

Worship the King **Rev. 15:1-8**

The book of Revelation or The Revelation is a difficult and often misunderstood and misinterpreted book in the Bible overall. However, if we look at the background and context of this writing we might better understand what John is trying to say. Actually, this letter was very understandable to the original audience. The Revelation is a very particular type of literature called “apocalyptic.” Understanding something about this literary style will help us better understand the book of revelation.

Apocalyptic is an Old Testament style of writing where symbols and strange occurrences and characters lace a story of God’s intervention on behalf of His people to bring great deliverance and victory that can come to them by no other means while they are suffering persecution and peril. The author usually wrote as if coming from some person of renown in the past, which adds credibility to the writing. It is prophecy writing, but predicts some events that have already happened at the time of the writing so the audience can grasp that fact that God has fulfilled these things on their behalf as predicted. In addition, there are events yet to be fulfilled that encourage the people of God that He is in control in spite of their circumstances and situation. God’s judgment against the enemy is swift and sure. God will bring victory to the faithful, and He will be worshipped and glorified as a result. The O.T. documents Israel’s miraculous deliverance from Egypt and Babylon, and for our 1st century church of Christ, John writes about deliverance from Rome. Ezekiel and Daniel are examples of O.T. apocalyptic style writings and they bare the same resemblances to Revelation in their use of symbols, images, sensational events, and a mighty deliverance from God Almighty.

Written about AD 95, The Revelation speaks God’s encouragement to the 1st century church under severe Roman oppression. The Roman Empire was a tremendous monster that extended into Asia and all major cities of the world were under the rule of the Emperor. Emperor cultic worship was a major issue at this time especially in Asia, but the church refused to bow to anyone by God and His Messiah, Jesus. John writes about the martyrdom of Antipas because of his faithfulness to Jesus, and of his own persecution because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He foresees the great coming persecution of the church and the martyrdom of many believers in the near future. So, the book begins with the word “apocalypse” or “revelation” – the revealing of something hidden and important. It is not the revelation of the prophet or of an angel to a prophet; it is the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself as shown to Him by the Father and about things that will happen soon. We pay close attention to all that John sees and hears in this book. The book is filled with visions and events to see and hear, and John has disclosed them to the first century church because of what they were to experience soon. But as in much of the New Testament or Scripture in general, there is the aspect of the now and the not yet. There are things that happen to them, but they are but a foreshadowing of things that will happen in the future, at the end of time, when God determines to be the perfect time. We are not in human time frames in this book, nor can we use it as a timeline of events to take place sequentially, or a way of predicting the order and occurrence of such events. The Revelation is more of an unveiling of conditions and circumstances that happened to the early church and that will also happen at the end of history as we know it.

With this in mind, let's look at some of the events that have happened so far in the first half of the book. We will be looking at Chapter 15 today, and that is well into the story, but it is also at the heart of the revelation. In previous chapters of this book we have seen that John considers this letter to be a prophecy given directly from God. He sees a vision of the risen Jesus in glory and power. There is a recurring statement that He is the one who was, and is, and is to come, the Lord Almighty. It is He who has authority over the churches and all things. This revelation is to be read aloud to seven the churches in Asia Minor. Some of the churches are given strong warnings, but all are encouraged to remain faithful to Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God who purchased their redemption. There are promises given to each of them of the future rewards in heaven for their faithfulness. John sees a vision of the throne in heaven and the One seated on it. It is very similar to the description in Ezek. 1:26-28. The scroll with 7 seals is then opened by Jesus, also a similar scene as in Ezek. 2&3. John hears of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, but turns to see a Lamb as though slaughtered. He (Jesus, the Lamb of God) is the only one who can open the seals. This starts the wheels of God's judgment and victory in motion and nothing can stop it. As the events unfold, our minds can't help but flip back to the plagues brought against Egypt and Pharaoh as God prepared to bring them out of Egypt with a great and miraculous deliverance and victory. The Exodus imagery will remain with us for much of this book. As the seals are opened we see horses that remind us of the horses in Zech. 1:7-9, and the people cry out "How long O Lord, How long?" The same cry is offered in Revelation, but God is in control of history and all eternity. He will determine the times and events. Each time the King on the throne is addressed, worship is offered to the King. The residents of heaven offer songs of praise, and glory, honor, and they worship the King and His Messiah. On the earth, the early Christian church is on a crash course with the Roman Empire for refusing to participate in their required worship of the Emperor (an earthly king). A time of great persecution awaits them to the point of torture and death. But they are to remain faithful to the King of the universe and rely on this great and final deliverance for all eternity. It may cost them their very lives on earth, but there is great reward in heaven where they will forever worship the One who was, and is, and is to come. And so the story continues and the momentum builds as these judgments in groups of 7 (standing for completeness) are executed at the hand of Jesus and carried out by angels. Angels have been involved in the judgments of God throughout the O.T. Angels were present at the Exodus, at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other places, and they will be instrumental in the final judgment as well. They are the messengers of God for good news and for bad.

There are three groups of judgments. The Bowl judgments are the seventh Trumpet judgment, and the Trumpet judgments are the seventh Seal judgment, so the three groups are really one judgment of God in three aspects. They are not meant to be understood as a chronological sequence of events. "Divine retribution is revealed by the seals, announced by the trumpets, and fully executed by the bowls." Before each group is initiated, there is an interlude of events. Today we will look at chapter 15 which is the preparation before the seven Bowl judgments. The series of plagues has been initiated; the hearts of the unbelievers has been hardened like Pharaoh's, and the great and final judgment is about to unfold. We are poised as the last trumpet is sounded. Trumpets were used as announcements of something to come. In the mean time, on the earth, great persecution and martyrdom is taking place. The innocent are dying for their faith in Jesus. Yet John tells us that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they didn't shrink back from death to save their lives. They worshipped the King and only Him, no matter what the threat. They must remain faithful.

Let's look at Chapter 15 now... but first a word about our sponsor. Revelation is brought to you by John. The author identifies himself with no explanation. He is unknown, although some speculate he is the apostle, but others disagree. Whoever he is, he is very well versed in the O.T. and this letter is full of quotes and usage of the O.T. He also has an understanding of apocalyptic literature. He is a prophet and is not only forth telling, but foretelling in this position. He writes this prophecy in letter form as commanded by God, so it can be distributed to the churches. He sees this as a fulfillment of the O. T. and history in general by the hand of God, the King who reigns and lives forever and ever.

Read Rev. 15:1-8 – NIV

John sees “another sign” in heaven. The first two were seen in Ch. 12, but now he sees this great and marvelous sign. Why is this sign so great and marvelous? He sees seven angels with seven last plagues. What's so wonderful about plagues? Again our minds flip to the Exodus story, where he intends his readers to reflect. The Plagues were terrible for the enemy, but they were marvelous for the Israelites, for by them their deliverance was initiated, and they fled Egypt and their persecution. The Exodus story is the national epoch of the Hebrew people. They still refer to it to this day because of their deliverance from persecution by the hand of God Almighty and their victory over the enemy. God will redeem his people and in fact has redeemed us through the sacrifice of an innocent Lamb of God.

In this chapter John again stresses the majesty of God, this time before the bowl judgments take place. It is God, the Almighty, who is over the whole historical process. John calls them plagues, which puts us into the Exodus mind set, but they are judgments of God – final judgments. In the other images of seals and trumpets, the chance for repentance was afforded, but these final bowl judgments will fall on the impenitent, those who reject Jesus, who are unfaithful. They joined the enemy in blaspheming the God of the universe. They followed a different path enthusiastically. You know people like this, don't you? They jump on the bandwagon of anything that is against Christianity or even religion. Church, the Bible, God – are utter nonsense to them. They have no fear of God, seemingly no fear of death, they know no consequences, and everything seems to work out just fine for them on top of it all. But, God's wrath is coming; His judgment will be severe if they don't change. We may not see it in our life time, but it is promised! He is in control of history and the destiny of all humanity. With these soon coming last plagues, God's judgment will be completed. Yes, we have reason to worship the King.

John sees “what looks like a sea of glass.” He is always non-committal in describing his visions. It is not a sea of glass but what looks like one. We remember a similar scene from Ch. 4. John saw what looked like a sea of glass in his first glimpse of heaven and the throne of God, but this time it is mixed with fire (which could be because of the judgment about to take place). More importantly is that the conquerors, those who are victorious over the beast, the enemy, have made it across this heavenly Red Sea. Now, in Exodus typology, the sea should swallow up the pursuing enemy of God's people. The Exodus imagery permeates this passage. On the earth there was great persecution and trial. The beast wages war with the faithful after losing the battle against the Son of Man and His angels in heaven and being thrown down to the earth. Many of the early church were martyred during this time in the Roman Empire. They remained faithful even to death. It was considered their victory when any were martyred for Jesus during this time. They were victorious indeed as we see here that those martyred will be on the side of the sea of glass and will be given harps by God to sing the victory song, because the final judgments and end is near. The “not yet” is about to happen. This is the time that all Christians are waiting for. The faithful have been gathered from the earth, some have been martyred for their faith, but they are all before the throne of

God singing a song of deliverance referred to as the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Ex. 15 flashes to our mind as we think of the song of Moses. This was a song of redemption, but it was not fully realized at that time. Now through Jesus, the song is realized in its full measure because true and complete redemption is at hand. So the song is not only the song of Moses but the fulfilled song – rightly called the song of the Lamb. So, all gather on the victorious side of the sea in heaven to worship the King.

The song is a composite of O.T. scripture neatly woven together to accomplish the desired results. From Psalm 92:5 & 139:14, God's works are called great and wonderful. Those who follow the ways of the world and the ways of the beast think of human works, human accomplishments, human intellect, and human victory, but there is only one who is Almighty. The reality of the weakness of their power will be "revealed" by the awesome power of God at this time. They relied on their own strength and on their leader and camaraderie. The song states that it is God who is Almighty – all powerful – omnipotent. There is nothing that compares to Him. His power is incomparable and His ways are just and true, from Psalm 145:17. He is addressed as King of the ages or King of the nations. It has been stressed over and over that God is King and that He is in control of all that happens and will happen. This is extremely important to this first century church in what they are about to face, and it is important to all Christians everywhere for what is in store at the end of time. From Psalm 86:8 & Mal. 1:11 the rhetorical question is asked in heaven ... "Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name?" A name in their understanding stood for the whole person. The song ends with three declarations: "For You alone are Holy – For all nations will come and worship before You – For Your righteous acts have been revealed." These are the reasons why everyone will fear God, and why everyone will give glory to His Name. Only God is perfectly pure – Holy (1 Sam. 2:2). All nations will worship Him (Ps. 86:9). God's "righteous acts" would better be interpreted "judgments." His judgments will be recognized by all to be righteous whether for mercy or condemnation. God is pure and His judgments are governed by who He is. I read that although these singing are the victors, there is no mention of them in the song. In Heaven at last all self is absorbed in the presence of God, all will worship the King.

Our attention is snapped back to the present as John tells us that "after this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened." We are immediately drawn back to the Wilderness experience after the Exodus. Moses was instructed by God to construct a tabernacle (the tent of meeting) according to the tabernacle in heaven. This was the place where Moses would meet with God's presence on behalf of His people. John is giving us a symbol of the very presence of God Himself as we focus back to the original tabernacle in the wilderness. Out of this tabernacle in heaven from the very presence of God, come the seven angels with the seven plagues. These plagues are sanctioned by God Almighty Himself for it is from His direct presence that they emerge. It is one of the "four living creatures" who are always attending the throne of God, who brings out the seven bowls filled with the wrath of God who lives forever and ever and gives them to the angels. God is eternal and not limited to our time frames. Earlier we learned that the bowls are "filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints." It's very interesting that our prayers may be collected for the right time to be answered and fulfilled. All the prayers of all the believers who prayed that the Lord would come and make divine retribution are all held in heaven in the very throne room of God waiting for just the right moment. When God has declared that it is time, all the prayers of the saints will be vindicated at once against the enemy of our souls.

Once completed, the tabernacle was filled with the cloud of the glory of God and Moses could not enter the Tabernacle. Similarly here, the tabernacle in heaven is filled with smoke

(the cloud of the presence) from the glory of God and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues were completed. The final judgments that are to come are a direct act of God against those who are unfaithful or who reject Jesus as God, the King who was, and is, and is to come. Once this action is initiated, no one will be able to intercede or alter the course of events. The throne room will be inaccessible until after the final bowl judgments are completed. This is at the hand of Almighty God and nothing can stop his hand. The judgments are only against the unbelievers, so there is reason to worship the King before this takes place in anticipation of the victory soon to come. The believers are victorious especially those who have been persecuted or martyred for their faith in Jesus. So at this point right before the final plagues are unfolded they worship King Jesus in heaven, the one who was, and is, and is to come, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the King and worthy of our praise.

Who knows when God will declare that the time is right? It could be now; it could be years from now. The Roman Empire didn't know that they would fall at the direction of Almighty God. The Babylonian Empire didn't know, and neither did Egypt. What makes this generation any different than other generations of the past? Haven't we blasphemed enough? Haven't we relied on our own strength enough? Haven't we rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Messiah? How long, O Lord; how long? We long to be there in the presence of God Almighty. Will you worship the King or be among the unfaithful? For the true worshippers there is eternal joy and singing in the presence of God and the Lamb. For the unfaithful, there is eternal separation from God, the judgments, and eventually second death.

Be encouraged today. The faithful in Christ will not face these judgments, but will be taken from the earth and be in the very presence of God. The victorious will have crossed the heavenly Red Sea to receive harps to worship the Lamb. Some will have died faithful to the Lord; some will have been martyred for their faith, and some will be harvested by the angel of God before His judgments fall upon the unfaithful. Where are you right now in your relationship with Jesus? Are you ready to face persecution or even death, as they were, in order to realize the fulfillment and reward of your faith in Him? Will you be among the faithful worshippers, singing a new song in heaven of the victory that God will bring to those who have accepted the Lordship of Jesus? All will acknowledge God and that Jesus is Lord. For some it will be before they face the wrath of God, and for some it will be as His servants who worship the King. Which side of the line will you be on? If you're not sure, there is time now to make a decision for Jesus. When God's final judgments are poured out upon the earth, only those who have hardened their hearts against God will be left to experience His wrath. If you are not sure, then I encourage you today to make your decision to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. His grace is available now. Today is the day of salvation for you.

Will you Worship the King?