Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Final Wrath of God, Part 2
Scripture: Revelation 15:3-8
Code: 66-55

Again tonight as we study the Word of God, we turn in our Bibles to the fifteenth chapter of the book of Revelation. And we are continuing to examine this tremendous book which unfolds for us the future and the events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, to establish His earthly Kingdom, to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

One of the significant components that will occur during the time of the Lord's return is earthquakes. We have had a graphic illustration of what that might be like, we who in this very vicinity have lived through a 6.6 earthquake and a series of five-point-something aftershocks and so forth. We've had a small preview of what is to come in a time just prior to the return of Christ to establish His Kingdom, time when the wrath of God is released on sinners.

Before that time is over there will be earthquakes, many of them, and they will be of much greater magnitude than anything we've ever experienced till now. The universe, as a matter of fact, will be totally devastated as the Lord will destroy sinners and renovate the fallen universe.

In Job chapter 21 and verse 30 it says, "The wicked is reserved for the day of destruction. They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath." God's final wrath is coming. What we have experienced this week was just a very slight preview of the kind of thing that is going to take place. The full unfolding of the wrath of God has been a theme that has run its way throughout this book, and by the time we have reached chapter 15 we are used to hearing it. We have gone through seven seal judgments as a sealed scroll is unrolled to reveal the wrath of God. We have gone through seven trumpet judgments as angels blow trumpets declaring specific judgments on the world. And we are about to embark upon seven bowl judgments, or as they are also called, plagues which make up the final components of the wrath of God and lead us right to the return of Christ to establish His Kingdom.

Let's read chapter 15 again and set it in our minds. It's just a brief chapter. "I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who has seven plagues which are the last because in them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name standing on the sea of glass holding harps of God. They sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb saying, `Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty, righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name, for Thou alone art holy? For all the nations will come and worship before Thee for Thy

righteous acts have been revealed.' After these things I looked and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened. And the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple clothed in linen clean and bright and girded around their breasts with golden girdles. 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 temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished."

Now back in verse 1 as really throughout this whole chapter, we are introduced to the seven-bowl judgments, the seven last plagues of the time of Tribulation that are immediately followed by the return of Christ. You will notice again in verse 1 it says that these seven plagues are the last. And I might add, the worst. And by the way, the fact that they are the last is a good indication that this is not reiteration but sequence, that we're not going back over the same events but we're adding something, something has gone before and now this comes last. Here comes the severest and deadliest of all judgments the world has ever experienced.

There was an earthquake in the seals, chapter 6 and verse 12. But here comes an earthquake worse than that one described in chapter 16 and verse 17 and 18 as an earthquake such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth. So here is the last in the sequence, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowl judgments bring the time of Tribulation to its climactic end.

In these plagues also, again indicating sequence rather than reiteration, is the wrath of God being finished. So the stage then is being set for the final components and elements of the wrath of God. And they are described in detail starting in chapter 16 so that chapter 15 is really introductory. Before the seals actually...the bowls are actually described in chapter 16, before John gives us the picture of the bowls specifically, in this chapter he gives us the reasons for the revealing of the wrath of God and they are implied in this text. Starting in verse 2 and running through verse 8 I find three reasons for God's final wrath, three realities that trigger this final destruction.

The first one we looked at last time...the vengeance of God. Verse 2, and John seeing as sea of glass mixed with fire is looking up through that transparent platform that is beneath the throne of God in heaven introduced to us earlier in the book of Revelation as well as in the book of Ezekiel. And John looking up to the very throne of God through this transparent glass mixed with fire and sees those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name and they're standing on that sea of glass holding harps of God. Harps indicate praise, rejoicing, singing. And it is a vision, as we noted last time, of those who were redeemed during the Tribulation. It is a vision of those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and therefore overcame the powerful deceptions of Satan and Antichrist and the false prophet. It is a vision of those who were faithful to their Lord through all the persecution and all the pain. They are seen in heaven with harps and they're praising God.

We saw earlier in the book of Revelation a quite similar scene. And there were twenty-four elders, in chapter 5 verse 8, and they had harps...harps there indication...there an indication of their song and they sang a new song. And we'll get back to that in a moment. Harps indicate praise. There are only two instruments mentioned in the whole book of Revelation, trumpets and harps. And harps represent praise. We met some of these saints earlier. When we met them earlier they were praying, they were praying for the vengeance of God to fall on their enemies. They were praying for vindication. They were praying for the Kingdom. And now their prayers have been answered and so they're not praying anymore, they're praising. They are the faithful. Their prayers are answered. Their faith is vindicated. God is going to judge and avenge His beloved people, and they stand in heaven surrounding the throne, praising God.

We see then implied in this text the vengeance of God. He will bring about His vengeance on those who have mistreated His beloved. That's one of the reasons for His final wrath.

There's a second reason, not just the vengeance of God but the character of God. It is true to His own holy character to have this kind of a holy and final reaction against sin. And here, by the way, is the real fountainhead of God's wrath. It is His nature. And we find that described in verses 3 and 4. Here is the song sung by these triumphant saints. It says in verse 3, "And they sang...and they sang..." This is an anthem of praise, a song of praise that extols the character of God which character is the reason why God has the reaction He does against sin.

If you look back in Jewish tradition you will find that the Jews traditionally reckoned that there were ten songs. First of all, there was Adam's song at his forgiveness. Secondly there was the song of Moses at the Red Sea. Thirdly there was the Israelites song when given water in the desert. Fourthly there was Moses song at his death. And then they said there was Joshua's song at Gibeon. There was the song of Barak and Deborah. There was Hannah's song when God gave her a son. There was David's song. There was Solomon's song. And there was the song of the captives freed by the Messiah. Ten songs in traditional Jewish thought.

You notice that ten did include the song of Moses mentioned here. But there's a second song added in verse 3 and that's the song of the Lamb, not included in the Jewish traditional list. Here are the saints redeemed out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation as well as from Israel. They're gathered around the throne of God in heaven. They are triumphant. Their faith has overcome. They have been victorious over Satan and Antichrist and the false prophet and all the demons. And they sang.

Now I want you to notice there are two parts to their song. First they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God. Moses is called here the bond-servant of God because in fact he was that. He was God's servant, called by God to lead the people of Israel out of captivity in the land of Egypt to

the promised land, which he did.

When they reached the other side of the Red Sea, according to Exodus 15, after being delivered from the Egyptian army by that incredible miracle when God parted the Red Sea, you remember they were captive in Egypt, the Lord sent all the plagues. Finally because of the terrible plagues that came, Pharaoh released them and they started on their freedom, maybe as many as two million or more. And they came to the Red Sea and Pharaoh by then had changed his mind and started pursuing them. You remember that Moses stood before the sea and God worked an incredible miracle and rolled the waters up and they all walked right through the Red Sea in safety. And Pharaoh and his army thought they could follow and were drowned totally behind them.

As they stood on the other side of the Red Sea having passed through the waters on dry land, realizing God had delivered them miraculously and drowned the whole Egyptian army and they were now safe and ready to move to the promised land, they sang a song. That song is the song of Moses. You want to hear the song, go back to Exodus 15. Here we find them at that very moment in history. And the song of Moses is introduced in verse 1.

"Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord and said, `I will sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song and He has become my salvation. This is my God and I will praise Him. My father's God and I will extol Him. The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea. And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deeps cover them. They went down into the depths like a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power. Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. And in the greatest of Thine excellence Thou dost overflow those who rise up against Thee. Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger and it consumes them as chaff. And at the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up, the flowing waters stood up like a heap. The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, "i will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my desire shall be gratified against them. I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them." Thou didst blow with Thy wind. The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. In Thy loving kindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed. In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation. The peoples have heard, they tremble. Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed. The leaders of Moab trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them. By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone, Until Thy people pass over, O Lord, until Thy people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling. The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever."

What an incredible song. What are the components of that song? The devastation of the ungodly and the triumph of the righteous, right? The rescue of the people of God and the judgment of those who are not the people of God. 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. (Laughter) Nobody is going to understand this on the tape, are they? We just had a little rumble in here. This is the song of Moses. And it is sung by the delivered. It is sung by the redeemed. It is sung by those who are rescued. And it depicts them gathered in triumph in a place of safety and a place of security. And that is precisely the same song that is being sung back in Revelation 15. You can turn back to Revelation 15 at this time.

Now there's also another song, and I just give you a footnote on this. There is also another song Moses sang in Deuteronomy 32, that's a song about God's faithfulness to Israel. That too could be called a song of Moses. But Exodus 15 is really the song of Moses that is in view. And one good evidence of that is that Exodus 15 is sung in every synagogue. The ancient synagogues sung it every Sabbath day of the year in the afternoon. They sang it to extol God's great delivering power. And here the Tribulation saints who have been saved out of that period, they've been rescued, as it were, and all of the ungodly who pursued them are destroyed and judged, they sing the same song, the song of deliverance and the song of judgment, the same song that Moses and the Jews sang long ago.

By the way, there's no dispensational conflict within the redeemed. Because they sang the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Now what is the song of the Lamb? Go back to Revelation 5 and we'll hear the song of the Lamb. Verse 6 describes Christ as a Lamb standing as if slain. Verse 8 says that the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. And verse 9 says they sang a new song. Here's the song of the Lamb. "Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals for Thou wast slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God and they will reign upon the earth. And I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, `Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.'  And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea and all things in it, I heard saying to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, `Be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying amen, and the elders fell down and worshiped." That's the song of the Lamb.

Listen, 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.

Now you might be saying. "Well look, I'm reading these verses and this song is a little different than the song of Moses." It's not a quote and it's a little different than the song of the Lamb. The themes are the same, greatness, marvelous, almighty, righteous, King, glory, holy, all of those terms and truths are in the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. But you say the words are different. Well listen, this song has many stanzas, many verses. Here some new ones are written to the songs of triumph.

Let's look at the song again. "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty. Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy. For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed."

Here is the celebration of redemption. Here is the celebration of God's delivering power first demonstrated at the Red Sea in the time of Moses, and now demonstrated at the end of the age through the power of Jesus Christ. Here are the high points of redemptive history. Here is the demonstration of God's power to protect His own and to destroy the wicked.

Listen to the expressions of God's character that are in this song. "Great and marvelous are Thy works," that views God as creator. By the way, every one of these lines comes out of some part of the Old Testament. This draws on Psalm 139 verse 14 and shows God as the creator, the One who is great and marvelous as demonstrated by His mighty works in creation and in providence as He upholds the universe by His power. "O Lord God the Almighty," sounds like an echo of Amos chapter 4 verse 13 and looks at God as the omnipotent God. "Righteous and true are Thy ways," is an echo of Daniel 4:37, Deuteronomy 32:4. It means that God is immutable, He does not change, He is always right, He is always true, His ways are absolutely consistent and unchanging. "Thou King of the nations," looks at His sovereignty and draws from Jeremiah chapter 10 and verse 7. He is creator who is omnipotent, immutable and sovereign. "Who will not fear and glorify Thy name," drawn from Psalm 86 and verse 9, speaks of Him being worthy...worthy of glory, worthy of honor. "For Thou alone are holy," speaks of His absolute moral perfection. It's reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 6, "Holy, holy, holy."

Thus do all of these saints extol the character of God. He is creator, omnipotent, immutable, sovereign, worthy and absolutely perfect. He is righteous, He is true, He is holy. Therefore He must judge. Therefore He can judge and will judge. A righteous, true, holy God must judge sin and

sinners and a fallen world, a great and mighty Creator, an omnipotent, almighty God can judge because He has the power. His character, therefore, demands that He do it and brings it to pass. If he lets sin go unpunished, He wouldn't be righteous, He wouldn't be true and He wouldn't be holy. And if He couldn't do anything about it even though He didn't like it, He wouldn't be the creator, He wouldn't be great, He wouldn't be marvelous, He wouldn't be almighty.

But He is all those things. And it out of that character that His judgment flows. God's character demands inevitably that He judge. God's holiness demands wrath. He has to hate sin, it is His nature. It is His nature to destroy sin forever from His presence and that is what He will do. Habakkuk said it this way, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity." God cannot tolerate it. He will destroy it. It is set for destruction. God's character calls for judgment.

The prophet Nahum, not often read, not often thought about, does say a lot about the character of God. Listen to Nahum 1, I'll read a couple of verses. Verse 3 and verse 6, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." Then verse 6, "Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him." Then the next comforting verse, "The Lord is good. A stronghold in the day of trouble. And He knows those who take refuge in Him." And then it flips over again and the next verse says, "But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its sight and pursue His enemies into darkness." God loves His own, God hates the sinner, and ultimately His justice, righteousness and holiness demand that He punish.

Job asks the question, "Does the Almighty pervert justice?" No way. Psalm 19:9 answers, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous all together."

So God's character calls for wrath. It's consistent with who He is, even if He has to mete it out on His own Son, which He did when Christ died on the cross.

Then the song closes, go back to verse 4, with joyful anticipation of deliverance. "For all the nations will come and worship before Thee." Literally will come and fear from phobeo, phobia, to fear. All the earth will come to worship or to fear, as Psalm 66:4 says, all the earth will worship Thee and will sing praises to Thee. What that is anticipating is the Millennial Kingdom. Once this justice and judgment falls, all the nations are going to come and worship before You. And so that song is drawn out of Isaiah...out of Psalm 66 and verse 4.

And then it says, "For Thy righteous acts have been revealed." Once God has revealed the righteous acts of judgment and they are done, He will set up His Kingdom in the earth and all nations will come and worship Him. This is the fulfillment of, in some part at least, of Philippians chapter 2, "Every knee shall bow of things in earth, under the earth and in the heavens and declare that Jesus is Lord."

In Isaiah 66:23 Isaiah looks ahead to this time. And he says, "And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me." And so the song then extols the character of God and the glory of the coming Kingdom in which Christ will reign on the earth. After the judgment or the righteous acts of God have been revealed, the elect from all nations will enter the Kingdom to worship the King.

Why is God going to judge? Because it is consistent with His vengeance. He is going to take vengeance on those who have persecuted His beloved, as we saw in verse 2. And it is consistent with His character as extolled in this marvelous song in verses 3 and 4. Then a last point. God's wrath is motivated not only vengeance and by His nature, but thirdly, by His plan, the plan of God...the vengeance of God, the character of God and the plan of God. And in verse 5, and we won't spend a lot of time because I think this unfolds rather clearly, but there is...there is the execution of a plan going on here. It doesn't actually say "this is the plan of God," but it is very clear that there is a plan being executed. And each of the angelic players in this unfolding drama gets into place to fulfill their assigned role. Holy heaven has always planned for the destruction of sin. It has always planned for the destruction of sinners. Some time in the past a lake of fire was prepared, right? For the devil and his angels. A lake of fire where people would be tormented forever along with demons out of the holy environment of the kingdom and the new heaven and the new earth. That lake of fire has been there and the holy angels have been waiting, in all honesty to populate it, to bring the plan into action.

And now is the time, verse 5. "After these things I looked and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened." This marks a change in the vision John saw. After having looked through the transparent platform beneath the throne of God and seeing the saints, hearing them sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, praising and extolling the character and purpose of God, something shifts. And after this he looks to see something else. The temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened.

This reminds us of chapter 11 verse 19, "And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple." The ark of the covenant, you remember, right? It was a little box and the primary function of that little box was to contain the law of God. The ark of the covenant was the repository of God's law, the tables of stone on which He had written the law on Mount Sinai. The ark of the covenant was placed in the tabernacle in the temple in what was called the Holy of Holies. There was the outer court, there was the holy place, and then there was the Holy of Holies where only the high priests could go once a year because it was the place representative of the residence of God, the holiest of all places. And in that place was the ark of the covenant, a little box with cherubim on each side spreading their wings over the law of God inside.

The ark of the covenant, now stay with me, look at verse 5 again, the ark of the covenant also had another name and the other name of the ark of the covenant is the tabernacle of testimony. That's just another name for the ark of the covenant. Tabernacle just means container, it can mean tent, it can mean anything that contains something. And the ark of the covenant contained the testimony. What testimony? The testimony of God. God's revelation. So John looks into heaven and he looks right in to the naos, right into the Holy of Holies, that's the temple, right into the sanctuary, right into the inner chamber where God dwells, where the ark of the covenant is placed. That's what he's trying to say. I saw right into where God dwells. By the way, if you want an Old Testament text where the ark of the covenant is called the tabernacle of testimony, it is Numbers chapter 10 and verse 11. And that stresses to us that the most important feature of the tabernacle, that little box, that tabernacle, not the big one, the tent, that it was the dwelling place for the law of God. There were some other things in there, Moses' rod that budded, and manna and things like that as remembrances, but the primary function of that little box was to contain the testimony, the great revelation of the will of God, the testimony He had established in Jacob, as Psalm 78:5 says. The tables of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments is God's testimony revealing His own perfect holiness to man and His standard of holiness for man. It sums up the whole teaching of holiness in ten statements.

All Scripture is divinely inspired but the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, is divinely inscribed, written by the very finger of God on tables of stone and placed temporarily in an earthly tabernacle as the peculiar treasure of His chosen people. And now enshrined in heaven. And so as John looks in this vision and it is a vision, something...something other than reality as we know it, and he sees right into the holy place where the heavenly tabernacle of testimony is placed. He is looking into what the writer of Hebrews would call the heavenly temple, the true temple of which the earthly tabernacle and the earthly temple is only a temporary replica or copy. He looks into the place where God dwells. He looks into the inner sanctuary, the dwelling place of God, the Holy of Holies forbidden to men. And it's now opened to him.

But listen, back in chapter 5 it was opened to the faithful so that they could see in. Now it is opened for the unfaithful so that judgment can come out. Verse 6, "And out of the very inner sanctuary of the heaven of heavens, out of the dwelling place of God, seven angels who had the seven plagues come." Right out from the very presence of God, they are the executioners of the plan. Time for them to act. These seven angels are lofty, royal in their bearing, holy in their nature. They're clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden girdles. That magnificently beautiful, clean, shining, glowing, brilliant, dazzling linen is an evidence and an indication of their holiness and their purity. It also is the garment of the armies in heaven which return with Christ described in chapter 19 verse 14 and refer to the saints.

And so they are pure and holy as evidenced by the beautiful, clean and dazzling, brilliant, white, gleaming linen. And they're girded with golden girdles, a golden belt probably running from shoulder to waist, evidence of riches, evidence of royalty, evidence of untarnished glory. Here comes some

glorious shining, blazing, pure, holy angels out of the very presence of God to execute judgment.

Then verse 7 says, "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." Four living creatures are cherubim, you remember we studied them back in Revelation 4 and 5. They are very unique. I believe they are angels. That should be clear. They are described so uniquely. Back in chapter 4, full of eyes in front and behind, the first was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had the face of a man, the fourth like a flying eagle. They had six wings, eyes around and within, day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty who was and who is and who is to come." And they are giving glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever.

These are very high-ranking angels, very unique. They were originally introduced in the Scripture in the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy. They appear again here in Revelation chapter 4 and again in chapter 5 where they join in the wonderful song of praise and even punctuated with some final amens. They are incredible and perhaps even beyond our comprehension. But they step out because they have a role to play, one of them anyway. And they hand to these seven angels ready to execute seven golden bowls. This is interesting, just as a note, phialosis the Greek word and it means a shallow saucer. And that's indicative too of the way in which these judgments are going to come, just dunked. And they'll not be poured out of a long spout or a thin glass with some pace, it's just a dump. Such golden bowls, by the way, were often associated with temple worship in the past. First Kings 7:50, 2 Kings 12:13; 25:15, those texts refer to that.

Bowls were used for a number of functions in the temple. They were used for wine, according to Amos 6:6 and for blood sacrifice, according to Exodus 27:3. So they used bowls, and golden bowls were not unfamiliar. And here in the very temple of God, the true temple, out comes the four...one of the four living creatures, he's got these seven bowls filled with the wrath of God, they are golden bowls. They're going to be dumped and emptied instantly. Those who have refused to drink the cup of salvation will now drown in the bowls of wrath. The psalmist said, "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, I will take the cup of salvation."

And then this note at the end of verse 7, God is described as the one who lives forever and ever. That's really the key to our third point. The eternal God will not have sin and sinners destroying His universe forever. He is going to live forever, but He's not going to allow sin to live forever. And so this is the unfolding of His plan. He will destroy sin. He will destroy sinners. He will remove them from His presence and the presence of His redeemed and from the environment of His holy new creation. God's plan is holiness. God's plan is peace. God's plan is perfection. God's plan is joy. That's indicated to us, as we shall see, when we get to chapter 21 and read of the magnificence of the eternal state. And the One who lives forever and the One who promises eternal joy and eternal peace is not going to allow sin to live forever.

The scene is further dramatized in the final verse, verse 8, "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished."

Remember Hebrews 12:29, "Our God is a consuming fire." And out of that place not only come the angels with the golden bowls, not only the living creature giving them the judgments to pour out on the earth, but out comes smoke from the glory of God and from His power, billowing, fiery clouds of wrath, something like must have engulfed Mount Sinai when God came down. It is glory smoke, the kind of smoke that filled the temple in Isaiah 6, you remember, when Isaiah went into the temple and he had a vision of God and the place was filled with smoke. Glory smoke. Not unlike, perhaps, Exodus chapter 40 when the tabernacle was complete, you remember what happened? The glory of God came down in a great blazing glorious light, a cloud of glory and filled the tent. And then when the temple was finished in 1 Kings chapter 8, verses 10 and 11, the same thing happened, the glory came down and filled the place with the shining Shekinah of God. Same thing happens here. Some kind of blazing, glorious smoke indicating both God's glory and His wrath fills the temple and nobody is able to enter until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

This time the glory cloud will not remove itself like it did in the days of Israel. The glory cloud will stay until the earth is completely purged and cleansed and prepared for the King and His Kingdom.

This is taking us to the brink of final judgment. And chapter 16 begins, "I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, `Go and pour out the seven bowls.'" That's imminent.

Once the wrath of God was placed on Jesus Christ because of what He was doing for sinners. In the future, the wrath of God will be placed on sinners because of what they are doing to Jesus Christ. God is not willing that any should perish, He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and Jesus Himself wept over lost souls. In wrath God remembers mercy, but mercy refused brings judgment.

Remember, this doesn't happen until the world has been warned and warned and warned and warned every imaginable, conceivable way. They have already by this time had seven years of holocaust judgment unceasing. The sky has collapsed. The earth has shaken. Death and devastation has wreaked its havoc across the globe. The seas have been devastated. The fresh water has been devastated. The vegetation has been devastated. The tides have engulfed the land as the moon is knocked off its course. Comets and things flying out of the sky, pieces of fragments of stars crashing into the earth and destroying, demons released out of the pit, people killing one another, people struck with diseases from which they cannot die but wish to die, all of this going on for a long time. At the same the gospel will continually be preached and those who get to this point and refuse mercy have made their choice against all kinds of opportunity.

In wrath God does remember mercy. Mercy refused leaves God no choice.

Father, we come now to a time of prayer as we close this study, so stark and yet, Lord, this is the end. And it's not here yet. We sometimes talk about the day of grace, well the day of grace is now...it's now and the day of grace will run right up to the very moment of the end. But, Lord, as the Scripture says, "Now is the time of salvation." Now is the time to hear, before it is too late or before our hearts get so used to rejecting that we will reject even in the direst of times. Lord, we pray that You'll sensitize every heart to the coming of judgment. We pray that people will come to You while they still have the opportunity. We remember the parable that Jesus gave about the man who planted the fig tree, and he went back three years and it bore no fruit and he said cut it down, and another man said give it another year and then if it doesn't bear fruit, cut it down. There is a time of patience and there is a time of mercy, but it's limited. O Lord, how we pray that no one would be so foolish as to waste the opportunity and therefore harden the heart and find it easier to reject again and again and again. Lord, may the sense of judgment, the reality of coming wrath fill our hearts with a holy fear so that we might knowing the terror of the Lord be anxious to persuade others of the truth.

Father, at the same time for those of us who know and love You, we thank You that You have delivered us from the wrath to come. We thank You that we don't look for the Antichrist, we look for Christ. We're not looking for judgment, we're looking for the Rapture, we're looking to be taken to heaven. We thank You that our confidence is that we are waiting for Your Son to be revealed from heaven. We thank You that we're waiting for the time when the One who has prepared a place for us will come and take us to be with Him. We thank You that there will be a day when we will be transformed and this..this mortal will put on immortality, this corruptible will become incorruptible, death will be swallowed up by life. We thank You that there is coming a day when there will be the glorious manifestation of the children of God. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but in that day we shall appear like Him for we shall see Him as He is. We thank You for the confidence that we belong to You and have been delivered from e wrath, not only eternally, but even temporally. We thank You that because of Christ and because of our faith in Him we will not fall into condemnation and we can look forward to a joyous future to be rescued from the wrath and taken to glory to return to reign in the kingdom.

So, Father, our hearts are mingled with the sweetness of our own hope and the bitterness of the frightening future for so many. We pray for the salvation of many and we pray that You might use us to bring them out of wrath into glory, that You might rescue them and that we might be Your instruments in that rescue before the day when You command Your angels to be the instruments of their judgment. Make us faithful, Lord, to the task at hand, to so live and speak that we might lead many to righteousness and we'll thank You for such a privilege in the Savior's name. Amen.

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