A Day of Victory — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 15 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, May 8, 2022 · *The Day of the Lord*

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He gives it that magic touch the click track just doesn't have. So it's good to have you back, Tim, and wish you the best in your healing. Revelation chapter 15, if you have a Bible. I really wondered if I should preach a special Mother's Day sermon outside of the book of the Revelation, because there was a— I probably should not tell this story. But there was a couple who left our church because I did not preach Mother's Day sermons or other special-day sermons, and I won't tell you who it was.

I thought that was interesting. So hopefully none of y'all leave because I'm not doing a special Mother's Day sermon. I did one last year, you can go back and listen to that. But we had pressed pause on the book of Revelation and just started it back and so I didn't want to just pause it again. It felt way too stop-starty. And so I tried to figure out a connection between the passage that we're looking at today in Revelation 15 and Mother's Day. And there really isn't one, because the passage today— we're at the point in the book of Revelation, if you've not been with us— we're at the point in the book of Revelation where God's wrath has been storing and storing and storing.

And then finally it comes to the tipping point, so he begins to pour his wrath out on the earth, and the earth is utterly destroyed as a result of this cataclysmic event of judgment. And I thought, hmm, Mother's Day not a big connection. But then it hit me. Maybe your mom said this. Maybe your mom didn't, but I know some of you had mamas that say this. It's that phrase, it's infamous. Boy, girl, I brought you into this world, and I can take you out. And that's Revelation 15. It's basically the Lord saying I brought you into this world and I'm about to take you out.

It really is fascinating just how devastating the judgments are. So much of the book of Revelation has been making its way towards this climactic event, and it's not even in this text. It's in tomorrow— it's in next Sunday's passage, Revelation 16. But what John does in Revelation 15 is what he does throughout the book of Revelation before he explains the catastrophe and the judgment and all the terrible things that happen on the earth. What he does is he gives God's people a picture of the victory that belongs to them on the other side of that catastrophe.

And so it's almost as if John is saying you're about to go through the fire, but as you're walking through the fire, keep this in your mind. Keep this picture of victory, because it belongs to you. Now there's nothing like the celebration and joy that people experience after a great victory or after the cessation of a war. I was interested this last week when I was studying for the sermon that in 1945— I believe it was August 14th and 15th of 1945— President Truman announced to all Americans the end of World War II, because the Japanese finally accepted the terms of surrender.

And so they dubbed that day VJ Day, victory over Japan Day. Was anybody alive during that time? Anybody around during the parties? Some in our first service actually were. They raised their hands. It was phenomenal. I mean, the whole country lit up in joyous, raucous celebration. I took some pictures off of Wikipedia and I want to show you some of these. This lower right-hand corner, my right hand, your left, that's New York, Times Square, just packed with people who are so thankful and joyful because of the end of the war.

Up there in the upper— my right, your left— is, I believe that's Nashville, Tennessee. Right here you can see the little picture says War Ends, and— oh, that's Knoxville Journal. Yeah, that's Nashville, Tennessee. And then right here on my left is a picture of a sailor kissing a stranger. A nurse. Hello. That's where the phrase Hello, nurse— no, it didn't come from this. But it says a sailor kissing a nurse, not his wife, not his girlfriend, random stranger. Now, you've got to be in a really good mood to kiss a random stranger.

But it was happening all over the place. You can Google this, like random dudes were kissing random women on the streets or maybe vice versa. Maybe the women were kissing the men, I don't know. But they were so happy. There was an article written by Life magazine. This is what they said: civilians began celebrating "as if joy had been rationed and saved up for the three years, eight months and seven days since Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941," which was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. VJ Day, nothing better than the joy and celebration that takes place at the end of the war.

And what Revelation 15 is, essentially, is not victory over Japan Day, but a different VJ Day. It's a Victory in Jesus Day, where the joy and celebration that God's people experience on that day is so powerful and so all-consuming, it is as if joy had been rationed for three and a half years, or however long that tribulation lasts and then was unleashed. That's the picture

of Revelation 15. And John's giving it to us so that you and I, as we walk through the tribulations of life, remind ourselves this is the future.

I don't have to focus on my circumstances. I can focus on God's promise and his faithfulness. And so if you're taking notes, we've been in the book of Revelation. This is a prelude to the seven bowls of God's wrath. And these bowls, if you're taking notes, are the climax to a conflict between two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the beast. Like a lot of passages in Revelation, it's a two-pillar text. It's a pillar of hope and promise to God's people, a pillar of encouragement, but it's also a pillar of warning and rebuke to those who reject God.

And so we'll see both of those in this passage. And it's really the point that Revelation has been building up to. So we're finally getting to that climactic moment where God's justice rains on the earth. It just falls down like rain. It really is fascinating, and horrific, some of what we see. So let's read the passage, and then we're going to have to preach a quick sermon. So listen real fast because we got 15 minutes to go. So Revelation 15, starting in verse 1. John says, "Then I saw another great and awe-inspiring sign in heaven: seven angels with the seven last plagues; for with them God's wrath will be completed.

I also saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had won the victory over the beast, its image, and the number of its name, were standing on the sea of glass with harps from God. They sang the song of God's servant Moses and the song of the Lamb: Great and awe-inspiring are your works, Lord God, the Almighty; just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you because your righteous acts have been revealed.

After this I looked, and the heavenly temple—the tabernacle of testimony—was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, dressed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes wrapped around their chests. One of the four living creatures"— one of the seven angel— excuse me. "One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God"— those bowls used to have the prayers of the saints; now they're filled with wrath— "the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. Then the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

So John is building the tension. He's getting ready for the big climax, and he gives John— or God gives John— this great, awe-inspiring sign. In fact, John calls it a sign. It was great and awe-inspiring. Now when he says great he just means big. Not small, big. These judgments are not small, they're not geographically isolated. They're global, they're worldwide, they're huge. It's devastating. No one is left unharmed by these bowls of wrath. You see people get boils and skin rashes all over their body. The water turns to blood, seawater and fresh water.

You see people get scorched by the sun. You're talking about global warming? It's probably coming, and it's like burning people to death. It's so hot on the earth. Earthquake that is so big the whole landscape of earth as we know it is forever changed. It is a great sign. John sees something great, large in scope, but it's also, he says, awe-inspiring, which just is a way of saying, when it happens, everybody recognizes it's God. It's not Mother Nature getting cranky. It's God. He exists. He's real. He's angry. And he's pouring out his judgment.

There will no longer be any atheists in any foxholes. There will not necessarily be many believers left on the earth. They will know God exists. They will know he's judging the earth, and they will hate him for it. It's great and it's awe-inspiring. And it's a sign. And the fact that he calls it a sign, I think it's important if you're taking notes. Signs are not just displays of supernatural power. You need to think of a sign as something that points beyond itself to a greater theological truth, kind of like a stop sign, points to the idea that you should probably bring your car to a halt unless you want a violent death.

Right? It points beyond itself. It's not a thing in and of itself; it's pointing to some truth. That's what John sees. It's a sign, meaning there are theological truths contained in this vision that point beyond the supernatural acts themselves to greater theological themes that we need to embrace. And we need to embrace it as a hope-filled promise as the people of God, and we need to embrace it as a grave warning to those who are outside of Christ who reject God, and some of you may be in that camp this morning.

So I'm going to put those theological truths under three headings very quickly. Our roles will be reversed, number one; the righteousness of God will be revealed; and then finally, our chance for reconciliation will be removed. And the first one is in chapter 15, verse 2, and that is the roles being reversed. John says, I saw this great sea of glass, it was mixed with fire. The people who had won the victory over the beast, they're standing on the glass, and they had harps that were given to them from God. So what is this sea of glass?

The glass is not real literal glass; it's probably not even a real literal ocean. Remember, this is apocalyptic, so it's metaphor, it's symbol, it's communicating something else. So it's probably just a reference to the holiness of God. Sometimes the idea of sea refers to people, so maybe it's representative of all these people standing in this vast gulf between God who is holy and completely other and the rest of his creation. It says that it's mixed with fire, talking about the judgment that these people are probably experiencing that they did experience as they made their way up to heaven— the saints who had been crushed and conquered by the antichrist.

But now instead of being crushed and marginalized and suffering they're presented in glory and in joy and celebration. And it points to the truth that as God's people there's a day coming when our roles are going to be reversed. The suffering and hardship that we experience on this earth will be exchanged for glory and gladness and celebration. And we

need to live as if that is true. Because if we will live having embraced the reversal of roles that will happen then, that gives you the spiritual power to live with the reversal of roles today.

You'll be much more quick to forgive and to be patient and to be kind and to not demand your rights, to not wield the weapons of this world like political power or violence or physical violence or any of those things. But rather you'll be more prone to press into the kingdom of God, faithfulness, endurance, the truth of the gospel, love, not violence; sacrifice, not demanding your rights. You'll embrace that great reversal here when you believe in that great reversal there. Because on that day, our garments of praise will be— our garments of heaviness, I'm sorry, will be exchanged with garments of praise.

Our broken hearts will be exchanged with golden harps, harps that give praise to God forever and ever. So, practical application: we should live today with joyful lives, even in the face of suffering. We should live today with fearless lives, even against great opposition. We should live joyful and fearless lives regardless of the circumstances. There are so many passages that support this idea throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. One that I thought of just off the top of my head when I was studying this week was King Hezekiah's words to the Israelite army when they were facing the Assyrians.

This is just like what will happen during the end of days. There will be a big godless government, headed by a big godless king called the antichrist, and he's going to crush God's people just like the Assyrians crush the Israelites. But when King Hezekiah was leading the Israelite army against that opposition force, he tells them, Be strong, be courageous. Why should you not fear? Because there are more with us than there are with him. Now when he says there are more with us, he doesn't mean there's more soldiers. Because there were not.

They were itty-bitty compared to the Assyrian army. What he's saying is there is a greater power. There is One— some translations actually capitalize the word One. There is One with us who is greater than with him. And then he fills in the gaps in verse 8: "He"— the Lord, or I'm sorry, he, the king of Assyria— "has only human strength, but we have the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." "So the people relied on the words of King Hezekiah." And that's what John's saying to us in Revelation 15.

Rely on this vision, rely on this sign. I know they're big, I know they're scary, I know it's easy to live with fear and bad attitude, but reject that fear, live with confidence, be strong and courageous, just as God commanded Joshua in Joshua 1:9: "Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." You will overcome. But embrace the tension because even though you will overcome, you will stand victorious— in this world you're going to have troubles.

In this world you're going to be overcome. Remember Jesus in Revelation 2 and 3, he wrote the seven letters to the seven churches. He told the church in Smyrna, You're going to get thrown in prison, you're going to suffer, some of you will even die, but to the one who overcomes, there's a reward. In Revelation 13 you have the antichrist kind of taking names and putting his stamp on everybody and everybody bowing the knee and following the antichrist, taking the mark of the beast and God's people who resist and reject, what happens to them?

They are ostracized from society, they're kicked out of the system, they have a death sentence that's put on them. They are overcome by the antichrist. It says in Revelation 13:7, it— I'm sorry, it being the antichrist— was given authority by God to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. So who's doing the conquering? Are God's people conquering the antichrist or is the antichrist conquering God's people? The answer is yes. That's the tension of the kingdom. You will be overcome. But don't fear the one who can destroy the body only.

Fear the one who can destroy body and soul in hell, because when that day comes, the roles will be reversed, and you will stand victorious. So live joyful, live fearless. The roles will be reversed. Secondly, the righteousness of God will be revealed. On the day of the Lord, not only will our roles be reversed, but God's righteousness will be revealed. Look again at that song in verses 3 and 4. They, God's people, "sang the song of God's servant Moses and the song of the Lamb." The song goes, "Great and awe-inspiring are your works, Lord God, the Almighty; just and true are your ways, King of the nations.

Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you because your righteous acts have been revealed." Now the song of Moses that they talk about is a throwback to the Exodus. How many of you read your Old Testament, read the story of Exodus? Some of you watch the movie instead. I understand. The story of Exodus is about God's people. They're enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt, right? God raises up a leader. Who is that leader? Moses. What does Moses do?

He goes into Pharaoh, let my people go. Pharaoh says no. Moses says, Or else. Pharaoh says, Or else what? Moses says, plague, plague, plague, plague, plague. Pharaoh says, okay, leave. And so the Israelites leave. This is the shortened version. Israelites leave. Pharaoh hardens his heart, right? God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Satan, whoever does it, this Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He tells his army, go get the Israelites. I changed my mind. We're going to crush them. And so God's people are at the edge of the Red Sea. They're about to be crushed by the Egyptian army.

And what does God do? He splits the Red Sea open. God's people walk through without a wet bone on their body. And as soon as the last Israelite person is delivered, what does God do? He shuts the— whatever, he closes the water; the waters flood over the Egyptian army,

and all of God's enemies are destroyed. That's what the song is about. Imagine teaching your seven-year-old. Praise God, because he killed a bunch of Egyptians. Isn't he great? A little bit dark, but, you know, PG-13 maybe. Here's what the song says, Exodus chapter 15, verse 1: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.

They said: I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted; he has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea." That's not metaphorical. The Egyptians who were trying to kill us and crush us, God took care of them. It's a long song— verses 11 through 13, just to make it shorter: "Lord, who is like you among the gods?" It sounds just like Revelation 15. "Who is like you, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders? You stretched out your right hand, and the earth swallowed them"— your enemies.

"With your faithful love, you will lead the people you have redeemed; you will guide them to your holy dwelling with your strength." So that's the song of Moses. The song of Moses was a song of deliverance for God's people from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt. The final song, John says in Revelation 15, will be a remix of that first song. It will be a remix in that it's still a song of deliverance. It's still a song of God crushing his enemies. But this time the leader isn't Moses. This time the leader is a greater than Moses.

It's the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the lion from the tribe of Judah, the lamb who was slain. The song of Moses was the first song listed in Scripture. The song of the lamb is the last. The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea. The song of the Lamb is sung on the crystal sea, the vision in heaven. The song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt and Pharaoh. The song of the lamb is a triumph over Babylon and the antichrist. The song of Moses told how God brought his people out.

The song of the lamb tells how God brings his people in. The song of Moses celebrated the execution of God's foes, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lamb; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three things. That's from James Montgomery Boice. Of all the Old Testament passages that point to the cross, of all the Old Testament passages that you could understand to better understand the book of Revelation, the story of the Exodus is hands down the best. The book of Revelation is the Exodus times 10.

Think about it. In the exodus, God raises up a leader. God's leader tells God's people, follow me, believe the gospel, trust God. He wants us to be free. He doesn't want us to be slaves. He'll make a way. Follow me. And that leader is used by God to liberate the people. But then Satan's schemes are unleashed. As his schemes are unleashed, God's people who had faith are beginning to question. Moses, did you lead us out here to die? Is this the deliverance? Is this what you really say God wants? And then right in the nick of time, as people's love is growing cold and they're about to give up faith, God delivers his people miraculously, supernaturally, crushing his enemies, and giving them the promised land.

That's the Exodus. What happens with Jesus? Well, in his first coming, God raises up a leader. His name's not Moses, his name is Jesus. Jesus preaches the gospel to God's people. God's people begin to follow him. Jesus says, I'm giving you freedom, not from slavery to the Romans, but from sin and death itself. If you'll follow me, if you'll repent and believe the gospel, you will be saved. And so God's people begin to believe. And Jesus raises up his disciples and they begin to advance the gospel. But then Satan's schemes are unleashed.

At the cross, the Romans arrest Jesus. They beat him within an inch of his life. They crucify him. He's hanging on the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And God's people are beginning to doubt. They're beginning to question, did you lead us all this way, just to die, just to be crushed by the Romans? Is this your deliverance? Is this what you say? The love of many begin to grow cold, many people begin to doubt and despair. But then right in the nick of time, on the third day, God raises Jesus from the dead.

And delivers his people. And the disciples go from being people who are cowering in fear to people who are filled with faith and courage, and they begin to preach the gospel. And that deliverance continues. Now the Holy Spirit raising up men and women, raising up ministers and preachers of the gospel, saying, repent and believe and be saved. And God is making a people for himself, but then Satan's schemes are going to be unleashed. Even as they are today. They'll be unleashed in a greater way during the end of days, that Satan will raise up an antichrist figure, a godless government, a false religion.

It will crush the people of God. They will begin to question. They will begin to wonder. They will begin to say, Is this our deliverance? Is this what God wants? Is God truly real? Is he truly a deliverer? And then just as God's people are about to give up, as the love of many is growing cold, God will say, lift up your heads, your redemption draws nigh, and Jesus will return, God's people will be delivered, and the promised land will be ours. Jesus is a greater leader of a greater exodus that provides greater freedom, culminating in a greater future than any of us can even begin to imagine.

His righteousness will be revealed, just as it was in the Old Testament, just as it was in the New Testament, it will be on that day. God will come through. And so what should we do in response? I think what John's saying is you should praise him. Praise him. Sing the song in advance. Sing the remix. Sing the song of the Lamb. Praise God for the greatness of his works. Praise God for the rightness of his ways. Praise God that his ways are just and true. "Just and true are your ways, King of the nations."

A lot of people look at God and say, how can God be just? How can a holy God, how can a loving God send good people to hell? What kind of love is that? On the day of judgment, no one will ask that question. You shouldn't even ask it now. It's like imagine if you had a wife and child and some piece-of-junk human being rapes your wife and children and murders them in cold blood. It's a horrendous thought. And then imagine you're in the courtroom,

the evidence is presented, he is guilty as charged, and the judge says, Well, I'm a loving judge.

You can go. You would probably go to prison, right, for what you're going to do to that judge. I know I would. That is not justice, that is not truth, and that is not the Lord. The Lord is loving, but his love does not violate his justice. We crave justice. We need justice. That's in every superhero movie we ever watch. Except for the new Doctor Strange. That was a little bit awkward. But every other superhero movie we watch, justice needs to prevail. Justice is what we desire. It's deep down in our bones.

It was given to us by God because we were created in his image. He's a God who is holy and just and true. And there's coming a day when the sins of this world and the brokenness of this world and the injustices of this world will be answered for. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord. I will repay. And so God's people should praise him in advance. The vengeance is yours. I can let it go, I can endure, I can be faithful because I know the day is coming when your righteousness will be revealed.

So the roles will be reversed, the righteousness will be revealed. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. But on that day, our chance to reconcile with that holy God will be removed. That's the last thing. And then with this, we'll be done. I know it's late. Verse 5: "After this I looked, and the heavenly temple—the tabernacle of testimony—was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, dressed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes wrapped around their chests.

One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. Then the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." So what is the temple? Why is it open? And how did it get closed? The temple that John sees is the temple in heaven. And what John sees in particular is what's called the Holy of Holies.

I don't have time to go into this, but in the Holy of Holies there was the Ten Commandments, there was the Ark of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, and the bowls, the golden bowls that they used to collect the manna[1] that they ate every day in the wilderness. The Holy of Holies was just that. It was the Holy of Holies. Nobody went in there, nobody had access. That was where the presence of God was, just like this glassy sea. Nobody approaches who isn't burned up in judgment. But this Holy of Holies is open.

Why is it open? It's open because of the cross of Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, he tore the veil. The veil, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from everywhere else, it was destroyed. Meaning you and I can have reconciliation. We can be reconciled to God.

The enmity between us and God can be removed when we repent of our sin and put our faith in Jesus Christ. But what John sees is that when the day of the Lord comes, when the day of judgment finally arrives, that invitation of mercy will be extinguished.

And you and I need to know this. We need to know that the mercy of God, the invitation of God's mercy is not indefinite. There's a timetable, and one day it will end. And on that day it'll be too late. And so today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart like they did in the Exodus. Today, if you hear his voice calling you to faith and repentance, don't put it off. Don't let the excuses and the Well, I just want to keep living this way— I don't want to repent.

I don't want to honor God with X, Y, or Z thing in my life. That spirit is taking you to a destination you are not ready to receive. God is holy. We will atone for our sins or we will have our sins atoned for by the blood of Jesus. It's one or the other. Where do you stand? Have you accepted the gift of God's mercy through faith in Jesus Christ? And if you haven't, as Taylor leads us through this time of response, there's going to be an opportunity for you to do that.

For those of you who are Christians, this passage is a pillar of hope and promise. That you and I, even in the valley low, can trust God to be faithful to his promises. You and I can embrace the tension of the kingdom to forgive instead of get revenge, to be patient instead of short-tempered and angry all the time, we can walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh, because we know the day's coming when our righteousness will be rewarded. Do not grow weary in doing good. You will receive the reward if you don't give up.

And so as Taylor leads us through this time of response, I don't know what that looks like for you. I know we as Christians need encouragement. You need to hear from the Lord. In his word: you're doing good. Keep on keeping on. Don't give up. God will be faithful. You can do this. If you want someone to pray with you about that, whatever's going on in your life, I'll be happy to pray with you. If you're here this morning and you've never responded to Jesus for salvation, if you want to receive the miracle of salvation into your heart this morning, there are no magic words, there's no magic prayer, just a recognition, God, I can't save myself.

I believe Jesus is the only way that I can be saved, and so I confess him as Lord. And if you're willing to do that this morning, you can make that decision public through walking down the aisle or saying, Hey, sign me up for baptism. Whatever God's doing, you respond as he leads. Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your promise that you are faithful to your promises even when we don't see it, even when we're questioning and saying, Is this really your plan?

Is this really your will? Is this deliverance?— to be reminded that just when we're about to give up hope, you're going to come through. Just when the night is the darkest, that's the

moment before the sun dawns. May we never forget it. May we never grow weary and discouraged in doing good but to live with the end in mind, to always keep that picture of our good shepherd in front of us, so that even as we′re in the valley low, we′re sitting at a table prepared by our good shepherd, laughing in the face of our enemies, because we have everything that we need.

Because we have one with us that is greater than the things that are in the world. Would you fill us with that knowledge, but not only knowledge, but with the hope and the faith and the love that can only come from a spirit-enabled knowledge of God, a knowledge of you and your word and your promises that enables us to live like no one else, respond like nobody else, To be citizens of the kingdom of heaven, not citizens of this world. Would you work that in us now as we respond in Jesus′ name?

Amen.

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1. Transcript note: the manna kept with the ark was in "a gold jar containing the manna" (Hebrews 9:4; Exodus 16:33), not golden bowls used to collect it; wording left as spoken. Source: Hebrews 9:4 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩