

We're returning to our accidental series on the book of Revelation. This morning I want to tell 2 stories, which will maybe help us remember where we are in Revelation and more importantly help us to see where we're going. There is quite a lot in Revelation the author, John, assumes the reader knows. He assumes our brains are filling in pieces of the story he references but doesn't fully tell. I realized as I searched for the right example that with multiple generations it's hard to come up with something where everyone will know the reference. But let's try. If I said don't stay out too late because once it's midnight everything turns back to pumpkins and mice - what story does your mind fill in? Cinderella. Because the fairy godmother turned pumpkins into the coach - it doesn't matter if you watched Disney or Rodger's and Hammerstein it's going back to a pumpkin. If I say lions and tigers and bears your mind fills in what movie? Wizard of Oz and you see Dorothy and the Scarecrow and the Tin Man skipping down a yellow brick road into a dark forest. You don't need me to explain the reference you know what it's from. John didn't think he needed to explain his references to Israel's history - he assumed they all knew what it was from. The problem is too many today don't know the backstory. We read something in Revelation and it no longer triggers our mind to go - oh, yeah, I've read that before. I know that reference. The Bible is actually one huge story which in a lot of ways repeats itself. And, one way we can connect the dots and understand the references is to read the story backwards. Richard B. Hayes is a big time scholar who looks at how the New Testament authors understood and interpreted the Old Testament authors. He talks about reading the Bible backwards and sort of reinterpreting the story of Israel in light of the story of Jesus. It's a way of connecting two events that seem quite separate but are actually more connected than we first thought because the 2 seemingly stand alone, separate events actually help us understand each event better when we know both stories. Let me explain by telling you the two stories.

John, a pastor, has been stuck on the island of Patmos, and one Sunday morning he is worshipping the Lord and he gets this revelation of Jesus given to him to help everyone understand what would take place. He sees a vision and Jesus himself says to John - write all this down and tell these 7 churches what you see. What he begins to see and hear is some super crazy stuff that honestly he has a hard time describing but he does so to the best of his ability. Because he's describing things it often leaves us wondering - is that real?

Is it literal or is it figurative? Is it a metaphor? And, we've talked about this before. He sees animals that seem to be made up of multiple types of animals all at once, he sees rainbows and crystals and rare jewels. He hears thunder and harps and voices singing. He weeps and he cheers, he eats books and receives instructions. And, he witnesses all sorts of terrible judgments being released on the earth. In Revelation 16, which is where we are now as we've been making our way through this series, he will see seven angels pour out seven bowls full of God's wrath on the earth.

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 second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, 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.

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 fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. 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.

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.

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!" Revelation 16: 2-4, 8-14, 17

What's interesting is John had witnessed very similar and equally terrible things when the angels had sounded trumpets in Revelation 8. With the trumpets had come hail and fire

mixed with blood, a mountain thrown into a sea, a sea turned to blood, stars falling out of the sky and waters turning bitter, the sun and the moon went dark, and locusts that looked like horses with the power of scorpions filled the earth. With these trumpets and bowls of wrath God is desperate for more people to repent of their sins as a result. They seem to be warnings and calls for repentance. We just read that after the 4th bowl the people refused to repent and glorify God. The first bowl of wrath was poured out on those who had pledged allegiance to the beast and worshipped the pseudo lamb instead of the real Lamb who had died for them. After the first 6 trumpets back in chapter 8, we're told the people "**...still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.**" **Revelation 8:20-21**

Yet, even as God is issuing warnings and calls of repentance and pouring out judgements on those who do not – John tells us there are those who have remained true to the Lamb, who have been dressed in white – a white that is only clean because it's been washed in the blood of the Lamb. In other words, it wasn't that they were good or better it's just that they repented and came to Jesus, and He was good and sinless and died for them. It was His blood that cleansed them. John sees these who have not worshipped the beast or the fake, pseudo lamb, who have kept themselves pure before the Lord gathered around the throne. He sees them worshipping Jesus and bringing Him glory and honor and he sees that they are made up of every nation, tribe, language, color.

Then, when John saw the angels with the bowls of wrath getting ready to pour out what would be the final outpouring of wrath he also witnessed this incredible scene: **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. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb... After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden 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 for ever 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. Revelation 15:1-3, 5-8

Here's what's interesting: **A day of judgement for some is also the day of salvation for others.**

The people who kept their eyes on the Lamb are now standing with him singing a song of victory and witnessing the presence of God come to dwell among them forever while at the same time those who did not follow the lamb but worshipped the beast instead are having ugly, festering, painful sores break out on their bodies. There's something about this drama John sees play out that doesn't seem quite right, and it doesn't sit well with us. It doesn't make sense how this could all be. How could God do this to anyone and also how can I be sure to avoid painful sores are both questions that swirl in my head. So maybe it's time to tell the other story to help shed light on this one and maybe this one will shed light on the other.

For the other story we go backwards in our Bible – almost to the beginning. We have to go to Exodus 1. The people of Israel are living in Egypt and have now been made into slaves. They begin to cry out to God, how long, and God heard their cry and raised up a leader, Moses. Moses tries to solve the problem his own way which was not good and ends up running for his life. While living in the desert God appears in a burning bush and speaks to him. He is to go before the Pharaoh and ask that the people of Israel be allowed to go into the desert to worship God. When Moses, and his brother, Aaron, go before Pharaoh and make this request they're told no. They return to Pharaoh to make the same request and this time to let him know if he refuses then the Nile River will be turned to blood. What follows are 10 plagues because Pharaoh will not let God's people go. The people in Egypt and for the most part the Israelites living there experience the waters turning to blood, frogs living everywhere, gnats, flies that come only to Egypt and not to the people of Israel, the livestock are all killed in Egypt but not the livestock of God's people, then festering boils break out on men and animals, hail destroys the crops, locusts eat everything that wasn't destroyed, darkness rules over the land, and then finally the firstborn of every household in Egypt dies. These plagues were the result of the hardness of Pharaoh's heart toward the things of God, his idolatry, and his persecution of God's people. He would not relent nor

would he repent. But, the ultimate purpose of these plagues was not to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave but to give God opportunity to show His power, which is above every other power including the magicians in Pharaoh's court and to demonstrate that God was over all creation. He made the day and the night and He can cause it to stand still and be only dark for 3 days if He chooses. God understands the seasons because He made them but He'll not be controlled by creation – He'll send hail or locusts to destroy what He made if need be. The result is that even creation would recognize God alone is worthy of glory. God through the plagues of judgment and the salvation of Israel will gain glory and all will know that He alone is the Almighty God.

God prepares the people of Israel to leave and let's them know in advance about the final plague that is coming to the households in Egypt. To be spared from death in their own households they are to kill a lamb and apply its blood to the doorpost around their homes. When God passed over that night if He saw the blood He would spare them and if not judgment would come. And, once again **The day of judgment for Egypt was also the day of salvation for Israel.** Pharaoh tells them to get out and they leave. But, then they reach the Red Sea. Pharaoh is angry and orders his army to go after Israel and bring them back. Moses looks at the people, looks at the sea in front of them, sees Pharaoh's army coming towards them from behind and says these words which are absolutely amazing given the circumstances, **“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Exodus 14:13-14**

God parts the Red Sea and they walk across on dry land and then Pharaoh's army is drowned in the same waters. Moses leads the people in a new song – a song of redemption and celebration, a song declaring victory and worship to the Lord. The people continue on towards the land God has given them. During that time Moses meets with God and is given the ten commandments written on stone. God tells Moses to **“have the people make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” Exodus 25:8-9** In that tabernacle was to be the tablets of Testimony or The Testimony which was another name for the law. Once the tabernacle was built and set up **“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of**

Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” Exodus 40:34-35

The Lord dwelt among the people in that day.

Now, what light does the story of Exodus shed on the story in Revelation and the story of Revelation shed on the story of Exodus? What do we learn or what do we see in a greater way by having our minds fill in details of the Revelation story that the original readers in John’s day would have automatically filled in? And, how does knowing the end of the Exodus story fill us with hope about how the story of Revelation will end?

God always has a plan for deliverance

In both stories we see very similar plagues that come to people. The first 5 trumpets are patterned after 5 of the plagues and the bowls of wrath pour out several similar plagues as well – boils and frogs and seas to blood. But where the plagues in Exodus served as a demonstration of God’s power over all in Revelation their primary purpose is judgement of unbelievers. John is writing them down as a warning while there was still time to repent. Some of the judgment comes to everyone because everyone lives in a fallen world. Jesus said the sun would shine on the evil and the good and the rain would fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. Sometimes gnats annoy everyone and sometimes God says the flies will only be on those who fail to listen because I’ll make a distinction and put my hand of protection over my people. Sometimes bad things happen because we live in a broken world, but sometimes painful sores break out on the people who had the mark showing they worshipped the beast and not the Lamb. But, through it all God has a plan. God hears the cries for deliverance from gnats that no one deserved and from boils that no one wants. In Exodus God raised up a deliverer named Moses. In Revelation God has raised this Jesus, who was crucified, to be both Savior and Lord. In Exodus God delivers His people as they walk across the Red Sea on dry ground. In Revelation the people are led over the sea of glass mixed with fire and looking every bit as red as that sea so that they can claim victory over an enemy just as real. God always has a plan to deliver His people safely to the other side where victory is secured.

The price of salvation is always the Lamb’s blood

In Exodus it’s an actual lamb that is killed and applied to the homes of the people of Israel. It was the blood of a lamb that saved them from death. When God saw the lamb’s blood He

spared them and those in the house did not die. But, in Revelation it's the blood of The Lamb looking as if it had been slain who has washed the robes of those who have come through the tribulation and made those robes white in the blood of the Lamb. It is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and who is victorious over death, hell and the grave who now stands with the people leading them in the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. How many times have I said - Keep your eye on the Lamb. Where is He? He's leading the singing at the head of the victorious procession.

God has always desired to dwell among His people

In Exodus His glory fills a tent fashioned as a sanctuary for God to dwell. His presence is so strong that when Moses meets with God he walks out and no one can even look at Moses because his face was so bright. When Moses asks to see God's glory he's told he can't for no one can see God and live – but God hid him in a cleft of a rock and allowed His glory to pass by. God dwelt with His people then. Then, in the season we just celebrated, God became flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus and now we have seen His glory. In Revelation we once more see the temple but it's a tabernacle again – we get a flashback to the way God's presence used to dwell with the people. This tabernacle John sees matches the exact specifications God had given Moses in Exodus. Once again, the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God. God is present with His people. And pretty soon we'll get to turn 2 more pages in the book and read, **“Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.” Revelation 21:3** He will be with us, and we will be with Him forever.

Worship has always been the key

In Exodus God wanted His people to go out and worship Him in the desert. Pharoah wanted the people to be known for what they did and what they could produce. But, God wanted them to be known for who they were – His children. God chose them, loved them, appointed them, made them His heirs, His people, His nation. He wanted the people to worship Him alone. He delivered them from Pharoah – twice – and you know what they did? What was their participation in accomplishing the victory? They ate a meal, they stood still, and then following a miracle walked across a sea on dry ground. Victory came because the Lord fought for them – not because they did anything. It's what He told them to do. Stand still and see deliverance come. And it did. Their response was to sing unto the Lord.

They expressed their thanksgiving in song. **“The enemy boasted, I will pursue, I will overtake them...but you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them...Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” Exodus 15:9-10**

And, so in Revelation we see the same God has made a way for His people once again. Those who have remained loyal to the Lamb have come through victorious. They have battled the enemy in an unbelieving world, and now they stand before the Lord. Their weapons, by which they defeated the beast, were the word of their testimony, the blood of the Lamb and the harps given them by God. They testified and worshipped their way to victory. And they began to sing the song of Moses and the song 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.”**

Revelation 15:3-4

When we read the story backwards we already know how it ends. The people of God win. They might have to deal with some gnats and frogs on occasion but victory is ahead. There may be days of doubt and days of darkness but victory is still ahead. It may seem like God has forgotten or failed to hear but He’s listening, He has heard, and it’s always been His desire to dwell among His people. He longs to have us near Him. It may seem like deliverance is a long time in coming but victory is ahead and the plan is in motion. It may seem like you just can’t get it right no matter how many times you try – but victory doesn’t depend on you – it’s dependent upon the work of the Lamb and His work is already accomplished. He’s already paid the price for you to be saved – for you to be forgiven. It’s not on you – it’s on Jesus and He’s won. For all of us walking into 2023 with worries, anxiety, trepidation or walking in ready to take on the world full of energy and courage – the weapons we need this year are the word of our testimony, the blood of the Lamb applied to our life, and an instrument for worship. Grab a harp – start to sing. We’ll worship our way to victory. Because all we have to do is stand still and watch – the Lord is fighting for us this year.

Will you bow your heads with me? As I prepared this message there was a song that just kept coming to my heart so will you take these next few minutes to just stay still, to worship and pray and invite the Lord to fight for you in this new year?