Stay Awake and Remain Clothed

Revelation 15:1-16:21

Key Verse: 16:15 “Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

Last week in chapter 14 we learned the three angel’s messages and two harvests. God’s first message for the perishing people was ‘fear God, glorify and worship him.’ God’s second message was the fall of Babylon, and the third message was Gods’ wrath against those who worship idols and follow the beasts. People may ask why the loving God pours out his wrath on this earth. The wrath of God does not go nowhere, but for the work of salvation. The wrath of God purposes to lead people to repent and be saved. The wrath of God brings the holy fear to people so that they may seek him for their salvation. In the book of Exodus God judged King Pharaoh and Egypt with ten plagues. What was God’s message to the Israelites? “*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment…Then you will know that I am the Lord your God…*” (Ex 6:6-7) What was God’s message to Pharaoh? “*Let my people go, so that they may worship me*.” (Ex 8:1) The purpose of God’s judgment was to redeem his people so that they might worship him. The purpose of God’s wrath in Revelation was the same as in Exodus: To save his people so that they may fear God, glorify him and worship him.

Revelation chapter 15 is the preview of chapter 16 which teaches us the seven bowls of God’s wrath. This Seven Bowls of God’s wrath is the last cycle of God’s judgment following after the judgment of the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets. Let’s see how the seven wrath of God being poured out against this perishing world.

First, the song of victory (15:1-8) John saw two signs. Look at verse 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***.” John saw the seven angels with the seven last plagues. They were the last plagues because God’s wrath would be completed with them. Here the word ‘complete’ is ‘*teleo*’ in Greek, the same word which Jesus said on the cross “*It is finished*”. (Jn 19:30) The angels’ mission is completed with the last plagues. God’s will is accomplished after his divine judgment. John saw another sign. Look at verse 2. “***And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name***.” The other sign was the vast army of the victors who won the spiritual battle against the beast and its army. In chapter 13 we studied the two beasts, one beast out of the sea and the other out of the earth. Both were powerful and deceptive spiritual forces which blasphemed God and deceived the believers. They were anti-Christ and false prophets. It was not easy to keep patient endurance and faithfulness to Christ in the spiritual battle against these two beasts. But these are the glorious victors who triumphed over the beasts by the blood of the Lamb (12:11). They endured patiently and kept their faith in Christ (13:11). They feared God, glorified and worshiped him. (14:7) What did they do in heaven as victors? They played harps and sang of the song of victory. Look at verses 2b-4. “***They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, 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***.” Exodus 15:1-21 records Moses and Miriam’s songs right after they crossed the Red Sea as a dry land. In their songs Moses and Miriam praised God’s mighty hand who delivered them out of Egypt. It was impossible for the Israelites to come out of the slavery of Egypt because King Pharaoh was too powerful and they were too weak to stand against Pharaoh. But God’s great power and his marvelous signs crushed Pharaoh with ten plagues and delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh. Moses and Miriam praised the Lord and gave thanks to him. In the same way the victors in heaven praised God’s great and marvelous work of salvation. In summary they praised the works of God, the way of God, and the worth of God so that people might fear God, glorify his name, and worship him. It was the same in Exodus as God let the Israelites go and worship him.

I pray that we all may join the victor’s song in heaven after finishing our spiritual battle on this earth. Victory requires patient endurance and faithfulness to Christ. These days the pandemic brought us an unprecedented situation spiritually, socially, economically and in all aspects of our lives. We have mission to reach out students on campus for Bible study and worship service. But we are limited and restricted. Church is *koinonia*, where brothers and sisters meet and have fellowship. But many churches are closed, and worship service and meetings are replaced by online service. Because of these restrictions and limitation we compromise and become complacent knowingly and unknowingly. At the same time many people have to go through financial difficulty after they lost their job. The time has come when our Christians really practice patient endurance and faithfulness to Christ. It is not easy for us to overcome our laziness and complacency and serve God as before. We have to cope with this total paradigm shift and create new strategy for the gospel work. The first beast, the strong anti-Christ, and the second beast, false prophets, threaten us and tempt us to give up our spiritual battle. But we must triumph over these two beasts by the blood of the Lamb Jesus. We must endure hardships as God’s divine discipline to share his holiness. Let us sing the song of victory after fighting a good fight. Amen!

In verses 5-8 there appear the temple in heaven and the seven angels with the seven plagues. The door of the temple is wide open because Jesus opened the door for sinners to come to God through his death and resurrection. Out of the temple the seven angels came to receive the seven bowls from one of the four living creatures. The angels were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around the chests. When the seven angels received the seven bowls, the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power. No one could enter the temple until the seven plagues were completed. The fact that the seven plagues come out of the temple is meaningful that all things are in God’s control and under his plan and power. All human history and destiny belong to God. Now we suffer from the pandemic. But I believe that God controls even this pandemic. All things are in God’s control. I pray that we may endure this pandemic as God’s divine discipline to share his holiness. As Job said, God is the one who gives and who takes away (Job 1:20)

Second, stay awake and remains clothed (16:1-20) Chapter 16 shows us the seven bowls of God’s wrath. What is the first one? Look at verse 2. “***The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image***.” The first plague from the first angel was ugly and festering sores. It reminds us of the plague of boils, the sixth plague against Egypt. In Exodus 9:8-12 when Moses took some soot from a furnace and tossed it in the air, festering boils broke out on people and animals. (Ex 9:10) In the same way when the angel poured out the first bowl, such horrible disease broke out among Satan worshipers and the evil-doers. What was the second plague against them? Verse 3 says, “***The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living in the sea died.***” (3) In Exodus when Moses stroke the water of the Nile River with his staff, all the water turned into blood. (Ex 7:21) It was the first plague against King Pharaoh and Egypt. It also overlaps with the second plague of the second trumpet. When the second trumpet was sounded, a third of sea turned into blood, and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. (Rev 8:8,9) But now when the second bowl was poured out, every living in the sea died. There is no survivor in the bloody sea. What was the third plague? Look at verse 4. “***The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood***.” All remaining water on this earth turned into blood. What a terrible plague against the earth! Then there is a special message from the third angel who poured out the third bowl. In verses 5-6 the angel said, “***You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve***.” The angel justified God’s judgment through the blood of the martyrs. The angel said that God is just in his judgment and that the evil deserve to drink blood because they shed the blood of the innocent. What was the response to the angel’s message? Look at verse 7. “***And I heard the altar respond: “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments***.” Some people may complain against God that God is unjust and unfair because of all these plagues. But our God is indeed just and fair. God’s righteousness can’t be mistaken or misfunctioned. He didn’t condemn sinners like us, but condemned his Son instead on the cross. By doing so he satisfied his justice. At the same time, he provided sinners the way of salvation by leaving them unpunished. All those who receive his Son Jesus and believe God’s unconditional and sacrificial love will not be condemned, but be saved. (Jn 3:16-18, Ro 3:24-26)

What was the fourth plague from the fourth angel? Look at verses 8-9. “***The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.***” The fourth plague was the intense heat of the hotter sun. According to a civil engineer’s statement, if the sun gets seven times hotter than today, all the ice and snow in the North and South pole and Greenland will melt away, and the sea level will rise up 200 feet higher than today. The great city New York (33ft), Miami (6ft), and New Orleans (-6ft) will be under the water while St. Louis will still survive (466ft). What was the response of the remaining people to this catastrophic calamity? Verse 9 says that they cursed the name of God, who had control over all these plagues, and they refused to repent and glorify him. Here we learn the extreme wickedness of fallen men. They are like King Pharaoh, who would not repent in the midst of the ten plagues. He finally surrendered God after all the firstborns in Egypt, including his firstborn son, died.

The fifth plague was darkness. When **the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness**. (10) **People gnawed their tongues in agony, and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.** (11) Darkness is the prelude of the final judgment. Darkness was the ninth plague against King Pharaoh right before God stroke all the firstborns in Egypt. (Ex 10:21-29) In Revelation the plague of darkness is also the last chance for repentance and salvation for the remnants. Still, they refused to repent and be saved. Rather, they cursed God and continued to do evil.

What was the sixth plague? The sixth plague was the great spiritual battle at Armageddon between the Holy Spirit and the evil spirits. Look at verses 12-14. “***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. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.***” (12-14) When the sixth bowl was poured out on the great river Euphrates, the way for the worldly kings is prepared to join the demonic spirits. The kings from the East, some said that they are from China, India, even Korea, will join the spiritual battle against the Holy God. Verse 16 says that the demonic and impure spirits gathered the worldly kings to the place called ‘Armageddon’. In Hebrew ‘*har*’ means ‘hill’ or ‘mountain’, and *mageddon* indicates ‘Megiddo’ in Israel. It is known as the Jezreel Plain in Israel. But in general Armageddon is not a specific location, but the symbol of the eschatological battle. It is the last battle between good and evil in human history. What is going to happen to the Lord at this last moment of human history? Look at verse 15. “***Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stay awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed***.” Jesus comes again. He returns as he promised. No one expects the day he comes because he comes like a thief as he predicted. Jesus often told his disciples that he would come suddenly when nobody knows. (Mt 24:42,25:13, Mk 13:33,35) Therefore, we should stay awake and always remain clothed. ‘Stay awake’ means spiritually awake and watch out. ‘Remain clothed’ means be ready to welcome Jesus and be ready to join this spiritual battle. This reminds us of Gideon and his 300 soldiers who drank from cupped hands, lapping the water like dogs. (Jud 7:5,6) The 300 soldiers did not put down their weapons or put off their armors in order to drink water. Instead, they drank the water like dogs in order to be ready to fight against their enemies who might attack while they were drinking. They were spiritually awake and remained clothed.

Last week Stan, one of our Bible members on Saturday, recommended us to watch the biographical movie of William Carrey, the first English missionary to India, who is known as the Father of Modern missionaries. William Carrey was a shoemaker before he was converted and called to go to India as a missionary. He persuaded his wife and two children and went to India. The reality which waited for them was poverty, persecution, disease, loneliness, and hostile natives. His family didn’t have any proper room to stay. They had to move one town after another until they were provided with a room like animal’s barn. William’s second son soon died of unknown diseases. His wife became mentally ill and finally died. For six and half years William didn’t get any converted native Christian. Most missionaries must have returned to England in this situation. But William did not give up. He did not go back. He stayed in India and remained clothed. He began to translate the Bible into Sanskrit and Bengalis language. Even though the printing shop got fire and all his translated Bibles and dictionaries were burned, he did not give up. His translating mission continued. God raised many believers and native leaders through the Bible which William had translated. Even though William lost his son and wife in the mission field, he was faithful to the Lord with patient endurance. After three centuries of his ministry, Esha, Stan’s wife, was one of the fruits of William Carrey’s sacrificial missionary life and his ministry in India. Missionary William is a good example who stayed awake and remained clothed.

The seventh bowl of plague is written in verses 17-21. When the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, there occurred a severe and tremendous earthquake. Verse 18 says that no earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth. The global earthquake caused the celestial, geological shift. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found because they were submerged under the sea which turned into blood. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. I don’t know how many people still survived during these plagues, still they did not repent. They cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible. (18-21)

In conclusion we must acknowledge that the purpose of God’s wrath is true and just. His judgment on the earth is not condemning people, but saving them. God wants people to fear him, glorify him and worship him. John 3:17 says that God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Revelation starts with the second coming of Jesus Christ and ends with the second coming of Christ. Let us stay awake and remain clothed until he returns. Let us get rid of our old self with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, rage, anger and clothe ourselves with Christ’s compassion, love, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness. (Col 3:5-14) Amen!