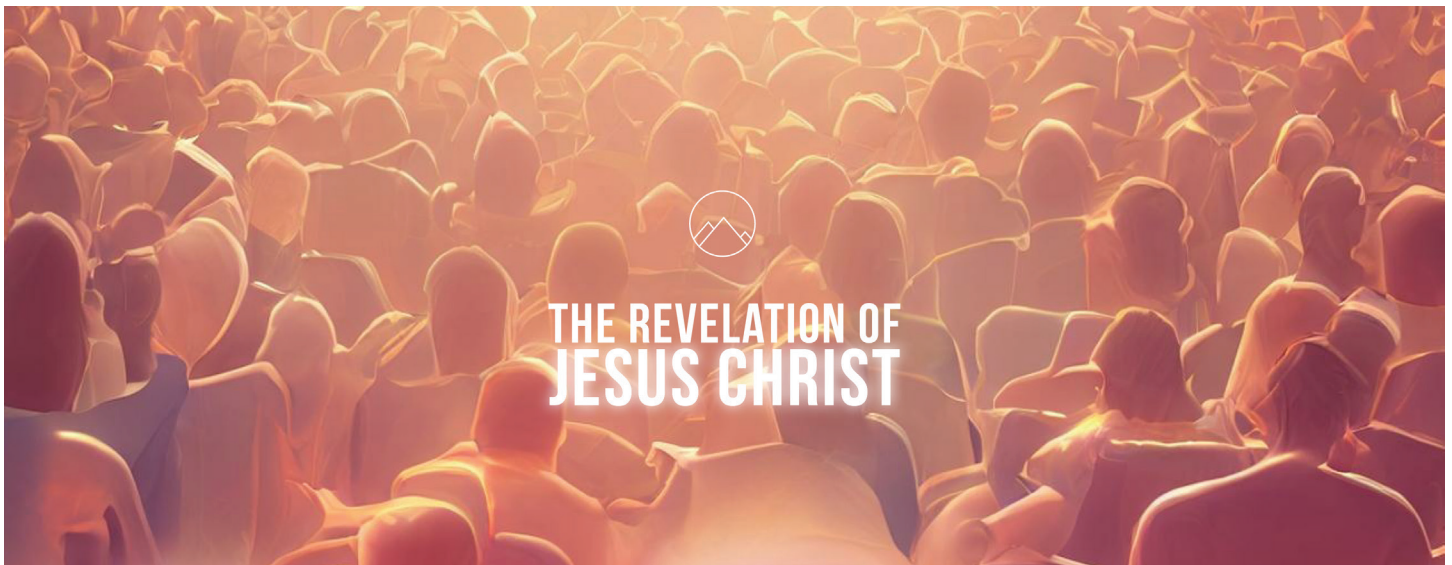




Sunday, March 17, 2024
Revelation 14

So, today we find ourselves in Revelation 14 which is an important text because this is one of the last readings before we get into the seven bowl judgments or more commonly known as the seven plagues of judgment in Chapter 16. Now, in case you've forgotten, there are three sets of judgments that appear throughout the book of the Revelation, and they are meant to remind us of the three sets of judgements that exist within our world even present day.

The first set of judgements is portrayed by seven seals and they help us to see the permissive wrath of God. This view of God's wrath is not to be looked at as an active motion that God now takes towards humanity resulting in judgment. But rather, a permissive one: that in His great Love for humanity, He permits them to choose to be their own gods knowing full-well that this choice will lead them to death and destruction. This actually allows us to view His wrath here as redemptive and not punitive. That this is actually an expression of God's great Love, Grace and Mercy towards humanity. For through this divine tolerance, the hope for redemption would be found as humanity - in the depths of its despair - might finally realize that it cannot be its own god and therefore would be brought to its knees in hopes of finally surrendering to the salvation and redemption of Almighty God.

The second set of judgments is the seven trumpets which represent God's partial, active wrath. In this section we saw fire from the altar flung to the earth and 1/3 of creation was destroyed. It's important to note that not 2/3 was spared. Again, 2/3 were given a chance to repent and choose to submit to God to avoid the final judgment.

Which we will see over the next few weeks in Chapters 15-16 as the bowls/plagues are introduced to remind humanity that they cannot mock God but will need to answer for the sin that they have embraced. If they will not paint the doorposts of their hearts with the blood of the Lamb that has been freely offered to them, then the angel of death cannot passover and they will face the full extent of God's judgment pronounced towards sin.

And so the space between the judgments of the seven trumpets and then the judgments of the seven bowls/plagues is actually 4 full chapters. And over the past few weeks we have been introduced to this heavenly planetarium scene of sorts where John is being exposed now to the role of the church in times past, present and future. The first one shows a scene of a woman giving birth to a child that is caught up to Heaven before the dragon can get to it but in its fury, the dragon now goes after the woman instead. Ultimately this picture is a picture of the pressure that the church has always experienced from the enemy when Light is invading darkness and its a reminder that this pressure will continue to be there as the church remains obedient to the call. This same message was also solidified by the next image of the two witnesses and then by the image of the two beasts. That these two beasts represent political and religious power that the enemy is trying to mimic and impersonate to deceive humanity into following them instead of Jesus Christ. We are left with the reminder that, just as the Lord places His mark on the foreheads of His children, so the enemy also mimics this action with its followers, by placing a mark on their foreheads or their right hands. The implication being that this is not a physical mark per sé, but symbolism that shows who we belong to. As Christians, who are marked by the Holy Spirit, the Bible teaches us that, that mark presents itself through the character and nature of our actions. They will know we are Christians by our actions, by our love for one another. In the same vein, as followers of the dragon, the mark presents itself through the character and nature of their actions as well. They will know they follow the beast because of their beastly actions (deceitful, lying, carnal, selfish) towards one another. And these two marks have been around since the birth of Christ and will be around until He returns.

The point being that the scenes that we are witnessing in this heavenly planetarium of sorts is a reminder that as long as we live in this world, disciples of Jesus will find themselves in the midst of this cosmic battle everywhere they turn. The outcome of the battle is certain. The dragon has already been defeated by Jesus Christ through the cross. It's just that he will not concede to that defeat and is doing his diabolical best to wreak as much havoc as he can, to keep as many people as possible from following Jesus Christ.

And so now, as we shift our gaze back up to the scenes in this heavenly planetarium of sorts, we see a new image appear - one now of the Lamb standing on Mt. Zion and the mountain is filled with

His presence and the worship of the Saints and Angels fills all of heaven in this most magnificent of worship sets! Let's read:

Revelation 14:1-20

'Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. 3 They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. 4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

The Proclamations of Three Angels

6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— 7 saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

8 And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

9 Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'"

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”

Reaping the Earth’s Harvest

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” 16 So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Reaping the Grapes of Wrath

17 Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

18 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” 19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

The chapter begins with a vision of Jesus standing on Mount Zion alongside 144,000 saints, symbolizing the victorious and redeemed church. Following this, John sees three angels delivering important messages: the first proclaims the eternal gospel to all nations; the second warns against worshiping the beast and receiving his mark (as we talked about two weeks ago); and the third announces the impending judgment on Babylon (the world) and the fall of her corrupt system. The chapter finishes off with a widespread harvest from the Lord.

And keeping true to the overall theme of this book thus far, there are definitely some challenging examples that John uses that are hard, but necessary to walk through. Let’s go.

As already mentioned, verse 1-5 paints for us a beautiful picture of the Lamb standing now on Mt. Zion. In previous chapters He was sitting on the throne in the throne room of Heaven and now He is standing on Mt. Zion. This is interesting because while the act of sitting on the throne signifies kingship and sovereignty over all creation, standing on Mount Zion with His people emphasizes His presence among His people, particularly during times of worship and spiritual victory.

The mention of Mt. Zion is specific but not meant to be literal though. For the first-century readers, Mt. Zion was a term that was often used in conjunction with Psalm 2 where David declares that the Lord has been installed as King upon Zion, His holy mountain. And so the use of Zion came to be understood as a symbol of victory. And so when the first century readers would have heard this term, they would have viewed this as a proclamation of God as victorious among His people. It also underscores the importance of the fact that our God is not just sitting on the throne, in an unattainable place, but that His victorious presence is among us - He is with us.

He isn't just 'over there.' He is 'right here.'

And standing with Him are a multitude of the redeemed. The number 144,000 is used here to identify them and we first saw this number back in chapter 7 where we learned that the symbolism of numbers in the book of the Revelation is incredibly important. 144 is achieved by multiplying 12 by itself. 12 is the number of the church - both in the OT as well as the NT. The 12 tribes of Israel in the OT made up the people of God and then the 12 disciples of Jesus in the NT make up the foundation of the church - now, not just one group of people like in the OT, but from every tribe, tongue, nation and language. Together this number represents people from the church past, present and future. Multiplying that number by ten implies a big number. Multiplying it by 10 again, implies a really big number. Multiplying it by 10 yet again, would imply a number more than anyone can number.

John then goes on to describe the nature of these people and says something that has ruffled feathers, confused the intellect and scratched heads for centuries. He says that the nature of these people, '...are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.'

Ok so I don't want to spend heaps of time on this statement because I think there's a really simple explanation but I'd like to start off by identifying what this doesn't mean. This statement has been used by some to say that there are a group of people that God will elevate to higher positions because they have lived celibate lives. There are some traditions that have embraced this to the fullest extent by stressing that their leaders live lives of celibacy. The challenge with this thought is that all throughout the NT, Jesus celebrates marriage and calls it a covenant. He even goes as far as to use the example of marriage to compare His relationship to the church so it seems out of character that He would elevate celibacy associated with singleness over marriage. Still there are others that look at this and suggest that these are warriors who are geared up for battle against the Dragon and similar to ancient rules of engagement where soldiers were not allowed to have any kind of sexual relationships before the battle, the same rule would be applied to this group.

I think for me, however, the language being used here is more likely symbolic - like much of the rest of the book - and reminds me of Paul's words to the church in Corinth:

2 Corinthians 11:2

'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity (and purity) that is in Christ.'

I think this verse is key to understanding our verse in Revelation today. I don't think John is talking about physical virginity but rather using it as a picture of spiritual virginity. This is highly figurative language that John is using to encourage and remind the church that the enemy is set to deceive but that they/we are to remain steadfast in our resolve to follow the Lord and to be holy as He is holy. Later on in the book we will read more of Babylon the Great as the mother of harlots who makes the nations drink the wine of her adulterers...and so on and so forth. The point being that the Lamb's people are those who have not entered into relationship with Babylon the harlot, but have kept themselves pure - in right relationship - with the lover of their souls - Jesus Christ.

Another way to say this would be to say that we are to be in the world, but not of the world. So I believe what John is witnessing here is a massive group of the redeemed of God. Those that went through trials, tribulations, and those that were attacked by the enemy, some of whom even lost their lives, for the sake of the gospel, but at the end of the day they did not succumb to the pressure - the thlipsis - or the temptation that the world/Babylon had put in front of them. It seems that John is pulling from Revelation 21 where we will see the impact of Babylon more clearly, but never-the-less, it is a reminder that we the church are betrothed to Him and must live our lives accordingly.

The next thing that John sees is three Angels declaring three separate yet connected messages. One goes across the earth proclaiming the Gospel message, another declares that Babylon the Great has fallen and the third warns against embracing allegiance to the beast by taking its mark and adopting its nature and character. This third one warns us that those that embrace the enemy's mark instead of the mark of the Lord will not find peace. Instead, it will be impossible for them to be at rest and until they switch allegiances, they will have to suffer with the mental anguish and torment that following the beast entails. Example: I've watched enough documentaries to know that criminals who embrace their lifestyle for the appeal of the money and power always wrestle with the torture of their souls whether they admit it or not. It's all part of the price they pay in following Babylon. It promises freedom but delivers bondage instead. Even to the point of conceding defeat.

Share story of mobster openly admitting all that he had done and admitting that he's going to hell and has come to terms with it.....blinded...deceived.... Sure he acknowledged his sin, but he did not repent of his sin. And only the power of the Gospel can move us to repentance.

And that's the importance of this section because it reminds us of the power of the Gospel to save and we see this especially in the closing section of this chapter, as the call for a great harvest echoes through the heaven-lies. We see God Almighty on His cloud of Glory with sickle in hand being thrust into the earth. But then immediately afterwards we see the same reaping action taking place as the sickle is now thrust into the earth to gather the vines of the earth, throw them into this winepress of God's wrath that is just outside of the city and as we close out the chapter we are met with a scene of gallons upon gallons of blood oozing out of the winepress. There was so much that it flowed up to the bridles of the horses, for 1600 furlongs.

What do we make of this?

The language that John uses here is specific. The terms sickle and harvest are taken from the prophet Joel in the Old Testament:

Joel 3:13 says:

'Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

Come, go down;

For the winepress is full,

The vats overflow—

For their wickedness is great.'

In this verse, we have both the mention of a sickle for the harvest and the connection to the winepress - just like what we see in Revelation. Now, whenever we see the term reaping in the Bible it is always used in accordance with something good about to take place and that which one would want to keep. When the crops are ready, the field is harvested to be able to reap the fruit of which we enjoy. Harvest and reaping is always connected to what is meant to be kept - that which is good.

But it seems that in Joel's verse, as the reaping is connected to the winepress, that this action is actually poised towards the ungodly - because he says...'for their wickedness is great.' And even in our text in Revelation we can see that the first mention of reaping is clearly directed towards salvation and a good action, but that this second act of reaping is somewhat confusing as it is connected with the winepress squeezing out the river of blood which seems to be evidently connected to the un-

godly as an act of wrath poured out by God towards them. That He would gather them to then pour out His wrath upon them and utterly destroy them... But if that's the case, why would John use the same term of reaping and harvesting for this action, when it has only ever been used in the entirety of the Bible as a good action towards something that is to be kept not destroyed? The harvest of grapes is specific and interesting though because it is only through the destruction of the grapes that, that which is good and meant to be kept can be produced.

Look at what Jesus says in John 15. He makes the statement of Himself saying that, 'I am the true vine, and my father is the vinedresser.' And then in Matthew 23, Jesus tells a story about the workers in the vineyard, who killed the son of the owner of the vineyard outside the city. Well, historically, the term outside the city is also significant, because Scripture teaches us that this was the term that was used all throughout the NT for the location of the cross of Jesus. It was not in Jerusalem, it was outside of the city. So if you follow this line of thinking, with Jesus as the vine, and the only way to get the good wine from the grapes is by destroying the grapes and the fact that the winepress that does this is specifically mentioned to be outside the city, then the picture that John seems to be painting here is a picture of the cross. As just outside the city, was the place where the wrath of God was poured out towards sin. But instead of all of humanity that deserved the wrath of God, it was positioned towards Jesus, where upon that winepress the True Vine was crushed but in His destruction flowed rivers of New Wine in His blood. And it flowed like a river that was gallons deep and fathom's wide. Enough to cover the sin of all humanity for all of eternity. 1600 is the term that John uses. 16 is 4 times 4. Four is the number of creation - specifically humanity. There are four corners of the earth. Times ten - a big number. Times ten again - a really big number. Times ten again, a number so vast it cannot be fathomed. The blood of Jesus Christ - the true vine - is more than enough to cover the sins of every single person that repents, past, present and future.

It's the Gospel pure and simple. It was exactly what the angels were preaching over the Earth in verse 6-7, and it is what is now being pictured at the end of this chapter. Which is so incredibly significant, because in chapter 15 and 16, when the judgement of the bowls/plagues rears its ugly head, that judgement will be final. And still, we see the goodness of God, reminding us in vivid detail what He did for us - the price that He paid so that we would not have to experience the coming judgement towards sin. He already paid the price. You don't need to pay that price for you simply need to repent.

4 quick points to consider as we close:

1. Don't just acknowledge your sin, repent. There is a river of blood that can cleanse you from your sin. Don't just acknowledge it, but turn from it.

2. Decisions have consequences: you reap what you sow. Someone once said, 'Sow a thought, you reap an action; so an action, you reap habit; sow a habit, you reap a character; sow a character, you reap a destiny.'

3. Love God, not the world.

1 John 2:15-17

'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.'

4. Let your light shine. Join the cry of the angels and keep proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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