

Rev 26-03-29b

We continue our study in Revelation chapter 15, looking at this great and marvelous sign. The seven angels having the seven last plagues. It just seems, doesn't it seem a little bit dissonant or jarring that it's great and marvelous and these angels are standing there with plagues.

It's something the human mind has to make an adjustment to. A pastor years ago used to talk about making an adjustment to the justice of God and that it was for mature believers. And when I was taking my notes, I had this acronym, MADJOG, M-A-D-J-O-G, which was my shorthand for maturity adjustment to the justice of God.

And it requires something of us to understand the righteousness and justice of God in judging those who after repeated opportunities are recalcitrant, are rebellious, would rather have rocks fall on them than accept the proffer of deliverance and salvation and relationship to God through Christ. With all of the hardship, all of the difficulty, all of the self-induced misery, as well as the judgments that come from God, they do not repent. And we've seen this in earlier portions of the book.

But if we are mature, if we are balanced, and if we understand that these things must come, it is necessary. No one looks forward to major surgery, but sometimes it is necessary. There can be a long recovery period.

There can be pain and rehabilitation involved after this kind of repair. Sometimes they have to remove some portion of our body in order that the rest can return to health and function. And these judgments have a twofold purpose.

These plagues are specifically to A, B, express God's vengeance. Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.

We appeal to God's justice that the measure of his judgment will be appropriate. Punishment fits the crime. God knows the hearts.

God knows if there are any mitigating or extenuating circumstances. We, in Christ, pay close attention to this point. We, in Christ, do not receive justice and we thank God for it.

God's justice was expressed at the cross. We receive God's grace. We receive God's mercy.

I don't want to be the recipient of God's justice because all I deserve is wrath and the penalty. The wages of sin is death. Justice would demand that death from me.

The Lord Jesus Christ died in my stead, in our place. That's where justice was meted out and was satisfied. The opportunity for us now is grace and deliverance to be gathered to the Lord Jesus and presented faultless before the throne.

That's not justice for me, that's grace. Turn to Hebrews chapter six. Hebrews chapter six.

As you know, I am utterly and thoroughly convinced that Paul wrote Hebrews. There's no doubt in my mind. Others may quibble and disagree.

If you ask me, Paul wrote it. End of discussion. But he begins in chapter six, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, to maturity would be a good translation.

Not laying again the foundation of change of mind away from dead works and of faith toward God. These are two sides of the same coin. Remember in Isaiah, you hear this at Christmas time, you hear it in Handel's Messiah.

Isaiah, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, the mighty God. Remember that actually those are dual descriptions. The first title is wonderful counselor.

They're not separate. Wonderful counselor, the mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. In the same way, there are things that are linked.

They are two sides of the same coin. And you see that here. The foundation is change of mind away from dead works and of faith toward God.

It is not enough to say these works are unproductive. They lead to death. Change of mind away from dead works has to be a part of faith toward God, has to eventuate in faith toward God.

People, I've used this illustration any number of times, but people who want to quit a bad habit, realize when this is a strong pattern, you can't sit at the table staring at a pack of cigarettes and a book of matches and say, I'm not gonna smoke. I'm not gonna smoke. I'm not gonna smoke.

If you change your mind away from smoking or any other habit that intrudes into our life and pulls us off the straight and narrow path, not only do you have to change your mind about that bad habit, but if you truly want to be free from enslavement to that which is nonproductive and eventually destructive, it has to be replaced with something else. We change our minds away from dead works and we point our minds through faith to God. I'm no longer looking at works, works of death.

I've changed my mind about that. I'm not going to spend my day and spend my time looking at a square screen being floated down the Perfume River, look it up. It's not, it's the most misnamed river in the world, floating down a river of trash and sewage carried along by the off scouring of humanity that is social media.

We change our mind, we extract ourselves and instead whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things and the peace of God that passes all understanding will preserve your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus. Change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God.

You go on to the doctrine of baptisms, plural. There are different kinds of baptism. James and John are going to undergo the baptism that the Lord Jesus Christ himself underwent.

And this is not the one in the Jordan with John the Baptist. This is the baptism that involves being faithful unto death and being raised as a witness and a testimony to the world. Baptisms, laying on of hands, recognition of gifting and opportunity and challenge and commission to service.

That's what laying on of hands is. Recognizing the purpose for which God put us here, observable to the hearts and the minds of fellow believers who can pray for us, who can encourage us, who can support us, who can carry a burden with us in some cases. Laying on of hands, cooperation, recognizing that someone has been fitted by God and it can be any number of different purposes.

Many of them don't even have a formal name, but it is opportunity given by God. God has fitted a perfect tool to be used to implement his good will and purpose. And that person is recognized and lifted up and supported by fellow believers.

Laying on of hands, we are with you. We bring you before the throne of grace in intercession and in petition. Laying on of hands.

You notice this requires fellowship. No such thing as Lone Ranger Christians. Part of Christian life is laying on of hands.

That requires at least two people. Somebody's got to lay hands on somebody else. I can't lay hands on myself.

It requires fellowship. It requires not forsaking the assembly. Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. These are things that are a part of understanding for those who want to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You can't get there without understanding resurrection.

And this is part of what we're looking at in our revelation study. We'll do this if God permits. Why is it a question of whether or not we are gonna move forward and enter into these concepts and these spiritual truths? Why is there any doubt? Because it is impossible to understand them.

It is impossible to enter into them. It is impossible to practice, to grow, to comprehend these things if those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, the heavenly gift. What is the heavenly gift? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. And taste the heavenly gift. Recognize the value of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. Who are we talking about here? Unbelievers do not partake of the Holy Spirit. That summary, that sort of fivefold, there are more things the Holy Spirit does.

It's a convenient memory aid, sealing, gifting, indwelling, filling, and so on. Partaker of the Holy Spirit means you have entered into union with Christ in this age. Hebrews here is talking about this age.

You have tasted the heavenly gift. You have come into contact with and become a part of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you are now a partaker of the Holy Spirit.

This is so important to understand because of what follows. You have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. This is what we're looking at in Revelation.

Notice, this is the initial contact. Tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit. This is the one thing that is not gonna leave.

The sealing of the Holy Spirit, however much grieving and quenching you may do, you will not lose the sealing. This is how we know that salvation is irrevocable. It is a birth.

You may only taste of Jesus Christ and quickly forget that you ever knew him, forget what he's like, misunderstand his purpose, misunderstand his mission, misunderstand his priorities. Think of him only as the gentle lamb and not the conquering king and the lion of the tribe of Judah. You may have only tasted of Christ.

You may have only tasted of the word of God. You may have only tasted of the powers of the age to come. The one thing that you are more than tasting, you have partaken of is the Holy Spirit.

If you want a passage on what they call eternal security, this is it. These who have fallen away, in verse six, it is impossible. You go back up to verse four.

Those who are once enlightened, you can return to the darkness, but you were once enlightened. Unbelievers are not enlightened. You don't get light and life until you enter into salvation.

But having been enlightened, having tasted the heavenly gift of the Lord Jesus, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the word of God, tasted the powers of the age to come. If they have fallen away, and you look at your New King James text note there, if they have fallen away, it is impossible to do what? To renew them again to repentance. Renew them again to repentance.

What is this referring to? Context is the key. What is the foundation in verse one? The foundation of repentance. Change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God.

You can't be renewed to turning away from dead works. You're in the darkness and you're back

in dead works, and you're not practicing faith toward God. Both of these things are post-salvation opportunities.

Unbelievers have no choice, have no chance, have no ability to change their mind away from dead works. It's impossible. And they can't enter into faith toward God.

By definition, if you have faith toward God, you're a believer. But if you have tasted these things, if you have become a partaker and you have fallen away, it is impossible to get you back to the very first principles of the doctrine of Christ. You can't even be a baby in the crib with diapers.

Why? Impossible to renew them again to repentance. Why? They crucify again for themselves the son of God and put him to an open shame. What happened when they crucified the Lord Jesus? Who crucified the Lord Jesus to themselves? Self-righteous, self-sufficient, arrogant scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and elders of the people who were believers.

Jesus told them, you are going to see many come from the North, East, South, and West and sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and you are going to see yourselves thrust out. They can't be unbelievers or they would never see that because they wouldn't wake up until the great white throne after the millennium is over. They were believers, but it was impossible to bring them to repentance away from dead works and faith toward God because they crucified the Lord of glory who is the means of entering into those things.

They were saved in the Old Testament sense. As New Testament believers, you cannot avail yourself of any of these blessings, any of these opportunities if you are instead crucifying to yourself the son of God and putting him to an open shame. You're rejecting his substitutionary work.

And believe me, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement is under major attack today. Most Christians, this will shock you, most Christians today alive on the earth do not believe in substitutionary atonement. The believers that we know and have fellowship with and are familiar with do.

You can go to the great gray heads of the faith who have written commentaries in the past, they did. But those who are getting their quote unquote spiritual education in churches today do not believe in a literal millennium. They do not understand the distinction between Israel and the church, and they do not believe in substitutionary atonement.

It has been rejected, it's out. You crucify the son of God. You think, well, he messed up.

He got involved in politics and the Romans got him. Complete, twisted deception at work in their hearts. You can't make progress if you don't enter into the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

Instead, you crucify him for the same reasons the original crucifiers did so. And as an

addendum, we're coming up on Passion Week here. Remember, when Jesus looked down from the cross, you read the passage, read the context.

When he said, father, forgive them for they know not what they do, he was not talking about the scribes, the Pharisees, the chief priests, and the elders of the people. Look at the context. What is the nearest reference for the pronoun them? Father, forgive them.

Look at the preceding verse. He is looking down from the cross at the Roman soldiers who were following orders, doing their duty, entering into the usual practice when executing criminals. Well, here's this guy's personal effects.

We'll split them up. We'll throw some dice and split them up. Jesus said, father, don't hold that to their account.

They don't know what they're doing. Who did know what they were doing? The chief priests and elders and scribes, the Pharisees, Sadducees. The one thing that united the Pharisees and the Sadducees is this Jesus character needs to go.

We have a righteousness of our own definition and our own making. Tragic. It's impossible to renew them.

For the earth, verse seven, which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God. This is what the Lord Jesus, the son of man, seated on the cloud, having the sharp sickle, has just reaped in Revelation chapter 14. The everlasting gospel has been preached.

The 144,000 have been present as examples. Scripture is still available. The two witnesses have given their testimony and those who remain are without excuse.

The rain came upon the earth and to the extent that it produced herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, it receives blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. It doesn't just wither of its own accord.

Its end is not, it just won't thrive because it's not soaking up the rain. Its end is to be burned. There is an active judgment.

You cannot believe the deception, the false teaching, the twisting of scriptural truth that is going on around us today. And take my advice and don't go looking for it. It will discourage you like few things in life to see the blindness.

Paul said blindness has happened in part to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. That was at the end of the age of Israel. Believe me when I tell you, blindness has happened almost entirely to the church at this time and in this closing chapter of this age.

There is rampant blindness, rampant deception, false shepherds who are setting up the time

for the idol shepherd, I-D-O-L, who is going to deceive the world. But the pattern is already in play. It's already being practiced.

How important is it for us to remember what scripture teaches us? Don't get distracted by the story problem here. We all have challenges at work. We have challenges with technology.

We have challenges with time management, with temptation, with distraction, with relationships, with the ebb and flow that brings in the flotsam and jetsam on our beaches of life. Don't let anyone deceive you. Get off the rectangular screen and look around for what God has put in our immediate personal periphery.

Nothing wrong with exchanging texts, email here and there, but the clickbait, the chain smoking of YouTube shorts and dancing cats, and I don't know what all they've got on there. Watch out. Every minute that the world claims of your time that isn't redeemable before God doesn't offer an opportunity to practice faith and obedience and encouragement and productive fellowship and expression of the fruit of the spirit.

Too much of the news, too much of the viral trending tropes and such. Watch out. It is a direct practice designed to deceive us.

And Jesus said, don't let yourself be deceived. Be a good steward of your time because there is judgment. If we fall back into the darkness, having once been enlightened, having tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if we fall back and think and act and get deceived like unbelievers, you can't even get back to repentance because you're not thinking in spiritual terms.

You're not recognizing and confessing sin. You're not walking in the light, not maintaining fellowship with the father through Christ, not maintaining healthy fellowship with other believers. Danger, Will Robinson, warning.

We cannot take this too lightly. Or we're in trouble. If we have the opportunity to see these wonderful things in the word of God and our soul ends up hosting thorns and briars, we get aggravated, we get testy, we get frustrated, we forget who we are and why we're here.

We get caught up in the debates and the controversies and the opinions and looking down on this and insulting that and worrying about this and fretting about that. We've given away the heavenly gift. We've exchanged our birthright for a mess of pottage and it's not even good pottage.

Bears, thorns and briars is rejected and near to being cursed whose end is to be burned. Who wants the fruit of their life going up in the flash fire of wood, hay and stubble? Beloved, verse nine, Hebrews 6, nine. We are confident of better things concerning you, things that accompany salvation.

That's why we're speaking in this manner. God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of

love which you have shown toward his name in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. You have ministered and you do minister.

God keeps a record. He's not unrighteous. He does not forget.

And it is work. It is a work and labor to express that love. Ministering to the saints, we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.

That is the example that we see throughout scripture among the faithful. That's what those in Smyrna were called to. That is what the 144,000 are called to who follow the lamb wherever he goes.

And this is our example. This is our inspiration, our exhortation that we are faithful unto death, until death. Most of us are not gonna be challenged the way the early Christian martyrs were or these who will be martyred during the tribulation.

We have not yet resisted to the point of blood, as Paul says. Each of you, we desire that you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end. The assurance of hope.

This is our motivation. We don't forget what's on the line, hour by hour, minute by minute, day by day. That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

It's easy to be sluggish, slow to respond, slow to recognize opportunities, slow to remember the grace of God, the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus, the opportunities that the Holy Spirit identifies for us. Opportunities to confess, opportunities to profess, to not become sluggish. Follow the example of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

This is why we're here. Anybody can do a job. Anybody can have a conversation.

Anybody can drive a car. Anybody can live in a house. Anybody can do laundry.

Anybody can shop. Anybody can do maintenance. Anybody can spend a day in pursuits that give some sort of derived pleasure.

Only you and I, having been enlightened, having tasted of the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. This is what fuels our hope. We know what's coming.

What an opportunity to be read in and to be ready, read into the picture, understand the plan, have skills, a particular set of skills that have been honed throughout our life by God placing us where He did, training us as He has, giving us experience in specific areas that are unique to us. We are uniquely prepared so that we can uniquely serve in the age to come, the powers of the age to come. We've tasted it.

We can't fully comprehend it, but we've got a taste. And when you taste something good, you

know how they give you the samples at the store? Little lady at the end of an aisle there and she's sitting at a desk and, hey, you got a sample here. You want to try this? They want you to taste and then go buy the entire package.

We have tasted it. God wants us to invest in the fullness of Him who fills all in all. So it is great and marvelous that these plagues are coming because those who reject this opportunity and will not even come through the door of faith in God, they don't believe that He is and they don't believe He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

They impugn the very idea. They reject it. You see these dyed-in-the-wool atheists, especially the new atheists, and they've been asked, several of them have been asked, what would it take to convince you that there is a God and produce a response of faith? And when pressed, they have said, actually, nothing.

There is nothing. I would suspect myself of hallucination or mental debility, having had a stroke or some other mental defect if I were to ever believe in God, much less place my faith in Him. I would assume that there was something wrong with me.

There is nothing you can say. There is no presentation you can offer. There is no sight I could see.

There's no voice I could hear. There's no experience I could have that would engender a positive response toward the God of the Bible. I don't believe in Him.

He doesn't exist, and I hate Him. This is why you can't just take souls out of infants who died before accountability, pop them up into heaven, because if they were gonna be unbelievers here, having lived to accountability, they're gonna make the same decision when they get there. There are people who will not repent, no matter what God does.

He offers them sweetness and light in the lamb. They reject it. He comes in judgment.

All they say is, I'm seeking death. May the rocks fall on me. Won't turn, will not repent.

Why are these great and marvelous plagues and judgments? Because people that are built this way and angels that are built this way have to be removed from existence. They must be purged, or it is a metastasizing cancer. Are people grateful when there is a procedure that removes a cancer that threatens their life, and they're in complete remission, the cancer is gone, they ring the bell at the hospital and go home? There is celebration that that which was causing death has been removed and is no more, and it was a part of me, my cells, my DNA, but it turned against me and was trying to take my life, and it had to be removed.

And we celebrate the removal of that which used to be a part of us when it must be removed to preserve life and to avoid disease and death. How can you celebrate a great and marvelous set of violent, destructive plagues? We have to be mature, not laying again the foundation, going on to maturity, see it from God's perspective, look at the bigger picture. That's what Revelation

encourages us to do.

So as we get into chapter 15 and begin to see the bowls of the wrath of God, the vintage of the wrath of God, the winepress being trampled, it is a sobering sight, but it is necessary and something for which we should praise God and give Him glory. That's what the angels do. That's what the four and 20 elders do.

That's what the four living creatures do. That's what we should do. This is the power of God.

This is the grace of God, and this is the justice of God. And we love Him for this, and we are grateful to Him that in the same way that He can purge and remove sin in our personal life, He is going to purge and remove sin and rebellion from the universe so that we can go into an eternal life that has value and joy, purpose, and opportunity. Without this purging, that could never happen.

The Lord Jesus would have died in vain. The death He died, He died to sin. The life He lives, He lives to God.

That life can only ultimately move into the eternal future when sin and death and those who embrace them are removed from the picture. That's what we're going to see as we move into this chapter. Next time, we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for Your righteousness and justice. We thank You even more that we have been removed from the expression and the function of those by the sacrificial work of Your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus, who has redeemed us out of the world and has given us the opportunity to be freed and cleansed from not just the penalty of sin, not just the power of sin, but the defilement and the impurity and the limitation that it imposes on us that prevents us from coming into Your presence and being used by You for our benefit and Your glory. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that God, the Holy Spirit, will give us that mature perspective that enables us to sing a song of praise even as we witness the power and the might of Your justice at work.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.