



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text Revelation 15:1-8

Revelation

“The Justification of God”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re continuing our studies in the book of Revelation in chapter 15. We’ll have a look at verses 1 through 8 – it’s a brief chapter.

“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

‘Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?

For You alone are holy;

For all the nations will come and worship before You,

For Your 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 chests with golden sashes.

Then 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.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time together, this opportunity we have on this beautiful Lord’s Day to gather as your people and sing hymns of praise, read this text of Scripture, consider its meaning. We pray you’d bless us as we do that. Open it up to us. Give us an understanding of the things we’ve read and how all of this applies to us.

It does apply to us, Father. It’s an ancient chapter, written 2,000 years ago, and yet it’s relevant for us today. Just as relevant for us today as it was then, and as it will be in the future when those saints of whom we read will live and suffer martyrdom and be victorious over the beast. It’s about them, but it’s about us as well, so I pray, Lord, that you will guide us in our thinking and make the applications to our hearts.

And in so doing, equip us for the week to come. Help us to live in light of the things that we will read and study this morning. Help us to live in light of the fact that you are sovereign; you’re ruling over things, and you’re bringing history to its ordained end, and it will be glorious for us, a triumphant conclusion to history. So bless us with an understanding of these things, Father.

It’s a great privilege to be able to come together and study together and do so freely. It’s a great privilege to do this – to come before the throne of grace and to speak to you; open our hearts to the Almighty God, who is from eternity to eternity, the eternal God. We can speak to you, and we can seek your help in time of need, and we pray, Lord, for those who ask for our prayers.

We pray for the sick. We pray that you bless them with healing mercy. We pray that you bless those who are going through medical procedures for their health – that you would give success and restore them to health. We pray for those that have a variety of struggles in life, in the home or at work. Life’s difficult; give them strength. Give them encouragement. Give them wisdom.

Bless all of us with that, Father. We thank you for the times of peace, times that are placid in our experience. It’s a gift from you. You give us rest from the toil

and the turmoil of life. And yet someday that comes – it comes for all of us. Equip us for those times that are yet to come. Ground us solidly in the faith, and may that be the result of our time together this morning.

May we have a deeper appreciation of who you are, a greater understanding of who you are, and the confidence that comes with knowing that the Almighty God is working every moment of our existence for our good. We thank you for that. Prepare our hearts for a time of study together. We pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] The story is told about Oliver Cromwell, England’s Lord Protector, that while he was sitting for his portrait he saw that the artist was painting a flattering picture of him. Cromwell stopped him and said, “Sir, I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, warts and everything; otherwise, I will never pay a farthing for it.” That’s a well-known anecdote about Cromwell, and well-known I suppose because it’s so unusual.

That’s not the way most of us think, or what we desire; we want the flattering picture, not the real picture. But that’s very much like God, Cromwell’s perspective, because God wants us to have a picture of him truly like he is. God, of course, has no flaws. He’s perfect. But his perfections, his attributes, those are the things that men try to remove in order to make a picture of God not truly like he is.

They can accept some of his attributes. They can accept some of the statements about God found in the Bible, like that of John 4:16 – God is love. But reject statements like Hebrews 12:29, that God is a consuming fire. So they paint an incomplete picture of God. They downplay his justice, dismiss his wrath, and present him as a very amiable God, who gladly pardons everyone.

I think the modern view of God is summed up in the dying words of the German poet Heinrich Heine, who said, “God will forgive me. That is his business.” Well, that illustrates the danger of not having a complete picture of God. Certainly he forgives; God is love. These are great truths – the forgiveness of God, the love of God – we would be lost forever without those great truths, and we must set them forth.

We must set forth the grace of God clearly and boldly, but we must also present the whole counsel of God – his will, his truth. We must paint him as he truly is. God wants us to have a complete portrait of him. The book of Revelation gives us that. It’s filled with the love of God. It’s filled with the grace of God. But it also is a book about God’s justice and wrath. We see that in chapter 15, which introduces the seven bowls of wrath.

These are the final series of judgments in the book of Revelation. They are described fully in chapter 16, and they are more intense, they are more severe than the previous judgments of the seals and the trumpets. We read of malignant sores on people. Of men scorched with fierce heat. We read of cities falling. These are horrific judgments that are coming. In chapter 15, God prepares us for that.

He prepares us with the assurance that we find throughout this chapter that God’s ways are always just. Throughout this brief chapter, we read of his righteous acts; that his ways are righteous and true, and that he is holy, which reassures us that these great judgments are right. They’re just. I’m reminded of the scene in Genesis 18. It’s a remarkable scene where God visits Abraham, his friend.

And because he is the friend of God, as Abraham is described as being, God informs him of his intention to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, standing before the Lord, begins to plead for those wicked cities. It’s really an expression of the mind of God that is expressed by Abraham; it’s not just his mind. But as the friend of God, he reflects the very mind of God, who doesn’t take any pleasure in the death of the wicked.

He tells us that twice in the book of Ezekiel. Judgment is not God’s great work. It’s not what he enjoys doing. It’s the work of salvation that gives him great pleasure. And so Abraham, reflecting the mind of God, pleads for those cities, and he says, “Will not the judge of all the earth do right?” That is not, as some have seen it, a challenge to God. It’s not as though he’s saying, “God, you must do right.”

Now, what that is is a prayer expressing Abraham’s faith in God’s just and righteous character. What he’s saying is God will always do right, and that’s what we must understand. That’s how we must approach life. It’s how we must approach our understanding of God. We must begin with that fundamental truth.

The wrath of God is a hard truth to study, to contemplate. It’s not an easy truth to preach – I don’t enjoy preaching it. But when you preach through the Bible, when you go through books of the Bible, and you go through them chapter by chapter, verse by verse, you come to these chapters, and you come to this subject. And it’s there, and it’s real, and so we come to it.

And we must teach it and study it and contemplate it, but always with that fundamental truth in mind that the Judge of all the earth will always do right. He will always deal fairly with his creation, and he will deal fairly with you. Well, that is the

explanation that Revelation 15 gives for God’s actions in chapter 16. The Judge of all the earth will do right. This chapter is what I think we could call a theodicy.

That’s a theological term that basically means the justification of God, and it refers to an attempt, generally by theologians, to explain God’s actions, the difficult things about God. For example, the problem of evil, of how God can be good and evil can exist. Theodicy is an attempt to justify God; it’s an attempt to exonerate him. Well, God doesn’t need to be exonerated, of course. He doesn’t need a defender or an apologist. God is who he is.

Who are you, O man, who answers back to him who created him? That’s the question that Paul asks in Romans 9, and God doesn’t need us to defend him, and we certainly are in no position to question him. But for our sake, to help us in our weakness, God does give explanations of himself and of his actions. He’s a God of wrath, he’s a consuming fire, but only because he is a God of justice.

That’s a portrait the Bible paints of him, and that John gives here in chapter 15. It begins with John seeing a vision in heaven. He calls it a sign. It is of seven angels who have seven plagues. He describes the vision as “great and marvelous,” because of the awesome effect these plagues will produce on the earth, and against the kingdom of the antichrist. But they are the last, he says, because in them, the wrath of God is finished.

These are the last judgments leading up to the Lord’s return and the conclusion of all things. Wrath will continue for the unbeliever; he’s not denying that. It will continue for all eternity, and we read about that in more detail when we come to the end of chapter 19 and chapter 20. But these plagues that he refers to – they complete God’s warnings to the unbelieving, unrepentant world, before Christ returns and history ends.

In a moment, a voice in chapter 16 will tell the angels to pour out their bowls of wrath on the earth, but before that happens, John hears other voices. In fact, he hears a whole choir of voices singing praise to God. The singers are gathered around the sea of glass before the throne of God. The choir is composed of those who were victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name.

In other words, these are the martyrs who were steadfast in their faith, who didn’t worship the beast or receive his number. They didn’t succumb to the great pressure that was brought against them to worship a false god, and as a result they suffered death for their faithfulness and their obedience. The beast, in putting them to death, thought that he had conquered them, but John says that they were victorious.

Because through death, they went from a world of pain and into the very presence of God; death became the means of them entering into glory, and entering into it triumphantly, because they entered as obedient individuals; those who were faithful to the end, faithful unto death. And so it was triumphant. Now, that’s hard for us to believe, I think; hard to believe that death and departure from this world is a victory.

It’s hard for us to think that way because we’re so earthbound. If we understand the nature of this world, we live in what C.S. Lewis called “the shadowlands.” This world isn’t really what’s real. Well, it’s real, of course – it is reality – but there’s something far greater than this that makes this pale in significance. The real world, the ultimate world, the eternal world is yet to come.

That’s what the Bible teaches. We grasp that by faith, not by sight. We look at the world around us. We have this sense about us of what’s really important, and it’s the things that we can feel, that we touch, that we see. We are almost compelled to live by sight, but the believer, the believer in Jesus Christ, the child of God is to live by faith, not by sight. Live by faith in what the Word of God teaches.

And that’s what these saints did. They believed God’s promises. They were not living for this world. It wasn’t their ultimate reality. That was the world to come. That’s what they lived for. That governed their conduct, and as a result they entered heaven triumphantly. John sees them there, standing on the sea of glass which is before God’s throne, and the glass on which they stand is described as “mixed with fire.”

That’s an unusual description, because we saw this back in chapter 4, the glassy sea, and there it’s described as being “like crystal.” Here it’s mingled with fire, symbolic of God’s holiness and justice. The ground of what will be the work that he does of bringing righteousness to the earth, and so they sing praise to that. Their song is described in verse 3 as the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb –two names given to the same song.

It’s a song or hymn that extols God’s righteousness and celebrates his mighty deeds of deliverance from the hostility of the beast, from the persecution of the antichrist. He saves these saints from all of that, saves them from this evil system of the beast. He saves them from the false worship of the beast. He saves them through death. He saves them by making them persevere in their faith and obedience.

But he will deliver them from the rule of the beast when he pours out the plagues on the earth, and destroys the devil’s domain and establishes his kingdom. That’s really what they praise here. They were victorious. Their faith was victorious.

They didn’t succumb. They were obedient to the end. But the great victory is coming when the kingdom will be established on this earth, and the evil of this world is swept away.

And so they sing praise to that when they sang, “Great and marvelous are your works.” They mean his works of judgment on the world. It’s what Moses and the Israelites sang about in Exodus 15, which is the song of Moses; a song in which they praise God for his judgment on Pharaoh at the Red Sea. “The horse and his rider he has cast into the sea.” That’s the chorus that runs throughout that song of Moses.

“They went down into the depths like a stone,” they sang. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, died in the Red Sea. Pharaoh’s army, the flower of Egypt, when Egypt was at its apex of power, was crushed in a moment when these soldiers, this cavalry of Pharaoh, pursued Israel into the Red Sea. And then God at that moment collapsed the walls of water and drowned them all.

That was judgment, and Moses calls that judgment, as well as the plagues that God poured out on the land of Egypt. Wonders – that’s how he describes them – and acts of holiness, because it was all against evil men. In that way, by that judgment, God delivered his people. This song in Revelation 15 is like that, because it too praises God’s future acts of judgment on the world as great, and God as righteous and true.

His plagues will punish the wicked. They will bring down Babylon, the capital of the antichrist’s kingdom. They will sweep away that which is evil. But at the same time, these plagues will also alert people to their desperate need of repentance. And through it all, these plagues, these acts of judgment that are about to come, will deliver the saints.

So they sing in verse 3, “Righteous and true are your ways, King of the nations!” Verse 4: “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, For Your righteous acts have been revealed.” God’s ways, his judgments, the bowl judgments of chapter 16, are righteous and true and holy.

It is a way of saying that the judge of all the earth will do right, and he will put everything right. The world is not right today. It hasn’t been since the calamity in the Garden. Today the whole world lies in the evil one – that’s how John ends 1 John

5:19. And just as Israel was under the power of Pharaoh, the world today is in the power of the evil one.

But just as God destroyed the king of Egypt and all of his works, he’ll someday destroy the works of the devil, and that’s really what all of this is about, future deliverance from evil. This is not really a song, a hymn, about personal salvation. It’s about rescue from the antichrist. It’s about the triumph of those who are saved, and how we will be delivered from evil; how that will be swept away from the earth.

And yet having said that, the basis of this future deliverance and the coming of the kingdom of Christ is the work of Christ at the cross; it’s the work of Christ in personal salvation. Just as Israel’s exodus from Egypt was based upon the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, all of the blessings that we receive in the kingdom to come is grounded in the person and work of Christ at the cross.

So this is the song of the Lamb; the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the earth. In John 16:33, where Christ concludes the instruction of the upper room discourse, and before he gives the high priestly prayer in John 17, he encourages his disciples by saying, “Take courage – I have overcome the world.” Now, that was a prophetic statement.

He meant that at the cross, where he would be in just a matter of hours, he would triumph over all of his enemies. He would triumph over the world. He would triumph over the prince of this world. He would triumph over all of his enemies, and he did that because through his death he paid the full penalty for the sin of all of his people, thereby removing sin’s penalty from them and breaking the power of sin over them.

That was the purpose for Christ coming into this world. He didn’t come into this world simply to be a great teacher – which he was. He didn’t come into this world simply to be a good example for us – which he was. That’s not why he came. He came to be a sacrifice. He came for the purpose of dying, and the result of that is because of the cross and his payment, Satan has no claim on the redeemed.

We have been transferred out of his kingdom. We’ve been placed in the kingdom of God. Christ’s sacrifice has secured the eternal destiny of the elect, and it has sealed the fate of the devil. He triumphed over all of his enemies at the cross, and that is the reason for his disciples to take courage that night when he was betrayed and

arrested. And it’s the reason for us to take courage in this world in which we live when we face hardship and testing today.

It’s the reason that these martyrs standing on the fiery sea of glass are called “victorious.” They triumphed over the temptations of the beast due to Christ’s sacrifice. And it’s the reason that God will complete the work of salvation by destroying all of the evil works of the devil, and establish his kingdom on the earth.

That’s our hope. And that’s what John describes in verse 4 – all the nations will come and worship before you. Now, that’s a promise that’s taken out of Isaiah 2:1-4, where “in the last days,” Isaiah says, “all the nations will go up to the mountain of the Lord in Jerusalem and be taught by him. Men will hammer their swords into plowshares, and never again will they learn war.”

That’s when in the words of Amos justice will roll down like waters. That is holy. God will destroy evil and establish righteousness. The Bible is filled with that hope. That is the goal of the book of Revelation. That’s the goal of history, this glorious kingdom to come, when righteousness will prevail, and we will be saved from the very presence of sin.

The nations will come and worship. That doesn’t teach universalism, that everyone of all the nations, every individual of all the nations will be saved; they won’t be. But God will draw people from every nation, and will draw multitudes from every nation. That’s what the 24 elders sang, you may remember, back in 5:9, that Christ, the Lamb, standing on the throne, is slain, picturing him as the crucified and resurrected Savior.

Standing on the throne, sovereign, ruling over all things – they say of him that he purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Here the song is all about God, and all about what he’s done. That’s what they sing about in chapter 5, and that’s the focus of the hymn here in chapter 15. The martyrs don’t sing about themselves.

Oftentimes, that’s what our hymns are about. They’re sort of about us and our love for God, and this and that about us; not here – they don’t sing about themselves. They don’t sing about their sufferings or their achievements. They don’t recount their personal victory. It’s not about them – it’s all about God. It’s about his great and marvelous works.

That’s what occupied their thoughts and their words. That’s what this choir sings about, God and his sovereignty, God and his justice and glory. That’s what they sing about, but that’s so often what people recoil from; they don’t like to hear about the sovereignty of God. They don’t like to hear about the holiness of God. They don’t like to hear about the justice of God, the fact that God is intolerant of sin.

He is intolerant of sin. Now, he’s a longsuffering God, he’s very patient, but in the end, he will not dismiss sin. He will not ignore sin. He cannot do that. And so that may be repugnant to the modern mind to hear about judgment, but that’s the subject here and that’s what’s promised here, and what is promised in chapter 15, and what will be seen in chapter 16 is judgment.

It is coming. It must come, because God is holy. He cannot be indifferent towards sin. We ourselves – and not just those of us here, but men in general, people in general – are troubled deeply by evil in the world, and they want it stopped. And yet they can’t do that – no one has the power. Not all of the governments in the world, all of the armies, all the police forces can end evil in this world.

But God will do that, and that is because he’s a holy God. He hates sin, and he must deal with it. But his kingdom will also come because he has promised a kingdom. We find it all through the Bible, all through the Old Testament we find the promise of a kingdom to come, and he cannot fail to keep his word. He keeps his promises. He fulfills his prophecies because he is righteous and true, and so his word will stand.

The certainty of these things, of the final judgments, is stated in the last half of the chapter. John sees a third vision in verse 5. This is a vision of the temple in heaven. He calls it “the tabernacle of testimony,” and says that “it was opened.” The tabernacle recalls the wilderness wandering. It recalls the law being given at Mount Sinai and being placed in the tabernacle, placed in the ark of the covenant.

That’s where the two tablets were put, and the ark of the covenant was placed in the holy of holies of the tabernacle, and so we are to recall all of that with the mention of the tabernacle of testimony. Here, it is opened in order to indicate that the world’s rebellion will be dealt with according to the law that’s associated inside that tabernacle. It is a straight standard of righteousness, the law of God.

And God will deal with the world according to that standard of righteousness; he will deal with the world according to his strict justice, and it will be righteous. It

will be right. And then John sees the seven angels coming out of the temple clothed in clean linen and golden sashes; all of that has some symbolic significance. I take it to be this: that the golden sash around them represents God, that they are commissioned by him.

And that their clean linen, their white garments, would represent the purity of themselves and what they are doing, the purity of their mission. They are given seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who, it is said, “lives forever and ever,” verse 7.

God lives forever and ever. That is the God we serve, and it’s good to be reminded of that; that God is forever and ever.

He has no beginning. He has no end. He is eternal. Man in all of his glory, Isaiah tells us, is just grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Man is so impressed with himself. He says things like, “Man is the measure of all things.” But we’re just creatures of time. We don’t last. We’re just a vapor, James tells us; we’re here for just a moment. It’s all so brief.

So this is a reminder that though evil seems to dominate the stage of history, and tyrants seem to direct the course of events, they don’t. God is sovereign. He is the almighty. He is eternal, and the architect of the plan of the ages. He is presently working out that plan. We don’t understand it very often. We look at life as just a series of events, and they puzzle us.

And we wonder what is the significance of that, and why did this happen, and why was that plan frustrated, and why are things going the way they’re going, and are they going anywhere? In the midst of it all, we can’t figure it out; we have no idea where history is going. But what we know from the Word of God as we read it is that God has a plan of the ages, and he’s working that out.

And in that future day, when the seven angels come out of that temple, he will finish with things. He will begin to bring history to its close, and he will not be frustrated in doing that by man or by angels. They are all temporal, finite creatures; he is eternal. Now, this is the kind of perspective that we all need on life. We need to see things in the light of eternity.

God is working all things according to the counsel of his will, Ephesians 1:11. Now, when everything was ready, or I suppose we should project in the future, in that

time, when everything will be ready, when the angels will have received their bowls and taken their stations, then the words of verse 8 will be heard.

“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.” Smoke symbolizes God’s presence and glory throughout the Old Testament. When God came down to Mount Sinai to deliver the law, the mountain smoked. When Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple, the temple was filled with smoke.

Smoke filling the heavenly temple indicates that God is there. He’s directing events. It indicates that he has sent out the seven angels with the seven bowls of wrath; this is his work that’s about to unfold. And the fact that no one will be able to enter the temple indicates that no one at that time will be able to approach the Lord, to intercede for the world, and stop the judgment. At this point, it is unavoidable.

These are ineluctable events that are about to unfold; they cannot be stopped. So just as the prayers of Abraham could not prevent the brimstone from falling on Sodom and Gomorrah, so too, when this day comes, no one will be able to turn away God’s wrath from the world. When the time for judgment comes, nothing can stop it, so this is a warning to unbelievers.

It’s a warning to people today; certainly a warning in that day, but a warning even today to flee the wrath to come. This is the day of salvation. All through the book of Hebrews, particularly in the early chapters of the book, the author of Hebrews makes that point. Today is the day – this is the opportunity to come to Christ, and we should see it as that.

We shouldn’t look at life as simply an opportunity to make money, or to enjoy the good things of life. I’m not saying we shouldn’t do any of that. This is the day to make money, and we have to do that, and it’s a day to enjoy the good things of this world, but that’s not why we have today. We have today so that we have an opportunity to turn to him, turn to Christ and be saved.

That’s what we read throughout the New Testament. Don’t delay; this is the day. Well, this is a warning to the unbelieving, but this is also a passage that is a great encouragement to all who have come to him, who have turned, who have believed, because the song of those martyrs reminds us of who God is, and what he is doing for us.

Our situation is similar to the situation of those future saints who will be victorious over the beast and his image, because we, too, fight spiritual battles. We’re constantly in a spiritual battle. The world is continually trying to conform us to itself, and to its image, and it wants us to worship its images, its idols. In chapter 13, we read of an image that’s set up and that men are compelled to worship on pain of death.

Well, there are many kinds of images today. In principle, it’s the same – we face the battle that they will face. We face that every day of our lives. To compromise our faith, or to deny it altogether, to conform to this world, and it’s always been that way, from the very beginning, from the first generation and on. Moses dealt with the same temptations, growing up in the privilege and opulence of the palace of Egypt.

But he came to a point in his life when he made a decision. It was a decisive decision. He decided not to go the way of Egypt, but to go the way of the Lord; to follow Christ. The author of Hebrews tells us of that. He writes in Hebrews 11:24-25 that Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, and chose instead to endure ill treatment with God’s people rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.

Well, those passing pleasures are so tempting. They’re pleasures, so that’s our daily battle. It’s to choose Christ over the world and all that it offers; to choose not to worship the image of the beast. And very often it’s a choice that is made under very difficult circumstances, because hardship has a way of raising doubts in the heart of God’s people about the goodness of God, and about his faithfulness.

I’m sure businessmen feel that. I don’t have much experience of this on my own, but I do talk to businessmen, and I know the frustrations they experience, and what they must feel when a deal falls through, after having put a great deal of time and effort into it. And then at the last minute, it all falls apart, and the temptation arises to doubt God and to give in to despair; wonder does he really care, what’s going on?

Is he in control, or is everything just chaotic, arbitrary? And then there’s the temptation in such a situation to choose to adopt the ways of the world, and try to function the way the world functions. That’s a struggle. And then there are the trials that one faces regarding health, and when one faces death, and all of us will at some time face death. We can’t escape that. It’s appointed unto a man once to die.

Maybe not like these saints here around the glassy sea in this choir; we may not die as martyrs, but every one of us will die. And sometimes Christians experience difficult deaths. They go through protracted struggles with their health, and eventually they succumb to some terrible disease, and sometimes, as I say, they have a hard death. And in those battles, they can begin to wonder.

Is God really a caring God? Does he have any control over this? And begin to question his goodness and his faithfulness. Well, those are the battles we face. People face those battles just reading the Bible, and come to difficult questions about evil, and what’s going on in the world. But a passage like this encourages us to face the difficulties of life with courage and faith every day.

That is the message of Revelation 15; at least, that’s what it encourages us to do. It reinforces the statement of Abraham that the judge of all the earth will do right. What he does may not seem right. It may seem very hard to us, and we may not be able to understand it and put it all together, but then we don’t know the end perfectly. We can only see through things as in a glass darkly.

But we do have his Word, and what his Word assures us is that his ways are righteous and true, and he is holy. Now, that’s not the testimony of a group of armchair theologians; these aren’t a group of men who are sitting in their ivory tower spinning out interesting, pleasant thoughts about God. These are not men who have never taken the spiritual field of battle, never contended for the faith and made hard sacrifices.

Not at all. This is the testimony of people who have done just that. Who have suffered death at the hands of the enemy – brutal deaths, no doubt – and yet they didn’t feel that God had failed them. In fact, they praise him, and they even rejoice in their experience, that they could suffer for him. We can do that, as we know and cling to the great truths of God’s Word.

One of which is the truth that stands behind the song of the Lamb, and that is the truth of 1 John 4:16, that God is love. God is holy and just. He must punish sin and sinners. He would not be God if he did not do that. We need to know that and have that full portrait of him as he truly is, but to have the full portrait of him and know him as he truly is, we must also know that this God, who is holy and just, is also full of love and mercy.

And to save sinners from the judgment to come, the judgment that we deserve, he sent his Son, his only-begotten Son, to die in our place. He provided a substitute for us to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. At the cross, God poured out his wrath on his Son, satisfied his justice so that he can now freely forgive all who trust in Christ as their Savior.

Now, that’s the love of God. It’s seen at the cross. We see the love of God in lots of ways in lots of places. We see it just looking out the window and seeing that it’s a beautiful day out there, and it’s a pleasant day, and we’ll have a pleasant time today, perhaps. That’s a gift from God. Your health is a gift from God. All of that is a gift from God, and it’s an expression of his love.

But where we really see the love of God is at the cross. He loves like that. He loves as one who sacrificed his beloved Son, his eternal Son, for sinners. And that’s a love that will never stop loving his people for whom Christ died. He will be faithful to us to the end, and through all eternity. And though we may go through hard times, we should remember that he is always faithful.

He stays with us to give us victory. And when this brief life is over, he’ll bring us into his presence as victors, to stand on the sea of glass before his throne. That’s our future. It’s glorious. It’s really far more glorious than anything we can comprehend. The analogies of this book help, but it’s far beyond anything we can comprehend. It is glorious, and it’s eternal; doesn’t end.

It’s a world without end, that kingdom to come. But again, it’s a kingdom for the redeemed; for those who have been bought by Christ, who have believed in him. Have you done that? Don’t think that forgiveness is for everyone; that all can expect it because, well, that’s God’s business. No. God’s business is that of judgment as well, and he judges those who have not believed.

So look to him. The day is coming when he’ll pour out his wrath. Flee the wrath to come. Flee to the cross. Come to Christ, believe in him, and be saved. Have all your sins forgiven in a moment, and be made a child of God, a son of God, an heir of all that’s glorious and eternal. May God help you to do that, and help all of us to rejoice in the deliverance that’s to come, and in the righteousness and holiness of our God.

He is righteous and true, and always faithful. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the truth that’s set forth in this hymn of praise, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. We are reminded that you are holy, that you are righteous and true, and we can count on you. You are our savior, our deliverer, and we have a glorious future. And not only that, you are with us now, presently. Things don’t happen arbitrarily in our lives.

They are a part of your plan for us, and for our good, ultimately. Help us to rest in that, and to know that in all things, the judge of all the earth will do right. We give you the praise. We thank you for the relationship we have in you in Christ, and it’s in his name we pray. Amen.