

**Revelation 15: 1-4; “The Sign of Triumph”, Sermon # 110 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012. And, after much revision of the sermon it was preached on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.**

The reason that these verses are placed here is to let us know that this anticipated victory over all of the Antichristian powers began at the Reformation, and it continues to be held as dear, in the hearts of all those who are faithful to Christ. This sure hope of Triumph has been from even before the Reformation, and it will be held throughout all the generations which have followed the Reformation. It will continue to be held until the time will come that these things will have their certain fulfillment. This “great and marvelous sign”, mentioned in the first verse, is a sign of Triumph. It is a sign, 1<sup>st</sup> of all – Of the Triumph of the Seven Angels. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Of the Triumph of the Saints standing on the Sea of Glass. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – Of the Triumph of their singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb. Let us consider these great spiritual realities which make up this sign.

**1<sup>st</sup> – The Triumph of the Seven Angels.** (verse 1)

There is, here in these verses, the announcement of a great victory and great rejoicings which are given to us for our encouragement. Great praise is ascending to God as the saints realize that God is fully intending to judge the Antichristian system which is called here, “The beast”. The saints are described as already “having the victory” over the beast through Jesus Christ. But they shall also rejoice when they actually witness the end of the whole Antichristian system as the angels pour out the vials of God’s wrath upon the “earth, the sea, the rivers and waters, the sun, the throne of the beast, the great river Euphrates, and the air. These are the rejoicings of many centuries of believers, pictured for us here in nutshell, in verses 1-4.

Every believer who reads this passage, and understands it, is going to be able to witness this anticipated victory. For whether they have died and gone to heaven, or whether they are alive upon the earth, by the time that this victory takes place, they will know and understand that this, the greatest of Satan’s schemes against the Church, has been overthrown, and the Church has triumphed. I believe that the culmination of these plagues which are mentioned, will happen as a cataclysmic event which will come upon Rome when the end of the 1260 days (or years) prophecy is fulfilled. At that time the two witnesses will be slain, and thereby, the hope that the Great Commission will be fulfilled will look very dim indeed.

But fortunately we have God’s word that this shall not be so. The witness of Christ’s Church shall rise from apparent death, and life shall again come into these witnesses, which represent Church teaching and government, and the victory shall be won. (Revelation 11: 11). Here in Chapter 15, we should understand that John is still receiving the vision which concerns the Church of Jesus Christ in this third time period of Church history; the time period of the 1260 days or years. Let me review with you where we have been, for a few minutes. There has been this great conflict between false and true Christianity which has been taking place during the whole 3<sup>rd</sup> time period of Church History.

I once thought that these years ran from the year 756 A.D. to 2016 A.D. I had taken my cue in dating these years, from Moses Lowman in his analysis of this part of the book of Revelation, that the 1260 days/years prophecy began when the temporal power of the Papacy was established, in 756 A.D. Since this time period has come and gone with the year 2016, it has forced me to re-think the whole subject of what is the basis of the reign of Antichrist. I have come to the conclusion that the reign of Antichrist has much more of a spiritual basis rather than a political basis; that the beginning of the reign of Antichrist did not actually begin with the Pope’s temporal power being established. Rather, it now seems to me to be directly related to the establishment of Image Worship in the Church of Rome, as well as in the Byzantine Church in the East.

Therefore, in my analysis of who the Antichristian powers are, and how long they will reign together, I now believe that it is important give consideration to both the Eastern and Western sections of the former ancient Roman Empire. The temporal political power of the Pope in the West does not appear to have been the most important issue in the spiritual reign of these powers, but rather it has been the provoking sins of Idolatry in both the Eastern and Western Churches that were, and they presently are, the basis of the reign of the Antichristian powers all of this time. Since this is the case, I have now decided after much thought and study, to put forth the hypothesis that the 1260 days/years prophecy could not have begun any earlier than 787 A.D. and indeed it may have possibly begun as late as 843 A.D.

Therefore, according to these calculations the ending of the 1260 years will probably take place no sooner than 2047 A.D., and probably no later than 2103 A.D. When I say these things, I hope that you will always remember that although these times mentioned in the book of Revelation are fixed in the Father's mind, that He has not chosen to allow us to completely be certain about their beginning and ending of them ourselves. So many godly men have been wrong in their dating calculations, who have gone before me.

I myself may be wrong about these things now. But I put them forth here in the hope that we all will see, how great and important to God are the issues of righteousness and unrighteousness in the doctrine, the worship, and the practice of Christ's Church. That God will bring His judgments upon all idolatrous systems of worship is certain. How much more so, then, when any church claims to be Christian and falls into idolatry and maintains it over many generations.

Speculating on the beginning of the 1260 days/years prophecy, on when it might have begun: I now think that a date which could be established for its beginning was at the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Nicaea's decision to allow the false worship of images in the Western Church in 787 A.D. This decision then, after it was made, was disputed at certain times later on, but it was confirmed and built upon, by the Byzantine Empire's churches false worship in 843 A.D. when the Empress Theodora decided to reverse her husband Theophilus' decision to ban image worship in the Eastern Empire. We then find, to our astonishment, that Pope Nicolas the 1<sup>st</sup> in Rome, in the year 858 A.D., highly commending the Empress Theodora for this.

I believe that these actions taken by this Empress and commended by the Pope help us in giving us a reasonable date as to when the 1260 years of the reign of Antichrist began. I am going to take this date of 843 A.D. as being at least close to the actual beginning of the established idolatrous worship in both Eastern and Western churches because of the difficulty of Papal Rome's really settling the matter at the initial council in 787. 787 could be used as the beginning date, but that council really did not actually establish their edict for the worship of images for many years in the Roman Catholic Church.

The decision either to ban or to permit image worship went back and forth a number of times. It only really seems to have been finally settled and established in both the Eastern and Western sections of the Roman Empire and generally in all their churches, through what the Empress Theodora did in 843 A.D. Her decision to reverse her husband Theophilus' policy of banning image worship after he died in 842, was a blasphemous decision which he would have never approved of. It had very grave consequences, especially for the 100,000 Paulician Christians who were put to death at her order, because they would not submit to it.

Surely this is characteristic of the whole Antichristian system from this date forward; a Harlot riding a Beast and drunk with the blood of the saints, and so, therefore, I believe that this may be the best date for the start of the 1260 days prophecy to begin. So, now let me review for you the times that came before the 1260 days, the first time period in Church History which is being described in this blessed book, was being represented by the opening of the seals in Chapters 6 and 7. I have said to you in past sermons that I believe it lasted from 98 A.D. to 323

A.D. which was the time of the Pagan Roman Empire's awful persecution of Christians. Then came the second time period, which was represented to our minds by the sounding of the trumpets. That was the time of the rise of the Antichristian powers which is described in Chapters 8 and 9. It lasted from 323 A.D. to about 843 A.D. The various trumpets, when they were sounded, alerted the true Church to the coming dangers of false doctrine and false prophets trying to infiltrate the churches of that day.

The first false doctrine to come up was Arianism. Next came all the heresies related to the Trinity, and also the doctrine of Christ in His two natures. Then followed Pelagianism. Then came the rise of Mohammedanism in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, and at the very same time in the West, the rise of the Papal system which began in 606 A.D. This vision that we are studying here, began back in Chapter 10, verse 7, "in the days of the sounding of seventh angel". At that time, John was given, "a little book" by the angel, and he was told to eat it, and that it would be "sweet as honey in his mouth", but it would be, "bitter to his stomach" after he ate it.

That little book gives an overview of the whole 1260 years; the time of the dominion of Antichrist, the great deception perpetrated by Satan to hinder the advance of Christ's kingdom conquering among the nations. I believe that each of these three time periods of Church History is consecutive in order of time. First the Seals, then the Trumpets, and then the pouring out of the Vials or bowls of wrath. When John says that he saw "seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete", he is not speaking of hell. He is speaking of the wrath of God which is going to be poured out upon this false system of Antichrist, Roman Catholicism in the West and Eastern Orthodoxy and Mohammedanism in the East.

Let us remember that the wrath of God never ends, in hell. It never is complete there. But here in this vision in Chapter 15, we read of God's wrath as being complete, or finished, or filled up. This means that what we are looking at, is a series of earthly judgments upon a false spiritual system which John calls Antichrist in other places in the Bible. (1<sup>st</sup> John 2: 22 and 4: 1-6) This false system will be further described in greater detail as the vials of God's wrath are poured out in Chapter 16. But here, John is seeing this "great and marvelous sign", and it indicates that something is about to happen which will cause the saints of all the generations to rejoice. The saints are going to have the kingdom delivered to them after this system is judged.

Chapters 17 and 18 describe the judgment of the false system that has tried to deceive the world into thinking that it is true Christianity when really it is not. Chapter 19 will describe the great rejoicing which takes place in heaven and earth at the downfall of spiritual Babylon, and then Christ will spiritually lead His Church, His Christian soldiers to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. The stage will then be set for the greatest advance of the gospel which the Christian Church shall ever engage in. It is called in prophetic language, "the Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in chapter 19, and it will issue in the Church's triumph in "the Thousand Years" mentioned in Chapter 20.

It will be the time of the Millennium, the time when nations shall come to serve God through Jesus Christ our Lord. It will be the time when Satan will be bound and will not be able to deceive the nations any longer. Here John is able to look into the prophetic counsels of God, in this visionary picture being presented to him. And he sees that the seven angels of God are armed with spiritual plagues which are about to be poured out upon the false system which holds the witness of the true Church of Jesus down. This church all during this time period has been insisting that its own false doctrines and practices of worship were true.

These seven angels, having the seven last plagues, are going to bring spiritual and desolating judgments upon this false system. The number 7 represents the number of completeness. By the time that the last vial of wrath is poured out, Antichrist will be completely destroyed. How can we apply this to ourselves living in the latter times of the 1260 years prophecy? Let me give

you an exhortation of hope. Do not question in your heart whether Christ's cause is going to triumph on the earth. Even though the final manifestation of Antichrist may come in our own lifetime, and it may appear that all is lost, don't give up the faith. No matter what happens, you should hold on to the truth of God's word and persevere in your faith in Christ.

Hold on, and fight the good fight of faith, even when false religion appears to have overpowered the true. Even when false religion has its lying signs and wonders to display, do not believe them. You cannot go wrong if you will simply hold to the truth of the Bible and pray to receive wisdom from God. The seven angels are not done yet. Their greatest work of judgment is still to come. All will come right for the Church of Jesus Christ. We must be prepared for a time of great spiritual darkness, after which will come, the greatest revival that the world has ever seen.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – The Triumph of the Saints standing on the Sea of Glass.** (verse 2)

“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.” I believe this sea of glass to be a picture of God's providential ordering and care of His dear people in relation to their having to face the persecutions of the beast during this time of Antichristian darkness. The picture is that they have overcome them. I want you to turn back with me to Revelation 4, verse 6.

Here we find a previous reference to this sea of glass. “And from the throne (that is the throne set in heaven which Christ is seated upon) there was a sea of glass, like crystal.” “And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.” I told you when I preached through this passage that this is a visionary scene of the worship that goes on in heaven. Everything in the future and in God's providential ordering of things during this Church age is clear to God. It is crystal clear, and He knows what He wants the ministry of His word, by all of his called servants, to look like.

These living creatures are “in the midst of the Throne” and “around the Throne”. God's ministers, His pastors and teachers, are those who are in the midst of the Throne in the sense that they are extensions of the Divine rule of His Son's kingdom in the midst of the Church. They are responsible for teaching and ruling God's people, having received authority to do so, by their being called by God and their having their call verified also by the church, that they are called to minister that word on His behalf. God rules in His church by His word, and his word is preached and taught by His ministers.

This is the meaning of the sea of glass mixed with fire. God is ruling in heaven and earth through Jesus Christ our Lord. The sea of all of life, and of every generation, lies open before Him. It is crystal clear what He will do to bring about the end of the false system of Antichrist. But it is not at all clear to His people here upon the earth. For them a sea is something that you sail on to arrive at your destination. Those who have overcome, our text says, are those who are standing on the sea of glass.

We who believe in Christ are moving on the sea of life, and we are completely in the hands of God. We are standing on the promises of God; we are standing on the finished work of Jesus Christ; we are standing on the deck of the ship of the church which is riding on this sea, and we are heading for the desired destination of heaven.

God is most certainly and definitely going to bring us to our desired destination. His purposes are clear like this sea of glass. They will not be thwarted. By trusting in His providential ordering of all things for our good, we can rest in his providential care just as those who are sailing on a crystal clear sea. The saints who have overcome, who have the victory over the beast, are those who are standing on this sea. Those who have overcome, and have gone to heaven in the process, they see things very clearly now. Those here upon the earth, they must believe in the words of this vision. In other words, even though this sea looks simply like a sheet

of clear glass, you and I who are still here upon the earth must trust in the leading and the lovingkindness of the Lord. We must hold fast the truth of His word. For us there is going to be fire which is mixed in with this clear sea, which means that there will be difficulties, persecutions and afflictions which we will face as a result of the opposition of Satan working against our witness to the truth of Christ and His word.

This opposition is what has especially come to God's saints through this false religious system of Papal Rome and all of her daughters. But let us rejoice. God has providentially ordered all things for good, to those whom He has called to face these oppositions. He has commanded the victory for them through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. And so the true Christian should be filled with love for those whom he contends with, in a righteous sense, when he is trying to further the gospel and God's truth.

Turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13, verse 4. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails." "But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge it will vanish away." "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." "But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away."

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." "For now we see in a mirror (a glass), dimly, but then face to face." "Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." Here we find a relationship with the mirror (the glass) we see dimly into, and the sea of glass of our text. Now we see through the mirror of God's purposes dimly. Then, in heaven, when we see Christ face to face, we will know as we are known. All will become perfectly clear.

But in the meantime, let us exercise every Christian grace; faith, hope, and love, as we go about to witness to the grace and truth which is found in Christ. Even in sharing the gospel with Roman Catholics, Liberal Protestants, and Muslims, let us speak the truth in love. Let us understand and remember that because of the truth of the word of God, we are the ones who truly do have the victory over the beast of Antichrist, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – Let us think about the Triumph of the saints singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb.** (verse 2b, 3, and 4)

"...having the harps of God, They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!' "Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!" "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?" "For You alone are holy." "For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested." The reason that the saints, here in the New Testament time period of Antichrist, are singing the song of Moses, is because their deliverance from Antichrist is very much like the deliverance of Israel from Egypt under Moses in the Old.

Egypt is a picture of the world. Pharaoh is a type of the Devil, and even in this case, a type of the Popes who for these hundreds of years have wanted to hold the saints under his spiritual foot. There are many of God's dear people who have been held in bondage to serve the edicts of Popes; their false doctrine, and the false system of Christianity which is commonly in the world thought to be true. But when God sent Moses and Aaron to the children of Israel in Exodus 4: 29 it says this: "Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel." "And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses." "Then he did the signs in the sight of the people."

"So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped." They believed the word of God and worshiped when they saw that God had considered their estate.

But we know, if we have read the rest of the story, that many of them did not believe when it became so much more difficult, later on. Why? Because Pharaoh would not let the people go, so God had to bring His plagues. We are going to see in later sermons that some of these plagues poured out by the seven angels are very much like some of the plagues which were given by God to Moses to bring upon Pharaoh and the land of Egypt so that the people could leave and worship God in the way that He had commanded.

But after the plagues were poured out, the people did leave Egypt. And even though Pharaoh chased after them with his armies and he thought to destroy them at the Red Sea, instead, he himself was destroyed and all of his army. And the children of Israel saw it and afterwards they sang the song of Moses. "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!" "The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!" "The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him."

I will speak to you more about this subject of praise in my next sermon, and tell you more about the song of Moses and the Lamb. It will be enough for us now to know that we should believe in the sign of Triumph, for God will surely judge the false religion of Rome, and bring His own dear people into the promised land of Gospel Triumph and Millennial holiness.