In wrath, God will remember mercy

(Revelation 7)

O

n the morning of October 2, 2006, a troubled milkman named Charles Carl Roberts barricaded himself inside the West Nickel Mine Amish School, ultimately murdering five young girls and wounding six others. Roberts committed suicide when police arrived on the scene. It was a dark day for the Amish community of West Nickel Mines, but it was also a dark day for Marie Roberts—the wife of the gunman—and her children.

But on the following Saturday, Marie experienced something truly amazing while attending her husband's funeral. That day, she and her children watched as Amish families—about half of the 75 mourners present—came and stood alongside them in the midst of their own blinding grief. Despite the crime the man had perpetrated, the Amish came to mourn Charles Carl Roberts—a husband and daddy.

Bruce Porter, a fire department chaplain who attended the service, described what moved him most about the gesture: **"It's the love, the forgiveness, the heartfelt forgiveness they have toward the family. I broke down and cried seeing it displayed."** He added that Marie Roberts was also touched. **"She was absolutely, deeply moved by the love shown."**

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I don’t need to tell you, do I, that this was an incredible display of mercy to the family of someone who was extremely undeserving of mercy. When many others in their shoes would have been brimming with hatred and anger, the Amish community of West Nickel Mines remembered mercy.

And that is what I would like to speak to you about this morning as we consider Revelation 7. You see, as we talk about that future 7-year period of judgment that God has in store for the people of planet earth (called the Tribulation Period), it is so easy to focus on the fact that God will be pouring out His judgment on people that we miss the fact that **in those 7 years, more people will experience the mercy of God and find eternal life through Christ possibly than in the history of mankind.**

So this morning, I have taken the title for my message from the OT book of Habakkuk, and it is this: **In Wrath, God Will Remember Mercy.**

(Prayer)

Now the last time we studied Revelation together we saw in Rev 6, that from just **one** of God’s judgments alone, 25% of earth’s inhabitants have lost their lives:

Revelation 6:7-8 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” 8 So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to [him] over **a fourth of the earth**, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

The loss of human life due to God’s judgment is staggering. And in the last verse of chapter 6 (verse 17) a statement is made and a question is asked:

Revelation 6:17 “…the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

The mighty men of planet earth are looking around at the devastation and wondering, “Is there **anyone** who will escape God’s wrath---who will be able to stand?”

**Answer from the Word of God:** So many people that you couldn’t count them.

In His great discourse on the events of the last days (called the Olivet Discourse) Jesus told us that even though the 7-year tribulation would be a time of trouble like never before, it would also be a time of salvation like never before. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus said:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in **all the world** as a witness **to all the nations**, and then the end will come.

And in spite of how bad things will be for planet earth --- in spite of wrath --- God will remember mercy.

Lamentations 3:32-33 Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. 33 For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

Habakkuk 3:2 O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

The prophet is saying, “Lord, we ***deserve*** your judgment---but please---remember mercy.”

In chapter 6 of Revelation we see that God hates the sin. In chapter 7 we see that He loves the sinner. In wrath, He remembers mercy.

Listen to what Walter Scott said in regard to Revelation chapter 7:

The course of judgment is suspended and the veil is drawn aside that we may witness the heart of our God. It is not all judgment in those dark and evil days.

This morning, we will see two groups of people to whom God displays his mercy in the midst of wrath:

 **I. The Nation of Israel (7:1-8)
II. The Gentile Nations (7:9-17)**

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**I. God’s Mercy towards the nation of Israel (7:1-8)**

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.

The **four winds** are a figure of speech referring to God’s judgments. John saw four angels who released these judgments at God’s request. Now the following verses tell us why they are withholding these judgments:

2Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

They are withholding some of the judgments that are to fall on the earth until God’s servants (the 144,000 Jewish men who will carry the gospel around the world), are sealed. The seal represents God’s protection from the judgments that fall on the unsaved.

 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;

… Reuben … Gad … Asher … Naphtali … Manasseh … Simeon …

Levi … Issachar … Zebulun … Joseph … Benjamin …

Is God angry with Israel for their sin and rejection of His Son? Yes, He is. In fact, we know from Zechariah 13:8 that 2/3 of the people of Israel will die during the tribulation; however, 1/3 will not only survive---they will be saved! In wrath, God remembers His mercy towards Israel!

Isaiah 54:7-8 “For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with **great mercies** I will gather you. 8With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with **everlasting kindness** I will have **mercy** on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer.

Wiersbe: “*Grace is when God gives you what you do not deserve. Mercy is when God does not give you what you do deserve.”*

**II. God’s Mercy towards the Gentile Nations (7:9-17)**

We know that God is angry with Israel, but He is also angry with the Gentile (or non-Jewish) nations for their sin and rejection of His Son. And huge numbers of people outside of the nation of Israel will die in that future day. But once again, we see that God will remember mercy by bringing a huge number of Gentiles to Himself (notice verse 9):

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying:

 “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,

 Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,

 Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” 14 And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Notice, their robes were not made white (in other words, these people here were not saved) because they shed their blood **for God** but because the Lamb shed His blood **for them**––they made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

We are not saved by laying our lives down for God. Salvation is made possible because God laid down His life for us. And when we believe in Christ for eternal life, it is freely given to us because of our faith in Christ.

The 144,000 Jewish men who are the converts of the Two Witnesses go all over the earth, and millions of Gentiles are saved. And many, many of these Gentiles pay a huge cost to stand up for Christ. Notice some of the words I have put in bold print:

15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither **hunger** anymore nor **thirst** anymore; **the sun** shall not strike them, nor any **heat**; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every **tear** from their eyes.”

In His mercy, God saves these people. Do they still have problems? Of course. No child of God is exempt from problems. But what we must never forget is that the problems we face as we follow Christ will be richly and mercifully rewarded in eternity.

God is a God of mercy. **Are you like God?** Do you show mercy? Or do you always want people to get what they deserve?

Luke 6:35-36 says,

Luke 6:35-36 …He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Years ago, Charlie Hainline was a member of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He was a man who radiated the love of Christ, and was serious about sharing his faith with others. One year, his goal was to lead 1,650 people to faith in Christ (five a day)! Once, he was out witnessing with a couple of other people, and though he didn’t share the gospel, he sat there and smiled broadly as a teammate did. When the teammate was finished and asked if the person would like to trust Christ for the gift of eternal life, the person replied, **“If being a Christian would make me like him** (pointing to Charlie), **I want it!”**

Now you might think that Charlie was full of joy because he had an easy life or something like that, but actually, the opposite was true. His daughter was kidnapped, killed, and her head was found floating in a Florida canal. When the murderer of his daughter was caught and convicted, Charlie visited the prison in order to witness to the man. He remembered mercy!

(Invitation)