

Revelation 15:2-4

Singing the Song of the Lamb

The saints who overcome sing of the Lamb's victory.

When do you sing the victory song?

King Ahab of Israel, an otherwise foolish king of Israel, replied wisely to his enemy, Ben-Hadad of Syria, when Ben-Hadad boasted that he would reduce Israel to the dust. Ahab said, "Tell him, 'Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself as he who takes it off.'"

Don't sing of victory until you have it.

When should the Christian sing the victory song? Do we wait until we have died and gone to heaven? Do we wait until Jesus has come to make all things new? When should we sing the victory song? I say we sing as soon as the victory is assured. Even while battles lay ahead, when the victory is assured we should sing the victory song. They are an encouragement to those in the trenches. Even if I give my life in this battle, I do so knowing that it is not a lost cause, the victory is already assured to me.

Setting: Martyrs who have conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name – namely, those who were sealed with God's seal and thus refused to believe the lies of the satanic trinity of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They conquered by maintaining their testimony about Jesus Christ, even in the face of the world's hostility. They have the "harps of God" in their hands. These are instruments that are designed exclusively for the worship of God. They stand on a sea as of glass mingled with fire. The sea represents the hostile world out of which the beast arose. The fire indicates the wrath of God that consumes His enemies, the beast and all who follow him. The saints are not just standing beside the sea, like the Israelites stood by the Red Sea following the exodus from Egypt. They are standing on the sea, a strong statement about their conquest.

This worship scene comes at the end of a series of judgments that ends with the final judgment and at the beginning of another series of judgments that also culminates at the final judgment. So in the midst of the outpouring of the wrath of God, we have an idyllic scene of the saints in worship of the One who saved them through judgment.

We sing of His great and amazing deeds (3a).

Teaching: "Great and Amazing" is found in only one other place in Revelation, 15.1, where it describes the seven angels with the seven plagues. The song of Moses in Deut 32 says that Moses will ascribe "greatness to our God." The song warns of God's judgment on the faithless and unbelieving. "Great and amazing" seems to point to the overwhelming, staggering, judgment of the Lord God the Almighty. The wrath of God poured into the beast and those who worship the beast makes one stand back and marvel

at the greatness of God (cf. Psalm 111.2-4, which extols God's great and marvelous works in the exodus as His covenant faithfulness to Israel).

This wrath was first displayed in the cross of Christ, where the Lamb's blood stained the pavement, the wood, and the earth He created. But the day comes when He will ride forth on a white horse and clothed in a robe dipped in blood to tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

All of God's attributes are glorious. And the saints praise Him for the display of each one, including His justice, which is displayed in the outpouring of His wrath.

Correction: In popular parlance, the wrath of God is absurd. Even among Bible believing Christians the wrath of God is minimized. Many Christians are embarrassed by the doctrines of judgment and hell. The biblical portrait of God as a Judge is ridiculed by the world and marginalized by the church. Yet warnings of God's judgment and wrath were often on the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the apostles sound many warnings in their sermons and in their letters concerning God's judgment and final wrath.

To preach God's love apart from God's righteous anger toward sin and sinners is to reduce God's love to mere sentimentality and to pare the attributes of God so that He is no longer a God to be revered, only One to be appreciated.

Training: One way to overcome the temptation to be embarrassed about the great and amazing wrath of God is to sing songs celebrating the attributes of God that point to His greatness. Millard Erickson discusses God's attributes under the headings "Greatness" and "Goodness." While this is a bit arbitrary and oversimplified, it is helpful to make sure that we worship God, not only for His love, mercy, grace, and faithfulness, but also for His truth, justice, power, sovereignty, and righteous judgment. We need songs like "Holy, Holy, Holy" to remind us that God is utterly opposed to everything that defiles. We need songs like "O Worship the King" to remind us that God will put down every rebellious act against His authority. We need songs like "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" to remind us that "though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little Word shall fell him!" Meditate on these attributes of the greatness of God. Sing in celebration of His awesome, terrible power and righteous judgment.

Encouragement: While this is the song the saints sing when they have overcome the beast, it is also the song the saints sing while still in the fight. You will find strength to fight sin in your own life and unrighteousness in your world as you celebrate the great and amazing deeds of the Lord God the Almighty. When you train your heart to fear the Lord, you are training your heart not to fear man.

We sing of His just and true ways (3b).

Teaching: His "just and true ways" are praised in Deuteronomy 32.4. Beale notes that "God's 'righteous and true ways' in 15.3 are parallel with 'great and marvelous works,' showing that God's sovereign acts are not demonstrations of raw power but moral expressions of His just character." I would also add

that, in light of Psalm 111, they are also expressions of His covenant faithfulness. These are not just disinterested acts of justice, they are also the fulfillment of covenantal obligations toward His people.

Note that the “ways” are said explicitly to be “judgments” in 16.7 and 19.2. This suggests that “ways” should be understood in this context to refer to God’s judgments, as the “great and amazing” deeds refer to the meeting out of judgment in wrath in the parallel line.

Correction: One of the reasons that Christians are squeamish about the doctrine of Divine retribution is that Hell just seems too harsh. We look at God’s judgment as not fitting the crime. But one of the themes of Revelation is the *lex talionis*. We know this judicial principle in terms of “eye for eye; tooth for tooth.” The principle basically means that the punishment must fit the crime. If someone knocks out your tooth, justice does not demand capital punishment. The offender must suffer a similar loss and the offended must be adequately compensated. This is the principle of justice that God operates under. Thus His judgments are always just.

But here is the rub. We don’t think of sin as being all that serious. How can eating a single fruit from a forbidden tree be worthy of spiritual and eternal death? This is why we must understand two things. First, sin is an act of rebellion against authority. Rebellion sets two parties in opposition. When we sin we are opposing God. Second, the severity of rebellion depends on the majesty of the government being opposed. If I rebel against my parents and break their rules, I will suffer consequences related to their government and sphere of authority – the home. If I rebel against my boss the consequences will be more extensive because he has a larger sphere of authority than my home. If I rebel against my government the consequences have the potential of being fatal, because rebellion against my nation’s governmental authority threatens to destabilize many lives. When we consider God’s government we see that it is infinite (having no spatial boundaries) and eternal (having no time limits). God’s government sustains all of life, indeed all of creation. God’s government exists before space and time among the persons of the Trinity, as the Father has always been Father, and the Son has always been Son, submitting to the Father’s will. Now, when you sin, remember that you are rebelling against this most majestic government. So what may be deemed as the smallest infraction incurs an eternally severe penalty because of the majesty of the One offended.

If a person’s sins are not atoned in the propitiation of Christ’s death, then justice demands the severe penalty of Hell. So, Hell is not an overreaction, but a perfectly just penalty for rebellion against the King of the nations.

Let me say a brief word about Hell and God’s covenant faithfulness to His people. When God makes His gracious covenant with His people, He obligates Himself to them. In fact, He swears by His own Name to confirm His fidelity to His people. He promises to protect them and to vindicate them when they are unjustly judged by the world and mistreated. So, part of the evidence that God brings out against unbelievers on the day of judgment is how they treated His people (Matt 25.31-46; Rev 16.6; 18.20, 24). This is why the saints sing that God’s judgments are “true.” The truth relates to the covenantal promises that are upheld with integrity when God vindicates His saints and afflicts those who afflicted them.

Training: Meditate on the angry rebellion that sin represents. Meditate on the filth of sin. Meditate on the hatred of God's glory that sin represents. Do this, not for self-loathing purposes, but so that you will understand the just and true judgment of God in casting the unbelievers in the lake of fire.

Encouragement: You don't need to worry that the wrongs you suffer will somehow go unanswered. God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." We don't have to exact a penalty from every person who wrongs us. We can show them compassion and mercy and appeal to them to repent, knowing that they will either repent (in which case their sins are justly paid in the cross of Christ) or they will be damned for eternity by a just Judge. Praise God and sing of His perfect justice and faithfulness to you.

We sing of His right and guarantee to be worshiped (4).

Teaching: Verse 4 begins with an allusion to Jeremiah 10.7. "Who will not fear You, O King of the Nations?" Jeremiah was contrasting the LORD with all of the false God's of the nations. The false gods are impotent, like a scarecrow in the field that must be carried from one corner to another to scare away the birds. "But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation" (Jer 10.10). Jeremiah affirmed "there is none like you" (10.7). The saints concur: "for You alone are holy." The beast and the false prophet had used signs and wonders to deceive people into worshiping the beast. Many did worship the beast and give their allegiance to him, receiving his mark on their hand or head. But the saints refused to acknowledge the beast or receive his mark. They maintained that only God has the right to be worshiped because He is incomparably holy. No other being is in a class with God. On two occasions in Revelation John is tempted to worship his angelic guide (19.10; 22.8-9). Both times the angel rebukes John and explains that he is more on par with humans than he is with God ("I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus"); therefore, it is only right to "worship God." The highest archangel in heaven is still a creature. God is distinct as the Creator of all.

Not only does God have the right to be worshiped as the only true and holy God, but He also has the guarantee to be worshiped. "All nations will come and worship You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed." Some will be converted and worship God with a willing heart. Others will remain recalcitrant until they are brought to their knees at the final judgment. Paul reminds us "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2.10-11). The very next chapter, in a flash back to the time before the beast is vanquished, tells us "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. . . . People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds." Similarly, in chapter 9, after the blast of the sixth trumpet he says "the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (9.20-21).

But those who refuse to give the Lamb the worship that He is worthy of in this life, will bow before Him as those who have been conquered by His judgment.

Correction: The theme of worship calls for both celebration and reverence. We often choose one or the other.

Training: All of life is to be unbroken worship to God. There are worship practices that are designed to focus us exclusively on God and His mighty, salvific works. Singing is a primary act of worship that focuses our minds and affections on the LORD. Our songs should extol the uniqueness of God and the perfection of His works. As you learn songs try to find the places in the Bible that the song alludes to and study those Scriptures. This will make the song much more meaningful to you.

Encouragement: Bob Kauflin tells the story of a Christian woman who spent time serving God in south Africa. "While visiting a health clinic, she was deeply moved by the sound of the local Zulu women singing. Their harmonies were hauntingly beautiful. With tears in her eyes, she asked a friend if she knew the translation of the words. 'Sure,' her friend replied. 'If you boil the water, you won't get dysentery.'"

Music alone can affect the mind and heart. But we need more than moving music. We need songs that will build up by pointing us to the glory of God.

Psalm 47.6 "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!"

Kauflin

God-Glorifying Emotion

Edwards: "The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections. There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections."

Not emotionalism, but emotions. Truth and Passion. Doctrine and Devotion. Mind and Heart.

God's Work in Us

God will rejoice over us with singing Zeph 3.17 "He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing."

Jesus sang a hymn with His disciples before going to the cross (Matthew 26.30)

The Holy Spirit puts songs in believers hearts as He fills them Eph 5.18-19 "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart."

Reminds Of Truth About God

Deuteronomy 31.19-21 of the Song of Moses in Deut 32 “Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. . . . And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring).”

Josh’s additional note

New Songs Express Vital Experiences of God