

A God of Victory

Revelation 15:1-16:21

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



As we have been going through the book of Revelation, we have established that it is not about uncovering timelines and events or decoding secret messages and knowledge. It is a book of hope that is about uncovering timeless principles that spur the Christian on to faithful living. This continues to be an important focus to keep at the forefront of our reading. The middle of this letter continues to present images and events that leave us asking, who, how, and when? These aren't wrong questions, but often they lead us to focus on the "shiny objects" of the text and miss the main idea altogether. So, we must ask, how does this passage help me to see Jesus more clearly and live faithfully in righteousness, and declaring the gospel?

Revelation 12–15 consists of one distinct cycle of visions within the longer drama. In chapter 14, we were reminded that as we focus on God's promised victory, it helps us endure and remain faithful. Now, as we continue in chapters 15 and 16, we are again reminded of the fact that God is a God of victory over the powers of this age. Too often in this life, it seems like evil wins. But the book of Revelation offers us an alternative ending. Revelation chapters 4 – 11 offered hope for those longing for security in an insecure world. Chapters 15 – 16 offer hope for those longing for justice in an unjust world. And this hope is not a fiction.¹

While Revelation points us to a future time when God will have complete justice over all evil, it also reminds us of the victories we have experienced in Christ here and now. That experience of the now, combined with the vision of the promised future, compels us to faithfulness. In these chapters, we are once again reminded that our God is a God of victory, and by his grace, we experience that **victory now (in part) and then (in full).**

1. Victory now ... in part. (5:2; 16:15)

- a. How is victory the main theme of these two chapters?
 - i. First, it is a main theme that we traced through the book of Revelation as a whole.
 1. **Chapter 1** – We were given a vision of Jesus that reminds and clarifies for us his authority. (cf. 1:16)
 - a. ¹⁶ **In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.**

¹ Chester, Tim. Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective (pp. 107-108). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.
A God of Victory Revelation 15:1-16:21 (July 2nd, 2023) Speaker: Kyle Bartholic

2. **Chapters 2-3** – To the seven churches of Asia Minor, they were called to remain faithful and to conquer the desires of the world.
3. **Chapter 5** – John weeps because there is no one worthy to open the seven seals and complete God’s redemptive plan for history. Then he sees the Lamb, the one who is worthy. (cf. 5:6)
 - a. ⁶ **And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.**
4. **Chapters 12-14** – A longer vision that is aimed specifically at reminding believers of God’s authority over evil and his ability to have victory.
 - a. The picture of God’s victory in these chapters was specifically a call for believers to endure faithfully.
 - b. **12:11** – ¹¹ **And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.**
 - c. **13:10** – Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.
 - d. **14:12** – ¹² **Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**
- ii. This theme of victory will culminate in chapter 21 with the full and complete redemption of man. (cf. 21:3-4)
 1. ³ **And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”**
- iii. Victory in chapters 15 and 16.
 - a. **15:2** - 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.**
 - i. John sees also those who had obtained the victory which he spells out as *over the beast and his image and over the number of his name* (see note on 13:18). **Nothing evil can triumph over God’s people.**
 - ii. In the early church, the day of a person’s martyrdom was often called the day of his victory. Barclay comments, **‘The real victory is not to live in safety, to evade trouble, cautiously and prudently to preserve life; the real victory is to face the worst that evil can do, and if need be to be faithful unto death.’**²
 - iii. **They are able to participate in the Lamb’s victory because of their enduring faith in the midst of persecution and their**

² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 181.

resistance to compromising their faith with the world (in direct development of 12:11).³

b. **16:15 – ¹⁵ “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”**

i. **cf. 3:18 - ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.**

ii. In 3:18, Jesus spoke to the church in Laodicea to remain faithful and gave them the image of nakedness as an image of their idolatry.

iii. In the context of the Apocalypse and specifically ch. 16 to “watch” and “keep one’s garments” is to refuse to concede to the idolatrous demands of beast worship (see on 3:4–5) in the face of the pressure of the final attack.⁴

iv. Revelation gives us a picture of the victory that will come once Jesus returns, but it also reminds of the victory we have experienced now as well.

1. How do we experience victory now?

b. Salvation

i. **15:3-4 – Remarkably, the faithful do not sing about their own deliverance but celebrate God’s position as King of the nations. Instead of focusing on the destruction of Israel’s enemies, as does the song of Moses in Exodus 15, the song in Revelation 15 focuses on the conversion of the peoples of the world. ⁵**

ii. 12:11 – Don’t forget the victory of believers is not something they have earned but is accomplished by the blood of the Lamb. → Jesus grants new life (salvation).

iii. Paul will express it this way in **Rom. 6:12-14 –**

1. **¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.**

2. What Paul is expressing in this verse is that in salvation, we have been brought from death to life and in that shift of status, we have been changed.

a. **How often do you spend time considering the reality of the victory of your salvation on you’re here and now?**

3. There are two ways that the victory of our salvation can be considered on a daily basis.

a. Identity – Who you are because of whose you are.

b. Sin – You are no longer marked by sin nor are you held captive to it.

c. Identity

³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 790.

⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 837.

⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 141.

- i. Revelation is clear, those who are marked by the Lamb and the Father are marked for life and that they belong to God. This means that their identity is fundamentally changed in Jesus. Paul reminds the church in Corinth of the centrality of their identity change. This was a church that routinely had issues with sin and dysfunction.
 - 1. **2 Cor 5:17 - ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**
 - ii. **The Bible answers the question of “Who am I?” by asking, “Whose am I?”** → I.e., Do you belong to Jesus or the world? (Those are the only two options.)
 - 1. We see this all throughout the OT, just consider Deut. 6, a passage that reminds Israel that they belong to God. The era of the prophets called Israel back to an unwavering allegiance to God.
 - 2. John (the author of Revelation) will tell believers in 1 John 2:6 – “If you are in Christ, then you are to act just like Jesus.”
 - 3. Revelation has reminded us that there is no neutral ground on this matter. You are either aligned with Christ or you aren’t.
 - iii. **When I consider my identity, what are the primary markers or adjectives that I would use?**
 - 1. Do I see myself first and foremost as a child of God and aligned with his kingdom and priorities?
 - 2. Or, do I see Jesus as part of my identity like that of a patchwork quilt? → I attempt to put mismatching items together to create a cohesive vision for my life. (This is not endorsed by the Scriptures, btw.)
 - iv. **Warning:** Do not forget that Revelation was written to seven churches that were all facing calls to compromise their faith, that is, to compromise their identity in Christ. All of them were at risk. Some were holding better than others. But, one of the strongest and gravest warnings of Jesus to those churches comes to the church in Ephesus. Jesus warns them that they are at risk of having their lampstand removed. They were the church with the most robust and accurate theology, yet, they had misconstrued intellectual belief with true faith. **They are a warning to us that we can have the right theology and still have a misunderstanding on our identity in Christ.**
 - 1. **Reflect:** What idols am I allowing to creep into my life and become key aspects of my identity so that Jesus is sidelined?
- d. **Over sin**
- i. If my identity has been changed and I am now something new, that means I am to have a different approach to sin. We heard it in Paul’s words in Romans and we have heard it over and over again in Revelation. → “Those who have overcome the beast.” (cf. 15:13)
 - 1. The response of the believer towards sin is to give it no quarter. – Sin has no place in the life of a believer because the believer is to be focused on exulting and glorifying Jesus.
 - a. Remember, believers are no longer part of the world and are not to revel in it.
 - b. The reality (on this side of heaven) is that we struggle with sin. And that is why repentance is a needed regular rhythm in our lives.
 - c. We must remember that in our struggle, we do not need to just “give in” as if we are powerless. Paul reminds the church in Corinth about this.
 - 2. **1 Cor. 10:13 - ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with**

the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

- a. Paul reminds us here that there is always a way out of temptation and we do not have to give into temptation and sin.
- b. The truth is that we all struggle and need help in that struggle against sin. We need to support each other. That is why we ask the question of sharing tough stuff around here.

ii. Who shares my tough stuff?

1. The struggle against sin and the brokenness of this age is not meant to be a solo sport.
2. We need other mature believers that help us through our struggles.
 - a. Reflect: Who is discipling me?
3. We need to be that other mature believer for someone.
 - a. Reflect: Who am I discipling?

2. Victory then ... in full. (16:17)

- a. **The victories that we experience now, we experience them in part, that is, in our current struggle. However, Revelation reminds us that there is coming a time when our victory in Christ will be experienced in full and there will be no more struggle.**
 - i. What we experience now, prompts us to trust God for what is still our ahead of us.
 - ii. How are we to think of this victory out ahead of us?
- b. **Final** – The victory coming is once and for all.
 - i. This is the scope of chapter 16 and will continue to be unpacked through the text but especially in chapter 21.
- ii. **V. 17 – “It is done.”**
 1. **The announcement is that “it is done (γέγονεν),” which marks the historical realization of the purpose of the seven bowls stated in 15:1:** “in them [the bowls] God’s wrath *is consummated*” (ἐτελέσθη). The declaration is the converse of Christ’s accomplishment of redemption at the cross (cf. the cry “it is finished” [τετέλεσται] in John 19:30). In this light, the declaration here refers to the final consummation of judgment. This is borne out not only from 16:18–21 but also from 21:3–6, where the same phrase “a great voice from the throne” (φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου λεγούσης) is again followed by “it is done” (γέγοναν). There the focus is on final punishment of the wicked, the destruction of the old cosmos, and the complete redemption of God’s people in the new creation (cf. 21:1–8).⁶
 2. This should give believers a “sigh of relief” even in our current struggle that our struggle will not continue forever... for us or the generations that come after us.
- c. **Complete** – God’s character is front and center again.
 - i. In both chapters 15 and 16, we hear the repeated declarations of God’s character, he is just, true, and righteous.
 1. **Righteous** - He does what is right, every time.
 2. **Just** - To be righteous you must also act justly.

⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 841–842.

- a. In the OT and NT the declaration of righteousness is a legal designation. That is, you have been found to be righteous by your actions.
3. **These things go together – In the scope of the Scriptures, one cannot be proclaimed to be righteous without having done justice. It is literally seen as a legal standing.**
- ii. We are again reminded that this is God’s character – He knows what is right, does what is right, and will see it all through, because that is right.
 1. We’ve said it this way in the series, someone’s future offer only matters if can trust them to deliver on it.
- iii. Another cycle of 7’s → 7 bowls.
 1. In Revelation, 7 is always seen as a number symbolizing completeness.
 2. The seven bowls show us the completeness of God’s redemptive work and the need for his righteous judgment.
 3. **The seventh bowl describes the final destruction of the corrupt world system, which follows on the heels of the battle of Armageddon.** The bowl being poured out on the “air” (ἀήρ) is best understood as part of the exodus plague imagery present in the trumpets and the preceding bowls and alluded to in “the plague of hail” in 16:21 (cf. Exod. 9:22–34). Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1.129, calls the hail in Egypt together with other trials “plagues of heaven and *air* (ἀήρ)” (cf. also *Vit. Mos.* 1.114, 119–20). Already Rev. 9:2 has alluded to Exod. 10:15, where there were so many locusts that “the land was darkened”; Rev. 9:2 reads, “the sun and the *air* were darkened from the smoke of the pit.” Also, in Exod. 10:21 God says to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky that there may be darkness.” In Rev. 9:2 “the air” is associated with demonic spirits (in Eph. 2:2 “the air” is a realm ruled by Satan). As in 9:2, so again that “air” is affected suggests a judgment. As in the fourth, fifth, and sixth bowls, the judgment here is on the unbelieving realm ruled over by the dragon and the beast. In 16:10 in particular the bowl was poured out “on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened.”
- d. **A sure thing.** → My posture of expectancy.
 - i. The tone of this entire section and chapter 16 is that of definitive victory.
 1. So, if it is a sure thing, what is my posture to be? → Expectant.
 2. **We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.**⁷
 - ii. An expectant posture:
 1. Healthy expectations – Now in part, then in full.
 - a. A willingness to see God at work in my life through any number of struggles.
 2. Willingness to do the work of righteousness. – Victory often takes time on this side of heaven and requires me to cooperate with the Spirit of God for the purposes of God.
 3. Willingness to help others through their struggles and walk in victory.

⁷ EFCA SOF Article # 9 (Christ’s Return) - EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 266). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.