

Revelation 15
Isaiah 6
Psalm 111

“The King of the Nations”

November 3, 2019

What does it mean for God to be holy?

Isaiah 6 covers the ground pretty well!

“I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up;
and the train of his robe filled the temple”

The seraphim stood above him –

calling out – “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the seraphim –
and the house was filled with smoke!

When God appears –

when we *see clearly* who God is! –
he is high and lifted up –

and *we* are very small.

Isaiah’s response shows this clearly:

“Woe is me! for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips,
and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

The Holiness of God always starts with us seeing how *great* he is –
and how small – and how sinful – we are!

But that’s not where the holiness of God *ends*.

After all, why is the *thrice-holy God* here?
Why has he come to speak to Isaiah?

Where does the holiness of God *end*?

Jump down to the last line of chapter 6!

“The holy seed is its stump”

God is holy!

He is *holy, holy, holy!*

And therefore, because he is holy –
he wants a holy seed – holy offspring –
to partake of his holiness!

Our Psalm of response sings about this as well.

Psalm 111 speaks of God's great works –
his mighty deeds – full of splendor and majesty.
Verse 9 ends by saying, "Holy and awesome is his name!"
Why is God's name holy and awesome?
"He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name."

Sing Psalm 111A
Read Revelation 15

Introduction: The Seven Pictures (13:1-15:8)

1. The Sixth Picture: Another Sign in Heaven – Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues (v1)

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.

John is doing two things here.

First, he is connecting back to chapter 12:1,
where "a great sign appeared in the heaven" (the Woman – our heavenly Mother),
and in 12:3 where "another sign appeared in the heaven" – the Dragon,
who failed to destroy Jesus – and who failed to destroy our Mother –
the heavenly Jerusalem –
and so he now makes war upon us.

This war is the theme of chapters 12-15 –
the war of the Dragon and his two Beasts against the Seed of the Woman –
not Jesus, this time – because Jesus has already defeated the Dragon!
But rather, this is the Dragon's war against "the rest of her offspring –
those who keep the commandments of God
and hold to the testimony of Jesus." (12:17)

Now John sees another sign in heaven –
the Woman and the Dragon were the first two signs.
This third sign is the sign that the war is almost over!

Because with these seven plagues, the wrath of God is finished.

And that's the second thing that this "sixth picture" is doing.

As John draws near to the end of each of the sevens,
he sees a foretaste of the next seven.

When the seventh seal was opened (8:1-2),
John saw seven angels with seven trumpets –
and then he heard the response of the people of God to the seven seals.

At the end of the sixth trumpet,
John was warned that the “third woe” was soon to come (11:14).
That “woe” was proclaimed when the Dragon was cast down to earth (12:12),
at the beginning of the Seven Pictures.

And here at the end of the Seven Pictures,
the Seven angels with Seven plagues (the Seven Bowls) are introduced.

The message for John’s hearers –
the message for you –
is that we are almost there!

Don’t be afraid!
Do not worry!
Don’t be anxious!

We are only *one step away* from the end!

Some scholars think that this proves that John was mistaken.
After all, it has been nearly 2,000 years since John wrote this.
And Jesus hasn’t returned.
So therefore, John must have been wrong!

But that misses John’s point.
John wasn’t saying that Jesus would return in their lifetimes.
John is saying that *the next thing that will happen* is the return of Christ.

There is no “intermediate step” that we are waiting for.
When it comes to redemptive history –
when it comes to “where we are in God’s redemptive purposes in history” –
there is no real difference between John’s day and ours.

The *next thing* in redemptive history is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And here John sees:
*seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last,
for with them the wrath of God is finished.*

Some take “last” to mean that these judgments come at the end of history
after all the other judgments –

after the seven seals, and *after* the seven trumpets.
But chapter 10, verse 7, told us that in the days of the seventh *trumpet*
the mystery of God would be fulfilled.
And for that matter, chapter 6, verse 17, told us that when the *sixth seal* was broken,
“the sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up...”
and the kings of the earth called on the mountains and rocks to fall on them,
“and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne,
and from the wrath of the Lamb,
for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

In other words, *each of the sevens* concludes with the coming of the final judgment.

So when John sees that “with the seven plagues...the wrath of God is finished”
that is not a statement of historical sequence
(After all, chapters 17-20 will continue to talk about the wrath of God,
after “the wrath of God is [supposedly] finished”!)

It would be more accurate to say that with the seven bowls,
the wrath of God reaches its goal – its *telos* – its purpose
(the verb here is *telew*).

With the seven bowls, the wrath of God is fulfilled.

But before we get there, we need to finish the Seven Pictures!!

2. The Seventh Picture: The Response of God’s People – The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb (v2-4)

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.*

Notice where we are:

John sees a sea of glass mingled with fire.

We saw earlier in Revelation 4 that there was a sea of glass before the throne of God.

And back in chapter 4, we saw that the sea of glass – in heaven –
represents the heavenly side of the “firmament” –
that great blue dome over your heads.

From our side, we look up and we see the heavens.

What does it look like from God’s side?

His throne is set “above the firmament”!

He looks down at a “sea of glass” –

so that those who gather at his throne
can see all that is happening on earth.

(Now, please, don’t take this literally!

No one in biblical times took it literally!
Solomon said, “heaven of heavens cannot contain you,
how much less this house that I have built!”

The picture is drawn for *our benefit* –
not because anyone thought that God literally sat at the peak of that blue dome!)

We don't take it literally – but we do take it seriously!
God is teaching you something by telling you that he sits
enthroned above the circle of the earth.
He is sovereign over all the earth.
But he is also near – and the sea of glass tells you that he is watching –
he is paying attention to what happens on the earth.

So, if you take seriously the picture of the sea of glass –
then what does it mean for the sea to become a “sea of glass mingled with fire”?

Well, at the end of chapter 14, we just heard about the reaping of the earth
the grain harvest and the grape harvest – and the winepress of God's wrath.
In other words, judgment has come upon the earth.
So when those in heaven look down through the sea of glass,
what do they see?
They see fire come upon the earth.

And in confirmation of this, where are the saints standing?
The ESV translates it “beside” –
but it's the same construction,
“stand on”
that is used in 11:11 –
when the two witnesses stood on their feet (not beside their feet)
and 12:18 where the dragon stood on the shore of the sea (not beside the shore);
and 14:1 where the Lamb stood on Mt. Zion (not beside Mt Zion).

And for that matter, the same construction is used of the angel of chapter 10
who “stood on the sea and on the earth.” (10:2, 5, 8)

The saints are standing on the sea of glass –
namely the sea of glass mingled with fire –
why?

Because they have conquered!
They have conquered the beast.
They have conquered its image.
They have conquered the number of its name!

They have not succumbed to the wiles of the Beast or the False Prophet.

They have not yielded to the whore of Babylon!

They have conquered!

And so they stand *on* the sea of glass mingled with fire.

just as God led Israel victorious *through* the Red Sea as if on dry land.

That's why their song is called "the song of Moses, the servant of God,
and the song of the Lamb."

Oh, and by the way –

John hears *you* there.

He hears those who "had conquered the beast..."

If John is catching a glimpse of the future –

then John sees *you* standing on the sea of glass!

He hears *you* singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

You and I – we haven't sung it yet.

We haven't made it yet.

But this is the song that we *will* sing one day:

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!"^[a]*

This is where we are going!

In one sense, all of it already true!

God's deeds are great and amazing!

The connection to the song of Moses is not so much in the words of the song,
but in the theme.

The language is drawn from Psalm 111, Psalm 86, etc.

Exodus 34:10 had promised that the nations would see the great works of the LORD,
and would marvel at the awesome deeds of the Lord.

Here in verse 3, God is called "Lord God the Almighty" –
but also "King of the nations."

“Lord God the Almighty” is often used by the prophets
to speak of how God sovereignly rules over history.
And so here “King of the nations” is added to show that God is not just king of Israel’s history,
but King over all the nations of the earth.

The phrase comes from Jeremiah 10:7 –
“who would not fear you, O king of the nations?” –
which connects with the next line here in verse 4:

Jeremiah 10 is where Jeremiah warns the people of God to stay away from idols.
But this phrase from Jeremiah 10 is woven together
with language from Psalm 86:9-10.

“All nations that you have made will come and worship before you, O LORD,
and they will glorify your name,
because you are great and you do marvelous things;
you alone are God.”

Revelation 15:4 replaces “you alone are God” with “you alone are holy”

*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.”*

The last line then is drawn from Psalm 98:2 –
“the Lord...has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.”

But I do have to quibble with the ESV translation of verse 4.
The first line is the foundation –
followed by three parallel clauses
which each build upon the other.

As one commentator translates it:
“Who will not fear, O LORD, and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy,
so that all the nations will come and worship before you,
because your righteous acts have been revealed.”

The ESV simply doesn’t translate the “so that” before “all nations will come and worship.”
It’s there in the Greek.
They just don’t translate it!
I can understand why the ESV translates it the way it does.

They don't see the connection between God's holiness and the nations' worship.
We often think of God's holiness simply as his transcendence –
that which makes him *other* than us.

He is holy.

We are not.

If that is what is meant here – then it would make no sense to say,

“You alone are holy – so that all the nations will come and worship before you”!

But why are the saints singing this song – as the *stand on the sea of glass*?!

How did they get there?!

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, the one who was and is and is to come!”

What does it mean for God to be thrice-holy?!

As we saw in chapters 4-5, it means for the eternal Son of God to come in our flesh,
and draw near to us – and ransom us for God.

God's holiness is not only that which makes him different from us –
it is also that which impels him to draw us near to himself.

Think of Isaiah 57:15 –

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity,
whose name is Holy:

‘I dwell in the high and holy place,

and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,

to revive the spirit of the lowly,

and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Therefore chapter 15, verse 4, says:

“For you alone are holy,

so that all the nations will come and worship before you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

God' righteous acts –

the righteous acts of Jesus –

whereby God might be *just* and the *justifier* of the ungodly –

because he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

So...

the Song of Moses and of the Lamb draws on several OT passages –
explicitly from Psalms 86 and 111, Isaiah 57, and Jeremiah 10.

What are all those passages doing?

They are all pointing to the new Exodus.

They are all pointing to the day when God will once more
raise his people out of death and destruction –

into new life.

AND – all these passages point to this new Exodus
(like the crossing of the Red Sea in Moses day)
as a salvation that *includes* the destruction of all of his and our enemies.

After all – how does God respond to the Song?
(verse 5)

3. The Glory of God Fills the Heavenly Temple (v5-8)

⁵ After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent^[b] 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.

Each of the sevens in Revelation is a communication of God Word.

Each of the sevens is God's sermon –
God's declaration of his purposes in history.
And at the end of each seven,
we hear the response of God's people.

At the end of the Seven Seals (ch 8) we saw the prayers of the saints rise before God.
At the end of the Seven Trumpets (ch 11) we heard the thanksgiving of the 24 elders.
Now at the end of the Seven Pictures (ch 15) we hear the Song of Moses and the Lamb.

And in the same way, when God's people pray, God responds!!
How does God respond?

In chapter 8, he sent fire from the heavenly altar on the earth,
and there were peals of thunder, rumblings,
flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

In chapter 11, God's temple in heaven was opened,
and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.
There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder,
an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Now in chapter 15, when God's people pray,
“The sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened...”
and out come the seven angels with the seven plagues...
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.”

Notice that this time, the effect of the fire from heaven is to clear out the sanctuary!
No one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues were finished.

In Moses' day, when the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle,
even Moses could not enter the tent of meeting.

In Solomon's day, when the glory of the LORD filled the temple,
even the priests could not enter the house of the LORD.

Why not?

It wasn't just "because God was there."

After all, the high priest was *supposed* to enter the holy of holies once a year
precisely *because* God was there!

What happened when the glory of the LORD filled the temple in Isaiah's day?

Isaiah heard the seraphim calling out,

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is filled with his glory."

(not just the temple – the whole earth – is filled with his glory!)

And Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am lost;

for I am a man of unclean lips,

and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;

and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

We often focus only on the next thing:

Isaiah's lips were cleansed with a coal from the altar –
his guilt was taken away – his sin atoned for.

But what comes next?

Isaiah was commissioned to bring a message of *judgment* –
a message of exile – to Israel.

The glory of the LORD – the holiness of God –
has two different effects:

either it draws you near and cleanses you –
or it destroys you.

Each of the sevens have been focused on God's message of salvation and judgment.

The Seven Seals – the Seven Trumpets – the Seven Pictures.

The Seven Bowls will be different.

These are bowls of *wrath*.

And that is why the heavenly temple is emptied of worshipers.

"No one could enter the sanctuary
until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished."

For the next three chapters, we will hear *nothing*
about anyone being in the heavenly temple –

except God.
There will be all the customary fire, lightning, rumblings, and an earthquake
at the end of chapter 16 –
but no prayers of the saints.

It is not our job to bring final judgment on the earth.
That job belongs to God – and to the Lamb.

There is something else new in our passage!
I told you last time that there are seven “then I saw’s” –
and that is true.
What I didn’t mention is that there is a very slight change in the phrase in verse 5.

There are seven, “then I saw’s”:

1. Then I saw (13:1) – the Beast from the Sea
2. Then I saw (13:11) – the Beast from the Earth
3. Then I saw (14:1) – the Lamb and the 144,000
4. Then I saw (14:6) – the Three Angels
5. Then I saw (14:14) – the One like a Son of Man
6. Then I saw (15:1) – Seven Angels with Seven Plagues
7. Then I saw (15:2) – the Sea of Glass and Those Who Conquered the Beast

And then in verse 5 it says, “after this I saw...”
So there is an eighth “I saw”

Because this time we finally move beyond the sevens.
All the sevens in the world will not bring the new creation!
There must be an eighth!

As we saw with the 6-6-6 in the number of the beast –
the number of man always falls short!
We need for God himself to bring the *eighth* –
to bring about the new creation where he will finally make all things right!