

15 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.

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. ³ 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!

⁴ 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.”

⁵ After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶ and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ 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,⁸ 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.

On Vision radio, I sometimes hear a song by “Jars of Clay” called “Two Hands”. And in it, there’s a line that goes “*I have a broken disposition, I’m a liar, who thirsts for the truth*”. That’s a **very** honest confession of something that many people struggle with – it’s something that **I** struggle with:

- It’s a **desire** for good – a **desire** for truth and justice, but an incapability of being good...
- It’s wanting to live by the Spirit, but the flesh keeps getting in the way;
- Longing to live by faith, but just not always trusting God quite as much as we need to be trusting God.

And in the first verse of that same song, it says:

*I am a house that is divided,
In my heart and in my mind.
I use one hand to pull you closer
The other to push you away,*

If I had two hands, doing the same thing.....

Now, I wouldn’t dare to speak on your behalf, but I know **I** have a broken disposition – **I’m** a liar who thirsts for the truth. **I’m** a house that is divided – in **my** heart and in **my** mind... I

use one hand to pull God closer, and the other to push Him away.... And my faith is weak...

Today, I want to talk about faith,,,,,, only most times when we talk about faith, it's about faith that God will provide something; or faith that I will be healed; or faith that I will be saved; or faith that God will get me through this circumstance; or faith that God will bring a sinner to repentance....

But today, I want to talk about faith in a way that you **may** have never considered it ever before: Faith that the wrath of God, is not only necessary, but good, and just – Faith that the wrath of God is not only right, but that the wrath of God is wonderful....

Because of our broken disposition, sometimes it's hard for us to see “God's wrath”, as something that is wonderful... With one hand we pull God closer, but with the other, we push Him away – Oh God, we love Your love, but we're not so sure about your wrath...

And I reckon this is partly because we rarely get to see righteous wrath demonstrated in our world.

Because of our human brokenness, even where someone **is** responsible for punishing wrongdoing:

- whether it be a parent disciplining a child; or
- a judge sentencing a criminal; or
- a teacher or headmaster punishing a pupil; or

- a nation defending itself against an enemy....

we so rarely get to see righteous wrath ...

Usually, one of 2 things happens:

- either the wrongdoer doesn't get what they deserve, because we feel it's not right to punish them that severely – after all, we've all done something similar, haven't we??? ; or
- the punishment that gets metered out, is more of a lashing-out in an uncontrolled fit of rage, and it's got nothing to do with righteous judgment at all – it's revenge; or malice; or spite – It becomes an expression of our **own** unrighteous anger...

And so, to use the example of a parent disciplining a child:
An angry parent can very quickly lose their temper, and beat the child, and punish them, way beyond what their actions deserved...

Years before I became a parent, I heard a wise man say something once, and it's always stuck with me:

*Never discipline a child from a place of rage. It's OK to do it while you're angry, but only if your anger is under control. If by disciplining your child, it's making you feel better (or if it's giving you **any** sense of satisfaction), stop it immediately.*

And of course the flip-side of this, is many parents today feel that **all** physical punishment is abuse, and so the punishment that **is** given, isn't anywhere near what is deserved. And we are fast becoming a society where children (who have now grown into adults) have never been made to suffer the full consequences of their actions... And we wonder why lawlessness is increasing.

This is a limitation of our human brokenness. We want to see justice. As a community, we demand justice... But because we ourselves are sinful creatures, rarely do we ever get to witness, a righteous demonstration of wrath...

But God isn't limited like we are...

God alone, is Holy. Just and true, are **His** ways... And when God punishes the wicked, it is **not** an uncontrollable fit of rage... In Ezekiel, God tells us that He gets no pleasure from the death of the wicked¹.

And here, in Rev 15, when John is describing the wrath of God, this is what he saw: he **saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire**. Do you know what that image tells me??? A sea of glass, is telling me that there is no chaos here. There is no fit of rage here... But it's mingled with fire. And fire is a symbol of judgment. The wrath of God, is not an uncontrolled fit of rage...

And gathered around this sea of glass, witnessing this righteous wrath, are **those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name**,
By the way, do you know how they conquered the beast and its image???? A couple of chapters ago, we learned that anyone who didn't bow down to antichrist, was killed... And this is how they conquered the beast – they remained faithful to Jesus, even unto death...

And here they are, they're praising God, because God is about to unleash His wrath...

And this is where I feel many of us have a broken disposition: Even the people of the world, call out for justice,,,,, but how many of us (even as Christians) really want the day of God's wrath to come??? And this is where we, as disciples of Jesus, need to be a people of faith...

When it comes to "wrath", we've probably only ever seen the injustices of how wrath is expressed in the world..., and so we're not sure that we really want the day of God's wrath to come...

And yet,

- By faith, and by experience, we know that God is love.
- By faith, and by experience, we know that God is a God of justice.
- We **already** know that God is a God of mercy – He's already provided a way for us to **escape** the day of His wrath – (repent of our sin, submit to Jesus as Lord, and receive forgiveness in Jesus Christ).
- And so by faith, we trust that it is not only necessary, but that it is good and wonderful, that those who reject God's mercy, do not escape His wrath.

In Revelation 15 & 16, we've come to the 7 bowls of God's wrath, and this is the final expression of God's wrath on the earth. And before we read chapter 16, I want us (in faith), to accept, that God's wrath, on the earth, is great and amazing – it's wonderful... , because that's what's proclaimed in

Chapter 15. And until we accept chapter 15, we're not ready to move on to chapter 16.

Now, we have to understand, that as we come to Chapters 15 & 16, there will be no more conversions. Those who haven't yet turned to God, have hardened their hearts so much against Him, there will be no more salvations. V8 says that **no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished**. And I think that's telling us that the door's shut – the time for mercy has ended, and the time for judgment has come.

So, by faith, will we accept that the wrath of God, against those who reject His mercy, is very good????

OK, let's read chapter 16:

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

² So the **first** angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

³ The **second** angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

⁴ The **third** angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.

⁵ And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

"Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.

⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!"

⁷ And I heard the altar saying,

"Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"

⁸ The **fourth** angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

¹⁰ The **fifth** angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish

¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

¹² The **sixth** angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. ¹³ And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. ¹⁴ For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. 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!") ¹⁶ And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

¹⁷ The **seventh** angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. ²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they

cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Righto, we're always going to have trouble understanding the book of the Revelation, until we understand that it is **not** a start to finish sequence of events.

*Once again, I'll use Phillip Jenson's analogy of the instant replay that we have with our sporting events ... In footy, somebody makes a spectacular try, and we don't only see it **once** on the TV – they show it 4; 5; 6 times, from different angles, shot with different cameras... Each time we're seeing something different, but it's recording the one event... And that's what we have in the book of Revelation...*

Back in chapters 8, 9 & 11, we encountered trumpets 5, 6 & 7, which were also called “the 3 woes” – they're called woes because these judgments are going to be **far** worse than the previous ones.

The **final** trumpet (by the way) – the last of the 3 woes – that which is **so** terrible for people of the world – we don't see it as a woe... It's the return of Jesus – it's a time of joy for Christians. But for those who have rejected Jesus all their lives, the return of Jesus is the **last** thing they want to experience...

And now, the 7 bowls of the wrath of God, are another camera-angle – they're giving us another picture, of these 3 woes...

So, what new things do we learn from this new camera angle?

1. Well firstly, we learn that this is the **final** judgment of God. We should already have a pretty good idea of that, but I think this is the first time we are told this is the final judgment of God.
2. Secondly, we also learn, that despite this obvious judgment of God, the wicked refuse to repent.
 - We're told that they curse God for the plagues.
 - They curse God for their pain.
 - They curse God for their sores...So they know that God's behind it,
 - But they did **not** repent of their deeds, and
 - they did **not** give God glory...

This is just like when the plagues of God came upon Egypt... And just like Pharaoh hardened **his** heart, so too, will the wicked harden their hearts.

1. The first plague was **harmful and painful sores** ...
But these sores only **came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.**,
(in other words – everyone got sores, but Christians)
2. The second plague was the sea became like blood, and everything in it died
3. The third plague was like the second, but it happened to the fresh water supplies of the world.

4. The fourth plague was the sun became extra hot...
Sounds like Global warming, doesn't it???

*You know as well as I do, the relentless media-driven campaign to put a stop to global warming – the campaign to **halt** climate change...* This would have to be, the height of human arrogance – for us to believe that the ability to change the climate of the Earth, is in **our** hands... Well, here we're given a picture of global warming, and we won't be able to do a thing about it – it's God's doing.

5. The fifth plague was darkness

6. The sixth plague was the drying up of the great river Euphrates. So what? – many rivers have dried up before... Well, this a symbol of barriers to invasion becoming ineffective...

7. And then the seventh bowl, is the global upheaval, which heralds the end of the world.

- Storms
- Earthquakes that change the face of the globe so much that Google maps won't be able to keep up to date
- Hailstones that weigh 40-45kg
- Cities are destroyed
- Islands disappear into the sea....

So, what is the result of all this? Well, the wicked curse God, they don't repent, and they won't give Him glory.

Satan and his antichrist, and his false prophet, send out their demonic representatives, performing signs, to entice world leaders to unite their armies against God... (and we'll learn more about **Armageddon** in a few weeks time)

The Angels are praising God for His justice – the wicked are getting what they deserve...

But what are the **Christians** doing? Well, those who have already died, are praising God for His righteous wrath, and those who are still alive, are remembering the words of Jesus:
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!")

Last week, in chapter 14, we discovered that as the day of the Lord approaches, how we live, matters. And as we've worked our way through this book of Revelation, we've been discovering that Christians are going to suffer terrible persecution, **and** there will be a very subtle (but strong) temptation to compromise...

But Jesus is going to make a surprise return – oh, it's not going to be a surprise that He turns up – we know that He's coming – we just don't know when. Even Christians will be surprised on the day that Jesus returns. And so we are urged to stay awake, and to stay dressed...

Does that mean we need to prop our eyes open with matchsticks, and never change our clothes just in case Jesus chooses that moment to return??? (If so, Christians are going

to get very tired and very stinky). Of course not... It's a metaphor – it's telling us to be ready. We don't know when Jesus is returning, so **get** ready, and **stay** ready... When the final judgment begins, there will be no more opportunities for mercy, so **get** ready, and **stay** ready.

And as with chapter 14, this is also a call to endurance. Remain faithful to Jesus. And live a life of **obedience** to Christ – that's what we learned in chapter 14ⁱⁱ.

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The final judgment is coming. It's a wonderful thing, provided we get ready, and stay ready.

Let's pray:

"Great and amazing are Your deeds,

O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are Your ways,

O King of the nations!

⁴ 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."

Lord, Your wrath, is a wonderful thing,
For in it, we begin to understand,
The immensity of your mercy.

Today as we consider the coming of Your wrath,
Help us to, in faith, know the goodness and the justice of Your
wrath.

And Lord, by the power of Your Holy Spirit,
Help us to remain strong in the faith.
Help us to be ready, for when Jesus returns.

And Lord, may we never give up – while there is still time,
Proclaiming the mercy of God,
In Jesus Christ,
Amen.

ⁱ Ezekiel 18:23 (ESV)

²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

Ezekiel 33:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

^{ii 14:12} Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.