THE FINAL WRATH OF GOD

Revelation 15:1-8

Key Verse 15:1

“I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the last seven plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.”

In chapter 14 were three visions. The first vision was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. The second vision was series of three angels’ proclaiming messages, the first angel proclaiming the eternal gospel, the second angel pronouncing judgment upon Babylon the great, and the third angel pronouncing damnation on those who worship the beast. After the three angels’ proclamation of the message there was a voice from heaven, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” which is related to the perseverance of saints. The third vision was the harvest of the earth in God’s judgment. Through all these visions we could think more about God’s broken heart for perishing inhabitants of the earth. We ask for God’s mercy that we may join in his heart while eagerly waiting for the arrival of the Lamb and his reigning on the earth and making hard effort to follow the Lamb wherever he goes in this world.

Chapters 15 and 16 are about the seven bowl judgments being executed on the earth. The actual execution is written in chapter 16, while chapter 15 is its preparation. This preparation is necessary, for it reveals who God is just before the final outpouring of his judgment. Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in Revelation with just eight verses. In this passage the word “last” or “final” is written two times, “Completion” twice, and “seven” eight times. God is the God of finality and completion, particularly the completion of his wrath. In this world there is no completion in a true sense, for no one knows the beginning and the end. But God is the God of beginning and the God of the end. In him there is true completion of all things. Let’s think about the meaning of this.

**First, the completed wrath of God (1).** Verse 1 says, “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.” Here is the third great sign (mega, massive, overwhelming) in Revelation. The first great sign is written in 12:1, “A great and wonderous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.” This sign is the future glory of Israel which was initially seen in the very dream of Joseph and would be fulfilled in its messianic hope when the Messiah returns to reign on the earth after the tribulation. The second sign is described in 12:3, “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.” It is related to Satan’s powerful ruling, especially during the time of tribulation. Here is the third sign, great and marvelous sign, seven angels with seven last plagues. This is about the final seven bowl judgments.

Why is this sign great and marvelous? Let’s think about it. Here the word “plague” is used. This word first used in Revelation in 9:18, “A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths.” Plagues is not just disease. It is a fatal disaster/blowing/calamity. The words “last plagues” imply that the seven seal judgments and the seven trumpet judgments were also plagues, and these last seven plagues would be the most serious, the worst plagues.

And it says in 15:1, “last because with them God’s wrath is completed.” With these seven last plagues God’s wrath of judgment is finished. It signifies the destruction of Satan’s kingdom and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom. So, what a great and marvelous sign after the first and the second great sign! It is similar to the description that at the sound of the seventh trumpet there were loud voices in heaven, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,” though the final seven bowl judgments have not yet been carried out.

Let’s think more about the completion of his wrath. It means there will be no more wrath of God. At the same time it also means the ending of his salvation work. We really need to understand the meaning of God’s wrath and judgment. We can say that in a sense the book of Revelation is the book of God’s judgment with three series of his continuous fierce judgments, specified as seven seal judgments, seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments, during the seven years of tribulation. Yet, his fierce, intense judgment means his intense salvation work. When we refer to other passages of the Scriptures, it seems that God’s wrath is poured out on the day of the Lord and that’s it. For example, Apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 3:10, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” But in Revelation we see that along with the intense judgment of God the intense salvation work is going on during the specific time of seven years. This will be the time of unbearable suffering and also the time of great salvation of souls, unprecedent in human history. We could see in chapter 7 that there was a great multitude who came out of the great tribulation. The best preparation for God’s upcoming intense judgment is to keep awake and meet the Lord in the air, that is the rapture, like the Philadelphia church. Christ Jesus said in 3:10, “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” I heard a message from a prominent servant of God about the spiritual condition of the evangelical churches in North America. They focus on social justice, losing the focus of soul salvation through the gospel. We need to fight for social justice and be concerned about the life of well-being in this world. Yet if it is shifted from eternal salvation of perishing mankind, that’s not Christianity anymore. Many so-called Christians will be left behind at the time of the church. It does not mean that they will not be saved. They will go through unbearable time of suffering depicted in Revelation to finally turn to God. Keeping our spirit and faith alive, we need to preach the gospel and serve God’s flock of sheep. Some will be awakened and meet the Lord in the air and some others turn to the Lord going through such a difficult time. A great multitude will be saved, and also a greater multitude will go into eternal destruction. In any case God’s eternal salvation and his eternal judgment are very personal before God. There will be the time of completion of God’s wrath. Again, it indicates a new world with the returning of the Lamb and his reigning on the earth and the eternal kingdom of God with a new heaven and a new earth.

**Second, victorious believers (2-4).** Then it says in verses 2 and 3, “And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.” We remember 4:6, which says, “Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” This is the description of what is there before the throne of God, the platform of the throne of God. We can imagine the calm, peaceful, life-filling scene before the throne of God. Yet, it was also written in 4:5, “Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.” As we studied, these are not lamps that give off a soft, gentle light to the indoors, but fierce, blazing torches used for war and so related to God’s judgment. So it is described in 15:2, John saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. It seems to show God’s peace and judgment of fire mingled, meaning that God’s peace would come after the fiery judgment, the final one. And then it is written in 22:1, “The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Fire is gone, and the sea becomes the river of the water of life.

Verse 2 continues, “standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.” In 6:9-11, when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood.” They were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.” Then in chapter 7 a great multitude who came out of the great tribulation were standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And in chapter 14 John heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder, and the sound like that of harpists playing harps. Here in 15:3 we see the victorious Christians over the beast, who held harps and sang to the Lord. We see that the prayer of all the martyrs for God’s vengeance had been answered. The victorious sing, praising God and playing their harps. Surely their singing is in the anticipation of God’s wrath being completed, which meant Christ’s kingdom coming and his reigning.

Here we see that those who were victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were clearly presented. As we studied in 12:11, they overcame their accuser the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much to shrink from death. They were victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. It shows how victorious they were. In 13:7, “He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.” Yet, it was temporary. They triumphed over the beast. In 13:15, “He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.” But they triumphed over the image. And in 13:16-17, “He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.” They triumphed over the number of his name. They make a sharp contrast with those who worshiped the beast and his image and received the mark of his name, who would drink the wine of God’s fury which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath and be tormented with burning sulfur eternally with no rest day or night. God gave them so many opportunities to repent and turn to Christ through sending 144,000 servants and two powerful witnesses and surely some other servants unknown and even through an angel proclaiming the eternal gospel flying in midair. But they remained unrepentant.

In the same way God gives each individual opportunities to repent and truly turn to God, not just one time but again and again throughout his or her life. Those who remain unrepentant to the end will face a terrible consequence, although they might have many blessings and successes in the world. But those who repent will be victorious in life, praising God.

**Third, the holy, eternal God (3b-8).** Verses 3b and 4 say, “They…sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the son of the Lamb: ‘Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.’” The song of Moses is the song Moses and the Israelites sang after being brought out of Egypt, the land of slavery and crossing the Red Sea as on dry land written in Exodus 15. The song of Moses can be a representative song among the songs in the Old Testament. In the song they praised God that Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea, while he redeemed his people to guide them to his holy dwelling. In Exodus we see that God redeemed them with the blood of a lamb, Passover lamb. They confessed, “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” And they believed that the nations will hear and tremble…The LORD would reign forever and ever.” The LORD is a holy God who redeems his people, but destroys those who opposed him in burning anger. It is a song of victory. It is a song of deliverance. It is a song of triumph and at the same time it is a song of judgment and wrath and devastation. And it is the song sung by the delivered. It is the song sung by the redeemed.

The song of the Lamb is written in 5:9-10, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” God is truly a holy God who purchased his people redeeming them through the blood of the Lamb, his Son from all nations of the world. He judges all those who reject the Lamb into the eternal condemnation. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same God, as the holy God who makes a distinction between his people and his enemies, between those who are victorious over Satan and worship the Lamb and those who are defeated and worship Satan. His righteous acts have been revealed in history and people from all nations will come and worship before him.

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 the foe, the expectation of the saints and the exaltation of the Lord. And the song of the Lamb deals with the same three issues. God’s faithfulness, God’s deliverance of His own and judgment of the ungodly.

This can be the song of all the saints throughout the generations who have been redeemed being victorious over Satan, “Great and marvelous are your deeds, LORD God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” This holy and righteous God brings to an end his wrath and thus his salvation.

Then verse 5 says, “After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened.” Here the temple is presented as the tabernacle of the Testimony, for in the temple the most important thing was the Testimony, Ten commandments. Certainly it is the Testimony of God. We remember in chapter 11 that when the seventh trumpet was sounded, there were loud voices in heaven for the Christ’s kingdom and then it says, “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within the temple was seen the ark of his covenant.” His covenant and the Testimony are the same. God dwells in the temple, particularly above the ark of the testimony. It is the place of God’s very presence. And he works according to his covenant, his testimony. He saves and judges. Then out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. The judgment of seven bowls is a part of the eternal plan of God, not being poured out from his emotional anger. He will accomplish his purpose. How important it is to have eternal perspective of life! His salvation is eternal and his judgment is eternal.

Now verse 8 says, “And 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.” It gives his people hope to live forever with him in his presence seeing him face to face after the completion of the judgment.

We thank God who is the God of completion, the completion of his wrath. He is the holy God who saves and judges. And he is the eternal God for his eternal salvation in his eternal kingdom. Thank God that the victorious believers were presented at the great marvelous sign of seven angels with seven last plagues. May we also be included in such victorious saints as we live in this world with eternal perspective of life, keeping our faith in the God of completion, holy and eternal.