

REVELATION – SERMON 59

THE MARTYRS' CHORUS

Revelation 15:1-4

INTRODUCTION

- The intricate complexity of the human body is a testament to God's infinite wisdom and power (Psalm 139:14)
- In the terrestrial creation, there is no other creature that has anything close to the human voice
- God has not only endowed us with the ability to communicate through speech, but through song
- Surely the highest most elevated, the most noble use of our voices is to sing praise to God (Ephesians 5:18-19)
- There is nothing that compares to a company of voices united in song to God
- Yet many of us find our singing is not as good as we would like.
- As great as the choirs in this world are, there is a choir, yet to be assembled, in the heavens, where every singer hits every note in perfect harmony
- It is such a choir we see in our verses today
- As we come to chapter 15, we are returning to the chronological flow of Revelation
- Chapter 15 provides an introduction to the final plagues, the seven vials full of the wrath of Almighty God

- After an introductory verse (v.1), there is a vision of the tribulation martyrs in heaven (2-4), followed by a vision of the seven angels with the seven golden vials (5-8)
- In this sermon we will consider these triumphant saints in heaven and their song of praise before God

I. THEY ARE STANDING ON THE GLASSY SEA (2)

- A. The sea speaks of God's unfathomable wisdom
 1. The great and unknown depths of the ocean are like the decrees of God, whose "judgments are a great deep" (Psalm 36:6; Romans 11:33)
- B. The sea speaks of God's steadfast judgments
 1. This sea is not of water, but of crystal (4:6), and is as firm and fixed as God's judgments
 2. It is mingled with fire, which indicates God's fiery wrath
 - a. Christ will baptize the ungodly with fire (Matthew 3:11-12)
 - b. He will take vengeance upon them "in flaming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:8)
 - c. Our God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29)
- C. The sea speaks of cleansing and forgiveness
 1. The tabernacle had the laver, or the brazen/molten sea, outside the tent at which the priests would wash their hands (Exodus 30:18-21)
 2. In heaven, the sea of brass becomes the sea of glass

3. The continual cleansing we now receive through the “washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26), will no longer be needed, as the cleansing will be complete
4. When God justifies sinners, he “casts all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19)

D. The sea speaks both of God’s wrath and salvation

1. The flood of Noah’s time showed God’s anger and mercy
 - a. When the wickedness of man had reached its fill, God sent the waters to swallow them up
 - b. The door of the ark was shut, leaving them no more opportunity to repent
 - c. Yet it was the same waters that supported those who were safe inside the ark (1 Peter 3:20)
2. In like manner, the waters of the Red Sea were death to the Egyptians, but life to the Israelites

II. THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL AS GLORIFIED SAINTS (2)

A. The tribulation saints

1. Repeatedly in Revelation, we are shown that many will be saved during the tribulation, and suffer martyrdom for their faith
 - a. Their souls are under the altar praying for God’s vengeance in 6:9-11
 - b. They are a “great multitude, which no man could number” in 7:9-17

- c. There is the 144,000 seal Israelites in 14:1-5
 - d. These in 15:2-4 who were killed for refusing to worship the beast
 - e. They are again seen in 20:4 being rewarded in Christ's millennial reign
- B. They are victors
- 1. The Greek word for "victory" is the same as to "overcome" as well as "conquer, prevail"
 - 2. Though it does not say here they were martyred, it is all but certain as this is the punishment for refusing to worship the beast (13:15)
 - 3. While on earth, the beast was given power to overcome them, and to take their lives (13:7)
 - 4. But ultimately they were the victors, overcoming him "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (12:11)
 - 5. Though *slain* before the beast, they *stand* before the Lamb (cf. 6:17)
 - 6. The threefold description of the beast's "image", "mark" and "number" amplify the magnitude of their triumph over the antichrist
- C. They have the harps of God
- 1. The harp and the trumpet are heaven's chosen instruments
 - 2. The twenty-four elders were also given harps (5:8; cf. 14:2)

3. The bestowal of harps to these saints denotes their dedication to the service and worship of God

III. THEY ARE SINGING THE GLORIES OF THEIR SOVEREIGN (3-4)

A. The grand occupation of the redeemed

1. They rest from their labours and toil (14:13)
2. Rest does not mean idleness, but the blissful employment of eternally worshipping God in song

B. Words, not music, is the centre of worship

1. They have the harps of God
2. Yet there is no description of the music they produced
 - a. The worship of God must always be with meaningful, intelligible words
 - b. Musical instruments may be used in worship, but only to lift up and promote the words being sung

C. The song of Moses

1. This was composed and sung in praise of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 15:1-19)
2. Its theme is redemption: "The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Exodus 15:2)
3. This refrain has been used throughout Israel's history (Psalm 118:14), and will be sung in the future by believing Israel in their land (Isaiah 12:2)

4. This song praises God for punishment of the enemy (1,4-10,12), his protection and guidance of his saints (13), and his eternal reign (17-18)

5. Another song of Moses is found in Deuteronomy 32, whose themes would also be appropriate to be sung by the tribulation saints

D. The song of the Lamb

1. This is thought to be the song of Revelation 5:9-14

2. As with the song of Moses, this song is one of praise to God for redeeming his people from the power of the enemy

THE SONG OF MOSES	THE SONG OF THE LAMB
The first song in the Bible	The last song in the Bible
Sung at the Red Sea	Sung at the sea of glass
Sung in triumph over Egypt	Sung in triumph over the beast
Tells of how God brought his people <i>out</i>	Tells of how God brought his people <i>in</i>

E. The words of the song

1. God's works
 - a. God is to be praised for his great and marvellous works (Psalm 111:2; 139:14)

 - b. He is to be praise for he is the Lord God Almighty (4:8; 11:17)

2. God's ways
 - a. He is just and true in his ways (Deuteronomy 32:3-4)

 - b. Everything God does and says is *right*

- c. He is the King, not just over all creation, but especially of his saints
- 3. God's worthiness
 - a. He is to be feared by all (Jeremiah 10:7)
 - b. He is to be glorified by all (Psalm 86:9-10)
 - c. He only is holy (Hebrews 7:26; Revelation 4:8)
- 4. God's worship
 - a. There is coming a day when all the nations shall worship God (Psalm 46:10; 86:9; Zechariah 14:16)
 - b. His judgments are manifest in the pouring out of his wrath and establishment of his kingdom on earth
- 5. Note that the focus of their song is not on themselves whatsoever, but solely on the person and works of God – this is what true worship looks like: objective and theocentric

CONCLUSION

- 1. The salvation of the tribulation martyrs is paralleled by the deliverance of Israel from Egypt
- 2. It is a picture of our own salvation—God's wrath passes over those who have applied the blood of the Lamb
- 3. The heavenly sea is that steadfast, calm, perfect and eternal abode of God with redeemed sinners
- 4. The sea of this evil world is one of trouble, unrest (Isaiah 57:20) and wavering (James 1:6), the home of leviathan (Job 41), and

the beast (Revelation 13:1); and will have no place in the new earth (Revelation 21:1)

5. Yet most choose this sea of death, casting themselves into it, only to be drowned destruction and perdition (1 Timothy 6:9)
6. The suffering of these saints before their victorious rest in heaven, reminds us that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)
7. Revelation shows us what the songs of the saints look like
8. The songs of this wicked world are the “songs of fools” and have no part in the Christian’s life (Ecclesiastes 7:5)
9. What song are you singing?