

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 21, Revelation 14-16--Grain/Grapes; Seven Bowls

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Alright, get ready because we're diving deep into Revelation chapters 14 through 16 today. Ooh, intense stuff. We've got some powerful imagery to unpack.

Like what? Well, we're talking harvests and plagues. Oh, wow. A sea of glass.

And of course, you can't forget Armageddon. No, you can't. It's one of those things that everyone's heard of, even if they've never read Revelation.

Right. And for this deep dive, we're going to be focusing on Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on these chapters. Oh, I love his work.

He's always got such insightful perspectives on Revelation. He really does. I mean, just thinking about those two harvests in chapter 14.

Yeah. They always kind of confused me before, but after listening to Dr. Mathewson, I finally get their significance. Yeah, he does a great job of explaining how those two harvests represent two totally different destinies.

Right. You've got the grain harvest, which symbolizes the gathering of God's people.

Yeah. Like those who've remained faithful. Exactly.

And he points out that it's not just about being saved, but about being honored. It's like, you know, being the first fruits, the best part of the harvest offered to God. Oh, I see.

It's an image of blessing and abundance. And then you've got the grape harvest. Oh.

Which is, well, a bit more intense. Yeah, a little darker, for sure. You've got those grapes being trampled in a wine press with blood flowing everywhere.

Definitely not a pretty picture. It's pretty graphic. It is, and it's supposed to be.

I mean, John, the author of Revelation, is drawing on imagery that was common in other apocalyptic texts of his time. Oh, like which ones? Well, like First Enoch and Fourth Ezra, for example. Okay.

In those books, they describe blood reaching the horse's chest, even a man's thigh and a camel's back. It's meant to shock. Wow.

That's intense. Yeah, and it's not meant to be taken literally, of course. But it drives home the severity of God's judgment against those who choose to follow the beast.

Okay. Now, when you say the beast, what exactly are we talking about? Well, throughout Revelation, the beast is used as a symbol for the Roman Empire and its opposition to God. Oh, okay.

So those who follow the beast are choosing a path that leads to destruction. Exactly. It's like they're choosing the wrong side in this cosmic battle between good and evil.

It's like those choose-your-own-adventure books we read as kids. Uh-huh. Yeah, except the stakes are a bit higher here.

For sure. So after this contrasting harvest, we move into Revelation 15, where John gives us this glimpse of a sea of glass and people singing the Song of Moses. Ah, now this is where it gets really interesting.

Right. This scene always felt kind of out of place to me. Well, Dr. Mathewson explains that it's like a flash forward.

It's a glimpse of the ultimate victory of God's people, even before the full weight of judgment hits. Okay. And the imagery here is packed with meaning.

The sea of glass, for instance, is thought to symbolize purity and the calming of God's power, similar to the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus. Ah, so it connects back to that theme of liberation, of God rescuing his people. Exactly.

And then you've got the Song of Moses, which echoes the song that the Israelites sang after escaping from Egypt. Right. It reinforces that sense of triumph and deliverance.

Yeah, it's a powerful reminder that even in the midst of tribulation, there is hope for those who remain faithful to God. Okay, so then we get to Revelation 16. Here we go.

And this is where those plagues come into play with the seven bowls of wrath. Things get really intense here. They do.

And it's interesting because these bowl judgments, they seem to mirror the plagues that God sent on Egypt during the Exodus. They do. It's almost a point-by-point parallel.

Really? Can you give me some examples? My mind is blown. Of course. Take the first bowl, for example.

It brings sores, just like the plague of boils in Exodus 9. And then you have the second and third bowls turning water into blood, just like the first plague in Exodus 7. And the fourth bowl brings scorching heat from the sun, similar to the ninth plague in Exodus 9. That's incredible. So each bowl has a corresponding plague in the Exodus story. Exactly.

But what's the point? Why echo the Exodus story like this? Well, Dr. Mathewson believes that John is emphasizing the consistency of God's actions throughout history. God liberated his people from slavery in Egypt, and he will liberate them again from the oppression of the beast. Okay.

He's showing that the consequences of rejecting God are severe, whether in the time of Moses or John's time. It's like a pattern, a recurring theme. Exactly.

But then there's this really interesting detail that Dr. Matthewson points out. What's that? Right in the middle of the third bowl judgment. Yeah.

John inserts a hymn. A hymn in the middle of all the plagues? Why? It's a hymn that praises God's justice and righteousness. It's like John is reminding us that these judgments aren't arbitrary or vindictive.

Okay. They are a direct result of humanity's rebellion against God. So even amidst all the chaos and destruction, John is calling us to recognize the righteousness of God's actions.

Precisely. And that brings us to one of the most notorious battles in Revelation: Armageddon. Here it is.

The big one. Now, before you get too excited. Aha! All right.

Dr. Matthewson cautions against taking it too literally. Really? Everyone always talks about Armageddon as this specific place. I know.

But Dr. Matthewson suggests that it might not be a physical location at all. He thinks it could be a powerful symbol of the ultimate showdown between good and evil. So not so much a place on a map, but a representation of a cosmic conflict.

Exactly. And think about it. There's no actual fighting described in this passage.

John is setting the stage for the final confrontation, which unfolds later in Revelation. He's building suspense, creating anticipation. I guess that makes sense.

But John's original audience would have been familiar with Megiddo, the real-world place that inspired the name Armageddon. Right. And that's important to keep in mind.

Megiddo was a historical site where many pivotal battles were fought, where kingdoms rose and fell. Yeah. By invoking that name, John is tapping into a history of conflict and using it to symbolize this ultimate clash between God and the forces of evil.

So he's telling his readers, get ready, folks. This is the big one. Precisely.

And the imagery might be deliberately ambiguous. It could be read as a geographical location, a symbolic representation, or perhaps even both. OK, so we're bracing ourselves for this epic battle.

And then John throws in the seemingly random verse in chapter 16.15. Which one? Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is he who stays awake. Ah, yes.

This verse is so crucial. It seems to come out of nowhere. But it shifts our focus from global events to individual responsibility.

So in the middle of all this talk about judgment and battles, John is reminding us to be personally prepared, to stay vigilant. Exactly. It harkens back to those messages to the churches in chapters 2 and 3. OK.

Where Christ calls them to persevere, to remain faithful, even in the face of persecution. Yeah. It's a reminder that the end could come at any moment, and we need to be ready.

Like he's saying, don't get so caught up in the big picture that you forget about your own spiritual state. Exactly. It's a call to action, to live a life that's pleasing to God, because we don't know when he will return.

That's a powerful message. And speaking of things coming to an end, we reach the final judgment in chapter 16: the fall of Babylon. Yeah, Babylon.

Such a loaded term in Revelation. I know. It's clearly bad.

Right. But what does it really represent? Well, that's a conversation for part 2 of our deep dive. OK.

Sounds good. I'm intrigued. Me too.

We've got a lot more to unpack. You know, it's interesting how this whole section on Babylon kind of connects back to those earlier images of judgment. Oh, yeah.

Like what? Remember that brutal scene with a grape harvest? You know, the grapes being trampled in the wine press. Oh, yeah. All that blood.

Exactly. It was pretty intense. I can definitely see how that ties into the idea of destruction and judgment.

Right. And Dr. Mathewson makes this point that Babylon in Revelation, it's not just about a physical city. OK.

It represents all the forces that are opposed to God. Like what kind of forces? Well, think about the systems and the ideologies, the powers that be, anything that stands in opposition to God's kingdom. So it's more of a spiritual concept than a geographical location.

Exactly. But John's audience. Yeah.

They would have known about the historical Babylon, the one from the Old Testament. Right. Right.

Of course. And that's no accident. Dr. Mathewson explains that John is intentionally drawing on the historical Babylon, which was known for its extravagance, its cruelty, and its oppression of God's people.

Ah. So he's using a familiar historical example to help his audience understand this new symbolic Babylon. Precisely.

But we also have to remember that John was writing to a community that was experiencing persecution under the Roman Empire. Oh, right. Right.

So while Babylon might represent evil in a general sense. Yeah. It's also likely a coded reference to Rome itself.

That makes a lot of sense. I mean, John couldn't just come right out and attack Rome directly. No, not if he wanted to stay alive.

It's like he's using the symbolic language to critique the empire and its excesses without putting himself in danger. Exactly. He was walking a tightrope, you know, trying to deliver this powerful message of resistance, but without inviting even more persecution on himself and his community.

So how does he describe this symbolic Babylon, then? What are his characteristics? Well, Dr. Mathewson points out that John paints this vivid picture of Babylon as this opulent city just brimming with luxury and wealth. Okay. Full of merchants and traders, and there's this constant emphasis on material possessions and worldly pleasures.

It sounds like a decadent empire that's lost its way. Yes. Seduced by its own power and wealth.

And that's the point. Dr. Matthewson argues that John is contrasting the fleeting pleasures of this world with the eternal treasures of God's kingdom. So Babylon represents everything that's temporary and meaningless.

Right. God's kingdom represents what truly matters. Exactly.

So it's not just about a physical city being destroyed. Okay. It's about the downfall of an entire worldview, a way of life that's opposed to God's will.

Wow. That's pretty profound. So this theme of judgment against wickedness, it's woven throughout Revelation.

It is. And Babylon's fall serves as this stark warning. A warning to who? To those who align themselves with evil, that they'll ultimately face the consequences.

Yeah. No one gets away with it forever. Okay.

So we've established that Babylon is this symbol of corruption and rebellion against God. Right. So what happens to it? How does John describe its downfall? Well, it's not pretty.

Dr. Matthewson takes us through a series of pronouncements against Babylon, detailing its sudden and catastrophic collapse. Okay. And it's described in really vivid detail with images of fire and smoke and mourning.

It sounds like one of those epic disaster movies. Yeah.

You know, where everything goes up in flames. Exactly. It's definitely dramatic.

Yeah. And Dr. Matthewson argues that John is intentionally using over-the-top imagery to emphasize just how completely Babylon is destroyed. So it's not just defeated.

It's completely obliterated. It's gone. Wiped off the map.

Nothing left. Wow. That's powerful.

So this destruction is meant to highlight the power of God. Yes. And the certainty of his judgment.

Absolutely. No matter how powerful or entrenched evil might seem, it's ultimately no match for God. Okay.

But there's this other interesting detail that Dr. Matthewson points out. Even though Babylon represents everything bad, there's a sense of mourning associated with its destruction. Mourning.

Wouldn't people be celebrating? I mean, it represents oppression and evil. You'd think so, right? Yeah. But John portrays the merchants and the kings of the earth as lamenting Babylon's destruction.

Really? They're crying out, "Whoa, whoa, and mourning the loss of its wealth and power. I see. It's not that they're sad to see evil defeated.

Right. They're upset because they benefited from that evil. Exactly.

Their fortunes were tied to Babylon's success. Okay. So when it falls, they fall too.

It's like they were complicit in the whole system. Yeah. And Dr. Matthewson argues that this detail underscores the seductive nature of power and wealth.

Hmm. It's easy to get caught up in those things. Yeah.

Become complicit in evil systems because we think we're benefiting from them. Right. We think we're winning.

But ultimately, those who align themselves with evil will share in its destruction. It's a powerful indictment of greed and compromise. It makes me wonder: how do we apply this idea of coming out of Babylon to our own lives? That's the million-dollar question.

It is. And Dr. Matthewson suggests that it's about recognizing the Babylonian systems and ideologies that exist in our own time and refusing to participate in them. So it's about identifying the forces that stand in opposition to God's will.

Yeah. Whether it's greed or corruption or injustice. Right.

And choosing to align ourselves with righteousness instead. Exactly. A call to purity, to faithfulness, to a radical allegiance to God, even when it's difficult or unpopular.

That reminds me of that verse we talked about earlier. Which one? Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake.

Oh, yeah. That's a good one. It's about being vigilant, you know? Both on a personal level and a societal level.

Yeah. Recognizing those Babylonian influences that try to pull us away from God. Right.

We can't afford to be complacent or complicit. We have to actively choose to stand with God. Yeah.

Fight against injustice and live lives that reflect his kingdom values. Okay, so we've talked about the symbolic meaning of Babylon. Yes.

Its destruction and the call to come out of it. Right. But there's one image that really stuck with me.

What's that? The angel proclaiming, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. Oh, yeah. It's such a powerful declaration of God's judgment.

It really is like the final nail in the coffin. It is. And Dr. Mathewson points out that this announcement is repeated several times in Revelation, emphasizing the certainty and finality of Babylon's downfall.

It's like a cosmic echo reverberating throughout the universe. I like that. Babylon is finished.

It's over. Sends chills down my spine. It's definitely meant to be impactful.

Okay. But Dr. Mathewson also emphasizes that the fall of Babylon isn't just about judgment. Okay, what else is it about then? It's also about making way for something new, something better.

Oh, like what? Well, he explains that the destruction of Babylon clears the way for the establishment of God's kingdom. Okay. The New Jerusalem, which is described in detail later in Revelation.

So it's not just an ending. No. It's also a beginning.

Exactly. It's like clearing out the debris to make room for a new building. That's a great analogy.

Thanks. And it's a really crucial point to remember. Yeah.

The judgment of evil isn't the final word. It's the prelude to a new creation. Okay.

A world where God's righteousness reigns supreme. That's a message of hope and renewal. It is.

That transcends the immediate context of John's time. Absolutely. It speaks to us across the centuries.

For sure. But what about those battles that are still to come? We've got Armageddon, the battle in Chapter 19, and then the final battle at the end of Chapter 20. Are those all

separate events? That's where we're going to unpack one of Dr. Mathewson's most intriguing theories in Part 3 of our deep dive.

Man, we've been through a lot in these chapters of Revelation. We have. Harvests, plagues, Armageddon, the fall of Babylon.

My head's spinning. Me too. It's a lot to take in.

It is. But, you know, Dr. Mathewson reminds us that in the middle of all this cosmic drama, there's also a very personal message. Oh, you mean like that verse in Chapter 16? Yeah, the one that says, Behold, I come like a thief.

Blessed is the one who stays awake. That's it. And it's so powerful because it reminds us that while these events might seem distant or symbolic, they have real implications for how we live today.

So it's not just about, like, understanding the end times in some abstract way. Right. It's about letting that understanding shape how we live now.

Exactly. Just like those messages to the seven churches back in Chapters 2 and 3. Oh, yeah. They were facing all those challenges.

Compromise, complacency, persecution. Then Christ called them to repent. To persevere, to remain faithful.

And this verse echoes that same call to action. It's a wake-up call, right? It is. In the middle of all the chaos, reminding us to be ready no matter what's happening around us.

I think that's a good way to put it. But I have to admit, some of those images are pretty terrifying, you know? Like what? The bowls of wrath, the plagues. Oh, yeah.

Is that really how it's all going to go down? Well, that's where Dr. Mathewson offers some helpful insight. Okay. What does he say? He emphasizes that the plagues and judgments shouldn't necessarily be interpreted literally.

Okay. They're more about conveying the severity and the certainty of God's opposition to wickedness. So less about predicting specific events and more about understanding the spiritual consequences.

Exactly. The big picture is this. Turn away from evil, embrace God's righteousness, and be prepared for his return.

Okay. Yeah, that makes me feel a little less anxious about the whole apocalypse thing. Good.

I'm glad. But we still haven't talked about those other battles that are mentioned. Oh, yeah.

The one at Armageddon, the one in Chapter 19, and then the final one at the end of Chapter 20. Right. Are those all separate events? Well, that's where Dr. Mathewson offers one of his most fascinating theories.

Okay. Tell me. He suggests that these three battles might actually be different perspectives on the same event.

Wait, what? So like— Instead of three distinct battles, it could be one ultimate confrontation between good and evil viewed from different angles. Kind of like those movies where they replay the same scene from different characters' points of view? Exactly. He points out that there were some intriguing overlaps in the language and imagery used to describe each battle.

And he challenges us to consider whether John might be using these multiple perspectives to highlight different aspects of this same cosmic conflict. Wow. That's mind-blowing.

It is, isn't it? Makes you think about the whole book in a new light. It does. It's a good reminder that there's always more to uncover.

Yeah. More to understand as we delve deeper into the mysteries of Revelation. So, as we wrap up this deep dive, what's the main takeaway? What should we be thinking about as we go back to our everyday lives? Well, I think Dr. Matthewson puts it best with this question.

How does this understanding of the end times challenge you to live differently today? Hmm. That is a challenging question. It is, but it's one we can't ignore.

Right. How do we stay vigilant and faithful and prepared in a world that's constantly pulling us in other directions? It's a journey, not a destination. True.

But ultimately, I think the message of Revelation is one of hope. Okay. Evil will be judged.

God's kingdom will triumph. Yeah. And those who remain faithful.

Right. They will inherit a new heaven and a new earth. That's a promise worth holding on to.

It is. Thanks for guiding us through this deep dive. No problem.

I enjoyed it. It's been quite a journey. It has.