

## REV 15:2-4—VICTORY

**INTRO:** Last week when we looked at **Rev 6** we dealt with the issue of evil. Today, we will be in **Rev 15:2-4**, and we will consider the end of that story. It is important that we do this, because on our own we are incapable of seeing much beyond our present, earthly circumstances. Paul puts it well in **1 Cor 13**: Now **“we know in part and we prophesy in part . . . now we see in a mirror dimly.”**

But the Bible tells us the end of the story. We can have confidence in the Bible because Jesus claimed to be God himself come to earth. And he said he would prove it by doing something no one who is merely a man can do, namely, rise from the dead. He did that and is alive today. Jesus' rising from the dead validates who he is and everything he said. He accepted the Bible as God's own word. He gave John the visions that comprise the book of Revelation. So we can have confidence in what the Bible says.

This is very practical. It's not necessarily easy, but if we can see the end of the story, it can give us the perspective, the strength, and the will both to face hard times as people of hope and not despair, and also to begin living like the people we are going to become. **[READ REV 15:2-4]**

**O/S:** We're going to look at this passage in two ways: (1) the details and symbols; and (2) the principles and applications for us.

### **I. THE DETAILS AND SYMBOLS**

We need to remember that the book of Revelation is a book of symbols. A symbol is taking a physical thing—a sea of glass; fire; a beast—to picture or mean something else, either an idea, an entity, or something. Also, the book of Revelation was written to the church in order to explain to the church how God is dealing with the world; Revelation calls the church to persevere in its struggle with the powers of evil, and comforts and encourages the church because Christ is victor. It is a book to and for the church.

v.2 talks about **“those who had been victorious over the beast.”** These may be martyrs only, but I think those being talked about represent the entire church which is shown victorious in heaven. We know that because multiple times in **chs.2-3** Jesus gives promises to **“he who overcomes.”** Those promises apply to every Christian. The same word for “overcome” used in **chs.2-3** is used in here and is translated “conquered” in the ESV and “victorious” in the NASB. So I think all Christians are in view here.

Additionally, this is not the first time the book of Revelation has pictured the church in heaven. Similar scenes appear in **7:9; 14:1; 19:1; and 20:4**. That shouldn't be too surprising since **Eph 2:6** tells us that Christ **“raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places,”** and **Phil 3:20** tells us that **“our citizenship is in heaven.”** That is our true home.

v.2 also talks about how the saints are victorious over **“the beast and his image and the number of his name.”** “The beast” is primarily talked about in **Rev 13** which talks about a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. Many people apply the “beast” imagery to a supposed end-time individual, but the Bible always applies beast imagery to empires, forces, or entities that transcend the individual. The “beast” can be present everywhere that Satan is at work in governments, religions, and cultures. The beast is akin to Babylon the great in **Rev 17-18**. When we talked about that some time ago, we saw that Babylon the great is a worldwide anti-Christian economic, cultural, and religious system with Satan as the “power behind the throne.” Since “the beast” represents a worldwide anti-Christian force, then those who have overcome the beast must represent the worldwide church.

v.2 refers to **“a sea of glass”** and shows the church **“standing on the sea of glass.”** What's going on here? The “sea of glass” was referred to in **4:6** which says **“before the throne [of God] there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal.”** So the church is shown in heaven before the throne of God itself. The picture we are getting is that although **13:8** says that **“it was given to the beast to make war with the saints and to overcome them,”** **Rev 15** is showing us that it is the *saints* who are the true victors.

This is confirmed at the end of v.2 which says that the saints are **“holding harps of God.”** In the Bible, harps typically are used to accompany songs of cheerfulness, joy, and praise to God. Even though they may have been defeated and killed on earth, the saints are standing, alive, in victory, singing before God himself.

Significantly, our passage adds the “sea of glass is mixed with fire.” Everywhere else in Revelation (except **13:13** which refers fire from the beast of the earth), fire is a symbol of God's judgment. This idea of judgment is confirmed in **v.3** which says that the saints **“sang the song of Moses, the bondservant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”** That reference takes us back to **Exod 15** the song of Moses after God delivered Israel through the Red Sea and judged the Egyptians. **Deut 32** is also called a “song of Moses” and also involves God's judgment. In fact, **Deut 32:43** concludes that song by saying that God **“will avenge the blood of His servants and will render vengeance on his adversaries and will atone for His land and His people.”** IOW, here in **Rev 15** God is answering the prayer of the martyrs when they cried out in **Rev 6**, **“How long, O Lord will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”** **Rev 15** shows the church celebrating its victory and vindication, singing and glorifying God for his

righteous acts and judgment.

In vv.3-4 the song itself is a combination of quotations from and allusions to various OT passages. It begins with “**great and marvelous are your works.**” The phrase “**great and marvelous**” stems from **Deut 28:58** where the same phrase is used in connection with God’s bringing judgment on his enemies. “**Righteous and true are your ways**” parallels “**great and marvelous are your works.**” That phrase stems from **Deut 32:4**, the OT song of Moses, and indicates that God’s judgments are not arbitrary or just demonstrations of raw power but are moral expressions of his true and righteous, holy character.

In fact, this whole song in Rev 15 focuses on God: his name, his righteous deeds, his holy character. There will come a time when the entire world—even though they do not acknowledge him now—will see who the true God is and that his judgments are, as **Ps 19:9** puts it, “**true and righteous altogether.**” That applies to oppressed believers who suffer and die now in this present life but find everlasting vindication and new life, and it also applies to the oppressors who have had their day and now face God’s judgment.

**PROP:** What this passage is telling us is: Faithfulness guarantees victory.

## **II. THE PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS FOR US**

In this passage I see three related principles that I’d like to briefly talk about.

The first is: don’t just look at your own life or what is going on in the world with earth-bound eyes. We tend to look at everything with earth-bound eyes. And because we tend to look at what is happening in the world only through earth-bound eyes, we look at the massacres of Christians by ISIS as nothing but defeats. We look at great reversals in our personal lives—financial reversals, severe illness, death of a loved one—as nothing but defeats. In an earthly sense, they are defeats.

That is why the book of Revelation is so important for us. Revelation gives us the heavenly perspective of what is happening on earth. Revelation is telling us there is more to the story. Revelation is telling us—and this passage in particular is telling us—God is working things out for good, and if we remain faithful, defeats now are only apparent; they are only at the surface level; and they are only temporary.

Christ is with us. He is with us constantly in defeats as well as in victories. He is using everything for the working out of his plan, to change us and make us like himself. He is using everything for our good and for the ultimate good of the entire universe. We may not be able to see how this is working out, but this is where having faith that Christ is present and is sovereignly working out his plan is crucial. So don’t fall into despair. Faithfulness guarantees victory.

But the second principle is: we need to understand what faithfulness is. While faithfulness guarantees victory, faithfulness is *not* like “the little engine that could.” You may know the story: A long train needed an engine to pull it over a high mountain. For various reasons, larger, more powerful engines refused. But the little blue engine agreed. As it pulled the train up the mountain it kept repeating the mantra “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can”—and it did! It succeeded!

That’s a nice children’s story, but that’s not what faithfulness is. **Heb 11:1** says, “**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**” IOW, faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of things we cannot see. Our hope—like our true citizenship—is in heaven; our hope is in Christ; our hope is in everything the Bible guarantees the faithful, the overcomers.

Faithfulness does *not* guarantee that we will get what we want in this life. We may not be strong enough to pull the train over the mountain. Faithfulness does *not* guarantee us an easy life or a materially prosperous life. Look at the context of **Heb 11**. The immediate context begins at the end of **Heb 10**. But, beginning with **Heb 10:32**, it talks about believers enduring great conflict and sufferings, being made public spectacles, suffering reproaches and tribulations and imprisonment. But the writer of Hebrews goes on to say [**READ 10:34-36**]. **Rev 15** shows the fulfillment of that promise.

Last week, when we discussed Rev 6, we saw how God is sovereign over everything, including being sovereign over sin and evil. Some people might think that because God has ordained and permitted and uses evil, therefore somehow evil really isn’t evil and we should not resist it for fear that we are resisting God. *That idea is absolutely false*, because we saw that God stands in an asymmetrical relationship with good and evil. God is perfectly holy, as **Rev 15:4** tells us. He cannot dwell in the presence of sin, and he is himself the source and standard of *good*. While God ordains all events, the “evilness” of evil and the “sinfulness” of sin are not attributable to him but are attributable to the agents who promote and commit sin and evil. Indeed, we saw that God stands *against* sin and evil. And he stands against sin and evil so much that he became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus never once sinned, as even his enemies admitted. Instead, he himself was subjected *to* great sin, evil, and death in order to *take away* the world’s sin and evil and death—and give us new life. Because God stands against evil, we are to stand against evil.

Whether we see it or not, we are engaged in a great spiritual war. It is a war that many of us, much of the time, do not even realize we are in when we make the choices we do. Jesus overcame Satan, sin, and death, not by physical force, but by doing his Father’s will even to the point of abandonment by his Father and death on the cross. That alone is what led to his resurrection.

Christians follow in their Master's footsteps. Christians overcome in the same way Jesus did: by resisting the powers of evil and sin in our lives and in the world and by maintaining faithful witness in the face of temptations and trials, even to the point of death.

Faithfulness is keeping Christ first. Faithfulness is living our lives in such a way that we advance the gospel. Faithfulness includes our response to the materialism of our own culture; it involves what we do with our time and our money; it involves how we respond to the temptations we face to sin; and it involves our response to evil.

In short, faithfulness involves our whole life and our character. Faithfulness is drawing on the power of the HS and letting him transform our character so that we become more and more like Jesus—more loving, more forgiving, more kind, more generous, more courageous. Faithfulness is continuing to do the right thing in our decisions and actions regardless of the results, even when remaining faithful is the cause of harm to us. As one writer puts it, **“Perseverance in faith despite persecution is victory for the church.”** **Rev 12:11** confirms this; it says [READ 12:11] That is precisely why in **2 Cor 5:7** Paul says **“we walk by faith, not by sight.”**

Life is not a walk in the park now; it's a test. But **Rev 15:2-4** show us the result of passing the test, of remaining faithful even when faithfulness results in defeat and death on the earth. We are guaranteed not just a walk in the park, but a glorious new earth! We'll have glorious new bodies; we'll be standing on the glassy sea in the direct presence of God himself; we will see him as he is; we'll be dancing on streets of gold; we'll be drinking from the water of life and eating from the tree of life living joyous new lives forever.

And that leads to the third principle, which is: ultimately, it's not all about us; it's all about God in Christ. Because this passage is showing us real, ultimate reality, one of the things it is doing—or should be doing—is getting us to rethink and refocus our priorities. As human beings, it is normal and natural for us to focus on ourselves and our circumstances. But when we do that we tend to forget that we are simply created beings—but there is a creator. We are simply transient, temporary beings—at least here—but there is an eternal being and we are destined for an eternal existence.

Last week's passage, Rev 6, focused on the evil that besets us; today's passage focuses on the victory and glory that await us. But both passages should lead us to the same conclusion, namely, there is a great, omnipotent, omniscient God in charge of everything, and we can trust him. We can trust him because he became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was trustworthy unto death—but then rose from the dead and is alive forevermore. If you want to know what god is like and “can I trust him?” look to Jesus.

And look at vv.3-4: The people singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are not talking about themselves, or their circumstances, or even talking about revenge on those who had harmed them in this life. Their focus is all on the Lord, his holy character, his righteous acts, and are glorifying his name.

We can at least, in imperfect, earthly ways, begin to do that here and now. How? By glorifying his name through righteous acts of our own. In practical terms, refocusing our priorities onto Him means refocusing what we do with our money, what we do with our time, and how we deal with and treat people. This is both an individual matter and a corporate matter. Hopefully, we as a church will implement certain of the ideas that the outside evaluation group discussed. As to what that refocusing will mean for us individually and as families, that will probably differ for every individual and family. But we need to be intentional. As that great Trans-Siberian Orchestra song “Old City Bar” puts it: **“If you want to arrange it, This world you can change it, If we could somehow make this Christmas thing last, By helping a neighbor, or even a stranger, and to know who needs help you need only just ask.”**

**CONCL:** We all have the opportunity to walk by faith not by sight. Christ is in us and gives us the ability to walk as he walked. To do that well means we need to get the truths of the Word of God deeply into us—and then act on them. It means making choices. I am convinced that, just as our lives in eternity will be far deeper and richer and more joyous than they are now—because we will be in the very presence of God in a new, deeper way—our lives now can be deeper and richer and more joyous as the eyes of our heart become more and more focused on Him.

It's like the Syrian woman I quoted last week: she lost everything physically, but she found Jesus. And that transformed her into a radiant person of joy, not despair. A Christian in Iran similarly said, **“For the people who were caught by the police and arrested [for spreading the gospel], their faith got stronger and their fear was gone because they experienced prison and police and there was no fear anymore.”**

We can experience a similar transformation from fear, negativity, and joylessness to fearlessness and joy right here. Christ is with his faithful people who do *not* experience persecution just as he is with his faithful people who *do* experience persecution. *Our* faithfulness guarantees *us* victory just like *their* faithfulness guarantees *them* victory. That victorious life begins now as we do the righteous acts God is calling us to do. That will show the people around us that there is a living God who is worthy of our love, and our trust, and our very lives.