

Homiletics Analysis: Revelation 15

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Revelation 15 is a brief but structurally pivotal chapter — the shortest in the book of Revelation — functioning as a solemn overture to the seven bowl judgments of Revelation 16. The chapter opens with John’s vision of “another sign in heaven, great and marvelous” (v. 1): seven angels holding the seven last plagues, which are identified as completing God’s wrath. Before the bowls are poured, the scene shifts (vv. 2–4) to the sea of glass mingled with fire, where those who had conquered the beast stand singing the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb — a hymn exalting God’s great and marvelous works, His just and true ways, His holiness, and the coming universal worship of all nations. The scene then transitions (vv. 5–8) to the opening of the heavenly temple — the tent of witness — from which the seven angels emerge clothed in pure, bright linen and bearing golden sashes, receive golden bowls full of God’s wrath from one of the four living creatures, and depart. The chapter closes with the temple filled with smoke from God’s glory and power, and a declaration that no one could enter it until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The chapter thus holds two simultaneous realities in view: the worship of the redeemed and the imminent finality of divine judgment. Neither is backgrounded. Both are brought to a focus at once.

This Text — Intent:

God is seeking, through this chapter, to ground the faith and endurance of His suffering people in the certainty of His righteous sovereignty over history’s final reckoning. The vision of the overcomers singing before the sea of glass answers the question every persecuted believer asks: *Was our resistance worth it? Did it matter? Was God just?* The answer given is doxological — the saints break into praise *before* the bowls are poured, not after. The intent is not merely to inform about coming judgment but to produce in the reader a settled confidence that God’s wrath is righteous, His character is true, and His people’s ultimate vindication is certain. The chapter confronts the reader’s tendency to doubt God’s governance of the world and calls them to worship Him precisely because He is who He is — even now, before the final resolution.

Subject Sentence:

The redeemed worship the sovereign God whose righteous wrath against evil is certain and complete.

Primary Claim:

God calls His suffering people to worship Him not after their vindication is seen but *in anticipation of it* — because His character, not their circumstances, is the ground of praise.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Identity of the “Sea of Glass Mingled with Fire” (v. 2): Some interpreters take the sea of glass primarily as a cultic image (cf. the bronze laver of the tabernacle, 1 Kings 7:23–26), emphasizing its heavenly sanctuary setting. Others, particularly in dispensational frameworks, read the fire as indicating ongoing divine judgment still in process. The more naturally satisfying reading is that the sea of glass (cf. Rev. 4:6) represents the crystalline purity of God’s presence before which the overcomers stand, and the fire represents the tribulation they have endured and passed through — they stand on the other side of the fire. This reading integrates the Exodus typology: Israel stood at the Red Sea having passed through and watched Pharaoh’s army destroyed. The Reformed reading holds this: the image celebrates victory through trial, not trial still in process.

The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb (vv. 3–4): A Lutheran Law/Gospel reading might press the song’s emphasis on God’s just acts (v. 3) as primarily preparatory to the gospel proclamation of grace, treating this passage as Law in function — exposing God’s holiness before the grace of the Lamb is invoked. This is qualified but not adopted: the song is not Law and Gospel in sequence; it is a unified doxology of the God who is *both* just *and* Savior. The Reformed tradition correctly reads this as the integration of both — God’s justice and God’s saving acts are not in tension here; they are simultaneously praised. The Lamb is not introduced to soften the severity of God’s righteous acts; the Lamb is the one through whose blood these overcomers stand to sing at all.

Dispensational readers often press the “Song of Moses” connection toward national Israel — reading the overcomers as a specifically Jewish remnant during the Great Tribulation who recall the Exodus deliverance literally. This connection to Moses and Exodus is genuinely present and worth retaining as a typological anchor. However, the text does not restrict the overcomers to ethnic Israel; those who “conquered the beast” (v. 2) is the consistent Revelation designation for the covenant people broadly — those who held the testimony of Jesus (cf. Rev. 12:17, 20:4). The Exodus typology illuminates without restricting.

The Closing of the Temple (vv. 5–8): Some Charismatic and experiential readings have drawn from the imagery of the temple filled with smoke and “no one could enter” a theology of divine inaccessibility linked to seasons of spiritual dryness or God’s felt absence in prayer. This misreads the passage significantly. The temple closure is not about the believer’s relational access to God being blocked — it is eschatological: divine

judgment, once commenced, runs its course to completion without interruption. No intercession delays it; no petition modifies it. This is not a passage about prayer or spiritual experience; it is a declaration of the finality and sufficiency of God's enacted justice.

Reformed Verdict: The Reformed reading of Revelation 15 treats it canonically — as the culmination of the exodus-judgment-worship pattern running from Exodus 15 through the Psalms and Prophets to its heavenly consummation. God's wrath is not in tension with His mercy; both are attributes of the one God praised by the overcomers. The overcomers' song is not a victory song that looks backward only to what they survived — it is a doxology that looks upward to who God is and forward to what He is about to complete. This is the Reformed instinct: right worship is grounded in right theology, and right theology produces praise in the face of the not-yet.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 15:1–18** — The Song of Moses after the Red Sea crossing is the Old Testament archetype of this heavenly song: God's mighty acts of judgment against His enemies and deliverance of His people generate spontaneous corporate worship. Revelation 15 is the eschatological fulfillment of that pattern.
 - **Psalms 86:9–10** — “All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.” The song in Revelation 15:3–4 draws directly from this language, anchoring the vision of universal worship in the Psalter's own expectation.
 - **Revelation 4:6 / 8** — The sea of glass and the four living creatures who distribute the bowls both appear first in the throne room vision of Revelation 4, establishing that what unfolds in chapter 15 flows from the sovereignty of the enthroned God and the unbroken worship surrounding Him.
 - **Romans 11:33–36** — Paul's doxology at the climax of his argument about God's sovereign purposes concludes: “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” — establishing the pattern Revelation 15 embodies: that God's ways, including His judgments, move the redeemed to awe and worship rather than explanation or negotiation.
 - **Isaiah 6:1–4** — The temple filled with smoke at Isaiah's commissioning, with the seraphim crying “Holy, holy, holy,” provides the Old Testament anchor for the imagery of Revelation 15:8. In both cases, the manifest presence of God's holiness is inseparable from the commission of judgment and the call to witness.
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Aim:

To demonstrate that Revelation 15 calls every suffering believer to a doxology grounded not in resolved circumstances but in God’s unalterable character — so that they worship Him *now*, before the final resolution is seen.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	John sees “another sign in heaven, great and marvelous” — seven angels with seven plagues, the last, completing God’s wrath	Echoes Rev. 12:1, 3 (“sign in heaven”); “last” and “completed” signal eschatological finality
2	Vision of the sea of glass mingled with fire; overcomers standing on it, holding harps of God, having conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name	Sea of glass = cf. Rev. 4:6; fire = trial passed through; harps = worship instrument of Israel’s liturgy
3–4	The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb: praising God’s great and marvelous works, just and true ways, uniqueness as holy King, and the coming universal worship of all nations	Direct OT allusions: Ps. 86:9–10; Deut. 32; Jer. 10:7; Ps. 98:2; Amos 9:12; “nations” language signals eschatological universality
5	The temple of the tent of witness in heaven is opened	“Tent of witness” = the tabernacle, heavenly archetype; the portable dwelling of God’s presence with His pilgrim people
6	Seven angels emerge from the temple, clothed in pure bright linen with golden sashes	Priestly and royal imagery; linen = purity; golden sashes echo the Son of Man in Rev. 1:13
7	One of the four living creatures gives the seven angels golden bowls full of God’s wrath; “who lives forever and ever”	The living creatures mediate between God’s throne and the execution of His purposes
8	The temple is filled with	Smoke = divine glory (cf. Ex.

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	smoke from God's glory and power; no one can enter until the seven plagues are finished	40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11; Isa. 6:4); temple closure = judgment runs to completion; no intercession intervenes

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1	The Sign Announced: Seven Angels Bearing the Last Plagues
2	2–4	The Overcomers' Song: Worship Before the Bowls
3	5–8	The Temple Opened and Closed: God's Glory and the Finality of Wrath

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The redeemed worship the sovereign God whose righteous wrath against evil is certain and complete.

Primary Claim: God calls His suffering people to worship Him not after their vindication is seen but *in anticipation of it* — because His character, not their circumstances, is the ground of praise.

Applications

1. (Mind/Belief) — Reframe what worship requires. We have been trained to think worship is the natural response to positive circumstances — relief, answered prayer, healing, deliverance seen. Revelation 15 shatters that assumption. The overcomers sing before the bowls are poured. Their worship is not retrospective gratitude for resolution already experienced; it is prospective confidence in the character of God not yet fully vindicated in history. Identify the circumstance in your life where you are waiting for resolution — and ask whether your theology is sufficient to sustain worship *before* the resolution comes. If it is not, your theology of God is too small.

2. (Affections/Worship) — Let the song of the overcomers reshape what you actually sing about God. The song in verses 3–4 is entirely about who God *is* — His works are great

and marvelous, His ways are just and true, He alone is holy, all nations will worship Him. There is no complaint, no petition, no lament, no request in this song. The overcomers are not negotiating with God about outcomes; they are lost in the reality of His character. The most common poverty in contemporary Christian worship is not bad theology but insufficient awe — we treat God as the solution to our problems rather than the consuming reality before whom we stand. Ask God to produce in you the affections these overcomers have: not the desire for your situation to improve, but the desire to see God as He actually is.

3. (Will/Behavior) — Stop treating your endurance under trial as evidence that God owes you something. The overcomers in verse 2 have conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name — they have endured real loss, real suffering, real cost. And they stand before God with harps, not invoices. The spirit of the overcomer is not “I endured, so God must now deliver.” It is “I endured *because* God is who He is — and that same God now completes what He promised.” Examine whether your endurance under present trials is generating entitlement or worship. The test of genuine faith is not whether you survived the trial but what you say about God when you come out the other side.

4. (Mind/Belief) — Recover a robust theology of God’s wrath as the necessary expression of His love. Western Christianity — and Western Christians — have largely lost the ability to say that God’s wrath is good news. Revelation 15 will not allow this comfort. The plagues are “last” and they are “complete” and God’s glory fills the temple when they are commissioned. This is not a passage that apologizes for divine judgment. God’s wrath against evil is not a regrettable necessity; it is the vindication of every person who has ever suffered under injustice, wickedness, and the violence of the beast. Study the connection between God’s justice and the cries of His martyred people (cf. Rev. 6:9–11) — and let that connection repair your understanding: God’s wrath is not opposed to His love for His people. It is its ultimate expression.

5. (Affections/Worship) — Learn to worship God for what He is about to do, not only for what He has already done. The Exodus was Israel’s great memory, and the Song of Moses was Israel’s great song of remembrance. But the overcomers in Revelation 15 sing that song in the present tense of heaven, forward-facing: “All nations shall come and worship before you” (v. 4). The tense of the overcomer’s worship is the future already grasped by faith. The persecuted church in every generation has lived here — worshipping a God whose final act is still future but whose character makes the outcome certain. Train yourself to praise God not only for what He has done in your past but for what He has promised and cannot fail to do. This is the specific form that faith takes in Revelation 15: forward-facing doxology grounded in backward-confirmed character.

Theological Importance:

Revelation 15 teaches that God’s wrath is not a departure from His character but the fullest expression of it. The God who is praised as “just and true” (v. 3) and “holy” (v. 4) is

not a God who is reluctantly forced to judge; He is a God whose judgments are “great and marvelous works” worthy of the same song that celebrates His salvation. The chapter also establishes that God’s purposes in history move through stages to a genuine *completion* — the language of “last” and “finished” (vv. 1, 8) resists any reading that treats God’s governance of evil as indefinite management rather than definitive resolution. And the vision of all nations coming to worship (v. 4) insists that God’s sovereignty over history is not merely judicial but redemptive — even at the edge of final judgment, the song anticipates the fullness of the new creation community gathered before Him.

Reformed Theological Significance:

Revelation 15 is a high-water mark for the Reformed insistence on the comprehensive sovereignty of God — not only over salvation but over history, evil, suffering, and final judgment. The overcomers’ doxology is possible only because they know the God they are praising: sovereign, holy, just, and true. This is covenant theology in its eschatological register: the God who made promises and kept them through the Lamb is the same God who now consummates His covenant purposes through the completion of His wrath. The Reformed tradition has consistently resisted the domestication of God — the trimming of His attributes to what is emotionally comfortable — and Revelation 15 is one of Scripture’s most powerful warrants for that resistance. Moreover, the song of the Lamb and the song of Moses held together in a single doxology is a Reformed canonical instinct made visible: the one God of both Testaments is praised by one people whose identity is shaped by both the Exodus and the Cross.

Main Takeaway:

God does not owe you resolution before He deserves your worship — He deserves your worship because of who He is, and the certainty of the resolution flows from that character, not the other way around. The overcomers did not wait to see the bowls poured before they sang. They sang because they knew the God holding them. Know that God — the one whose works are great and marvelous, whose ways are just and true, who alone is holy — and you will find that you can sing before the resolution too.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating Revelation 15 as merely transitional.** Because the chapter is brief and sandwiched between the seal/trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments, preachers may skip it as connective tissue — a brief narrative bridge before the “real content” of chapter 16. This misses what is theologically irreplaceable here: the only extended hymn between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, and the

most explicit statement in Revelation that the overcomers worship *before* vindication is complete. The chapter is brief but it is not minor.

- **Flattening the Song into generic praise.** The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb in verses 3–4 is built from specific Old Testament texts and carries specific theological weight — God’s justice, His holiness, His uniqueness, and the eschatological universality of worship. Preaching it as a general reminder to “praise God for His goodness” strips away its specificity and misses the pastoral point: this is a song about the character that makes trust possible when circumstances are at their worst.
- **Reading “no one could enter the temple” (v. 8) as a statement about prayer or spiritual access.** This is a recurring misapplication. The statement is eschatological and judicial, not devotional. It is not a word about the believer’s felt distance from God or seasons of prayerless dryness. It declares that once divine judgment is commissioned, it runs to its appointed completion without interruption. Applying it to the interior life of prayer domesticates what is meant as a declaration of God’s inexorable justice.
- **Disconnecting the overcomers’ worship from their suffering.** The overcomers in verse 2 are identified specifically as those who conquered the beast — they have paid real costs. Preaching the doxology of verses 3–4 without anchoring it in the costly endurance of verse 2 produces an aesthetically pleasing vision of heavenly worship that is emotionally inaccessible to suffering people. The song is not beautiful despite the suffering; it is *possible because of* what the overcomers know about the God who sustained them through it.
- **Using the wrath imagery to frighten rather than to ground assurance.** The bowls represent God’s final judgment on evil — but in Revelation 15, they are framed by the worship of the redeemed who stand safely at the sea of glass. The pastoral use of this passage is not to threaten the congregation with the bowls but to ground the congregation in the security of standing where the overcomers stand: on the safe side of the sea, holding the harps, knowing the God who acts. Judgment passages in Revelation are frequently preached to frighten; in context, they are frequently given to *assure* the persecuted and suffering that God has not lost control.
- **Importing dispensational timeline-speculation at the expense of the passage’s own claim.** The temptation in any Revelation passage is to spend the exposition mapping the bowls onto current events or constructing end-times chronologies. Revelation 15 is not primarily a timetable; it is a theology of worship in the face of God’s sovereign finality. Spending the exposition on “what these plagues represent” at the expense of “why the redeemed sing before the plagues come” inverts the chapter’s own emphasis.