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Sermon Notes

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Heavenly Preparation for the Final Wrath of God

Revelation 15:1-8

I. God's Heavenly Preparation of the Day of His Wrath

A. Everything is Meticulously Prepared

1. Jonathan Edwards

In June of 1734, Jonathan Edwards began a sermon with these words:

“It is the manner of God, before he bestows any signal mercy on the people, first to prepare them for it.”

2. The sermon was about Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel... Edwards points out that God had been preparing the Jewish nation for the amazing revival he was about to work among them
3. He had withheld dew and rain from Israel for 3 ½ years...he had brought severe famine on the land; he had raised up an amazing and bold prophet named Elijah who carefully prepared a contest of miraculous power between the true God of Israel and the false god, Baal
4. He gave Elijah the idea of the contest in front of the nation of Israel on the summit of Mt. Carmel... whereby two altars would be built, one for God and one for Baal; and a sacrificial animal laid on each one, and the prophets of Baal would call upon their god, and Elijah would call upon Yahweh... and the god who answered by fire from heaven—he is the true God!
5. All of this was carefully orchestrated by God, carefully lined up, through his servant Elijah...

As Edwards said:

“It is the manner of God, before he bestows any signal mercy on the people, first to prepare them for it.”

6. However, the Book of Revelation makes the opposite point...

“It is the manner of God, before he pours out his just wrath on the wicked of the earth, first to prepare them for it.”

7. Scripture clearly asserts this:

Proverbs 16:4 The LORD works out everything for his own ends-- even the wicked for a day of disaster.

- a. That Proverb shows that God has a careful and meticulous plan to expose the wickedness of the rebellious of the earth and to judge it in a precise and powerful way
- b. God is SLOW TO ANGER...

Exodus 34:6-7 "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished

- c. Romans 9 makes it plain that God BEARS WITH GREAT PATIENCE the wickedness of sinners
- d. However, in that very passage, it says they are PREPARED FOR DESTRUCTION

B. God Has a Meticulous Plan

1. God has planned out very carefully how he will deal with the wicked of the earth
2. He has borne their wickedness with astounding patience... they have flouted his laws, flaunted their freedoms, abused his people, fanned their lusts into a flame, blasphemed his holy name, drank in the blessings of his rain and sunlight without once giving him a word of thanks or praise
3. They have worshiped false gods of various types until everything will give way to the worship of the Beast and his image... they will bow down to Satan and his Antichrist with corrupted hearts
4. As we already saw earlier in Revelation:

Revelation 9:20-21 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood-- idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

5. So God will unleash his meticulously prepared plan of final judgment

6. Already the seven seals have been broken, resulting in a series of escalating judgments
7. These gave way to the seven trumpet judgments resulting in a level of destruction we can scarcely imagine—the destruction of a third of all green and growing things, the turning of a third of the sea into blood, the poisoning of a third of the fresh water on earth, the dimming of the lights of the sky—the sun, moon, and stars; the unleashing of demonic forces tormenting and eventually killing 1/3rd of all human beings on earth... the terrifying seven trumpet judgments
8. But the seven bowls will be the worst thing the earth has ever experienced... the end of everything on earth—God’s wise, just, righteous, and wrath-filled judgments on the sinners of the earth
9. These things were planned in the mind of God from before the world began... now the time will have come to unleash them and bring history to an end

C. Like a Terrifying Doomsday Machine

1. The most devastating weapon in human history—the nuclear bomb—was developed by the Manhattan Project during World War II—the greatest physicists, mathematicians, and engineers the Allies had, sequestered for over three years
2. A total cost of two billion dollars, a total workforce of 120,000... producing the weapon that unleashed the awesome power of the atom
3. The science was precise and complex, the final effect was unspeakable
4. On July 16, 1945, when the first nuclear blast in history was detonated at the Trinity Site near Alamogordo, New Mexico, the man in charge of the project, J. Robert Oppenheimer quoted a piece of Hindu poetry

“I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds”

5. The atomic fireball over Hiroshima was devastating and awesome, killing 90,000 people in one explosion
6. But it is as nothing compared to what these seven bowls will do, the greatest devastation the earth will ever have experienced
7. Revelation 15 is merely an introduction to that wrath, that outpouring of judgment
8. It shows that careful preparation and the source of the final judgments—how they flow from the character and purposes of Almighty God

II. The Heavenly Display of the Seven Angels (vs. 1)

Revelation 15:1 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues-- last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

A. A Sign in Heaven

1. This chapter unveils a heavenly scene for John
2. He calls it a “great and marvelous sign”
 - a. Signs point to something yet in the future
 - b. When Jesus’ miracles of healing were called “signs and wonders”, they pointed to the coming Kingdom of God, where there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain
 - c. But this “great and marvelous sign” points to the coming judgment of God on the wicked human race

B. Seven Angels, Seven Plagues

1. This chapter is the shortest in the Book of Revelation... a brief introduction to the seven bowl judgments
2. These seven bowl judgments will be revealed in detail in the next chapter— Revelation 16
3. The seven angels will be God’s chosen instruments to pour out these bowls of judgment on the surface of the earth
4. The number seven is well familiar to us by now... and this last series of judgments—seven bowls—completes the cycles of three sevens: seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls

C. Seven LAST Plagues... the Completion of the Wrath of God

Revelation 15:1 seven angels with the seven last plagues-- last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

1. The wrath of God is a perfect expression of his justice and his passionate nature
2. But it is not his home base... it is a necessary reaction to the existence of evil and his love for his people and his creation
3. BUT these terrifying judgments are his “strange work” and his “alien task” (Isaiah 28:21)

4. With the pouring out of these seven bowls on planet earth, God's wrath will be finished for redemptive history... but of course, it will eternally be on display as we saw in Revelation 14

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

III. The Heavenly Celebration by the Victors (vs. 2-4)

Revelation 15:2-4 And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God³ and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.⁴ Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

A. The Heavenly Vision is One of Triumphant Worship

1. The victors who have survived the terrors of the reign of Antichrist are assembled in heaven to worship God who is about to destroy their enemies with an overwhelming display of power
2. They will sing a song of victory, celebrating the character and mighty deeds of our God

B. The Sea of Glass

1. For the second time in the Book of Revelation, we have the sea of glass—or the crystal sea
2. We first saw it in Revelation 4

Revelation 4:6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

3. Here, however, the sea of glass was MIXED WITH FIRE
4. The sea is a direct contrast with the turbulent sea from which the beast emerged... that primordial and churning ocean which depicts the restlessness of a world of nations at war with God and with each other

Daniel 7:2-3 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.³ Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

5. Instead, in heaven, there is a crystal sea... as peaceful as glass... a vast expanse portrayed again and again in the visions of the prophets

a. First seen on Mount Sinai

Exodus 24:9-11 Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

b. Also seen in the vision of God by Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:22 Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome....

6. The sea of glass, clear as crystal, was before the throne of God

7. Only here, unlike in Revelation 4, this sea is also mixed with FIRE

a. The fire must represent the judgement of God, that which flows from his throne

b. As in Daniel 7, a river of fire flows from the throne of God onto his wicked enemies on earth

c. There is PEACEFULNESS in heaven, but a fiery determination to purge the universe of all those who do evil

8. And ON THIS sea walk the triumphant saints

a. The NIV says “beside the sea”

b. But it seems more likely they are walking on it, as Jesus once walked on the water

c. The perfectly peaceful and transparent sea is under their feet as they stand to praise the God who saved them

C. The Triumphant Saints

1. They are described as conquering heroes

CSB Revelation 15:2 I also saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had won the victory from the beast, his image, and the number of his name, were standing on the sea of glass with harps from God.

2. Remember that the rewards offered to each of the seven churches were “to him who overcomes”... to him who CONQUERS... who is a victor

Revelation 2:7 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:11 He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

3. Also remember Paul's triumphant statement:

Romans 8:35-37 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we are being slaughtered all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

4. The specific triumph? Over the Beast and his image and the number of his name
 - a. This hearkens to what we have learned from Revelation 13
 - b. The Beast is the Antichrist, the world ruler who will set himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be god...
 - c. The False Prophet set up an image to honor him, and forced everyone on planet earth to bow down and worship the image
 - d. He also required everyone, great and small to receive a mark on their forehead or hand enabling them to buy or sell... it was a mark of allegiance, even of worship for the Beast
 - e. If you refused, you would be put to death... it seems by BEHEADING
5. These triumphant Saints were willing to stand firm and lay down their lives for Jesus Christ, unafraid of the Beast

Revelation 12:11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

D. Their Worship Song

1. These saints are depicted as standing on the crystal sea, the sea mingled with blood
2. They are holding golden harps, musical instruments given them BY GOD!!!... along with the trumpets, they are the only instruments mentioned in the Book of Revelation... what a privileged gift, given directly from God... he wants them to SING
3. They are singing a song of triumph... the song of Moses and of the Lamb
 - a. Moses is called the "servant of the Lord"

- b. Servant because he did the Master's bidding
- 4. The Song of Moses must refer to the triumphant song sung by Israel after the Red Sea crossing, written down for us in Exodus 15
- 5. Exodus is the story of the great deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt... God poured out terrible plagues on Pharaoh and on all Egypt to deliver his children from slavery
- 6. Pharaoh and his terrifying and mighty army pursued Israel out into the desert; they trapped Israel up against the Red Sea; there seemed to be no escape. No way that Israel could escape being slaughtered at their hands
- 7. But God opened up a way through the Red Sea; he caused a mighty east wind to blow all night and opened up a highway through darkness and the deeps and death up to life on the other side
- 8. God hardened Pharaoh's heart and he pursued Israel into the Red Sea... but the walls of water on each side crashed down on them and killed them all
- 9. On the other side, the Moses and the Jewish nation looked upon the destruction of their enemies and sang a song of victory

Exodus 15:1-3 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. ² The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. ³ The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.

- 10. HOWEVER: this song is called the song of Moses and of the Lamb
 - a. The Lamb of course is Jesus Christ
 - b. We already heard the earlier song of worship sung to honor the Lamb of God in Revelation 5:

Revelation 5:9-10 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Revelation 5:12 "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

The Song of Moses and of the Lamb is a combination of all the mighty acts of God in history delivering his people from sin and from their enemies

Here in Revelation 15, these are the special words:

Revelation 15:3-4 "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. ⁴ Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

11. The great and marvelous deeds of God are celebrated
 - a. These are all the deeds of miracles and of mighty acts of judgment depicted in Revelation and indeed throughout history
12. The character of God is also celebrated
 - a. "LORD GOD ALMIGHTY"... he is the sovereign ruler of all the universe
 - b. "Just and true are his ways" ... all of God's judgments are just and true... God is no tyrant, but acts perfectly according to justice
 - c. "KING OF THE AGES": God's reign is eternal... unlike the Beast, who reigns for 3 ½ years... as Nebuchadnezzar said:

Daniel 4:34 His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

13. Who will not FEAR YOU and BRING GLORY TO YOUR NAME?
 - a. To these victorious saints, it seems incredible that anyone would not fear this God whose powerful word created and constantly sustains the entire universe!
 - b. The reasons given are three
 - i) FOR you alone are holy
 - ii) FOR all nations will come and worship before you
 - iii) FOR your righteous acts have been revealed
14. God alone is holy = there is an infinite gap between God the creator and all creatures... also God is perfectly PURE and hates sin
15. All nations will come and worship before God because God deserves it and has mandated it

Psalm 22:27-28 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.

16. God's righteous acts revealed

- a. Throughout all of redemptive history... the miracles of the Exodus, the actions surrounding Israel's history... but especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- b. And now, at the end of human history, God's righteous acts of wrath and judgment are being revealed—the seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls

SO... who would be so insane as NOT TO FEAR YOU, O God and come bow down before you?????

IV. The Heavenly Source of the Wrath of God (vs. 5-8)

A. The Song of the Victors Gives the Theological Source of God's Wrath

1. His person: Almighty God, holy Creator... the one who upholds his name and his glory and his reputation
2. His commitment to his people: he will act to vindicate his suffering people, to rescue the Bride of Christ from the vicious tyrant who is assaulting her

B. The Rest of the Chapter LOCATES the Seven Bowls as Flowing from the Heavenly Tabernacle of God

Revelation 15:5 After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened.

1. John is able with prophetic eyes to LOOK INTO the heavenly holy of holies
2. This most holy place was where only the High Priest could go, and only once a year and never without blood
3. The heavenly temple is the perfect and real dwelling place of God of which Moses's tabernacle and Solomon's temple were only types and shadows
4. John is able to GAZE INTO the heavenly temple... also called the Tabernacle of the Testimony

C. "Tabernacle of the Testimony"

1. This refers to the Ark of the Covenant, that holy golden box where the Ten Commandments were placed
2. These were the actual stone tablets on which the words of the Ten Commandments were inscribed with the actual finger of God

3. It is on the basis of this perfect Law of the Lord that all the judgments will flow from heaven to earth
4. God's holy laws have been violated... every one of them broken daily by the sinful human race

I am the Lord your God... you shall have no other gods beside me

You shall not make any idols or worship any idols

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy

Honor your father and mother

You shall not murder

You shall not commit adultery

You shall not steal

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor

And as Jesus summarized them all:

Matthew 22:37-39 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

5. From this heavenly Tabernacle of the Testimony, John is able to gaze at the righteous and holy character of God, his COMMANDMENTS for the human race
6. It is because of these transgressions of his holy law that all the judgments are flowing... it is OUT OF THIS TABERNACLE that the wrath will flow

D. The Seven Holy Angels Emerge

Revelation 15:6 Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.

1. They are deputized to deliver the seven plagues

2. They are dressed in clean shining linen, symbolizing their perfect holiness and purity
3. It is to purify the earth from all evil that they are about to be sent
4. They have golden sashes around their chests... just like Jesus did in Revelation 1, as he moved among the seven golden lampstands
5. They are emerging from the Tabernacle of the Testimony to bring the curses of the Law of God on all the unforgiven transgressors of it

E. The Living Creatures Give them the Bowls

Revelation 15:7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.

1. The four living creatures were introduced in Revelation 4

Revelation 4:7-8 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

2. They represent all of creation that has been GROANING under the curse of sin since God subjected it because of Adam's sin
3. They deliver the deadliest substance the universe has ever seen... bowls FILLED TO THE BRIM with the wrath of God

Illus. Smallpox virus... a very small sample of the live virus is still kept in research laboratories in a few places in the earth... it is the deadliest plague the world has ever seen

An estimated 300 million died in the 20th century alone from smallpox; researchers estimate that over the history of the world, half a billion people have died from this one virus, this one disease... the deadliest plague the world has ever known

In the 19th century, Edward Jenner developed the vaccine that would eventually make the disease obsolete

In 1984 it was agreed that smallpox be kept in only two WHO approved laboratories, in Russia and America.

Today these stocks still exist at the State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology (Vector) in Koltsovo, Russia, and at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, in the United States. The World

Health Assembly has passed resolutions to destroy the stocks, but each time the date of destruction has been postponed to allow ongoing research. In May 1999 it was decided to postpone destruction until 2002. The Americans announced in November 2001 that they have now decided not to destroy their stocks.

Imagine if someone wanted to transport a small sample of this terrifying virus from Russia to some other country...

That's how I picture the living creatures passing on the BOWLS OF PLAGUE to the seven angels

They are going to pour them out on the earth and the results will be overwhelming

Whereas in the seven trumpets, only ONE THIRD of people were affected, this time it will be the whole human race

F. The Smoke of God Fills the Temple

Revelation 15:8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Seen also with Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple:

Exodus 40:34-35 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

1 Kings 8:10-12 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. ¹¹ And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple. ¹² Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud

1. God is UNAPPROACHABLE

1 Timothy 6:15-16 God will bring about in his own time-- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.

2. This cloud makes God unapproachable in his WRATH... while his wrath is being poured out on the earth, no one can approach him, no one can stop him

Isaiah 43:13 No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"

Moses interceded for Israel:

Exodus 32:12 Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

But God will hear no intercession... the time of his wrath has come and no one can stop it

Isaiah 14:27 For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

V. Applications

A. Flee to Christ NOW!!

1. When that cloud fills the tabernacle and the time of his wrath has come, the day of salvation will have ended forever
2. NOW IS THE DAY!

B. We Christians Need to Get this Message Out While There's Time

2 Peter 3:9-10 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

C. Understand How Patiently God Has Waited... How Long He Has Prepared the Day of His Wrath

Romans 9:22 God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction?

D. Understand Also How God Has Shown Mercy to Us in Christ!

Romans 9:23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory

E. Worship God Based on What This Passage Says

The victors were singing a song of triumph... we were redeemed to praise his glorious grace!!

Revelation 15:4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."