

Revelation 15 & 16 The Apocalyptic Exodus

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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This morning we continue our trip through the book of Revelation – a book that we’re learning is full of worship and wonder as well as justice and judgment. We’ve seen Jesus take the scroll from the right hand of God and open the seven seals and we’ve seen the seven trumpets blow, this morning we see the seven bowls poured out, the last plagues as they’re called and we’ll notice how the division continues – you either escape these things through your relationship with Christ, or you suffer these things for the sake of your sin.

Let’s dig right in.

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

2 And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

The beast is also known as the antichrist, a world ruler we met back in chapter 13, and the Bible tells us that everyone will one day be forced to take this mark or be excluded from the global economy and then to actually worship him. Most people will go along with the program, but there will be some, called by God and enabled by Him to resist. These are those people when they finally arrive in Heaven.

These are those who overcame the beast. This reminds us of something: the enemy can be overcome. And notice, it’s not the way Islamic terrorists try to overcome – by blowing people up or pushing people overboard – these Christians overcame by counting their lives as nothing – it may have cost them in the short term, but their faithfulness has an enormous reward in the long term.

We need to remember this, that no matter how much the enemy fights against you, oppresses you, wounds you – he can be overcome, and one day you will sing. Look with me at what these people are doing in Heaven, after all they’ve been through on earth:

3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

“Great and marvelous *are* Your works,
Lord God Almighty!

Just and true *are* Your ways,

O King of the saints!

4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?

For *You* alone *are* holy.

For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested.”

Their response is like that of every other group we’ve met in heaven – they worship.

For all the strange and incredible things we’ve been seeing in Revelation, we’ve been seeing an awful lot of worship too. It seems we see it happening every time we turn around. And what are they worshipping about?

Well, here we find God being worshipped specifically for:

- His works, that is, the things He has done they’re “great and mighty”
- for His character, for being “just and true” in everything He does
- we see again how appropriate it is to fear God, to understand His mightiness and our weakness
- we see His holiness and we’re reminded that everyone will come and worship God because no one can effectively resist Him or stand against His judgments once they’re poured out.

But again, this is just one song of many that we have seen in Revelation. Which should provoke us to ask the question – if there’s so much worship in Heaven, how much worship is there in my life today? And by worship, I’m referring here specifically to the musical aspect of worship.

Why do Christians sing so much? Have you ever wondered that? Why do we begin, and end our services with songs? Is this just opening act? Is the sermon the headline event and the worship team are the new guys just trying to get noticed?

No. We sing because it’s a way to express ourselves to God and a way to respond to all that He has done to, for, and with us.

Fair enough you say, but why does that require music and song? Can’t we just say thank you with words? Of course you can, but haven’t you noticed that sometimes words alone cannot convey all that we feel. And so we reach over to the realm of music for help in adding what we feel to what we’re trying to say.

In worship music, what we think about God and what we feel about God converge. We love God with all our heart and all our mind. As the music carries us and amplifies us.

But, we must remember that the music has its limits. You never see anyone praising God by humming or tapping or strumming alone, the music is always accompanied by lyrical content. And even if you want to argue that someone like Bach wrote lyricless worship, I’ll grant you that, but only after you concede that there was verbal truth he was trying to communicate with his music – we have words for what he was trying to express.

And you have to notice that although we have the words of the Psalms preserved as eternal Scripture, we don’t have any of the sheet music that went along with them. We know the

tunes to which some of them were to be played, it tells us right there in the heading, but we don't know what those tunes sounded like anymore. We have preserved the words, but not the music.

The lesson here is that we must always focus on what a worship song says, over how it sounds. And then, if what it says is good and true, and the song is rightly used, music can help us express that truth even with all the depth of our soul.

We must also notice here the value of congregational worship – we never see anyone worshipping God privately in Heaven. It is always in the midst of the congregation. There is something to be said about private, devotional praise, but there is also much, very much, to be said about worshipping God with other Christians.

But let us be honest, it's not something that comes naturally or easily for many of us, is it? Especially us men.

We don't sing much in our culture, unless it's Happy Birthday and even that occasionally feels awkward.

So we must go through this process of training ourselves to sing, because it doesn't come naturally. I still remember quite vividly being at that point when I had to decide, will I sing or just listen when it comes time for worship? Am I going to be an active part of this, or a passive bystander? And of course, you like some songs more than others, and some are easier to sing than others. And it all feels very self-conscious at first, but the more you do it, the better you become.

Of course, by better I don't mean musically so, although that often happens as well, but you become better at it in the sense that your heart is in it and you learn, not how to sing a solo in front of a crowded room, but you learn how to join your voice into the chorus of Christian community that is gathered to praise our mighty God. You learn how to be a part of something, to fill your space in this enormous thing we call worship.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous Christian pastor, theologian, and spy who was martyred by the Nazis just as the Allied forces were freeing Berlin, was profoundly touched by an experience of visiting African-American churches in Harlem back in the 1940's. He noticed a vibrancy and a reality to the way they were praising God that he had not experienced in the German churches back home. When he returned, during the war, he made sure to emphasize the role of corporate worship for Christians. He wrote:

“The more we sing, the more joy we will derive from it, but, above all, the more devotion and discipline and joy we put into our singing, the richer will be the blessing that will come to the whole life of the fellowship from singing together.

It is the voice of the Church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song.”¹

He’s saying, and many of you have come to learn it’s true: singing praise to God in the congregation, blesses you as your voice fits itself into the chorus, as you join in the communal event, but it also blesses everyone else whose voice is being woven together with yours, and it leaves a lasting impression on those who don’t yet believe. And all of this occurs while we achieve the greatest benefit of corporate praise, which is of course, glorifying God.

Now, having said all of that about singing in general, let’s consider the specific nature of this particular song. It’s called the Song of Moses, the servant of God – and the song of the Lamb. That’s two parts coming together.

It’s the song of Moses the servant of God – this is a reference to a song sung by Moses all the way back in Exodus 15. The nation of Israel had been enslaved by Egypt, they were trapped and oppressed, there was no way out, no way to save themselves. But God sent Moses to deliver them, and because the Egyptians didn’t want to let the people go, God sent plagues on the country and it’s leadership.

The final plague was the death of the first born which the people of Israel were spared from as they celebrated the Passover. After that, Pharaoh finally consented to let the people go, but then changed his mind and pursued them.

In order for Israel to escape, God parted the waters of the Red Sea and Moses led them across on dry land in one of the defining miracles of Jewish and Biblical history. And then, as the Egyptian army came through in pursuit, God closed the waters and they all drowned. Standing on the other side, Moses sang The Song of Moses which celebrated not only all that God had done up until that moment, but which also looked forward to all that He had promised for their future in the Promised Land.

This song we see in Revelation is not an exact cover of that song, if you want the original lyrics look them up in Exodus 15 some time. But there is a connection between this song and that song, a connection modified and clarified by the words “and the song of the Lamb.”

You see, the events of the first exodus are intended to serve as an instructional aid for us today. God wants us to see how He is able to set the captives free and lead us into blessing. Their kingdom was going to be here on earth, on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean, ours is our going to be for eternity in Heaven.

And the similarities grow even more profound for those who will endure the Great Tribulation. The Israelites were ruled over by Pharaoh whose heart was hard against God and therefore God sent the plagues. The earth will one day be ruled over by the beast

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Chapter Two: The Day With Others; Singing The New Song

whose heart is set against God, and therefore God will send plagues. But one day, just as He delivered the Israelites into the Promised Land, He will deliver these people from their oppression. And then, they will sing a song of praise, just like Moses and the Israelites sang after their deliverance.

And now, we back up a bit and watch as the final aspects of God's judgment against sin and sinners is poured out:

5 After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. 6 And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. 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 The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

You may remember that God told Moses to build the tabernacle on earth based on what had been revealed to him about Heaven. The Jewish tabernacle and later the Jewish temple was not the result of some super pious architect's artistic vision – it was based on a real model. John sees that model here in heaven.

As the angels come out, bearing these seven bowls of God's wrath, the temple is filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power and no one was able to enter it.

We first see God represented in this smoke back with Moses on Mount Sinai - a cloud of smoke descended and covered the top of the mountain when He gave the Ten Commandments.

And then, as God led the people through the desert they were covered by a cloud each day – it protected them from the scorching dessert heat, but also served as their GPS. When the cloud moved, they moved and so God led them wherever He wanted them to go.

Then, when Moses finally built the tabernacle:

Exo 40:34 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

And later when Solomon built the first temple, at the dedication

1 Kings 8:10 And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy *place*, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

God maintained that reminder of His presence with Israel for hundreds of years, but eventually He withdrew it due to their repeated sin. It's an event described in Ezekiel Chapter 10. Now, finally, sin is going to be judged, and while it is, no one can enter the Temple until everything is wrapped up.

So we see these seven angels carrying seven bowls and we'll watch as each one is poured out.

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died.

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For it is their just due."

God often has a punishment that fits the crime.

Pharaoh drowned all the Israelite babies (though Moses escaped) and then God drowned all of Pharaoh's army.

Haman plotted to exterminate all the Jews and even built a gallows in his front yard from which to hang Mordecai, but he was hung himself from those very gallows.

Saul was commanded by God to slay all the Amalekites, a command he did not completely obey, and so, in a tragic twist Saul was killed by an Amalekite many years later.

Do you think we can trust the Bible when it says in Romans 12:19 "do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord."?

7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments."

God isn't out of control, He's not in blind rage. He judgments are true and righteous – remember that mom and dad, remember that boss, manager, supervisor, coach. Sometimes

you need to discipline. Sometimes an offense has occurred, sometimes correction and discipline need to be meted out – but make sure your judgments are true and righteous, not vindictive, bitter, or harsh.

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

This verse and those like it that we'll see shortly kill me. God has been declaring the gospel ever since the death of Christ – that men can be forgiven of their sin, no matter how bad, no matter how frequent, no matter how depraved, they can be forgiven of their sin and Jesus will stand in their place and endure the wrath such sin deserves. He will pay the bill and give us His righteous in exchange, if we will submit to God and stop living for ourselves.

But people don't want to submit. It's a struggle for all of us, even Christians, that's why we have to remind ourselves regularly of who and what we really are and what God has really done for us and crucify ourselves daily – tell our base desires no, and seek after Christ instead. It's not what everyone wants to do. Most people want to do their own thing. They want to decide what is good and right what should and shouldn't happen. They want their excuses and explanations to stand. And if God rejects them, they will reject Him. So these men who could have been forgiven, who could escape this judgment, suffer because they will not repent and give God glory. And in a futile response to their pain, they rebel all the more and cry out against Him in blasphemy.

If you see it and really understand it, it frustrates you. It helps you understand Ps 2 when it asks:

1 Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,
3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us."

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:

Friends, there is no escaping the judgment that is due for sin.

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the

pain. 11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Once again, more of the same. Why do they suffer? Because they WILL not be saved. It's not that they cannot, they WILL not. There is only one way out, Jesus said I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one comes to the Father, but by Me. And they refuse to accept it.

Ps 4:2 How long, O you sons of men,
Will you turn my glory to shame?
How long will you love worthlessness
And seek falsehood?

Apparently the answer is, until the very end.

Revelation 16:12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Armageddon is a real physical location, also known as Megiddo, the Plain of Esdraelon, and the Valley of Jezreel and it has been the site of numerous battles throughout history. Napoleon called it "the most natural battlefield of the whole earth." This is where Barak defeated the armies of Canaan in days before Israel had a king (Judges 5:19). It's where Gideon took on the Midianites (Judges 7) and it's where King Saul was killed by the Amalekite. It was an approach used by Titus and the Roman army when invading Israel, and the route taken by the Crusaders in the Middle Ages and was the site where the British fought against the Ottoman Turks in 1917.

And it is the place where one day Satan and his team will lead all the armies of men in a final attempt to defy God.

It won't go too well for them. We'll see it unfold in Revelation 19 when Jesus rides out to meet them in battle.

17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of

the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent (about 125 pounds). Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

All the way to the very end we find people stubbornly, obstinately, insistingly refusing to submit to God and blaspheming Him instead. Friends, it just goes to show us how desperately wicked our hearts really are. It shows us how much we need God to intervene in our lives, get our attention, and turn us from our wicked ways.

Hebrews 10:31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

But we don't have to fall into those hands, we can fall at His feet instead.

We must remember, over and over, the judgments and wrath described in this book are only for those who insist on rebelling against God. He doesn't take delight in judging them. He's not gloating over His victory, but if they will not submit then why would He ever force them to endure His presence for eternity?

If they want nothing to do with God now, why would He turn Heaven into hell for them by forcing them to be in His presence forever? No, instead He will give them what they want – eternity separated from Him, but with that He also takes away everything that is good, and true, and just, and pure, and beautiful – everything that is a reflection of Him.

And you sit here this morning and must decide – will I worship, or will I rebel? There are only two options my friends. We don't see any free agents, there's no mention of a neutral Switzerland in the final conflict between God and men. You're on one side or the other. Are you sure of which side you're on?

We're about to close in worship, and it will give a chance to declare your loyalty, or a chance to ponder your life. Take this time, and sing praise, or seriously consider the condition and destiny of your soul. And if there is anything I can to do help, any questions I can answer or help make clear, any guidance I can give, come see me after the service and I would be happy to help and so would any of our other leaders.

Let's pray.