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## THE REVELATION OF JESUS' BOWL

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### Part 9 of Revelation

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Revelation 15 | November 16, 2003

Good evening. Welcome to Mars Hill. We're in Revelation 15 tonight. We're continuing on a thematic study of worship. And as we've been going through the book, what we have witnessed is that the book is a series of visions. It's a series of things that John, the beloved, actually saw and witnessed, and that he is recording those things for us.

And in that spirit, as we get into our theme and our topic tonight, I wanted to visually make visible to you the great need that the book of Revelation addresses, and that is God's plan to bring an end to sin and to sinners.

You and I have this strong propensity to live lives of delusion, where we insulate ourselves from things that are troubling. And when something should break into our world that is emotionally distressing or devastating, we try to quickly dismiss it and move on and think happy, positive thoughts and take our medication and pretend like everything's much better than it truly is.

And tonight, what I wanted to do is I wanted to open up and show you why God has to get involved in human history. Why Jesus Christ has to come back. Why sin must be dealt with, and why sinners must be stopped.

So, I want you guys to see the subject that we'll be studying tonight. It's not a wonderful world, is it? It's a terrible world. That's why you have locks on your home. You have locks on your car. That's why in the middle of the night when you hear a noise, it terrifies you and awakens you.

That's why 911 is on your speed dial. That's why there is 911. That's why there's police officers and jails and courts. That's why there are soldiers and war and declarations of war.

Everyone agrees that sin exists. No one knows what to do with it. No one knows what to do about it. The thing that always fascinates me is that you and I are incapable of accepting this in the world as it is. Something in us wants the hungry to be fed. It wants the homeless to be housed. It wants the thirsty to drink. It wants the lame to walk, the blind to see, the weak to be protected from the injustice of the strong and the oppressing.

The marginalized to be cared for. For children to not be molested and raped and abused and abandoned, but to be cared for and loved. The reason why we are incapable of accepting life on the earth as it is, is because we were built and created and destined for so much more.

And no matter how many stupid songs we sing about the wonderful world, it simply is not a reality. So, a number of philosophies have come into existence, and a number of religions have tried in great vain to address the question. Some say we will reincarnate through multiple cycles of regression, and ultimately we'll work off our sin.

Well, the problem with that stupid theory is that we sin, and then we come back and we sin some more. We're not making any progress. Others will say, "Well, we are evolved animals. We act like beasts because we are, and so we should embrace that and accept that."

Others say it is through politics and legislation, through threat of violence and war. One tyrant is taken down, to be replaced by only yet another. Some teach that God is both good and evil, yin and yang, and the world is a reflection of the schizophrenic nature that is in the very nature of God, which is silly, and discomfoting at the very least.

Others will tell us that there is no God, that this is the way that it is. That you will suffer, and then you will die, and that is the finish line. And any yearning for anything more is just naïve bliss and utopian fantasy.

Still others will tell us that we simply need to be patient because we're evolving and we're getting better all the time. If you would just give us a few more million years, then we'll be really pleasant people, and the world will be a glorious place in which to live.

And in Revelation 6:10, we see the saints, who have been martyred and have died unjustly, standing before the throne of God, and they have their hands raised, and they continually ask one question. It's the same question that they're asking tonight.

I would anticipate it is the same question that many of you have. It is simply this: How long? How long, Lord God, until you avenge our blood? How long will you allow sinners to sin, will you allow tyrants to rule, will you allow and permit injustice to reign victorious? How long?

There is a sense of frustration on behalf of the people of God who are in the presence of God as we speak. Many of you have asked that question of God. God, how long must life continue as it is? Some of you struggle with depression. You struggle with despair and with despondency.

There is nothing perhaps wrong with you. Maybe you are the great realist. Maybe you have clear vision and see yourself and see your world as it is, and you have no reason for hope, and you can't think happy thoughts. You can't put on a positive spin, because there's nothing there.

In Revelation 14, we see that day is set on the calendar. It's not the day that we know, it is the day only known to God, where God, too, becomes so sick of it that he answers the question, "How long?"

We looked at last week that the Lord Jesus Christ at one point will rise from his throne, and he will stand. And standing with him will be 144,000 of the finest men in the history of the world who love that God. And they will be the first fruits. And as the Lord Jesus Christ stands, he stands as a conquering general, preparing himself for battle, to do war against sin and sinners in the earth.

Before he does, however, in keeping with his gracious and kind nature, he sends an angel out into human history to proclaim the eternal Gospel. The last opportunity for repentance is given. Many come to faith, and some do not.

What we see then is the harvest to the earth. That God comes and he harvests. He takes to himself all of his people, and he bundles them together as the Church. Everyone who remains unrepentant, everyone who remains sinful, everyone who resists God and continues in their lifestyle is then cut down, and their blood flows forth, according to Revelation 14, for 200 miles, 5 or 6 feet in the air.

In Revelation 15, we pick up the story whereby you and I, who are Christians and sons and daughters of God, find ourselves before the throne of God at this great and wonderful day. Some of you struggle with this concept of God crushing his enemies. Tonight, blood will be flowing from your Bible, and what we find in the book of Revelation is this is cause for celebration.

Some of you will be surprised to find that your God is not a pacifist. He is not impotent. He is not incapable. He is not incompetent, but in fact, he has a plan for human history. And he has a plan for sinners and sin.

You and I would love it if God intervened in human history. We want all of the sin to be taken care of. We want all of the sin to be taken away, as well as its stain and its sting of sickness and death.

~~We just want to deal with sin. The problem with sin is~~ sin resides in us, and sin comes out of sinners. And if God is going to deal with sin, he has to deal with us.

Those of us who have had our sin dealt with by bringing it to Jesus, who is our God, who died and rose in our place for our sins, will find ourselves in Revelation 15 standing with him. We pick up the story in verse 1.

Revelation 15:1 tells us, "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." There will be a day of wrath. Now we live in the day of grace. There will be a day of justice and wrath.

You and I will be there, and we will see what John saw. He says, "And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name."

In the book of Revelation, it's very simple. You and I are all worshipers. We give our time, our energy, our money, our life, our devotion, our heart, our will, our strength. We give it over to either God or something or someone else.

Everything other than Jesus is called the beast. We're told that we worship either the Lamb or the beast. And for everyone who is victorious and has not been worshipping in a beastly way the wrong object – sex, money, power, experience, success, or their own self – will find themselves in the presence of God, enjoying God and his people.

And it doesn't look like it in our history. It doesn't look like it in the pages of our Bible, but it tells us here that those of us who persevere and continue to worship God in spite of opposition, we are, indeed, quite victorious.

What happens to those who are worshipers of God in this life time is that they will be worshipers of God forever. Here is what will happen, "They held harps given them by God" – God is going to hand out instruments when we get into his presence. Some of you are not musicians. Some of you can't sing. You can't play an instrument. You're a junior varsity air guitar soloist. But the good news is, in the Kingdom, we all go varsity.

You'll get an instrument and the supernatural ability to play it. And we will sing a new song, we are told. We are told throughout this book that there are a series of new songs. That what God wants in his presence is people who love him, musicians who can play, and vocalists who can sing. It is all of eternity coming together for the audience of one.

You and I will be there if we love Jesus. We will receive the instrument that he has for us. And the Spirit of God will enable us to play. And we will sing together. He tells us that we will sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of his Lamb.

He harkens back to the days of the exodus, where God's people had been in slavery and bondage in Egypt for some 400 years, longing for deliverance. Just like you and I live in a world that is filled with sin and death, and Satan is the prince of the air and the prince of this world.

We live in that same place. That God then came and he sent a succession of plagues upon Egypt, telling the leadership in Egypt, "Either you obey me and stop sinning and let my people go so they may be free to worship me, or there will be consequences. Subsequently, it will be death."

You'll see the plagues show up again here in Revelation 16. The succession of plagues cause some people to become worshipers of God, but it's

hardened the hearts of others. Ultimately, they let God's people go because the final and most devastating blow was the plague on the firstborn. That every household that did not have the covering of the blood of the lamb over its doorpost experienced the angel of death coming through and literally killing the firstborn son.

It was all typifying and foreshadowing that unless we are covered by the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we, too, will face death. Upon that great act, the children of God were spared. Those who did not trust God and were not looking forward to Jesus' shedding of blood for their sin were destroyed.

God's people then are liberated, and the nation of them walk into freedom. And the freedom is for the purpose of worship. Freedom in the Bible is always not freedom to sin, freedom to be independent, freedom to rebel; it is freedom to worship and belong to God.

And so, the nation, the old and the young, and the rich and the poor, and the successful and the failures, who are all the children of God walk out together. They come to the Red Sea. You know the story. That God miraculously parts the sea. He sends a stiff wind to dry the ground so that the nation can walk through into freedom on the other side.

And as they do, their enemies, and the enemies of God that are in hot pursuit, are swiftly on their heels. And as they come into that great Red Sea, God drowns them and kills them. And on the other side, God's people, led by Moses and his sister Miriam, sing and dance. And it's the song of Moses.

They sing and dance as their enemies drown. You and I will sing and dance when the enemies of God are crushed. In the same way, that if Satan and his minions and evildoers declared war on you, and your death was sealed, and your fate was imminent, and God came in and delivered you, you would celebrate.

You would thank him for sparing you. And you would thank him for intervening. And you would be filled with joy. You and I will sing. We will sing of the victory of God and the destruction of the enemies of God and the enemies of God's people.

Some of you struggle with this. You say, "How could a loving and gracious God do this?" How could he not? If God loves you, he will not allow Satan to harm you forever. He will not allow evildoers to destroy you forever. He will not allow death and sin and suffering and injustice and evil to go on forever. Why? He's a loving God.

He cannot allow these sorts of things to continue indefinitely. He is, indeed, patient. But his patience comes to an end, and he must finally deal with human sin and sinners, and those fools who would say, "Well, that's not a loving thing to do."

In the same way that if you kept breaking into my home and molesting my children and threatening my wife and time after time after time I warned you to stop, and I invited you to be a friend, and I was willing to forgive you, and every time you refused – at some point, if I didn't stop you, I would not be a loving husband and father. I would be unjust and cruel and mean. I would be as bad as Satan himself.

God does love the nations of the earth. And God does love the peoples of the earth. And for those who fail to repent and become his friend, they will not get the hand of friendship, they will get the fist of justice. And it is their decision to make.

And you and I will be there. And we will sing. Do you not long for the day when there is no sin? Do you not long for the day when there's no suffering and there's no death and there's no evil? Do you not long for the day when you don't need to lock the car door, when you don't need to lock the house door, when you don't need to check it twice?

Do you not long for the day, parents, when you can send your children out to play and not check on them because there is no sin, there are no sinners, and there is no death – only God and brothers and sisters in Christ, so there's no such thing as a stranger? It's all family.

Do you not long for the day when someone speaks to you, and you can take them at their word, because there are no liars and there are no lies? That's what the loving God has intended. He has intended the kind of world that this was originally supposed to be before we sinned.

And when we see the unveiling of that great God, we see the unveiling of that great Kingdom, and we see that God has made everything new, and as Ecclesiastes 3 says, that he has made everything beautiful in its time. And as Romans 8 says, that he has worked everything out for good. And as Genesis 50 says, that he has taken all that was meant for evil, and he has turned it around for something good. We will take a deep breath, and we will sing.

And here is what we will sing, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty." We will thank God for who he is. We will thank God for what he has done. "Just and true are your ways, King of the ages." God's justice is not capricious. God is not indiscriminate in his justice. God is very specific, very purposeful. God is very accurate.

He will be just. It tells us two times later in the book that people will be judged according to their deeds. Praise God. Praise God that he will deal with sin and sinners. Praise God that this life is not all there is. Praise God when we walk into the Kingdom, it won't be with people who refuse to obey God and continue to sin forever and destroy the good, new creation that God has intended, as they have already destroyed the first.

Just and true. "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?" In that time, and in that place, when we see God face to face, and we're there with our brothers and sisters from all of the nations, we will fear God, and we will give glory to him.

There will not be the insatiable narcissism, the intense selfishness. We will not have books filled with self esteem and self actualization and the human

potential movements. Just glory to God, joy to people, freedom to worship.

In addition, we will sing, "For you alone are holy." We will recognize that God is different, and he is other, and he is good. And we will sing about that. "All nations will come and worship before you" – we'll be there with all of our brothers and sisters from all of human history. All of the nations, cultures, languages, tribes, and people.

You and I live in a world that perhaps we don't suffer for our faith, but some of our brothers and sisters are suffering violently. They long for this day when they get to sing, because sin and sinners are no more. Right now, there are still nations on the earth where Christianity is outlawed. Where the Church is underground, where it's persecuted.

There are still places where teenage girls who are our sisters in Christ are being sold into prostitution and raped for \$50.00 because they won't deny Jesus.

And when you and I meet them and hear their story and realize that these are not foreign people and separate countries that have nothing to do with us, these are brothers and sisters who by the blood of Christ are spiritual family, and we hear that they have been raped and we hear that they have been destroyed and devastated, that they have been wracked with disease because of what has been done to them, because they refused to deny Christ, you and I will not be saddened that their captors and that their persecutors were dealt with justly and won't do that any more.

We'll be very happy and glad. As we join together with all the nations of the earth, we will see that God is a glorious God, who has been working throughout history in a profound way. He says we will be worshipping in this way, singing, "for your righteous acts have been revealed," the most righteous of which connects to this concept at the beginning of the song, which is the Lamb of God.

You and I, in and of ourselves, we have no righteous acts. So you say, "I'm a good person." Well, you do it out of pride or self-interest, so you negate all of the goodness therein anyways. You and I do not have intrinsic righteousness.

And God comes into human history as a humble Galilean peasant. He suffers. We oppose him. We beat him. We scourge him. We mock him. We crucify him. When he dies, he dies for our sins, and that's righteousness. You will die for your sin, or he will die for your sin. But one way or another, penalty must be paid.

Jesus cries out, "Father, forgive them." He breathes his last breath. Three days later, he arises. And today if you turn from sin to him, he gives you his righteousness. And he takes from you your sin. And we will worship God because his righteous acts have been revealed, that it's all true.

We didn't believe in vain. We didn't read in vain. We didn't repent in vain. We didn't pray in vain. It's all true. Jesus is God. Jesus is righteous. He died for our sins. He takes our sin. He gives us his righteousness. We will throw our hands in the air; we will sing, and we will be filled with joy that we are friends of God and children of God, not enemies of God.

We will also see how God deals with those who are unrepentant, for those who persist in sin. For those who will not stop, and so they must be stopped. We see then in verse 5, "After this I looked in Heaven, and there was the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues.

"They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore gold sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

So Jesus left 2,000 years ago, said that he was coming again. Since his departure, it has been ruin – sin and sinners and death and injustice and atrocity, sickness, starvation. People have done terrible things to one another. People have done terrible things to you. You have done terrible things to people.

Many of you have, at various points, cried out the same question of Revelation 6:10, "How long?" Some of you are wondering if God cares. Some of you are curious if God is paying attention. Is God impotent? Can he not do something? Is God indifferent? Does he not care? Is God absent? Does he not exist? Is God unloving? Is he not concerned?

What we see here is that God is, indeed, very concerned and very involved and very attentive. And that as sin and sinners have been running unabated for thousands of years, that Jesus is not passive or indifferent. That he sits in Heaven and before him are seven golden bowls filled with – what? The wrath of God. The wrath of God.

So much anger resides with God over human history and what we have done, that one bowl cannot contain it. Indeed, two bowls cannot contain it. It takes seven bowls. In those bowls are justice and recompense and consequence. And occasionally, an atrocity happens in this world – a terrorist act, an earthquake, a famine, a flood, a plague. And we think that perhaps God is angry, and he's poured out his bowl.

No, at the very most a drop has been bumped out of the top. There is a day coming, the date is on the calendar, when we will see that those bowls are going to be poured out on evildoers.

In Revelation 16, I'm going to read to you in succession the seven plagues that come upon the earth that are poured out of the bowl of the wrath of God. All this is, is reaping what you sow.

These are sinners sinning – not getting instantaneous consequence, thereby thinking that they can continue to rebel against God, foolishly, not knowing

that the consequence and the justice and the wrath that they should have gotten instantaneously has been delayed. It is being held. And one day, it will be poured out in totality.

And all of the justice will flood upon them in an instant. Many of you sin, and you continue to do so, thinking that because there's not instantaneous consequence, there is, indeed, no consequence.

What we see in the bowls is that there is indeed consequence; it is just delayed. And that God is giving you an opportunity to apologize and to repent and to take Jesus' death in your place, so that that bowl need not be poured out on you. That in fact, it was poured out on him.

But for those who resist, for those who rebel, for those who continue, Revelation 16 is the future that is before you. And I'm just going to read this text in its totality. I will not comment much. Certain texts of the Bible need great explanation. Others need none whatsoever.

The hard part for you will not be understanding this chapter. It will be simply embracing it. There is nothing here that is ambiguous or unclear – just rather shocking and troubling.

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.’ The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

“The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

“Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:” – 13th song in this great book – “‘You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.’

“Then I heard the altar respond:” – the 14th song – “‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power 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 fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men 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.

“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 of the East. Then I saw three evil 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 spirits of demons performing miraculous 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. ‘Behold, I will come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he will not go naked and be shamefully exposed.’

“Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake.

“No earthquake like it had ever occurred since man has been on the earth, so tremendous was its quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.

“Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky, huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.”

Satan is real. Demons are real. Sin is real. Sinners are real. God, in stark and sobering imagery, shows us what awaits those who do not turn from sin and trust in him. He does so because of his great affection for us.

Everyone in this room who has ever complained, who has ever voted, who has ever signed a petition, who has ever called a talk radio show program, who has ever regretted, who has ever said, “What if,” who has ever called in sick, who has ever become frustrated, who has ever raised their voice, who has ever shed a tear, knows that something is wrong. And this is not the way the world is supposed to be.

We cry out, “God, how long? When will you intervene? What will you do?” This is what the answer will be. God created the earth good. He created us very good, to enjoy him and the earth. We gave him the finger. We ran from him. We stopped to build cultures and nations and families apart from him.

Because of that, there is sin and death and selfishness that is the consequence of our rebellion. God comes and dies for our sin. Some of you say, “How could God possibly kill someone?” Well, the beauty of God is that he has taken his own medicine full strength.

The Father killed the Son. I love you, but I got two sons. I don't love any one of you enough to slaughter my son on your behalf. God in his great love took our sins, placed them on Jesus, punished him and crushed him in our place.

I understand why God could crush you. I understand why God could crush me. I fully embrace why God should crush us all. The great mystery of

grace is why in the world God would pour out his own wrath and my own sin on Jesus, who is the eternal God, sinless and blameless.

God speaks in these stark and sober terms because some of us have a propensity to play mental games with him. To delay without a sense of urgency. To compare ourselves to one another rather than to Jesus, so that we feel good about ourselves rather than convicted.

You see the heart here of humanity. As God's justice and his wrath and his plagues come forth, they do not repent. They do not apologize. They do not stop. They curse God. Their attitude is the same as so many in our own day, "God, who are you to tell me what to do? Who are you to rule over the earth?"

"Who are you to claim me as under your jurisdiction? God, who are you to pretend that I have any obligation toward you? Who are you to believe that I can't have life apart from you? Who are you to decide who goes to Heaven? Who are you to decide who goes to hell? Who are you to decide how the end will come?"

These people gather together as nations, and they rebel against God, and they declare war on him in their folly. You're dealing with God. Who will not fear him and give him glory? There is no life apart from God. There is no joy apart from God. There is no redemption apart from God. There is no Heaven apart from God.

You are not God! I am not God! And just because we should come together does not mean that collectively we are God. We are unfit to decide who will enter the Kingdom and who will not. None of us has any answer for sin. We don't have any clue.

We medicate. We self-medicate. We deny. We get depressed. We get despondent. We put a gun in our mouth. We just harm others. It's survival of the fittest. They weren't strong enough. It's their problem or fault. The therapist will pick up the pieces. The government will load the guns. It's beyond our control.

God alone deals with sin. In that day, we will thank him. We'll be so glad that it's over. And we won't be sinned against any more. And that we won't sin against others any more. That everything will be restored as it was created and intended.

Do you really want the godless people who lie and steal and cheat, curse and blaspheme God, harm women and children, pursue selfish ends, in the Kingdom of God? All of you naïve optimists, with your perpetual stupidity that everyone is good and should be permitted into the Kingdom, need to ask yourself why do you have a door on your house?

Because you know that there are people that you don't want in your presence. Yet you would deny your maker that same right to have into his presence only his friends. You would question his goodness, and like these people, you would curse him, which would indicate to you that are not friends of his at all, that in fact, you're his enemies. And that what awaits you is Revelation 16 – nothing but wrath.

Some of you don't like this picture of God. Some of you don't like this picture of history. But none of you has a better answer. None of you has an alternative. If God is going to deal with sin, he has to deal with sinners. If he's going to deal with sinners, either sinners turn to him and he dies for their sins, or they run from him, and they die for their sins.

But one way or another, he needs to deal with the sinner, because the sin isn't just out there. The sin is in here. And so many of us want everything to change, but we don't want to change. That is impossible. The reason why God has brought you here tonight is because he commands all men everywhere to repent.

In the great book of Exodus, one of the greatest declarations of God in all of the Bible is this, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate, gracious God." Is God compassionate and gracious? Yes, he is. It doesn't matter what you've done, his compassion is there. His grace is there. He will forgive that.

Jesus' death is sufficient for everything and anything you have done or will do. Compassionate and gracious. "Slow to anger." He's not like us. He's not capricious or hot-headed. He's slow to anger. That doesn't mean he never gets angry. It just means that his wick burns slow.

That's why it's been thousands of years between his first and second coming. He's slow to anger. It tells us, "abounding in love." Abounding in love and faithfulness. The Scripture says elsewhere, even when we're faithless, he's faithful.

Some of you have stretched this out to the end of its tether. You sin. You rebel. You ignore God. You run like crazy. You worship the beast instead of the Lamb. God continues to be patient and slow and gracious and loving, compassionate and faithful.

That's the beauty of God. Some people say, "I don't see how God could send people to hell." I don't see how he could take any to Heaven. That's my great mystery. If you and I were God, this would not be an accurate description of us, because it's not an accurate description of us right now.

When they sing that God is holy, that means that he is different. He is. Name me one person who is perennially compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. None.

Maintaining love to thousands. And forgiving wickedness and sin. God alone is the one who can deal with wickedness and sin. In us, out of us, individually, collectively. I have heard many philosophers speculate about where sin comes from and how we should remedy it.

I have yet to hear one say, "Come to me all you who are burdened and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Human beings will speculate about sin and suffering and wickedness and evil and injustice, but they offer no capacity to resolve it, to cleanse it, to heal it, to transform it, to forgive it.

God alone, in Christ – death, burial, resurrection – alone gives love where there should be wrath. Gives mercy where there should be justice. Gives compassion where there should be anger. Yet he does not leave the guilty – what? – unpunished. And we say, “Praise God. Praise God that the guilty don’t go unpunished. Praise God that everyone is either forgiven or stopped.”

One way or another, they are stopped. By becoming new creations that are imitating the God who loves them, or by being destroyed and separated, so that they can harm no one ever again.

Until you are able to embrace the justice and the holiness of God, you will have a hard time worshiping him. Once you do, you will cry out, “How long?” God, we can’t wait to see that day when sin and sinners, and Satan and demons and death are no more. When we aren’t sinned against, and we don’t sin against.

Where everything has been made new. Where everyone is friend, not foe. When everyone is family, not a stranger. When everything is true, not false. When there is life and no death. Where there are no funerals and no obituaries. Where there is no regret or remorse. When all of the tears have been shed and wiped from the eye.

Something in us deeply longs for that. It’s because that’s what we were made for. We were made for God and his glory and his goodness and his joy, in his presence, in his Kingdom, in his life. And he warns us to stop fighting and running. And he demands that we repent. And he drops these terrifying images to sober us up – stark reality.

Tonight I invite you to the Lord Jesus Christ. His tomb is empty. He’s alive today. He’s at work, pursuing people through all the nations of the earth, extending a hand of grace and compassion to forgive their sins, to be their God, to put together the mess that they have made their life to be. To give them a worthy object of worship – that is himself. To hand them instruments, and to open their mouths so that they might sing with joy.

He does that to you tonight. Some of you got saved last week. Praise God. Some of you need to get saved this week. And for those of you that have stretched the tethers of God’s grace, it’s time for you to come home to your God, who is abounding in love and faithfulness and compassion and slow to anger.

But you need to remember. He doesn’t leave the guilty unpunished. You’ll get time in your seats to do business with God and pray and repent, which you need to do. You’ll be able to come forward and partake of communion, which is remembering Jesus’ body and blood, shed for your sins.

Truly, we are about one thing here. We are about Jesus. That’s what we’re about. Our hope is in him. Our trust is in him. Our future is in him. Our faith is in him. Our forgiveness is in him. Our cleansing is in him. Our redemption is in him alone.

You can give of your tithes and offerings, which is part of our response of worship. We want you to participate fully as a worshiping people, and so we ask you to give. And then you’re gonna sing. And you’re gonna sing about God’s justice.

One day, you and I will sing that God has dealt with all sin and sinners. Today we sing because he has first dealt with us, who are sinners who sin. And God will lovingly forgive and transform and encourage and embrace us who are repentant.

Father God, we love your Word. God, we thank you that you are not a God that we invented in our imagination, like so many religions and philosophies. Indeed, this is not a God that we would have made. This is nothing that we would have fashioned out of our own imagination. This is the truth.

I thank you, Lord God, that you pull no punches. That you are a truth teller, and then you are a grace giver. God, I thank you so much that we don’t get what we deserve if we turn to Jesus, that instead, we get grace and mercy and love and forgiveness. That we get to be embraced by the same God that we curse.

Lord God, we long for the day when the martyrs before your throne will have their prayer answered. That sin and sinners will be no more. I long for the day, Lord God, when we don’t have illness, just health, and doctors have nothing to do. When we have food and not hunger, and relief agencies have nothing to do.

When we have clean water and the engineers that are busy in the nations of the earth, trying to make sure that people don’t die of thirst, have nothing to do. We long for the day, Lord God, when contracts and attorneys and notaries and courts and such are unnecessary because everyone tells the truth, and a handshake endures forever.

God, we long for the day when our children can go out and play, and we never have to check on them, even if they should be gone for months, because we know that they’re just out enjoying brothers and sisters in Christ, laughing as the children of God, and perfectly fine.

God, we long for the day when our homes don’t have locks and they don’t even have doors. That all can come in and go out, because all are loved and welcomed warmly. God, we long for the day when those who are evil and wicked and stubborn and hard-hearted and unrepentant and dangerous are stopped.

We thank you, God, that you are so patient, that even though some of us were those very people, that you have waited to save us. You’ve waited to transform us. That you’ve waited to embrace us.

And so, God, we pray for others, and we pray for patient endurance as you are pursuing the rest of your people. But God, we do long for that day

when we shall see sin and sinners come to an end. When we shall see you on your throne and all things made new.

We long for that day, Lord God, where you hand us an instrument, and we raise our voices as a holy and hoarse people, shouting of your victory. God, as we gather today, we celebrate your forgiveness, your love, your grace, your mercy, your compassion.

You do not let the wicked go unpunished, and that we who are wicked, that you have sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die and rise in our place. And God, we sing now. We come into your presence. We celebrate for an audience of one. Amen.