

**3/27/22      “Heavenly Preparation for God’s Final Wrath”  
Revelation 15:1-8**

Welcome...

Let’s start with a quiz this morning: What is the most repeated Bible verse or the most repeated phrase in the Bible?

Some might answer with Psalm 2 where our heavenly Father says to His Son, “Ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.”

Others might say Psalm 118 this is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice in it. He is the Cornerstone that the builders rejected.

The answer is Exodus 34:6-7, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

That phrase is repeated 27 times in the Old Testament alone. We tend to focus on the first part, but today’s passage reveals that God will fulfill that last phrase, “He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

In Revelation chapter 6 we witnessed the unleashing of God’s judgment against an unholy world in the seal judgments, involving bloodshed, famine, death, economic upheaval, a great earthquake, and severe cosmic disturbances. In Revelation 8-9 we then witnessed the unleashing of the trumpet judgments, involving hail and fire mixed with blood, the sea turning to blood, water turning bitter and the death of a third of humankind.

Now, finally, the worst judgments of all fall on the earth during the great tribulation—the bowl judgments. Chapter 15, which is the shortest chapter in Revelation, serves as a prelude then to the final series of judgements.

**Let’s read Revelation 15...**

Proverbs 16:4 says, “The Lord works out everything for his own ends — even the wicked for a day of disaster.” God works everything out for His own purposes, including rebellion; He has a meticulous careful plan for the wicked of the Earth.

There will come a day when His righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 9 says that God bears with great patience the objects of His wrath, but the same verse says that they are prepared for destruction.

Revelation 15 introduces the heavenly preparation of God’s final judgment on a sinful world. Seven angels are commissioned to pour out bowls of God’s wrath on the earth, while others in heaven celebrate God’s justice and holiness expressed in his judgment against evil.

Chapter 15 forms a preview of the rapid-fire bowl judgments and provides three reasons for God’s final wrath.

- First, The Perfection of God in verse 1.
- Second, The Praise to God in verses 2-4.
- Third, The Plan of God in verses 5-8.

**I.      The Perfection of God**

Verse 1...

The wrath of God is a perfect expression of His character. It is nothing that He must repent from or snap out of later; it is not irrational or mindless. It flows from His character, a perfect expression of His justice and His passionate nature. Our God is passionate; He has emotions. We are created in His image, so we have feelings too. Our anger, however, is usually unrighteous, not often mirroring God's righteous wrath and righteous indignation. Usually our wrath is based on pride or inconvenience.

Notice in verse 1 the terms great and marvelous that expresses the enormous importance of this sign as it contains the final outpouring of God's wrath on the wicked, unrepentant sinners of the earth. God's wrath will be finished for redemptive history. There will be no more such display of His wrath of God in the New Heaven and the New Earth, except for the eternity of hell.

Notice in verse 1 the sign itself consists of seven angels who had seven plagues. The Greek word for plague literally means "a blow," or "a wound." For example, in 13:3 and 12 it describes the beast's fatal wound. Thus, the seven plagues are not really diseases or epidemics, but powerful, deadly blows that will strike the world with killing impact.

That they are called the "last plagues" sets them apart from the seals and trumpets in spite of some similarities. That they are the last also indicates that the bowls come after the seals and trumpets in chronological sequence. They are different chronologically and in intensity. Why? "For in them the wrath of God is finished (complete)," brought to its appropriate and climactic conclusion. These are the last and these are the worst judgments. They are the 3rd woe (11:14), the time of destruction (11:18), the wrath of God poured out in full strength (14:10), the final reaping of the earth (14:14-20).

The word translated "plague" in this verse literally means a "blow" or "wound." These judgments are not long, drawn-out epidemics like the flu or Covid. Rather, these plagues come with sudden impact—swift, severe, destructive, and fierce.

The seven bowl judgments will be the last expression of God's wrath toward the inhabitants of the earth. They will climax at the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ.

This snapshot preview of coming judgment should give hope to all people of faith in Christ. God's judgment will accomplish its purpose and come to an end. The wrath of God is an expression of His perfect character.

The scene suddenly shifts to heaven, where we are shown a scene of incredible rejoicing.

## II. The Praise to God

Verse 2...

In this vision of heaven, John observed "a glass sea" as well as a group of victorious Christians standing by the sea, ready to worship God for his righteous acts of deliverance. In 4:6 John had witnessed such a "glass sea" in the heavenly throne room and likewise struggled to describe what he had seen. The best he can do in both places is to phrase a comparison when he says, "something like a glass sea." More important for this vision is the group he sees standing "beside the glass sea," "the ones who had been victorious over the beast", that is, had faithfully resisted all the compulsion and deception of Satan to tear them away from allegiance to Christ.

These believers were victorious over three horrendous pressures to reject Christ during the tribulation: political pressure through the first Beast's compelling, charismatic military skill

religious pressure through the idolatry to worship the Antichrist  
economic pressure through the number of the Beast, necessary to buy and sell

These pressures, described earlier in chapter 13, pushed all people to the edge of a life-and-death decision. Revelation 13 told us who the beast is: the Antichrist, the one-world ruler who will come under the power of the dragon, the Devil. He will claim his throne over all the peoples and languages of the earth, not only going to be political power but religious power as well. People will worship him as God and bow down before him. He will require everyone small and great to receive the mark of the beast on the hand or forehead; no one will be able to buy or sell without it, and those who will not receive it will be executed. Revelation 12:11 says of these martyrs, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

Either they could worship the Antichrist and save their lives, or they could resist His regime and lose them. The redeemed standing on the sea of glass chose faithfulness to Christ—a foolish decision in the midst of unparalleled persecution. But to quote the famous line of missionary and martyr Jim Elliot, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

These martyred saints had no standing on earth, but they do in heaven! They stand on the majestic sea of glass, harps (joy, celebration) of God in hand. God is just in honoring his faithful servants. What they lost on earth they more than gain back in heaven.

The final phrase in v. 2, “holding harps of God,” leads into the worship song presented in verses 3–4...

Notice this heavenly choir will sing two songs: “the song of Moses” and “the song of the Lamb.” Commentators offer several theories for the identity of these songs. Most agree that the song of Moses probably incorporated lyrics from one or both of two Old Testament passages: Exodus 15:1–18 and Deuteronomy 32:1–43.

These songs refer to deliverance from Egypt through the ten plagues, God’s defeat of the Egyptian army, and Israel’s preparation for entrance into the Promised Land. How appropriate for victorious saints who were delivered from the judgments of the tribulation to witness the defeat of the Antichrist and the establishment of Christ’s earthly kingdom!

“The song of the Lamb” appears to be a new song, so John went on to describe the lyrics. This passage points to a profound truth about worship. Whether the songs are old or new, the purpose of worship is to glorify God for His awesome Person and awe-inspiring works.

Regarding the relationship of the two songs sung before the throne, one commentator observes:

“The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; 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 was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of a foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes.”

The song of these redeemed saints praises God’s character as the omnipotent, immutable, sovereign, perfect, and righteous Creator and Judge. Because He is all that, God must and will judge sinners; if He ignored their sin, He would not be holy, righteous, and true to His nature.

Notice how the song closes with joyful anticipation of the millennial reign of Christ, when all the nations will come and worship before God. In the words of the psalmist in Psalm 66:4, “All the earth will worship You, and will sing praises to You; they will sing praises to Your name.”

John’s attention is drawn away from the praises of the redeemed before the Lord. Verses 5-8 reveal the third and final scene of this chapter; the final act before the bowl judgments are poured out. The Lord is everlasting. He will send His divine judgement on His time in fulfillment of His plan, and that time has come.

### III. The Plan of God

Verses 5-8...

John saw a temple in heaven, similar to the physical building that once stood in Jerusalem. By the time of John’s writing, the earthly temple had lain in ruins for more than twenty-five years. Yet even that earthly temple was a “model” of the heavenly temple fashioned by God Himself (Heb. 8:2–5). Unlike the earthly temple, however, the “most holy place” or “holy of holies” in the heavenly temple was open. In its earthly counterpart, that place where the presence of the Lord dwelled had always been concealed (Lev. 16:2–3; Heb. 9:2–7). Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies once a year to make sacrifices on behalf of sinful people. In heaven, where no sinful people dwell, Christ Himself serves as our eternal High Priest. For the saints in heaven nothing obscures God’s glory. For believers the heavenly tabernacle is a temple of unhindered access to God, but for unbelievers that same tabernacle becomes a temple of doom.

As the vision proceeded, seven angels emerged from the heavenly temple, each clothed in pure white and adorned in priestly garments (15:6). With solemnity, these angels approached the throne of God. One of the four living creatures mentioned in chapters 4–6 handed each of them a bowl “full of the wrath of God” (15:7).

The word translated “bowl” verse 7 refers to a shallow, saucer-like dish used for boiling liquids as well as for “drinking or pouring libations.” One dictionary adds that the use of this term in Revelation is “suggestive of rapidity in the emptying of the contents.”

The imagery is not that of a stream being poured gradually out of a pitcher, but of the whole contents of the shallow saucers being hurled down in an instant flood of judgment. Bowls were part of the temple furnishings (1 Kings 7:50; Zechariah 14:20) and were associated with the sacrifices (Exodus 27:3; 38:3). Those who refuse to drink the cup of salvation of the Lord (Psalm 116:13) will be drowned in the judgments poured from the bowls of wrath.

300 million people died of smallpox in the 20th century, and perhaps over half a billion people have died from it overall, making it the worst plague in history. Because of Edward Jenner’s vaccination, little by little it was conquered to some degree. Now, the only place it exists is in two research laboratories, one in Russia and one in Atlanta, Georgia. Imagine being responsible for transporting this liquid death in a box.

Smallpox is nothing compared to this round of judgments in Revelation 16. It is hard to describe what we are about to see. The human race cannot long endure after the seven bowls are poured out — it will not be a third this time but the entire thing — the whole ocean, all the rivers. It is terrifying. These four living creatures give the seven angels the liquid death and wrath in these bowls.

These bowls may be connected with the bowls filled with the prayers for vindication offered by the martyred believers in 5:8. They are the direct response to that plea for God to avenge their suffering and death. These bowls of wrath also begin to answer the age-old question of why the wicked seem to go unpunished while the righteous suffer injustice. The truth is that God’s mercy during the tribulation delayed the full measure of judgment to give

people an opportunity to repent (2 Peter 3:9). But we must never presume on God's mercy. Judgment postponed is not the same as judgment denied.

As John continued to stare into the open temple, verse 8 says he saw it "filled with smoke from the glory of God." As in the days of Moses, after the earthly tabernacle was completed (Exodus 40:33–35), the heavenly tabernacle was consumed by the glorious holy presence of God. Similarly, when Isaiah witnessed the Lord sitting on His throne, "lofty and exalted" (Isaiah 6:1), he saw the heavenly temple "filling with smoke" (Isaiah 6:4).

John's vision of the final wrath of God underscores three important contrasts.

First, as God's temple fills with His glory the earth is filled with His wrath.

Second, In the past the wrath of God poured was poured out on Christ to save sinners, but in the future the wrath of God will be poured out on sinners to judge them.

Third, while the righteous in heaven rejoice over the triumph of good the rebellious on earth will suffer with the destruction of evil.

## Conclusion

W. Tozer wrote, "We talk of God much and loudly, but we secretly think of Him as being absent, and we think of ourselves as inhabiting a parenthetic interval between the God who was and the God who will be." The song of Moses draws on God's past deliverance; the song of the Lamb looks forward to His future judgement and justice. Yet John's vision of joy in heaven and sorrow on earth in Revelation 15 should turn our attention to our own situation today.

First, the law of Moses leads us to the faith in Christ.

The stone tablets Moses received were with the ten commandments clearly revealed God's standard for His people living in a fallen world. The Mosaic Law defines sin and exposes its heinous nature. Romans 3:20 says, "Through the law we become conscious of our sin." Ever since Moses received the commandments on Mount Sinai, there can be no question of God's opinion of adultery, murder, theft, etc.—they are wrong. And the severe penalties that befell transgressors underscore the serious nature of sin as rebellion against God. In defining sin and setting a divine standard, the Law convicts us of sin ... but it cannot change our hearts.

There is only One who perfectly obeyed the Law, and He did it on our behalf and then died in our place so that we might receive the promised blessing of salvation by faith in Christ.

Galatians 3:23-26 says, "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

The purpose of the law of Moses was to shatter our pride and self-reliance and disclose what he is really underneath—sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God and helpless to save himself.

And the law must still be allowed to do its God-given duty today. People need to understand the bad news of their sin and impending judgment, to understand the good news of the gospel. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned a man and sentenced him to death will he be driven to despair in himself and turn to Jesus Christ.

John Stott wrote, “No man has ever appreciated the gospel until the law has first revealed him to himself. It is only against the blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear, and it is only against the dark background of sin and judgment that the gospel shines forth.”

The law’s purpose has always been to show us our sin and our need of a Savior. So let me ask you: Are you seeking to build and maintain your relationship with God on the basis of “keeping the law,” that is, on the basis of your personal performance, or on the basis of the merit of Jesus Christ?

Do you try to obey by your own sheer will and determination, or do you rely on the Holy Spirit daily for His power to enable you to obey?

Do you view God as an ogre who has set before you an impossible code of conduct you cannot keep, or do you view Him as your divine heavenly Father who has accepted you and loves you on the basis of the merit of Christ? In other words, in terms of your acceptance with God, are you willing to rely solely on the finished perfect work of Jesus, instead of your own pitifully imperfect performance?

Second, we should express gratitude for God’s promise of protection. Prior to the tribulation events described in Revelation 15, those people on earth who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ will be raptured, as 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, they will be “caught up ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” While the final triumph of good over evil is yet future, believers in Christ can offer thanks for victory over the enemy.

Regarding this hope of future salvation, Paul wrote in Romans 8:23-25, “we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.”

One of the ways we can keep a heavenly perspective is to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. If you don’t know any by heart, I encourage you to learn them. Besides a Bible, every believer should get to know some of the songs of faith.

Spend time alone or with family fulfilling Ephesians 5:19-20 says, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father”

Our third response should be concern for those who choose to reject Christ. After the church is raptured and the Antichrist rises to power, many will realize that their choice to reject Christ was a regrettable, tragic error.

Others will continue to reject Jesus as their sovereign Lord and undergo horrible suffering as a result. The most important decision in life is to repent of sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Therefore, the greatest concern for believers today must be for the lost. How do you express your concern for them in a world increasingly hostile to the claims of Christ?

The apostle Peter answers this question in 1 Peter 3:15 (look at it with me)...

First, “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” Set Christ apart, and let Him set you apart as a holy vessel. Offer yourself for His service—anytime ... anywhere ... for anyone. Prepare yourself to be a ready and willing soldier to obey His prompting at any moment.

Second, always be “ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.” Rehearse your own testimony about how Christ saved you. Keep it fresh on your lips. Tell it freely and sincerely. Few things pique the curiosity of unbelievers more than the testimony of a joyous, transformed life.

Finally, treat unbelievers with “gentleness and reverence.” Steer clear of anything resembling a self-righteous, modern-day Pharisee. Let God do the judging in His own time. Let’s pursue people not with sour derision or proud contempt, but with the sweet fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Yesterday, I was out in town and saw someone who I know needs faith in Jesus Christ. I wasn’t sure how to start the conversation, so I silently prayed and asked the Lord to open a door for me to share the gospel. And then this person asked, “Hey, can I get your advice on a situation I am in?” And as soon as he asked, the door was open and I answered his question but also spoke about the most important decision he could make: to repent of his sin and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. We talked about what it means to be a Christian and how to find our greatest hope, joy and purpose in obey the Lord Jesus.

So friends, be praying about how to be a willing witness of the gospel message. Share your testimony of a transformed life. The law of Moses leads us to the cross of Christ. We sing songs because we find our greatest joy in Christ. Therefore, we can’t help about His saving power and how we can have assurance of salvation in the midst of tribulation.

Let’s pray...