

## **Worship and Judgment**

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Revelation: Looking at Life from the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 14 -16

Some of you know that back in the 1980's, Iraq was engaged in a terribly bloody war with its neighbor, Iran. Now, the United States had a horrible relationship with Iran, and we had terrible memories of the Iranians taking our embassy and holding embassy workers captive for a year and a half. With each Iranian battlefield victory against Iraq, the United States inched closer and closer to support the Iraqi government led by Saddam Hussein.

The United States provided hundreds of millions of dollars of credit to Saddam Hussein, and removed Iraq from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. During the war, Iraq used chemical weapons against the Iranians (approximately 195 times), killing or wounding some fifty thousand people, many of them civilians. One Iraqi commander was quoted widely saying, "For every insect there is an insecticide."

The United States had tremendous amounts of evidence that the Iraqis were violating the Geneva Convention by using chemical weapons. But our basic approach was that "the enemy of our enemy is our friend", and so we offered a very muted response to the gassing of tens of thousands of Iranians. Having

seen how effective chemical weapons could be against an external enemy, Saddam Hussein decided that he would begin to slaughter his great internal enemy, the Kurds.

Now the Kurds are a stateless people, scattered over Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. There are some 25 million Kurds, who are divided by two forms of Islam, five borders and three Kurdish languages. The Kurds have been historically innocent of desiring any harm to the Iraqi people, but their great "crime" is that they have wanted to form their own state and rule themselves.

In May 1987, Iraq became the first country ever to attack its own citizens with chemical weapons. The greatest and deadliest attack was on the Kurdish town of Halabja, which has become known as the Kurdish Hiroshima. In three days of attacks victims were exposed to mustard gas - which burns and mutates DNA, and causes cancer - and various nerve gases - like Sarin, which can kill or paralyze. Doctors also suspected that the dreaded VX gas was used in this attack. Thousands and thousands of Kurds were killed and this was just one of 40 chemical assaults that we know of.

I want to read to you from the accounts of an Iraqi chemist named Abdel-Qadir al-Askari, who had heard a rumor that a chemical attack was imminent. He left his village which was situated on low ground and scrambled up to a hilltop so he could warn his neighbors of imminent danger. When he saw Iraqi planes

bombing he sprinted back down to his village in order to help. When he reached his home no one was inside. Here is his personal account of what he found when he got back to his village. Listen to this tragic report. He writes,

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“I became really afraid – convinced that nobody survived. I climbed up from the shelter to a cave nearby thinking they might have taken refuge there. There was nobody there, either. But when I went to the small stream near our house, I found my mother. She had fallen by the river; her mouth was face-down into the mud bank...I turned my mother over; she was dead. I wanted to kiss her, but I knew that if I did, the chemicals would be passed on. Even now I deeply regret not kissing my beloved mother.”

His report goes on to say that he searched desperately for his wife and children.

Again, listen to his words:

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“I continued along the river. I found the body of my nine-year old daughter hugging her cousin, who had also choked to death in the water...then I went around our house. In a space of 200-300 square meters I saw the bodies of dozens of people from my family. Among them were my children, my brothers, my father, and my nieces and nephews. Some of them were still alive, but I couldn't tell one from another. I was trying to see if the children were dead. At that point I lost my feelings. I didn't know who to cry for anymore and I didn't know who to go to first. I was all alone in the night.”

al-Askari's family contained 40 people before the attacks and 15 after. He lost five children: two boys - one age 16 and the other age six; and three girls - ages nine, four and six months. Survivors of the attack on this village witnessed the deaths of their friends, their spouses and their children.

The United States chose not to respond to reports of the gas attacks. When one State Department official did condemn the attacks, the Iraqis were irate. The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, cancelled his long-planned meeting with George Schultz, the Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan, accusing the US government of interfering in Iraqi internal affairs. The State Department immediately issued an apology, saying the United States does not interfere in the internal affairs of countries with a Kurdish minority, and essentially the matter was dropped.

There was a powerful book written about genocide over the last 100 years titled, “A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide” by Samantha Power. It was written back in 2002 and it surveys genocide around the world and America’s response to it. From the Armenian genocide in 1915 to the Holocaust under the Nazis; to the Cambodian genocide in the ‘70s and the gassing of the Kurds in the ‘80s. From Rwanda and Bosnia in the ‘90s, and now perhaps again with the Sudan in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Our basic approach to the slaughter of people around the world has been to stay uninvolved. America is not alone in this. That’s been the basic approach of virtually all countries around the world.

So how do people like Abdel al-Askari find justice? As we continue in this series from the book of Revelation, we’re going to look at the theme of justice and

judgment today. That theme will continue over the next several weeks. In chapters 14 to 16 of the book of Revelation we find the theme of justice and judgment woven together, surprisingly, with the theme of worship. I've called today's talk very simply "Worship and Judgment".

Revelation 14 introduces us to all of the themes that we're going to encounter in the next seven chapters of the book of Revelation. One of the themes that we're going to encounter is the theme of judgment. We read in Revelation 14:14-20 these words:

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Rev 14:14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.

Rev 14:15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Rev 14:16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Rev 14:17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.

Rev 14:18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe."

Rev 14:19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath.

Rev 14:20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

The apostle John speaks about two harvests – one is a grain harvest, the other a grape harvest. I believe the grain harvest is the harvest of the nations unto

salvation and the grape harvest is the harvest of individuals unto eternal judgment and condemnation. John is using two images to depict two aspects of judgment, one positive and the other negative, when the Lord returns.

Reaping in the Bible is always a positive image of bringing people into the kingdom. On the other hand, gathering the grapes into the winepress and treading the winepress is always the negative action. By the way, most of you are familiar with the Battle Hymn of the Republic that begins with the words, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on." Written during the American civil war, the imagery is drawn right from Revelation chapter 14.

Why judgment? Why the judgment of God? Very simply, God's judgment squares up all the injustices of life. Hurt people want healing, bullied people demand relief. People get pushed around and want to push back. Life is unfair; and all of the lawsuits of our insanely lawsuit-happy, litigious society won't make life that much fairer. Life is unfair!

Our own families are often in the context of great injustice. There's favoritism shown to one child over another. You might be treated poorly by your in-laws for no particular reason. Many people have affairs even though their spouse is loving and faithful. When you look at the different treatment of children from one family

to another, you see great disparity. In one family the children are beaten and in another family the children are hugged. Why does one child in our city get raised around drugs and violence and another child is taken to museums and given piano lessons? Some parents are totally involved in their kid's education and others are totally uninvolved.

Life is unfair, not only in the family, but even in school. Children are treated better if they're cute. Studies show that active boys, especially minority children, are discriminated against if they can't sit still in first grade. Boys, in particular, are put on Ritalin or some other drug. School funding in our state is totally unfair. There's a wealthy suburb in the Cleveland area that provides more than \$14,000 per student for education. Three quarters of the kids take expensive SAT and ACT prep classes. Poor districts in Ohio provide their kids just a little over \$3000 per student. Then people say we want a purely merit-based system, in which college admission is totally based on SAT scores or ACT scores.

Life is unfair. You wait for a parking spot and then some aggressive person just pulls right in front of you. Someone grabs the credit for the job you did at work. Husbands and wives engage in charades in which they pretend to be hurt simply as a power-play to get what they want. None of these things, of course, amount to the big injustices of life: the genocides or the oppression of people like Mukhtaran Bibi.

Perhaps you read this piece in the paper, an editorial written by Nicholas Kristof. Listen to this. He writes,

“Last fall, I wrote about Mukhtaran Bibi, a woman who was sentenced by a tribal council in Pakistan to be gang-raped because of an infraction supposedly committed by her brother. Four men raped Ms. Mukhtaran, then village leaders forced her to walk home nearly naked, in front of a jeering crowd of 300. Ms. Mukhtaran was supposed to have committed suicide. Instead, with the backing of a local Islamic leader, she fought back and testified against her persecutors. Six were convicted.

Then Ms. Mukhtaran, who believed the best way to overcome such abuses was through better education, used her compensation money to start two schools in her village, one for boys and the other for girls. She went out of her way to enroll the children of her attackers in the school, showing that she bore no grudges.

A group of Pakistani Americans invited Ms. Mukhtaran to visit the United States, starting this Saturday. Then a few days ago the Pakistani government went berserk. On Thursday the authorities put Ms. Mukhtaran under house arrest to stop her from speaking out. In phone conversations the last few days, she said when she tried to step outside police pointed their guns at her. To silence her, the police cut off her landline.

After she had been detained the court ordered her attackers' release, putting her in jeopardy. That happened on Friday afternoon when courts do not normally operate in Pakistan, apparently as a warning to Ms. Mukhtaran to shut up. Instead, Ms. Mukhtaran continued her protest by cell phone, but at dawn yesterday, the police hustled her off and there has been no word of her since, her cell phone doesn't answer.

A Pakistani lawyer, who is the head of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said she had learned that Ms. Mukhtaran was taken to Islamabad, seriously berated and told that President Musharraf was very angry with her. She was led, sobbing into detention at a secret location. She is barred from contact with anyone, including her lawyer. Even if Ms. Mukhtaran were released, airports have been alerted to bar her from leaving the country. According to a Karachi newspaper, the government took this step, fearing that she might malign Pakistan's image around the world."

How will these injustices ever be righted? What can be done for injustices, little and big? Certainly much of the work of Christians in the world is to do justice.

Micah 6:8 -

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Mic 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.

The NIV translates this rather weakly when it says to “act justly”. Literally, we’re to “do justice”. The reason we are opening up the Community Center from the church is because we are commanded to “do justice”. We’re going to have a free legal clinic to assist people, to even up the scales a little bit. We have a summer program here, and we’ve got about 200 kids from the neighborhood enrolled. Again, it’s part of our commitment to “do justice”, to even up the scales a little bit, to assist kids who don’t have all the advantages of wealthy suburban kids.

The reason we repent and ask forgiveness from people we have hurt is so that we could “do justice” individually. The reason that we, as a church, gave over a hundred thousand dollars to assist with relief projects in sub-Saharan Africa, is again, so that we might, as Christians, “do justice”. I wrote to you, by the way, a congregational e-mail, offering a brief report of what happened with the money we raised last year in Africa. You should have gotten that in the last few days if you signed up for my congregational e-mail. If you haven’t, you can simply sign up on-line, or you can use the bulletin tear-off to get my congregational e-mail.

As we see in Revelation, there is something else we Christians are called to that is actually prior to our working for justice, and that is worship. Revelation alternates back and forth between scenes of worship and scenes of judgment. John punctuates this book with worship. Chapter 1, chapter 4, chapter 5, chapter 7, chapter 11, chapter 12...John begins the book with a vision of Christ, who we worship. In chapters 4 and 5 there is a heavenly vision of worship and the book

ends with worship. The newly created heaven and earth is fashioned into a place of worship. Christians are called to worship.

Revelation 14:6, 7 and 15:1-4.

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Rev 14:6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.

Rev 14:7 He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Rev 15:1 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.

Rev 15:2 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. They held harps given them by God

Rev 15:3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways,  
King of the ages.

Rev 15:4 Who will not fear you, O 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.”

Why so much worship? Especially in a world of violence against people like Ms. Mukhtaran; in a world of war and racism and AIDS and poverty and marital breakdown...I think it is appropriate to ask the frank question, “Isn’t worship a diversion from the real action?” Or to put it even more plainly, “Why waste time on worship when there’s “real” work to be done?”

This past week I read a wonderful book by Alister McGrath, titled *The Twilight of Atheism: the Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. In it, McGrath writes how disbelief in God has become a viable option for millions of people across the globe in the last two and a half centuries. Of course, in his study he covers one of the main proponents of atheism in the modern world and that was Karl Marx. Karl Marx said,

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“Religious distress is at the same time an expression of real distress and a protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless condition. It is the opium of the people.”

Religion, in other words, dulls the pain of an unjust world. It enables downtrodden people to cope with sorrow and distress. Indirectly, it causes people to collide with the existing order that causes the distress. As people’s pain is numbed, they get blind to the need and possibility of radical social change. Marx concludes this way –

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“The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness.”

Now I don't think we should write Karl Marx off too quickly. Nor should we write off less-radical people who ask the question about the value of spending time in worship in a world of suffering. Lots of people quit worship and some people quit Christianity altogether, not because they don't care about the world, but because they *do*. Gene Peterson, the great Christian writer put it this way – “It is not for lack of morality that worship is slighted by many, but exactly because of it. They desert the place of worship with the best of motives, in order to actually do something about the world.”

I mean, does it make sense to spend our time on communion, taking bits of bread and juice each week into our already over-fed bodies, when so many people in the world have no bread and no drink at all? Have any of you ever wondered “why worship”?

We considered this when we studied chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, but let's consider it again, in light of issues of justice and in light of all the other things that we're supposed to do – clean our homes, do art, write letters, earn money, mow our lawns, lead a small group, listen to our kids, practice hospitality, eat, hug people, witness... In light of all the things that we're supposed to do, especially justice – why worship?

Here's my simple answer: we Christians take time to worship for the same reason that we Christians take time to pray. Because we Christians believe (or at

least we try to believe) that the most important activity in the world is not ours, but God's. When we worship we are pinning our hope on the fact that God is working - God is on the move, even when we're not working, and even when we're not on the move. Worship focuses our attention on God and His activity.

Do any of you struggle with worship because it seems like you aren't "doing anything"? You might as well come to church 15 minutes late or during the announcements, since you're not doing anything "productive" during the worship portion of our services. Allow me to let you in, friends, on a little secret: you are right in part; and by being right in part, you have totally missed the point. The truth is, friend, that you are *not* being productive when you stand and focus your attention on God for 25 minutes each week at church – and that *is* the point.

Worship gets us to pay attention to the truth that our activity and our moral energy and our doing justice is not what ultimately matters. What ultimately matters is the being and activity of God. So having a specified time each week and having a time each day when you intentionally focus your attention on God and His activity is central to your spiritual health.

I mean, what is necessary for a human being to be saved? To be saved, you have to stop relying on your own activity. To be saved, you have to stop relying on your own accomplishments, your own person, and you have to pin your faith utterly and completely on what God has done in, and through His Son, Jesus

Christ. To be saved, you choose – intentionally choose – to not rely on yourself but on God, Who saves.

But this is an ongoing life lesson. This is a lesson absolutely central to spiritual health. How do you deal with a difficult marriage? By relying not on yourself, but trusting wholly in God and His strength to get you through. How do you do battle with temptation? By trusting wholly in God and refusing to simply rely on your own strength. How do we “do justice” in an unjust world? By looking first to God.

You know, frankly, when we rush out into the world - because of our own moral indignation, we often end up doing more harm than good. So many of us as Christians adopt a position of “moral superiority” so many of us as Christians turn gray issues into black and white issues. Ambiguous issues that are very difficult become crystal clear and reduced to little sound bytes.

When a person begins with worship, they gain perspective. They see as they come into the presence of God their own corruption and their own selfishness. They see that only God is perfect. The person in worship recognizes that only God knows everything - our knowledge is limited, imperfect, biased. I wish that before any political engagement by a Christian, Christians would first bathe themselves in worship. If we would, the things we say would be said with greater humility. We would allow for more ambiguity, for more disagreement, for more listening by us, for more dialogue. The foundation for working justice (or at least

not doing more harm) is worship - intentionally paying attention to God and His activity in the world.

Now what is the content of our worship as we focus attention on God? Revelation 15:1-4 –

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Rev 15:1 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.

Rev 15:2 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. They held harps given them by God

Rev 15:3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are your deeds,

Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways,

King of the ages.

Rev 15:4 Who will not fear you, O 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.”

This text is filled with Old Testament imagery, particularly images drawn from the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Back in the Old Testament exodus from Egypt we read about plagues falling upon Pharaoh, and here we have the final plagues upon the Beast and his worshippers. In Exodus the Israelites are led safely through the Red Sea while their Egyptian pursuers are drowned and on the other side of the Red Sea, Moses and his sister, Miriam lead the Israelites in worship and dance. They celebrate God’s salvation and His defeat of their enemies and here in verse 2 John sees a heavenly Red Sea, through which the 144,000

(which is symbolic of the army of Christian martyrs) has come. They are victorious in their battle with the Beast. Revelation 15:2 –

**SLIDE**

Rev 15:2 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. They held harps given them by God...

And like the Israelites they sing a song, which is called in verse 3 the song of Moses and the Lamb. Revelation 15:3 –

**SLIDE**

Rev 15:3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:  
“Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
King of the ages.

Now I want to focus upon three aspects of this song because I think this song assists us in understanding the content of worship. When we take 25 minutes each week here at Vineyard to focus attention upon God and His activity, specifically what is it that we’re doing? What are we saying? What do we celebrate?

First of all, worship celebrates our salvation. The Christians who stand on the other side of the Red Sea sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The song of Moses in Exodus prefigures the song of the Lamb. The Lamb, of course, in

Revelation is Jesus Christ, who was slain for our sins on the cross. Both songs, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, celebrate our salvation.

Do you know, one of the ways you can know whether or not you are a real Christian or are instead just a church-going, religious person, is whether you find yourself often singing the song of Moses and the Lamb? In other words, do you find yourself marveling over what God has done for you in Christ? Do you find yourself often brought to your knees? You can't help but kneel or cry or lift your hands sometimes when you think about how you, being who you are, and doing what you do, could be forgiven and be adopted into God's family and be called God's son or daughter.

Do you find your heart sometimes bursting inside of you with the desire to shout or celebrate because you have been set free from the things that were killing you? You've been given a purpose in life. You've discovered meaning for your existence. You have a guidance system to navigate the world. You have a basis for forming a relationship that can last. You have a basis now for raising a family, or succeeding in marriage. Do you ever find yourself wanting to worship because your enemies have been defeated - spiritual enemies that kept you in bondage and oppression? Does the fact that you'll one day be reunited with parents and grandparents and siblings and children and friends who have died in Christ cause your spirit to soar?

Bottom line: does the simple fact of your salvation and all that it means make you want to worship? Or is salvation rather a dull and boring concept to you, a religious idea, an abstraction that you're not particularly connected to? You can tell if you are a Christian or if instead you are a church-going, religious person by whether you join in the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Worship also celebrates God's uniqueness. He is utterly incomparable.

Revelation 15:3, 4a –

**SLIDE**

Rev 15:3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,

Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways,

King of the ages.

Rev 15:4 Who will not fear you, O Lord,

and bring glory to your name?

The Old Testament declares that we can't compare anything or anyone to God.

Isaiah says in Isaiah 40:25, 26 –

**SLIDE**

Isa 40:25 “To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

Isa 40:26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one,

and calls them each by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.

Jeremiah echoes this in Jeremiah 10:6, 7a –

## SLIDE

Jer 10:6 No one is like you, O LORD?

you are great,

and your name is mighty in power.

Jer 10:7 Who should not revere you,

O King of the nations?

This is your due.

In worship we remind ourselves again that God can't be compared to anything or anyone. You know, being a spiritually healthy person means getting life into perspective, getting things into perspective. That's why I love the book *When People Are Big and God Is Small*. Spiritual health is the opposite of this. When you worship God you realize that He is big and people are small. Worship clears your vision. Worship gives you perspective. The only spiritually healthy people are people who spend a lot of time in worship. They are the people who say, "I see now! This person that I fear is not bigger than God."

When we worship we say, "Now I see that this problem that is overwhelming me is not greater than God." When we worship we say, "Oh I see – Lord, You are infinitely stronger than the strongest temptation or addiction that afflicts me. Lord I see now that You are infinitely more satisfying than my greatest pleasure." As I worship God I recognize that God is infinitely more comforting than the thing or the person that I run to for comfort.

In worship all of our idols get shrunk down to size. Let me ask you friend, what looms large in your life? What is your biggest issue? Is it your bills, your

marriage, your singleness, your work, your kids? Get some perspective – worship always celebrates God's uniqueness, His incomparability.

Worship is not worship unless it proceeds into witness and missions. Revelations 15:4b, which reads –

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Rev 15:4

All nations will come and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Part of the misunderstanding of worship and the reason why so many Christians have been turned off to worship is that it is sometimes thought of as a private, pietistic, self-indulgent act which terminates on ourselves. “You know, I feel so much better now that I have worshipped, I get so much comfort, I enjoy worship so much, I get so encouraged.” Yes, all of those things are absolutely true – if you worship, you will feel better. You will get encouragement. You will find comfort and enjoyment, but if worship terminates only on you, on the meeting of your needs, then you have not been in the presence of the true God. Everyone in the Bible who meets with God feels compelled to share this experience with others. There are dozens of passages in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, like Psalm 96:1-10 –

#### SLIDE

Ps 96:1 Sing to the LORD a new song;

sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Ps 96:2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;

proclaim his salvation day after day.

Ps 96:3 Declare his glory among the nations,

his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

Ps 96:4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.

Ps 96:5 For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.

Ps 96:6 Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Ps 96:7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ps 96:8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering and come into his courts.

Ps 96:9 Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth.

Ps 96:10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."  
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.

If you feel disinclined to witness, if you find it hard to share your faith, if you wonder, "What will motivate me to want to express my faith? I know it's the right thing to do but I never do it." Perhaps you have cut the nerve of worship.

Brothers and sisters, you cannot spend time in God's presence without the desire to invite someone else into that experience. When you've been in the presence of God you'll find yourself saying things like, "I'm sorry, I don't know where you are at in your relationship with Christ; but having just spent time with Him and as I listen to your problems – Jesus is the One you need. I just know that if you met with Jesus you'd find the help that you're looking for."

It's kind of like an incredible counselor or doctor or program that you went to that really helped you. Don't you naturally share that with someone who has a similar need? My goodness, I hear women talking all the time about their hairdressers. "Oh, you just have to go to Raoul – he does such a great job!" When we spend time in worship we say the same things about Jesus. Worship leads to witness and missions.

Finally, in chapter 16 we encounter the judgment of God. Read in chapter 16 about seven bowl plagues. These seven bowl plagues form the content of the seventh trumpet blast that we studied in chapter 11. The seven plagues constitute the third and final woe mentioned in Revelation 11:14 –

**SLIDE**

Rev 11:14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

As we read through these plagues they are like the judgments that came with the earlier trumpet blasts, only these plagues in chapter 16 are more intense, they're more total. So, for example, in verse 3, we read these words –

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Rev 16:3 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.

This is reminiscent of Revelation 8:8,9 –

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Rev 8:8 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood,  
Rev 8:9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

That judgment only affected one-third of all the waters (Revelation 8:8,9). It's also reminiscent of the plagues that fell on Egypt. John keeps reaching back into the Old Testament, and specifically the exodus, for his images.

What can we learn about God's judgment from this text? Number one: When God judges the punishment fits the crime. Revelation 16:4-7 –

## SLIDE

Rev 16:4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

Rev 16:5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

"You are just in these judgments,  
you who are and who were, the Holy One,  
because you have so judged;

Rev 16:6 for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets,  
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

Rev 16:7 And I heard the altar respond:

"Yes, Lord God Almighty,  
true and just are your judgments."

How incredibly rare it is in this world for the punishment to fit the crime. How rare it is for people to get what they deserve. Is Saddam Hussein going to get what he

deserves for gassing tens of thousands of Kurds? Is the Pakistani government going to get what it deserves for its treatment of Mukhtaran Bibi?

Newspapers this week contained a story of a man who may have molested thousands of boys in the last 30 years, as he moved from state to state volunteering as a baseball coach, Boy Scout leader, always something that would connect him with pre-adolescent boys. This child-molester kept meticulous records and photos of his crimes in a notebook. How can that man's crimes be repaid in this world? How can that injustice be squared up? He's potentially ruined the lives of thousands of people and through them, maybe even thousands more.

Only God can even the score. You know people can, and do escape human justice all the time. Adulterers end up marrying the man or woman they've had an affair with and these home-wreckers often have very pleasant lives in suburbia. All their friends look the other way. After a year or two, everybody forgets that this relationship began in adultery, but God says repeatedly in the Bible, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." One thing that you need to know about God's judgment is the punishment *will* fit the crime and God *will* even the score.

The second and last lesson we can learn about God's judgment is that when God demonstrates his judgment it is always and only towards those who refuse to repent. Revelations 16:8-11 –

## SLIDE

Rev 16:8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire.

Rev 16:9 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.

Rev 16:10 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

Rev 16:11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

You say, why would anyone refuse to repent, especially in light of the increasing judgment of God? Surely people are not so stupid that when they are being disciplined by God they would refuse to turn and repent? If you feel that way you radically underestimate the depths of human depravity. I remember back in 1989 during the earthquake that hit the Bay area of California, I read stories of men who were openly having sex with each other in the streets of San Francisco during the aftershocks. In one newspaper article at the time, it said that drunken bands of men were shaking their fists at the sky and screaming at God to do it again.

Now, few of us would be that brazen or that blasphemous, but can I ask you a personal question? Does God's discipline cause you to repent?

You know, God does not delight in unleashing judgment. What does God delight in? Jeremiah 9:24 –

SLIDE

Jer 9:24 but let him who boasts boast about this:  
that he understands and knows me,  
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,  
justice and righteousness on earth,  
for in these I delight,”  
declares the LORD.

And Jeremiah 32:41 –

SLIDE

Jer 32:41 I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land  
with all my heart and soul.

The great Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel once said, “It is only blessing that the Lord gives with all His heart and soul. For just as God delights in kindness done by men, He rejoices in doing kindness Himself.” The point is if you and I modify our behavior, God’s judgment disappears.

We human beings have the power to cancel the judgment of God over our lives. The message of judgment includes a call to return and to be saved. That’s what God wants for you and for me. It’s because we have a God Who delights in doing us good and not harm that we worship. Let’s pray.

## **Worship and Judgment**

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Rich Nathan

June 25-26, 2005

Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 14 -16

- I. A Story of Injustice
- II. Why Judgment? (Rev. 14:14-20)
- III. Why Worship? (Rev. 14:6,7; 15:1-4)
- IV. What is the Content of Worship?
  - A. Worship Celebrates our Salvation (Rev. 15:3)
  - B. Worship Celebrates God's Uniqueness (Rev. 15:4; Is. 40:25, 26; Jer. 10:6, 7a)
  - C. Worship Always Flows into Mission (Rev. 15:4; Ps. 78:3-7; Ps. 96)
- V. What Can We Learn about God's Judgment? (Rev. 16)
  - A. When God Judges, the Punishment Fits the Crime (Rev. 16:4-7)
  - B. When God Judges, it is Always and Only Towards Those who Refuse to Repent (Rev. 16:8-11, 21; Jer. 9:24)