**THE BEGINNING OF THE END**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 15**

We’ve been moving fairly quickly through our study of Revelation. We come to a place today where we can catch our breath a bit. Chapter 15 is only 8 verses long so it is not going to take us long to cover it. So it gives us time to pause and reflect a bit on the journey thru Revelation so far.

The Book of Revelation is 22 chapters long. Two-thirds of the book covers what major future event? The Tribulation. How long does the tribulation last? Seven years. According to what I have taught you, the theology of most evangelical Christians including me, when will the 7-year tribulation period begin? With the Rapture of the church. And when will the tribulation end? With the return of Jesus to the earth (His Second Coming). The events of the tribulation are looked at from both heaven’s perspective and from the earth’s perspective. During the tribulation, what is going on in heaven? Worshipping the Lamb around the throne, singing and praising Him. During the tribulation, what is going on down on earth? Rise to power of the antichrist, cataclysmic events, natural disasters, unleashing of demonic forces, all the result of God’s judgment on sinful unrepentant humanity. Can a person who was left behind at the Rapture get saved during the tribulation? Yes. What can the saints of the tribulation expect? Severe persecution by the antichrist.

Finally a little harder question – So why the Tribulation? What is God’s purpose for the tribulation? Why doesn’t Jesus just come back and set up his millennial kingdom? Why go through all this terrible ordeal? It would make the Book of Revelation a lot shorter. Well, I believe God has several purposes for it:

To introduce a worldwide revival (Revelation 7). “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

To destroy the wicked followers of Satan and the antichrist (Revelation 14 and 19).

Through crises, to force the people of the earth to look to God.

To break the stubborn will of the nation of Israel so that they will seek their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

As we come to Chapter 15 we see the Tribulation saints in heaven worshiping God. So keep that in mind as we look at Ch 15 – it is taking place in heaven. Remember, the harvest has taken place and believers have been separated from the lost. So the events of the book of Revelation are winding down. Chapter 14 and 15 describe from heaven’s perspective the end of the Tribulation and the return of Jesus to the earth.

We looked at this last week – when Jesus comes back He is coming in judgment. He will separate out the lost from the saved, the weeds from the wheat, the goats from the sheep. Jesus talked about this in Matthew 24:30 and then on into Ch 25. Last week we looked at the harvest of the earth. The harvest included all the people of the earth, both believers and unbelievers. This same harvest will be explored in greater detail from earth’s perspective in Chapters 16 thru 19.

V 1: Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

These seven angels are the ones assigned to carry the seven bowl judgments, which will actually begin in Chapter 16. God will finally put an end to sin on earth. So this sets the stage for that.

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

The sea of glass or the crystal sea here is the same one described back in Revelation 4:6. I said before that the glassy sea was indicative of God’s perfect peace. This time the sea of glass is mixed with fire. The best explanation of the meaning of the fire in this context comes from 1 Peter 1:7 – “So that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” I see the glassy sea mixed with fire as the Lord’s recognition of the sufferings and faithfulness of His martyrs out of the Tribulation. This special group of saints has stood toe to toe with Satan and the antichrist and the false prophet and have refused to deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Their labors on earth are finished and having proved the genuineness of their faith they no stand before the throne of God praising and worshipping Him.

V 3-4: And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Both the songs of Moses and of the Lamb are songs of deliverance. The song of Moses (Exodus 15) was the song the children of Israel sang when they had been delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. The song of the Lamb (from the end of the Book of Isaiah, 66:23) celebrates God’s deliverance over sin at the end of time.

V 5: After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened,

This harkens back to the image of the ark of the testimony which was housed in the Holy of Holies, the innermost room in the temple of God. The ark symbolized the presence of God among His people. Only the high priest was allowed to enter there once a year on the Day of Atonement. When Jesus died on the cross the curtain was torn from top to bottom and this opening symbolizes our open access to God. It is from this symbolic position of God’s holiness, then, that His judgment is about to fall upon the earth.

V 6-8: and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The seven bowls of God’s wrath are handed out to the seven angels. The garments they are wearing are similar to the clothing worn by the High Priest. Smoke, symbolic of the presence of God, fills His heavenly temple. Evident to everyone in heaven are God’s awesome glory and power. These are about to be revealed to those people on earth who to the very end reject Jesus Christ. There will be no escape from His wrath!

There is an interesting statement made in verse 8 – “and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.” At the end of the Tribulation period nobody will have access to God. The time for mankind to respond to God’s mercy has ended. It is now time for God to deal with the human race in judgment.

Remember the rule of the harvest. We mentioned it last week, Gal 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

Aren’t you glad you made Jesus your Lord? Next week we will get into the bowl judgments, the last days of the Tribulation period as seen from earth’s perspective. Lots to cover in the next few chapters. Of course it all culminates with Jesus’ glorious return in Chapter 19. Even so, Come Lord Jesus!!