



gracefellowship

Revelation
March 14, 2019
The Lamb's Followers

:: Revelation 14-15

I want to begin today reminding us where we have been recently so we better understand where we are in the book of Revelation this morning. Following Jesus writing letters to 7 churches in the region of Asia Minor encouraging them to remain faithful to Him in all circumstances, we saw John begin to describe the way God has been judging sin and evil throughout history and His plan to do that in the future. We saw a series of 7 judgments happen with the breaking of the seals on God's scroll of ownership over the world. Following the 7th seal, God introduced a series of 7 trumpet judgments.

Following this look at the judgments of sinful man, John took a pause at the end of chapter 11 to give us a snapshot of the history of a cosmic war that has been raging between Satan and God, and between Satan and the people of God on earth. During this pause in the story we learned about how Satan desires to be like God and how he is working to establish his kingdom on earth- a kingdom that includes using government and religion to his advantage to keep people from following God. In the last days, Satan's plan to make his final stand against God is to set up a global government with one religion under the authority of two beasts: the anti-Christ and the False Prophet. These two people, with the power of Satan behind them will cause the whole world to move away from God and worship Satan.

Over the past two weeks we have looked at the reign of evil on the earth and the destruction it will cause. The people of God will become the enemies of this global system of evil and it will be a dark time for those who follow Jesus. But through the darkness we are encouraged to stand firm and exhibit patient endurance and faithfulness.

Today we will see the final visions John reveals during this interlude before we pick back up with God's final round of judgments. Chapter 14 is full of anticipatory visions. John is telling us, for those who find themselves hopeless in the middle of the tribulation in the anti-Christ's kingdom, there is future hope: so hold on!

Before we read the chapter together let me give you 3 things we will see as we go through this today.

- 1. The consummation of the history of man is in God's hands.**
- 2. The wicked, godless civilization of the beast will fall under divine judgment.**
- 3. The saints of God will be brought into their eternal salvation.**

Let's look at the first of 3 visions John is shown in Revelation 14:1-5

The First Vision

:: Revelation 14:1-5

1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

2 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.

3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

John spent time in Chapters 12 and 13 describing the kingdom of Satan, but at the beginning of 14 he brings us back to the reality that Jesus is in control and will prevail. John tells us that Jesus is coming back and that He will bring all His followers with Him. The 144,000 represent all believers, and John says they have the name of Jesus and His Father's name on their foreheads. This is in sharp contrast to what we saw last week where the followers of the anti-Christ will have his number on their hands and foreheads.

Jesus stands with His followers on Mount Zion. The earthly Mount Zion represents the temple mount and can refer to the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. In the future Kingdom, Zion comes to represent God's dwelling place and the consummated Kingdom of heaven and earth under God's divine control. John is telling us that Jesus is coming again to dwell with His people eternally. Our future is fully in God's hands. We can take heart in the face of evil and hardship and tragedy because there is a day coming when those things will disappear under the rule and reign of Jesus!

John goes on to tell us more about the Lamb's followers. They sang a new song that only they could learn, accompanied by beautiful music like harps, but as loud

as rushing waters. It's a song of redemption that only those who have experienced the salvation available to us through Jesus can understand.

Then John says something curious, which I believe many people misinterpret: *"These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins."*

Many people have taken this verse completely literally and believe that there will be 144,000 specific people in the tribulation age who will follow Jesus and will be virgins. However, I have been saying all along that the 144,000 represent all believers. If that is the case, are those of us who are married and enjoy God's gift of sex, messing things up? The answer is no! You don't have to become celibate to follow Jesus! Throughout Scripture the people of God are referred to as the Bride of Christ. We are intended to be in relationship with Jesus alone. However, Scripture also calls our sin, when led away by the world's enticement, adultery. In this chapter of Revelation John is going to introduce another "character" into the story- Babylon, or Babylon the Great. This is the capital of the anti-Christ's kingdom, and John refers to the city (or you might even think of Babylon as the entire kingdom of the world) as an adulterous or a harlot.

When we get to chapters 17-19 we will see how God deals with Babylon and the pain that causes the world. We will also see the celebration that brings to the people of God when the kingdom of the anti-Christ finally falls. But for now, this is important for us to understand because when John says the 144,000 remained virgins and did not defile themselves with women, he is communicating that the people of God remained faithful to Jesus instead of pursuing the lies of the kingdoms of this world. In our current context we have to be careful that our love of country doesn't become more important than our love of Jesus. I think it is good and right to honor our country and to have pride in the nation we belong to, but we must realize that...

America is not God.

The American dream is not God.

Our freedoms and liberties are not God.

The system of capitalism that allows us to earn money is not God.

All the stuff our money can buy is not God.

If we are not careful we can make any or all these things a god and worship them, committing adultery as people united in marriage to Jesus. The intoxication we can experience from what this world offers looks really good until we realize that making gods out of these things leads to destruction.

John tells us in verse 4 true followers of Jesus follow Him wherever He goes. We are purchased by God and offered to Him and we are expected to walk blamelessly before Him. This is the very idea of biblical discipleship: that we are people who know Jesus, who follow Jesus and who are on mission with Jesus. Being blameless doesn't mean we are perfect, but John says we will be ambassadors of the truth and enemies of falsehood.

Now let's turn our attention to the second vision John unfolds.

The Second Vision

:: Revelation 14:6-13

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.

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.”

8 A second angel followed and said, “ ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand,

10 they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.

11 And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.”

12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

Again, it is important for us to know where we are in the book of Revelation, because it is a book of prophecy sometimes it is difficult to know what is past, present or future. The things prophesied in this vision and the next will be fulfilled in Chapters 19-20. John is telling us now that these things will happen, then he is going to describe how in more detail later.

John first hears an angel give a call to all men to repent before the final judgments when it is too late. We are reminded that God created the world and that we are created for Him. However, the invitation will not last forever. We must choose now if we will follow Jesus or not. For those who choose not to follow Jesus, you need to know what the repercussions are:

8 A second angel followed and said, “ ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand,

10 they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.

Again, we see the city of Babylon described as making the nations drink the wine of her adulteries. The kingdom of the anti-Christ is designed to lead people away from God and into the worship of the anti-Christ. But for anyone who drinks up the wine of Satan's kingdom, God also has a cup of wine prepared for them. John calls it the cup of God's fury, poured full strength into the cup of His wrath.

This is not a cup you want to have poured out against you. In the ancient world wine was often diluted with 2 or 3 parts water to one part wine. The only reason you drank undiluted wine was to get drunk. God is telling us in this passage that for all who reject him to follow Satan, they will drink the undiluted wine of His wrath in final, eternal judgment. And I know it's not pleasant, and it's not popular, but look again at what that entails.

10b They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.

11 And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

I can't plead with you strongly enough- if you are not a follower of Jesus, give your heart and life to Him to be your Savior and Lord before it's too late. The good news of the gospel is that you don't have to experience the wrath of God against your sins because Jesus already did that for you! The night before Jesus died on the cross He prayed, asking God to take the cup from Him. The cup He was praying about was the cup of divine wrath. The worst part of Jesus's crucifixion was not the whipping he endured, or carrying his cross, or having nails driven through His hands and feet; the worst part of the crucifixion was that God was pouring out His wrath against all sin onto Jesus.

:: 2 Corinthians 5:21

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus became sin so God could punish Him in order to make us righteous in His sight.

There is bad news for all who refuse to repent and continue to follow the anti-Christ and embrace his kingdom. But there is good news for Christians.

12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

God promises the blessing of eternal rest to those who persevere in their faith in Jesus.

Those who face the wrath of God and are judged never find rest from their torment day or night. But the people of God enter into His perfect rest. We will rest from our labor and enjoy perfect peace with our Savior.

Let's look at the third vision and then I want us to read chapter 15 together to set up our next message in Revelation.

:: Revelation 14:14-20

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.

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."

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

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

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."

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

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.

John gives us a glimpse here of Jesus coming for the final judgment. He comes on the clouds with a crown of gold and a sharp sickle in His hand. He is both King, coming to rule in absolute authority, and He is judge of all the earth.

There are actually two ways to approach this text. We can see this as one single harvest both leading to judgment, or we can see two harvests, one of judgment, the other a gathering to be with Jesus.

When Jesus swings his sickle to harvest there is nothing seemingly bad associated with it. Some people see this as Jesus collecting His faithful followers to be with Him.

Then the angel, who also holds a sickle, harvests grapes and throws them into the winepress of God's wrath, where they are trampled.

The second approach is that both harvests lead to judgment. I would probably lean toward that. In the prophetic book of Joel when he is describing the judgments of the nations, Joel writes:

:: Joel 3:13

13 Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow— so great is their wickedness!”

Joel seems to use the same imagery of harvesting and trampling grapes in one show of judgment against the wickedness of nations rebelling against God.

In Revelation John tells us the result of the nations trampled in God’s winepress is blood, rather than grape juice, flowing as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia (184 miles).

When the armies of the anti-Christ line up to fight against Jesus at his return there will be absolute defeat of Satan’s forces. Some have speculated this is to be interpreted literally and that blood will flow like a river up to 4 feet deep for 180 miles. I suppose that is possible, but I don’t think that’s what John is trying to communicate to us. I think he is just telling us that the wrath of God will be complete and it will be devastating.

George Eldon Ladd said this concerning this passage:

“The entire land is pictured as being inundated in blood to a depth of about four feet. The thought is clear: [This is] a radical judgment that crushes every vestige of evil and hostility to the reign of God.”

We will see this battle play out in chapter 19, and while it is gruesome, it is one sided. Satan is no match for God and all mankind who stands with Satan will be destroyed.

That’s not a great note to end on this morning! So before we worship through singing again, I want to remind us of the glory of the One we are singing to. Look at Revelation 15 with me.

(Underscore with music)

:: Revelation 15:1-4

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.

2 And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God

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

4 Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Life is about perspective, right?

Illustration: Some of us love the upsets in the NCAA Tournament. Others of us

want the blue bloods to win. As long as TN wins and my bracket is better than my wife's, I'm good! But it's all a matter of perspective!

To everyone who suffers the consequences of God's wrath poured out against sin, we know they will shake their fists at God and live in hatred of Him. But to those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus and are being saved through Him, we worship God for the just way He deals with sin and the way he responds to centuries of violence against His people.

His deeds are great and marvelous

He is just and true

He is the King of the nations

He is holy and worthy of the worship of all nations

That's our King! Let's lift our voices to worship Him again this morning and go into our week renewed in the understanding that our enemy will be defeated and we will experience God's great salvation!