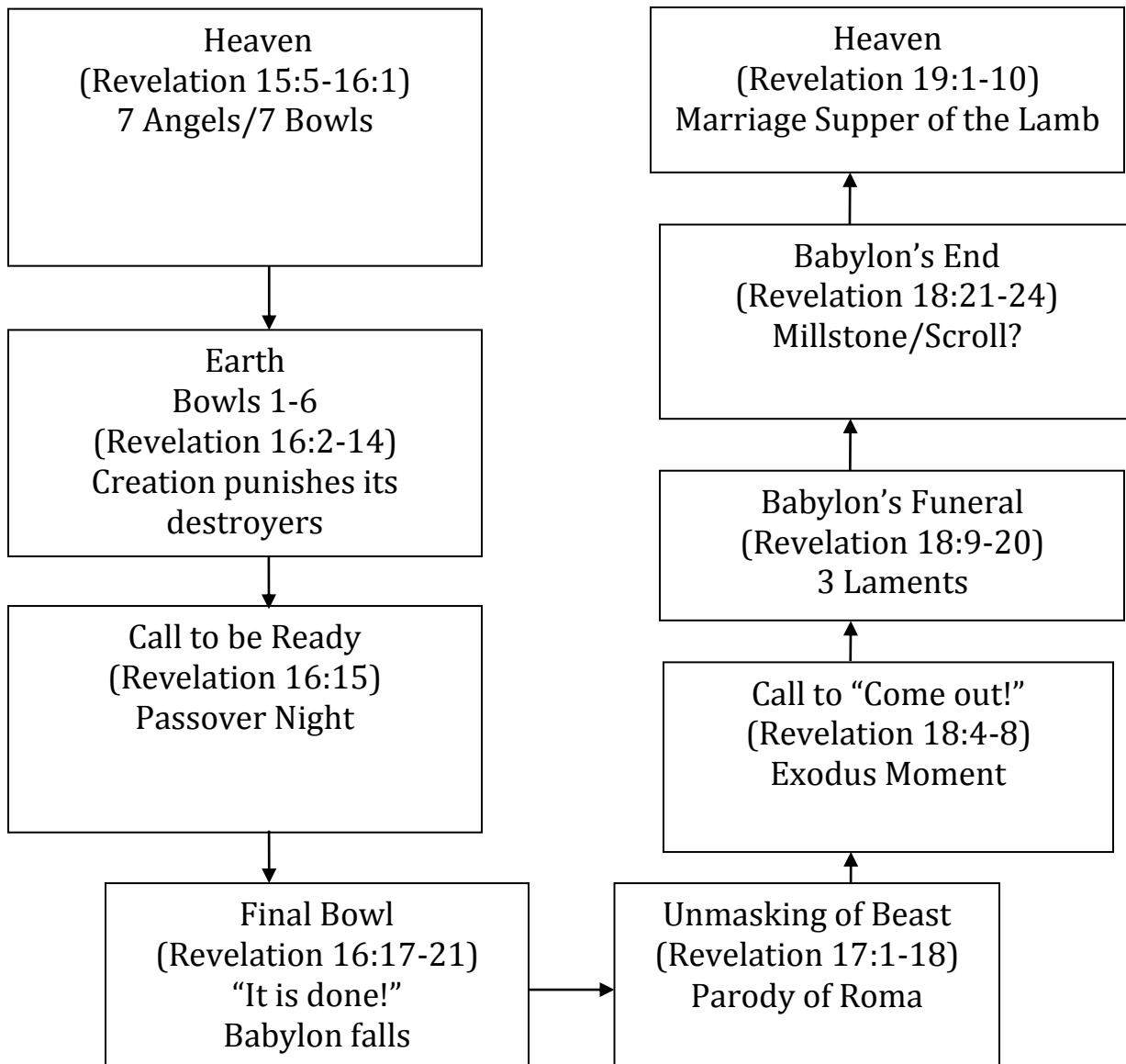
Don’t be surprised if God’s command comes at a time you think most inconvenient. Don’t be surprised if those around you just “don’t get it.” Don’t be surprised if it comes to you in an unusual way. It may be a word of caution from a close friend about a relationship that you are getting into that could destroy your marriage and your family. It may be a check in your spirit about the integrity of a word or act. It may be that God speaks through His Word about pride or unforgiveness. Whatever the case, you are being called to an Exodus Moment. Think of it as God’s “Early Warning” app. The next thing you do will determine your destiny for days, months, or even years to come. Your destiny and perhaps that of those you love.

Make the wrong choice and Egypt takes over once again. Make the right one and Egypt is defeated. It’s up to you.

Revelation Study

Session 5

The Fifth Vision Cycle (Revelation 15-19)



We've turned the corner. Now we see the final end of the corrupt kingdom of this world as it is unmasked as a fraud and ultimately turns against itself. Evil always destroys itself. The visions end with a funeral and a wedding. Which will be ours? It's our choice.

This cycle again portrays the New Exodus Journey. Interspersed among the visions are commands that anchor our journey in a confusing and dangerous world. We are called to ready to move out at a moment's notice – just as Israel

was commanded to prepare for Passover and the journey to the Promised Land. We are shown that this world's systems and kingdoms are no match for the rule of the Creator. Our greatest accomplishments and our attempts to control God's world always end in disaster. God uses His Creation to show us how fragile and insignificant we really are! He calls us to move out. Our journey in this world is that of people passing through on their way to God's New Creation.

John describes the world that his readers knew all too well – the world dominated by Rome, its commerce, its armies, its propaganda and its demand for worship. It was a world of luxury and oppression, of lies and half-truths. It sought to own the hearts and minds of every single human being under its control. Is our world that much different?

The reward for taking the Exodus Journey is that we escape both this world's corruption and its collapse. Our journey takes us deeper and deeper into God's New Creation. The gift of "Eternal Life" is a gift that begins giving in the here and now as we see that Life replacing the old false behaviors and assumptions of this world. And one day, when the journey is complete, we will be united completely with the Lamb!

Discussion Questions (10-15 minutes):

1. In what area of your life is God calling you to "move out"? What would it cost you to do so? What will happen if you don't?

2. What has God shown you about Himself during this time of studying Revelation? What has He shown you about *you*?

Prayer Time (5 minutes)

Next Week: Our final session (Nov. 26th) will be a family-friendly Thanksgiving Service.