

It was fun to experience the World Series through Derek this week. It has been many years since I followed major league baseball... as a fan. But I was a fan once again this week... pretty much living some of his joy vicariously – through him. ... I am so glad that he is here with us in Oregon – but my heart also ached with an identification of what it must be like to move away... and then have the team you are passionate about... finally make it to the World Series... and win it after 108 years. ... It is obvious that he knows God wants him to be here right now... but I am sure we can all understand how torn his heart must be... in also wanting to be back in Chicago... celebrating with his team... and fellow Cubs fans... who have waited so long!

All of this makes me mindful about the nature of the things we celebrate and the victories we enjoy. Ben Zobrist became the first Chicago Cub in history... to win the title of World Series Most Valuable Player. That is quite an honor! ... But let me invite you to imagine yourself winning the MVP of the team that wins the World Series. ... Or (if you'd like) imagine winning the Heisman trophy as the best college football player. ... Now try to imagine winning something better than these.

Perhaps it might be... the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government - the Medal of Honor... which is "bestowed by the President in the name of Congress on members of the United States Armed Forces... who distinguish themselves through 'conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity... at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty... while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States.'" ... OK... now imagine something better than being honored to receive the Medal of Honor.

Just for a moment... imagine being the doctor... who discovers the cure for cancer. But don't stop with this... now try to conceive of something better than that.

What could be better than the Heisman Trophy... better than being the World Series MVP... better than finding a cure for cancer... and better than winning a Medal of Honor?

I would like for you to know... with great certainty... and to believe with every fiber of your being... that there is something better... and that it will be yours.

One day the dead will be raised... and the multitudes will stand before Almighty God. ... On that day King Jesus will say to those who trusted Him and lived for Him, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and on that day no Heisman Trophy, no World Series MVP, no medical or military achievement will be worth more than those words.

What will motivate us to live for that commendation?

I believe very little will... like an understanding of the end times. This is why we have the book of Revelation. It shows us how God will win the final victory – and it motivates us to yearn to be part of the greatest victory celebration... as well as to live for His commendation... above any earthly reward.

We are not here this morning to satisfy our curiosity about end time prophecy in the Bible. We are here to have God's World mold... construct... and re-shape... our sin-infected priorities... desires... and motives. We are here to be re-oriented by God's Word.

So... my goal this morning... in looking through this lens of prophecy... is to watch with you... God's sovereignty and justice... seeing how He will save His people... winning praise to Himself... . . . And I pray that it will create a deeper yearning to be there and celebrating among the redeemed... with at least twice as much passion that Derek experienced this week. (And that is a lot!)

Our passage today in Revelation... is the time when the great cry of the oppressed of all ages is finally answered: "*How long, O Lord, how long?*" We come to the end... (the final series of judgments from God) through Chapters 15 and 16. . . . Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in Revelation. Chapters 15 and 16 actually should go together... so I am taking them together this morning.

John sees another sign in Heaven. . . . This is the third sign of three great signs in Heaven: the sun-clothed woman (Israel); the great red dragon (Satan); and now, seven angels with the seven last plagues.

Revelation 15:1-5

The first thing to notice here is the promise from God that this is the last of the series of judgments. . . . We have reached a turning point of history when we come to these seven bowls of God's wrath. . . . God will then begin to set up his kingdom upon the earth.

These plagues were in golden bowls. . . . (The seven last plagues are also called the seven bowl judgments.) . . . We will see them poured out in the next chapter. . . . The word "plague" literally means a blow or wound. . . . They are not epidemics... but powerful... deadly blows that will strike the

earth with a fatal impact. ... In these plagues... the wrath of God is finished. He is a God of love and also of judgment.

Men mock Divine wrath... make jokes about hell, etc. ... but when His wrath brings judgment... the joking will end. ... When God gets done with His judgment... holiness will be vindicated and victorious. Sin will no longer be triumphant on the earth.

But with verse two... the scene suddenly changes. A quick break is taken from the horrible judgments. Before continuing... it is as though John wants to encourage the believers who will live through these judgments. It is like he is saying... when this happens... I want you to keep something in mind. "Picture this..."

There will be a great host of martyrs... men and women who have given up their lives under the Antichrist... the beast of Chapter 13... "I've seen them now in heaven... standing beside the sea of glass mixed with fire. ... It is "mixed with fire," because there is a definite holiness in the midst of persecution.

We first saw this sea of glass in Chapter 4... and there we understood it to be a symbol of the Spirit of holiness... John says to the Tribulation saints to encourage them... "I saw you standing in the presence of holiness ! ... And you know what else...? I also saw you celebrating...! You celebrated because you were 'victorious over the beast'."

I love that way of putting it. ... John is writing to a group of men and women in the future... who will suffer terribly and be martyred... it looks as though

when these men and women leave the earth they are losers... but when they arrive in heaven... they are victors! ... It is a wonderful revelation of how God works far differently from man. ... Man is under the illusion that what he sees happening is actually according to the way he views it... but it really is not. ... The Antichrist thinks he is getting rid of his enemies down here... but what he is really doing... is running a shuttle service to heaven! ... He is but an elevator boy in God's service... taking loads of saints up to glory. ... God is using him for the very purposes that God has ordained.

The Tribulation saints whom John saw and heard were standing by the "sea of glass" in heaven... just as the Israelites stood by the Red Sea. They were singing "the song of Moses" and also "the song of the Lamb."

These songs are not on the wicked world's hit parade but they are on God's list of top songs.

The striking thing about what they will sing... is... there is not one single word about their own achievements! They do not ever say, "*O Lord, how faithful we have been to you! How true we have been to your word! How steadfastly we have endured!*" ... The only pronouns used in the song are "your" and "you" –

Revelation 15:3-4 (ESV)

*"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."*

Once you and I stand in the presence of God... we will not feel that we have done anything. We will simply be grateful -- grateful beyond words -- for what God has done for us.

... ..

From Verse 5 to the end of this brief chapter the seven angels proceed to the final judgment.

Revelation 15:5-8

The angels come out of the Temple – right from the presence of God. And they have special clothing. Their clothes are like priests. ... These are special angels... who have been delegated a very special task. They are bringing an end to the rebellion on men on earth.

We are told that this smoke which fills the temple... symbolizes the powerful glory of God -- it is "smoke from the glory of God and from his power." ... It fills the great temple so no one can enter until the work of the angels is completed. ... Again, that is symbolic. What does it mean?

I think what it means... is that it is too late to pray! ... By faith and by prayer we can enter into the presence of God in His temple... but here it has become impossible. ... The time has come when men can no longer repent. It is too late to pray when this judgment scene begins.

Until the seven plagues have been completed... no approach to God... by prayer or otherwise... can halt the coming judgment." ... God's mercy is not forever... His coming wrath will shut the door to mercy for the unrepentant.

Now... in Chapter 16... the seven angels pour out their bowls in rapid succession. ... It is a terrible time of judgment... the most intensive period of tribulation the world has ever seen. ... It is what several of the Old Testament prophets call "*The Great and Terrible day of the Lord.*" It is what Jesus referred to in the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24, when he said...

Matthew 24:22 (ESV)

And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

No one! All the population of the world would have been destroyed. It is a brief, intense period which comes at the close of the last 3-1/2 years of the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 16:1-2

Constant pain affects a person's disposition so that he finds it difficult to get along with other people. Human relations during that period will certainly be at their worst.

It is an awesome thought to consider almost the entire population of the world suffering from a painful malady that nothing can cure. Constant pain affects a person's disposition so that he finds it difficult to get along with other people. Human relations during that period will certainly be at their worst.

Revelation 16:3-7

J Vernon McGee wrote –

This angel, who knows the whole story, now declares that God is right and holy in this act of judgment.

My friend, whatever God does is righteous and holy. If you don't agree with Him, it is too bad. You are wrong, not God. Imagine a little man standing up and saying, concerning the Creator, "I don't think He is doing right." I have a question for the person who would make a statement like that: "What are you going to do about it? In fact, what can you do about it?" If you are not in agreement with God, you had better get in agreement with Him. God is righteous in everything He does.

Many people today do not like to talk about divine judgment. ... In their view... that is not what a god is for. ... A Santa Claus theology that makes God always kind... and never firm... (as many people have tried to do) is not the God of Scripture... but an idol of ones own making.

Heaven gives justification for this terrible judgment: the earth-dwellers have shed the blood of God's people... so it is only right that they should drink blood. ... In God's system of justice... the punishment fits the crime. Pharaoh tried to drown the Jewish boy babies... so it was his own army that eventually drowned in the Red Sea. ... Haman planned to hang Mordecai on the gallows and to exterminate the Jews... but he himself was hanged on the gallows... and his family was exterminated (in the OT Book of Esther.) ... King Saul refused to obey God and slay the Amalekites... so he was slain by an Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:1-16).

Revelation 16:8-9

I have told my students at the community college where I teach... and I have posted on Facebook... scientific research that contradicts – what I believe to be a hoax. ... Folks I believe that today's hype about Global

Warming is a manufactured deception. ... I have gone out on a limb to say that I do not believe it. ... But do you know what...? I guess I do! ... (Well not the kind that Political Correctness is trying to force us all to believe.) ... I don't think that it is happening now... but it will during the second half of the tribulation.

Revelation 16:10-11

The sixth bowl judgment sets up... and makes the seventh and final bowl judgment possible... (the one that brings the return of Christ.) The sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates River. This will allow the armies of the East to gather and prepare for Armageddon. The Armageddon Campaign is the last bowl judgment.

I am going save the Armageddon Campaign for next week. I hope you will return because it is a fascinating study... involving many prophetic passages from the Old Testament. There is so much that God has to say about His covenant people – Israel. For me... this is where it will get very exciting. There is so much detail about how God is going to bring the Nation of Israel's leaders to the truth of Who Jesus Christ is... and how they (and **ALL** Israel)... will cry out to Jesus for Him to return to Earth. ... And you know what...? That is exactly when He does!

So much will happen during the Armageddon Campaign – and I can't wait to show you! ... But the sixth plague opens the door for it all to start happening.

Revelation 16:12-16

Demons will convince kings of the world to go to war against each other. These are probably the other seven kings who had once ruled the world with Antichrist... before he took over. The Euphrates will dry up... and this will make it easier for the Antichrist to assemble his troops together.

In verse 12... the other kings are called “the kings of the east.” Many Bible commentators and prophecy speakers say that these are Chinese... because they are from the East. Then they combine this wording here... “Kings of the East” with the army of 200 million... that we saw in chapter nine. These prophecy writers and speakers declare... since China today boasts an army of 200 million... that the kings of the East... who gather for the Armageddon Campaign are from China. They say China will invade... when the Euphrates River dries up.

But can I tell you something...? We need to develop our understanding by staying in the context... of where these concepts are given. ... The army of 200 million is in chapter nine – where it is dealing with a totally different set of judgments. It is the context of Trumpet judgments. And the army of 200 million never says that they are men. In fact... Revelation nine seems to present them as demons.

The kings of the East... that are mentioned in Revelation 16... are part of the Bowl Judgments – not the trumpet judgments! We cannot ignore their contexts.

Everywhere in Scripture (each and every time)... “east” refers to Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia.) ... I think that these will be kings

from Mesopotamia (the rebuilt city of Babylon... which will be the world's capitol.) It suggests to me that these are the kings who once ruled with Antichrist. ... Now they are driven mad by demonic influence and are assembling forces near Babylon (which is on the banks of the Euphrates... the river that is dried up.)

In Revelation 16:15... it is as though John just can't contain himself... so he interrupts his own message to warn the saints once again who will be alive at that time. ... "When you see this happen... stay awake... stay dressed... keep alert in your faith..."

I have been so impressed since our study of this book... at how Revelation is so full of merciful warning. ... Aren't you?

God wants them... and us... to be ready. Stay awake... stay dressed...!

On Saturday November 5th, 2011, University of Tennessee freshman Derrick Brodus was lying on the couch at his fraternity on Saturday night, waiting for the Tennessee Volunteers college football game to start at 7 P.M. Less than an hour before kickoff, Derrick fumbled for his cell phone as it began to ring. Imagine his surprise as the voice on the other end told him the coach was sending a police escort to get him to the stadium immediately.

"I thought it was a dream," Derrick said. "I was just lying on my couch relaxing, and I answer my phone, and they just tell me that I need to come to the stadium as soon as possible."

Just minutes before that call, Tennessee backup kicker Chip Rhome pulled a muscle during pregame warm-ups. Starting kicker Michael Pardy was

already out, injured in Thursday's practice. One hour before kickoff, and the Volunteers were out of kickers.

Derrick, a freshman, had tried out as a placekicker when he enrolled at Tennessee, but never made the team. But on that Saturday Derrick emerged as the Vols' only option.

Vols coach Derek Dooley told the press, "I said, 'Let's get an APB out on Brodus. It's a good thing he wasn't [intoxicated]. Get him. Just get him here. Give him a Breathalyzer.' Fortunately he didn't do anything bad."

Minutes after Derrick hung up his phone, the police escort arrived at the fraternity to rush him to the stadium. The team's trainer stretched him in the locker room while he put on his pads and a jersey that didn't even have his name on the back.

Early in the game, Derrick was called into duty, and he quickly made the most of his opportunity. Derrick made all three of his extra points, and he kicked a 21-yard field goal at the end of the first half. His team won 24-0.

Back in the locker room after the final whistle, the kicker who began the evening lying on the couch with a bag of chips was celebrated as the hero. The team cheered as Coach Dooley gave Derrick the game ball.

I began this morning by telling you there is a celebration to be ready for that is far better than what made them happy in Chicago this week. ... Once you see next week how all the Old Testament prophecies bring a sharp focus and preciseness of what will happen... you might want to start

celebrating now... for how it will all come together. I sure hope that you will be here next week!

But you know... the rapture can come at any moment. It might come before we can gather again next week. ... Are you dressed and ready...? Those who are ready... will not be subject to these judgments we have been reading about in these two chapters of Revelation this morning. Only those who are not ready will.