

Revelation
15:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

The book of Revelation conjures up all sorts of images and ideas. I hope this series has brought out the message of Hope in this book:

Jesus has won
Jesus is winning
Jesus will win.

Sadly, it seems that over the years teachings about Revelation has caused such confusion and distress that many with an “evangelical” background suffer from RAPTURE ANXIETY, or so says CNN.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/27/us/rapture-anxiety-evangelical-exvangelical-christianity-cec/index.html>

THE purpose of Revelation is to bring hope and comfort to the church, not anxiety.

REVELATION 15

A Scene of Heaven

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.*

2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. 3 And they *sang the song of Moses, the bondservant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and marvelous are Your works,
O Lord God, the Almighty;
Righteous and true are Your ways,
King of the nations!
4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy;
FOR ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU,
FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED.”

5 After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, 6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

We have completed the interlude between the sounding of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven bowls of God’s wrath. Chapter 15, the shortest in the book of Revelation, is the introduction to this last of the three series of seven in the central part of Revelation: the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls.

The focus moves from those put in the “winepress of the wrath of God” to the saints in worship on the sea of glass.

This section is a transition from the interlude to the Seven Bowls or plagues. These upcoming plagues are echoes of the plagues in Exodus, even as the song of 15:3-4 is an echo of the Song of Moses and other OT passages.

v. 1 – seven plagues, WHICH ARE THE LAST -

There are several ways to interpret this idea of ‘the last’.

One is in terms of chronology. This would correspond to the futurist view of Revelation, i.e. all of the events of the book are for future generations, not the original audience. In this view, we are looking ahead and reading headlines to find the fulfillment of the various prophecies.

Futurism is the view that the visions in Revelation won't begin to be fulfilled until the final crisis immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. If you've been here over the length of this series, I've presented a commonly held view that Revelation lays out a series of visions that are concurrent. The fancy word used early on is 'RECAPITULATION'. i.e. the various visions give differing perspectives of the same events unfolding from the time of Christ until His return.

The events have been unfolding over the past 2000 years and are not confined to the days immediately preceding the return of Christ.

Beale...

Another view is to see “the last” in terms of the sequence in which John received these visions, not the chronological order of the events depicted. The vision of the Bowls is merely the last of the formal sevenfold visions seen by John.

v. 5 “after these things” is a phrase used in 4:1, 7:1,9; 18:1, 19:1 and it indicates a sequential order in which John saw the visions, not necessarily the chronological order in which the events unfold. So the upcoming Bowls judgement don't have to come chronologically after the other series of judgements. As we've seen with the different judgements, there is an increasing intensity.

Another nuance of “last” is that the bowls portray the full-orbed wrath of God in a more intense manner than any of the previous woe visions. Thus, John says, “because of them the wrath of God is finished.” V.1.

Taken together, these views point to the overall meaning that the bowls refer to the judgements of God throughout the ‘last days’ of human history, which are the years between Christ's resurrection and His return.

v. 2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

The sea of glass mixed with fire is a heavenly counterpart to the Red Sea. The “sea” in Revelation and the OT is symbolic of chaos and evil. Now the sea is calmed through the victory of the Lamb. The sea of glass mixed with fire points to the judgment of the God and the Lamb. In Revelation, “fire” commonly refers to the judgment of God.

15:1-4 parallels 14:1-5 in depicting the faithful followers of Christ singing a song of victory. In chap 14 the sound was loud like the sound of harps, and here in ch 15 they are standing on the sea of glass holding the harps of God.

It is the victory of Christ that is the basis for the victory of his people. The victory over the beast, his image, and the number of his name means the believers were faithful to stand firm in the midst of persecution. They refused to align themselves with the manifestations of the number of his name – 666 – the number of man.

Those who become active or passive allies with the image and number of the beast are failing to live faithfully as followers of Christ. For us, being victorious over the Beast requires intentionality, in the way it did for Jesus.

1 John 3:8 The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

Jesus didn't come to negotiate a truce with the Dragon – Satan. So too, as the followers of Christ, we can't go along to get along with the schemes of the beast as they play out in our cultural moment. We must not allow ourselves to drift or become complacent.

“Allegiance to Christ may cost us something in this life, but when we enter the gates of heaven and get our harp to sing the song of the Lamb, we won't regret anything we've laid aside in order to lay hold of Christ.”
Nancy Guthrie

To follow the path of Christ and His victory, we need to be prudent in knowing the times. We should pray that God would make us like the men of Issachar – **1 Chron 12:32 From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.**

<https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2020/7/6/the-men-of-issachar>

This means that we know more than headlines. We need to have a biblical informed mind and conscience to discern the underlying movements, ideologies, and worldviews at play in our world. It means that we understand that God has put us here for such a time as this, and that this is the day the Lord has made for us.

Like the men of Issachar, the overcomers of Revelation, the 144k faithful knew the signs of the times AND they knew HOW TO LIVE. This happens as we learn to ask and teach our children to ask certain questions:

What is the nature of the world in which I am living?

What are the biblical challenges to our generation?

Where do we see the key struggles between good and evil, right and wrong?

In what direction is our culture headed? What is the trajectory?

We need to be DISCERNING AND bold enough to ask the question, **“Then what?”**

EX: the 2015 Obergefell decision redefined marriage laws in our nation.

Some asked, “Then what?” and were ridiculed. Over the past few years, we've seen some answers.

EX; April 2022 a male same sex couple sues NYC because the city employee medical insurance doesn't cover infertility procedures for them, but it would cover for a traditional marriage or even two women.

In a sane world we know that BIOLOGY rules over IDEOLOGY, but a 666 world tries to distort biology to match an ideology. One beastly strategy is to destroy God given norms and create confusion and chaos.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/gay-couple-files-complaint-new-york-city-denying-ivf-coverage-rcna24405>

After asking these questions, we should ask, **“How should I then live as a follower of Lamb?”**

One answer to that question comes in v. 3 – Sing the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb.

The faithful are singing a song on the glassy sea because Jesus has triumphed over the chaos caused by the Beasts.

Don't let our discouragement with the spirit of the age keep us from seeing the ultimate victory of God and Christ.

Do you feel the world is broken? (We do)

Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)

But do you know that all the dark won't stop the light from getting through? (We do)

Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)

It is good for our souls to sing this song of the Lamb NOW. Don't wait until you get to heaven or Jesus returns. Keep the eyes of your heart fixed on the "great and marvelous works of the Lord God, the Almighty."

This song puts a focus not just on God's deeds but also his moral character – righteous and true are His Ways. His salvation through Christ is the ultimate demonstration of how He accomplishes righteousness (Rom 1:18; 3:23-26)

The natural response from one who understands the sovereign character of the gracious God is v. 4 "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy Name?"

It seems self-evident that we should respond in that way. We can't take credit for this being clear to us for it is by God's grace that our hearts and eyes have been opened.

EX: If you had known me months or even weeks before I came to faith you would have concluded that there's no hope for "that guy." BUT God being rich in mercy saved me. No one is hopeless or beyond the reach of the gospel.

This song of the Lamb is a patchwork of verses and ideas taken from the OT. It is a song that reflects the biblical flow of grace and faith from the OT to the NT. Moses and the NT believer share a like faith in a like salvation by the grace of God.

We see the theme of the salvation for the nations proclaimed in this song. It wasn't a new theme because it is all over the OT. God's holiness, i.e. being totally other, is the basis for our worship, and the result is that believers from the nations will be drawn to him.

EX: here in Lafayette it is easy to forget that God is a Missionary God. We need the reminders of the global scope of the kingdom of Christ.

V. 5-8

Next John sees the seven angels who are clean and bright, girded with golden sashes. These last few verses resume the introduction of the seven Bowls of Judgement. They also remind us of the glory of God and the purity of the work given to these angels.

This heavenly vision, like the ones in earlier chapters, is designed to bring a sense of wonder, comfort and joy to the people of faith. It provides a motivation for perseverance. Even though life in this world under the influence of the prince of the power of the air is confusing, disappointing, frustrating, and wearying, there is reason to sing and celebrate – The Lamb is on the throne, and he is surrounded by those who hold fast to HIM.

Before he gets to the final chapters that describe the bowls of wrath, John gives us the glimpse around the throne to remind us that heaven and the glory of God are in our future.

"Yeah, yeah. Tell me something I can use, do, or apply RIGHT NOW."

Some of you have been believers for years and the concept of the glory of God has become your mental or spiritual wallpaper. It just doesn't thrill you anymore.

WHY?

What does thrill you?

** App Questions:

Does the vision of ch 15 move you in any way?

Does it put steel in your spine?

Does it create a well of joy springing up in your soul?

Does it motivate you to be in that number, number, number when the saints go marching in?

OR does the prospect of heaven bore you?

Perhaps we've grown accustomed to His grace. Perhaps we've grown so accustomed to a lifestyle of relative ease that we don't want to leave it, not even for heaven. We've been busy trying to create our own heaven on earth.

Perhaps we've bought into the 666 mindset of personal peace and affluence.
"Don't bother me and I won't bother you. If it feels good, do it. YOLO, bro."

We may think, "I don't feel any persecution or suffering for my faith, so what does it look like to stand firm?"

In that case, stand firm in the fight against sin.

That entails a certain form of suffering that may last a lifetime in dealing with some areas. It entails dying to self on a daily basis.

Don't just fight sin with a bare-knuckle approach, but let your heart be sustained by the precious promises of Christ to those who hold fast.

We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling as we remember that the Lord God Almighty is at work in us.

Putting to death the deeds of the flesh, regarding others as more important than ourselves, overcoming the fear of what others think of us because of our faith, learning to accept correction as we lay aside our defensiveness, etc. These are all ways in which we can share in the fight of faith.

We won't be perfect in this life, but a life in Christ does involve the walk of repentant faith. Admitting our need and running to Christ is a way of living out the song of the Lamb.

While we don't always live on the spiritual mountain top, the contemplation of the heavenly throne of grace can be a spiritual practice that creates a sense of ballast for our souls.

Edward resolutions - 14 of his 70 Resolutions dealt with having an eternal mindset and the consideration of our final death.

Here's one such resolution...

#55. Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell's torments. July 8, 1723.

VOV - the Throne

O God of my delight,

Thy throne of grace is the pleasure ground of my soul.

What is the pleasure ground of your soul?

LIVING BY PRAYER

O God of the Open Ear,

Teach me that my great sin lies in my not keeping the savor of Thy ways.

Piper - Sin is what we do when we aren't satisfied with God.

The heavenly Song of Moses and of the Lamb are given to us so that we might savor the Ways of God. The Table before us is given for the same reason.

COME TO THE TABLE and Savor His Ways

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