**Revelation 15:1-8: Worship Before the Wrath**

Today is a special day—not only do I get to open the Scriptures with you, but I also get to celebrate my one-year wedding anniversary with my amazing wife, Jane. And to honor that, I thought I’d share a story from our first month of dating. Jane and I met three summers ago as interns at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs. One night, we stopped at Sonic to grab a slushy. I pulled into a parking spot, noticed the ordering sign was broken, and moved to the next one. As I was adjusting, Jane suddenly yelled, “Stop!”—and before I knew it, the broken Sonic sign next to us started swinging… and slammed into the side of my car. In my shock, I accidentally released the brake, and the sign ripped down the entire side of the car (Insert picture of car). Turns out it had been held up by zip ties. Zip ties! The next morning, as I was still recovering from the chaos, I remembered that I needed to call my parents about happened. Then, I got to work and immediately got a call from my bank—my card had been compromised and shut down, right before a four-day work trip. In a span of 24 hours, it felt like life just started piling on. Maybe you’ve been there—when stress and hardship come one after another, and it feels like you can’t breathe, like the weight of the world is pressing in on your chest. That’s where we pick up in the text today: the weight of God’s righteous judgment has just been poured out, and now, in Revelation 15, we get a chance to pause, to breathe, and to remember that even in the storm, God is working for something greater. In the context of the book of Revelation, chapter 15 is strategically sandwiched between two major sections that deal with God’s escalating judgment on the earth. The past couple of weeks, we have been looking at the conflict between the Lamb and the Dragon and the Beasts. After this chapter, the seven bowls of God’s wrath will be introduced as the final, climactic judgments poured out on the earth. Chapter 15 is actually the shortest chapter in the entire book of Revelation, but it is pivotal in building the tension and anticipation for what comes next. But also it helps us, as the readers and those waiting for Jesus' return, take a long, deep, and needed breath. These are just examples of moments where I appreciate the Lord. he knows how overwhelming this book can seem, and he knows how limited we are as sinful humans in the face of His holiness. So, God intentionally allows the opportunity to rest. To have a moment of worshipful pause, before the final and swift acts of God’s judgment are laid out and executed. So, before we enter the passage, I want to remind us all that we follow a God who knows us, sees us, and is preparing us for what’s next.

 It is within this worshipful pause that we, as readers, enter the text. And why do we worship the Lord? We worship the Lord for three reasons. First, we worship the Lord because He is in control. In Revelation 15:1, John recounts,

“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.”

 In this scene, God turns John’s attention from the judgment on the earth and directs it to the heavens. Actually, this is the first time since the opening of the scrolls that the scene shifts to what is happening in the heavens. It is in this scene that we are given two understandings of God’s wrath and judgment. When John sees this “great and amazing” sign in heaven, he is presented with numerical and climactic language. There are seven angels with seven plagues; these plagues are even described as the last of the plagues, and it goes on further to explain that with these plagues that “the wrath of God is finished.” It is with context that we understand that God’s wrath is measured. God’s wrath is not like a terrifying wildfire that bursts and consumes uncontrollably, and, as we have seen on the news, especially in the last year, fire in a wildfire is terrifying. Rather, God’s judgment has a purpose – to put an end to evil. It is like a controlled burn (controlled burn photo, before and after). When I was in college, every Spring I would smell the burning of plants and vegetation around campus, in April. I always wondered, Why are they doing this? What is the purpose? And every Fall, I would return to my university, and I would walk to class, seeing all the spots that were burned filled with vibrant, beautiful plants, flowers, and greenery. This is like God’s judgment, it ends evil so that good can grow!

 John continues by giving us another reason to worship the Lord: God is faithful. In verse 2, the vivid imagery of heaven continues with the description of a sea of glass mingled with fire.

“And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.” Revelation 15:2

This echoes Revelation 4:6, where John describes “a sea of glass, like crystal” before God’s throne. This symbolizes God’s transcendence, holiness, and the peace that flows from His sovereign rule. As I reflected on this image, I couldn’t help but think of my childhood in Michigan, where lakes were everywhere (Sam will provide photo of glass-like lake). My friends and I loved being on the water—tubing, waterskiing, and wake surfing. But because of the changing seasons, summer was the only time we could all go out, which meant the lakes were always packed. So, we’d get to the lake at 5:00 AM on the weekends to catch the calm. I still remember sitting on the dock, waiting for the first light of sunrise, watching the still, glassy water reflects the sky. In those moments, there was a deep sense of peace and awe—a glimpse of God’s majesty in creation. When I picture the sea of glass in Revelation, I imagine it carrying that same stillness and beauty, radiating the glory and calm that comes from being in the presence of our faithful God.

 And it is within this calm that we find the sea of glass “mingled with fire.” This is a representation of God’s judgment, purification, and holiness. And those who have conquered are a symbolic understanding of faithful believers who have resisted the beast and have remained loyal to God. These are those who have realized a core truth of victory. God’s people are victorious not by avoiding hardship, but by remaining faithful. As Pastor Darin has explained in great detail these past couple of weeks, the beast, the beasts of this world, our beast of our sinful selves, bring hardship and trials to our lives. By submitting to the beast and rejecting the Lord, we are not living in victory, but in bondage.

 Whenever I think of the bondage of sin and the beast, I point back to a scene from a movie called *God’s Not Dead* (maybe do photo of movie cover with quote below next to it). There is a powerful and emotional scene within the movie, where we find a mother and her son having a conversation. Mark is a successful businessman who has rejected God, and in a moment of clarity, his mother provides Mark with a profound insight. She says to him,

“Sometimes the devil allows people to live a life free of trouble because he doesn’t want them turning to God. Their sin is like a jail cell, except it’s all nice and comfy, and there doesn’t seem to be any need to leave. The door is wide open, until one day—time runs out—and the cell door slams shut, and suddenly it’s too late.”

 An illusion in our culture today is that a comfortable life without God can be dangerous. And when I refer to comfort, I refer to anything easy, free, or seemingly safe apart from Christ. This can be money, entertainment, relationships, success, appearance, or anything that draws us away from dependence on Christ. These faithful believers that John is describing are those who did not take the easy route. They did not live a life of comfort because the beast, their sin, the world, and the devil, tried everything in their power to turn them from the Lord. But in the end, where do we find these faithful believers? We find them standing beside the sea of glass in the sovereignty and holiness of God, given “harps of God in their hands”, celebrating all God has done.

 We find them singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, reflecting and pointing towards the salvation accomplished by Jesus, which united the Old and New covenants found in the Bible. Notice the language they use that glorifies God’s justice, mighty works, and holiness:

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Revelation 15:3-4

The song that the faithful believers sing glorifies God’s justice, holiness, and mighty works. What I want you to notice is while these faithful believers are singing this in heaven, they are not singing it when God’s justice is poured out, or when all things have been redeemed and made new, rather they are singing this song of glorification amid judgment, and the pause before God brings His final judgment. And this brings us to our next point that worship isn’t based on your situation, but on God’s character. We are waiting for God’s coming redemption, but as we wait in anticipation, we are faced with the reality that we live in a world that is broken. We live in a world of pain, hurt, grief, and disaster. But we must understand that worship is not reserved when life is good, when prayers are answered, blessings are obvious, and joy flows freely. Rather be like the Psalmist David and say, “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1). Because worship is not built on our shifting situations, but on the unshakable foundation of God’s character. When we worship through pain and hardship, we declare that God is bigger than what we are facing and that God is always worthy, always holy, always good, and always worthy of our worship.

 And as we continue to delve into why we worship the Lord, we worship the Lord because God is victorious. John continues to describe an ever-evolving scene:

“After this, I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests.” (Rev 15:5-6).

 We find in this part of the passage a shift to the image called “the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven.” This points directly back to a heavenly counterpart of the earthly tabernacle (Tabernacle Photo – Sam will provide). In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was a portable tent where God’s presence lived among His people and was a place of worship and sacrifice with the Lord, where God’s people could meet with God. Now we see this heavenly tabernacle symbolizing God’s divine authority being opened, and out of the sanctuary we see seven angels exit this holy space. They are wearing “pure bright linen” symbolizing their holiness and righteousness, and “golden sashes around their chest” as an indication of the sacredness of their task. But what is their task? John continues to elaborate on this scene, saying:

“And 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, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished” (Rev 15:7-8).

 We now have the four living creatures, who are heavenly beings, mentioned in Revelation 4, handing seven golden bowls full of God’s wrath to these seven angels. The task of these angels was to take these seven golden bowls to carry out God’s final judgment on earth. But this scene does not just describe the task of the angels but explains the qualities of God’s victory and plan. In this scene, we find that God’s victory is overwhelming. John provides this classic Old Testament image of smoke from the glory of God, and his power fills the sanctuary. God’s presence in his victory is all-encompassing and holy.

It is like visiting the Niagara Falls (picture of a boat creeping closer to the Falls). Whether you have been to this natural beauty or not, please imagine this with me. Standing at the edge of Niagara Falls, you feel the ground rumble beneath your feet. The roar of the water is deafening, and even though you’re not in the water, the mist soaks your clothes and fills the air around you. You can’t ignore it, you feel the power, the majesty, and the sheer force of something far greater than yourself. And this overwhelming experience pales in comparison to the holiness and majesty of God’s power and holiness that will go before Him in His righteous victory.

During this overwhelming scene and reality, remember to let God’s unstoppable plan give you peace. No one could enter the sanctuary of the Lord until God’s wrath was finished. There is a definite nature in God’s actions and His judgment. Access is barred to the sanctuary during judgment because God alone enacts his justice without intercession. God is certain about bringing an end to evil and for his judgment to pave the way for the fullness of redemption and restoration. So, as we look in anticipation of these events, let us look to them in anticipation of worry and fear, but of peace and reverence for the Lord’s divine authority. God’s judgment should not scare you but sober you and remind you that we are called to live on mission, and that God’s judgment is not a threat but a guarantee for those who trust in Jesus.

 So today, as we reflect on this short but powerful chapter in Revelation, I want us to hold on to three truths that inspire our worship. First, God is in control. God’s wrath is measured, and his judgment has a purpose–to put an end to evil. Next, God is faithful. His people are victorious not by avoiding hardship, but by remaining faithful, and worship isn’t based on your situation but on God’s character. Last, God is victorious and His victory is overwhelming, and we must let God’s unstoppable plan give us peace. And maybe you’re here today and feel like you’re in the middle of a 24-hour spiral like I experienced with Jane: everything crashing down, stress building up, feeling like you can’t breathe. Let Revelation 15 be your reminder that there is a pause, a breath, a moment of peace that God offers. A moment to worship, not because your life is perfect, but because *He* is perfect. So may we be a people who don’t just wait for the victory to celebrate, but who worship **in anticipation** of it, because we know the One who holds the victory in His hands.