

A NEW EXODUS

Revelation 15

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In the New International Version, Revelation 15 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. 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: ‘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.’ After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. 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 for ever and ever. 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.”

Some of you may remember that during the 1987 Olympics on ABC television that somewhat toward the close of the day's activities, the artist by the name of Nemo gathered the events of the day into a collage. He knit them all together in a beautiful painted way on a canvas giving us in one panoramic sweep an impression of the day's events. He would not so much arrange or paint

these figures chronologically but he would paint them symbolically as he saw them from the eye of an artist.

In Revelation 15 the Spirit is causing John to do much the same thing as the artist did with his painting of the Olympics. What John is doing is taking the events from Exodus, events such as the plagues upon Egypt, the crossing of the sea, the singing of a song on the other side of the sea, the tent of witness in the wilderness, taking these ancient religious spiritual truths and through the eye of the Spirit repainting them on the new canvas of the experience of the people of God at the close of the age. We really see in Revelation 15 a new exodus taking place. We see that right off by the fact that once more as in the original exodus we see plagues being mentioned.

I. Verse 1 mentions seven angels ready with seven plagues for with them the wrath of God ends.

When we look at the symbolism of plagues our mind leaps back to the Old Testament to remember that the people of God were in captivity in Egypt. Very symbolic of the fact that the people of God are now in captivity to the law of sin and death, that we await the greater exodus, the bringing of the Lord Jesus to himself others through the resurrection or through His coming, that prior to the escape of the people of God from their bondage in Egypt plagues were poured out upon Pharaoh and upon those who held the people of God enslaved.

The first three plagues—the water, the blood, the frogs, and gnats—were experienced equally by the Egyptians and by the children of Israel. But beginning with the fourth plague on through the tenth plague, the people of God were exempt. And in their tents in Goshen they dwelt secure. So John here takes that symbolism. The people of God in the Old Testament were spared the seven dreadful plagues and so here were the seven bowls of wrath that were to be outpoured to come after the sequence of judgments earlier in Revelation, the seals and the trumpets. Now comes

these final, deliberately called, bowls of wrath. These terms which speak of God's judgment. It's very clear right that the people of God, like the ancient people of God, did not experience God's wrath. The ancient people of God knew what it was to experience the wrath of Pharaoh. And it may be that God's people now will know what it is to experience the wrath of the Antichrist. But one thing is for sure: God's people will never experience His wrath. We are saved from His wrath. In 1 Thessalonians Paul puts it well in 5:9, "God has not destined us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Remember we have talked about in terms of wrath in the past the exercise of a judge. It is a judicial sentence passed calmly and deliberately on the basis of evidence that is accumulated against the indicted one.

God's people though are not around for God's wrath. They are safely on the other side of the sea, praise God. But there is retribution for God's enemies. The Book of Revelation is showing us how God tries to reach us as individuals. He seeks to reach us through love, through the cross of Jesus Christ. If we repel the witness of the Spirit, the love of God, God, to get our attention, will allow pain and suffering to come upon us. C. S. Lewis put it so well when he said "God whispers to us in our pleasures...and shouts to us in our pains." After the earlier sequence of judgments of trumpets in Revelation 9, John notes, "...nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts." In other words, the reason why these judgments were brought forth was to get people to accept God. If they won't accept Him from the standpoint of love, maybe they will accept Him from the standpoint of fear. God will even accept that.

But now the days when judgment was redemptive in nature are over.

There is instead the exercise of God's final judgment beyond which there is no appeal. So Revelation 15:1 finds us again as we look at the Exodus forcing us to decide whether we are God's people going through the sea or God's enemies who are on the wrong side of safety.

II. Another thing that comes through on the canvas of this new painting of the exodus is that God's people do come safely once more through the sea.

Verse 2 says they are overcomers. They have conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name.

That phrase "conquering the beast" is interesting. I've tried to say as we've gone through Revelation, don't strip Revelation's meaning away by always saying, "That belongs to the end of the age." If I understand Scripture rightly we always live at the end of the age. I'm living at the end of the age. I don't have a whole lot left to the end of my age. If the end time saints fight the Antichrist literally, I fight the Antichrist spiritually and so do you. John so clearly put it in 1 John when he said the spirit of Antichrist is already in the world and is evident whenever someone denies that Jesus has come in the flesh. So those who conquer the monster, the beast, are not simply end-time saints. They're all saints who have had warfare to engage in, temptations to turn down, loyalties to remain true to and being loyal and faithful to Jesus Christ. There has emerged for them a passing through the sea.

"Sea" here is a fascinating figure of speech. It can represent the distance that separates us from God. The uncharted sea over which there is no compass other than the compass of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 4:6, when the sea in heaven is first introduced to us, it is introduced with the idea that there is about the throne of God a sea of glass, a crystal sea of glass. Using the symbolism of Revelation 4 where about the throne of God are flashing light and the spectrum of the rainbow, one sees the beautiful presence of God radiated off the pavement of heaven, the sea of glass. Again saying that in this reflective sea of glass no one would think of walking across that sea except they had the personal invitation of God and were escorted by God safely there. There's

something so awesome and fearsome about God that one would not come barging into His presence.

Barring us from His presence is a shining sea of glass. But now the saints have come through the sea, the sea that John says here is mingled with fire, a phrase not used in chapter 4.

Fire, I think in this instance, possibly means the sword of suffering which the people of God have come through in order to get to that side of the sea. When we speak of a person today as being “under fire” we don’t think of them as being torched. We think of them as being under pressure. Here are the people of God brought safely through pressure. Therefore, the sea that is talked about in Revelation 15, like the ancient sea of the Exodus, the Red Sea, is a “red” sea—in this case, a divine “red” sea. For the sea of glass mingled with the red fire says there is a passage for God’s people.

They cross the sea. As they cross the sea, once they’re at the other side, as in the original Exodus so here again is a song that breaks out on the other side, a victory that is won. They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The song of Moses is found in Exodus 15 immediately after the people of God had walked through the sea on dry land. Throughout Israel’s history this song of Moses of Exodus 15 was sung at the end of every Sabbath evening service. Now the song of Moses is joined by the song of the Lamb forming one song, a song of the redeemed of all ages giving praise to God. For the passing through the sea of the Old Testament was a literal sea. The passing through the sea in the New Testament is a passing into heaven into the presence of God.

They praise God and they say who shouldn’t fear God, verse 4. I think this matter of fearing God is something that those who come safely into God’s presence have recognized as a starting principle of life. We recognize the greatest fear is not whether I’m going to succeed or fail as a person, not whether I’m going to die, not whether I’m going to be sick, not whether my business

is going to come crashing around my head or my income is going to run short. The greatest fear is the fear of meeting God unprepared. So acknowledging that, that is the fear we have a chance to make a decision, to make rational choices, to do something about it and to become aware of the God who loves us.

In this song of praise to the Lord there's not one word about what all these saints have done that have passed over the sea of glass. Not one world. Not "Lord, You're great and we are too. We've done a few things down on earth, cast out a few demons, healed a few sick people, suffered martyrs death..." Not a thing said about our own exploits but everything is praise to God. The more we see of Him, probably the less we see of ourselves intruding in the picture.

Coming into the beauty of God, the architectural grandeur of the person of God, His glory and His palaces and His person, the experience of coming into St. Peters is maybe a little foretaste of what it's like to come into the beauty of God. It stuns. It awes and makes you realize I truly am nothing in the face of such a great Person and great event and great surroundings. All I was able to do is, by the grace of God, get here. But the beauty and the glory is God's.

So there is the song of praise to God. True worship focuses in upon the Lord. Once more as with the old exodus, here is a fourth dimension to the new exodus John weaves by the spirit.

III. As was in the experience of the old exodus the tent in the wilderness, the tent of testimony in the wilderness where the people of God worship, here also was a tent of witness.

We know that from the Old Testament the tent of witness was exactly that. It witnessed to the presence of God. Wherever the people of God encamped there the tent of witness was in the center of their experience meaning that God means to be placed at the center of our lives. When

the people of God moved, the glory, which abode in the tent of witness, led the way. God leads the way for our lives.

John here not so much is concerned to show what the tent of witness is the true tent of heaven.

Hebrews says that everything on earth was just a copy of the true. The true tent in heaven now is being perceived as something out of which judgment comes.

At the very heart of the Old Testament tent of witness in the holy place the most sacred piece of furniture was something called the ark of the covenant, a four foot by two foot by two foot box of wood overlaid with gold which had a lid on it called the “mercy seat” where cherubim stretched over it. Inside that box there were three things: the law of God, Aaron’s rod that budded, and a pot of manna. Each of these things in the ark spoke of the sacred covenant that God had given to His people. He gave them a law that they might order their lives. He gave them leadership that they might follow Him. And He gave them bread in the wilderness that He might be their provision.

But everything in the ark of the covenant that was there witnessed for God and against man. For the law God gave was broken and, therefore, what was really in the ark of the covenant was not the original but the second tablets that were given. Aaron’s rod that budded got there because the people of Israel refused the leadership God provided. Moses took a rod from each tribe and the one from the tribe of Levi with Aaron’s name on it was the rod that budded. Israel wanted to reject that which God gave. Even the manna, the people of Israel got tired of and rejected God’s provision as well. Everything witnessed for God. The law witnessed for Him; the rod, the fact that He wanted to lead His people; the bread witnessed to the fact that God feeds His people. But on every count the people stood indicted. They rebelled against God’s law. Refused His leadership and rejected His provision. God provided in that holy place a law in the Old

Testament that said there's only one way you can ever enter that holy place since everything in it speaks against you. You can only enter it with blood, Hebrews 9. Once a year the high priest would walk in and put blood upon the mercy seat because God, for people who come with the blood, chooses to elevate His mercy over His law. The lid speaks of mercy, the law in the chest itself.

What you have in Revelation is a very striking reunderstanding of that from a New Testament perspective. Earlier in Revelation we have seen the elders having in their hands the bowls of incense, which contain the prayers of the saints. Saints have in effect come to that holy place through the blood of Jesus Christ whom they're worshipping.

The tent of witness must witness against them since they have accepted no sacrifice for sin.

This broken law and this rejected leadership of Jesus and this provision in John 6:51 where Jesus said "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." This provision, which has been rejected, in the end witnesses against persons. So that when God's eventual judgment takes place once it is where there is no interruption, no one can go into the temple.

That's why I think as we come to communion today we can look at this passage so significantly speaking to us. There is in our own lives that fact that has existed that we have broken God's law, refused His leadership in our lives and told Him to go His own way and we wanted to go ours. And there are moments too when we have rejected His provision which He so graciously gives to us. But He says "All of that is forgiven. If you'll come and worship Me. And if you'll bring with you that understanding that My Son was given for Your sacrifice. That, that which you have violated might be forgiven and that your rebellion might be cast away into a deep sea and remembered no more." This bread and cup speak to us of the great mercy of God.

I pray that as you walk with the Lord this coming year that you will keep in mind that witnessing to you is the fact that the Lord has a law by which He wants you to live, that He has provision for you in your daily needs, that He has leadership that He wants you to follow. That when you violate any of those, we have an advocate with God the Father, Jesus Christ our Lord, to come through and receive forgiveness, rather than experiencing His wrath, His punishment, and His anger.

Closing Prayer

We give You thanks, Lord Jesus, right now for the fact that this is the day of grace. Our heart shrinks from this awful event that is coming described here in Revelation. The time for intercession will be gone and You in Your unapproachable majesty and power will have declared that the end has come. No longer will You be standing at the door knocking. You will enter to act in sovereign judgment. Help us, Lord, in this moment and in every moment to leave the door of our heart wide open toward You. That You may come in as a friend and that You may sit down and sup with us and we with You. We thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your sacrifice which makes it possible for us now to share these moments of relationship with You. We have broken Your law, we have refused Your leadership, we have rejected Your provision, but through Jesus Christ who came and found us we have been brought to You. We have access through Him into the heavens. We praise You and glorify You and adore Your name. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.