

The Great Harvest of the Lord
(Sermon 22 – Rev. 14)
3.16.25

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation 14.

I've come to enjoy every season of the year, but I have to say fall is my favorite. Coming out of the heat of summer, feeling that slight bit of chill in the air. Watching the trees turn colors. And one of the things we've come to enjoy as a fall activity is taking our family and going with friends to an apple orchard. It's fun to walk through an orchard with an empty bag in hand, picking choice apples off of the tree.

But I've learned that you have to take your time. Some apples that are still on the tree may look healthy but could actually be rotten inside. And some apples that have fallen to the ground can be perfectly good and ripe.

But then, after all the crowds are gone and apple season is done, the workers still have to go through and harvest everything – the good and the bad, the ripe and the rotten. They keep the good and make amazing apple sauce, apple butter, apple cider. And all that is rotten is thrown away.

That's similar to the picture the Bible gives us of the great harvest of the Lord. When Jesus returns, He will gather all who are saved as well as those who are unsaved, the righteous and the unrighteous together. While both will be harvested together, their destinations will be very different.

Let's begin by reading verses 1-5 of ch. 14, and then we'll pray...

[14:1] Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. [2] And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, [3] and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. [4] It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, [5] and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

(PRAY)

PROP: A day is soon coming when the Lord will bring in His harvest of souls, both the righteous and the wicked, into eternity.

And our eternal destination will be determined by one question: in this life, did we surrender our lives to Christ, or did we not. And the Bible takes out all the guess work. God makes this abundantly clear in His Word so that you and I can know for sure how to be included in that harvest of the righteous, to be gathered into Christ's kingdom forever.

Now, the focus of ch. 13 from last week is on activity in the earth - with the vision of the antichrist and the false prophet persecuting the church. But here in the first part of ch. 14, our perspective changes from earth to heaven.

And that's helpful. Because, as much as we need to know what's going on here, God wants His people to have our gaze lifted. The Bible says, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2).

So Jesus begins ch. 14 reminding the Church that we are His, and that He has the final victory, and the joy we have to look forward to. And that encouragement comes in the form of a song in heaven...

I. The New Song of the Redeemed

In this part of the vision, the Apostle John sees Jesus standing on Mt. Zion. Since this is a vision of heaven, we know this is not the earthly Mt. Zion, but the heavenly one. Jesus is standing victoriously in heaven, surrounded by the 144,000.

We've seen that number before, back in ch. 7. It is a symbolic number that is meant to represent all of God's people – (a multiple of the number 12) – representing the 12 tribes of Israel as well as the 12 Apostles, identifying all of God's people, redeemed in Christ, for all time.

Some in this number have come through great tribulation. Some have been martyred. But this reminds us that all who are called by Jesus and saved by Jesus, are also kept by Jesus. This number is meant to remind us He does not lose a single one who belongs to Him.

And the redeemed are marked by the name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads. This is in contrast to the mark of the beast in ch. 13. It's not a literal mark, but shows ownership and allegiance. And those who were marked with the name of Jesus, those who belong to Him, they all begin to sing.

Now, singing in heaven is not unusual. We know angelic beings are singing day and night. But this song is different.

First, John describes their singing like the "roar of many waters", like the "sound of thunder", which tells us the singing was loud and powerful. And he says their singing was like the "sound of harpists playing on their harps", which reveals that the song was melodious and beautiful.

Second, the Bible says this is a "new song" that the redeemed of the Lord were singing. Usually whatever song is going on in heaven, all of creation can join in. But not this song.

The end of verse 3 says, **"No one could learn that song except the 144,000 [meaning the Church] who had been redeemed from the earth."**

Here's a song so exclusive, so special, not even the angels could sing it. But why not? Because this song is only for:

- Those who have lived on this earth – who were born in sin, and yet redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
- Those who know what it is to be forgiven of sin and washed clean.
- Who know what it is to be brought from death to life.
- Those who have been rescued from hell and made victorious over death by the death of Jesus.
- Those whose hearts were once made of stone, but Jesus gave you a heart of flesh.
- Whose mouths were once filled with curses, now they are filled with praises.
- This is a song for those who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.
- This is a song only for the rescued by Christ, redeemed in Christ, adopted by Christ, giving all glory to Christ.

This is a song only the Church can sing. Those who have been saved can truly appreciate and celebrate the Savior. And what a celebration that will be!

Now, in light of this celebration, John takes time to describe in beautiful, poetic terms, those who are singing this new song to Jesus:

1. Virgins – This is not literal, but symbolic. All through the Bible, God's people are often described as a pure, spotless bride. The Apostle Paul, writes to the Corinthian church...

I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ~ 2 Corinthians 11:2b

This means that those who have committed their lives to Christ have not defiled themselves with the false gods and the idols of the world. The Church, the pure bride of Christ, is singing this song.

2. Followers of the Lamb – The Redeemed are described (at the end of v. 4) as those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. This means they are disciples, those who have picked up our cross and followed Him.

3. Firstfruits for God and the Lamb – In a harvest, the firstfruit, or the first part of the harvest belonged to God. It was considered holy. Jesus is described as the firstfruit of the resurrection. So those who trust in Jesus, we follow Him in His holiness, being set apart for His use and His praise. And therefore we will follow Jesus as we are resurrected to eternal life.

4. Truthful, blameless – Contrasted with the lies and deception of the false prophet in ch. 13, those who belong to Christ speak the truth and live the truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life".

All of these beautiful descriptions of the Church singing in heaven are to encourage the saints while we are still on the earth. To remind us whatever you have to endure in this life, it's worth it all to be part of that heavenly chorus, singing the new song of the redeemed. Singing to our Victorious Redeemer, praising the One who died and rose again, who conquers every foe and fulfills every promise.

With those faith-building reminders, John's vision now turns our gaze back to the earth. The evil forces that were unleashed back in ch. 13 are about to face defeat at the hands of the Lord, along with all who have rejected Christ. That's the next part of the vision...

II. The Judgment of the Sovereign God

Three different angels announce three different aspects of God and His judgment about to be enacted on the earth...

[6] Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

[7] And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

This angel is communicating, not so much the content of the gospel as the motivation for us to trust in the good news, and that is because: **God is sovereign**. God alone is to be feared and worshiped because God alone made heaven and earth and He rules over it all, and His judgment is coming soon.

But we are told that those on earth hearing this warning do not repent. Even when the truth is proclaimed by angels, they still will not turn and trust in Christ. Speaking of the unrighteous people of the earth, Martin Kiddle writes this:

“Here is the bitter irony of their lot: though they damn themselves eternally by their refusal to face the truth, one day they will be forced to face it. Sooner or later the glory they refuse to give the Creator willingly will be torn from them by the spectacle of His wrath.”

~ Martin Kiddle

We know that one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord – either in grace-filled obedience in this life leading to forgiveness, or in forced submission in the next life, leading to eternal punishment.

Then another angel appears with a second announcement:

[8] Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”

While the first angel proclaims God’s sovereignty over all creation, the second angel announces that God’s enemies have been defeated. In John’s historical context, Babylon represented Rome, the central enemy of the church, persecuting Christians and demanding worship of the emperor.

But in the context of future events, Babylon is the symbol for all paganism, all those who have rejected God's sovereign rule, while giving in to the lusts and immorality and the idolatry of the antichrist and the false prophet – those enemies and all who followed them are defeated once and for all.

[9] And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, [10] he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

Church, let no one deceive you – hell is real, and hell is eternal. Those who reject Christ in this life will *not* get a second chance in the next life. If you die without trusting in Christ, you will not simply go to sleep in the grave or cease to exist. For those who reject Christ, what awaits that person is eternal, non-stop, never-ending torment.

And the reason is, when you reject the Savior, who took God's wrath in our place, then there is nowhere else for that wrath to land, except on you. The Bible says those who trust in Christ are storing up treasures in heaven (1 Tim. 6). But those who reject Christ are storing up God's wrath (Rom. 2). And that fearful holy wrath of God will be poured out for all eternity.

Knowing that, why would anyone choose hell? But that's exactly what we're doing when we reject Christ. That's what you're doing when you play religious games and trust in your own works.

I know. I played those religious games when I was a teenager. I played church, doing just enough for others to think I was a Christian without fully devoting my life to Christ. And it's only by God's mercy that He opened my eyes to my own hypocrisy and sin, and revealed the transforming power of the gospel in the beauty of the cross.

Hear me teenagers. Hear me adults. It's a dangerous thing to sit under the gospel for years, in church or in your home, to hear the gospel every week and not fully commit your life to Christ. That is a dangerous place to be. Verse 12 says...

[12] Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Hear the warnings of God's word today – you either belong to Christ, or you belong to the devil. There is no in between. Which will it be? Who will you live for? Who will you submit to? Trust in Christ today. Lower your pride, repent and turn from your sins, and trust in Christ alone. Your good works can't save you. Just repeating a prayer won't save you. Being baptized won't save you.

The question you need to ask is this: Am I trusting in what I can do, or am I trusting in what Christ has done? Have your eyes been opened to the truth of the gospel, that Christ alone is your Savior, that Christ alone is your only hope? Have you placed your faith in Him alone? And does your life bear fruit of that transformation?

Know for sure that you are saved today. Don't guess. Don't wonder. Know that you are saved. Be sure of that now, because your eternity depends on it. Before you face persecution, before things really heat up, know right now that you belong to Christ.

The Pakistani pastors that I've worked with and that we pray for as a church, they often share the gospel with villages of people who are called "Christian" but who have no idea who Christ is. Because in Pakistan, under an Islamic government, if you ever had a relative who converted to Christianity, your whole family is marked forever. It might have only been your great-grandfather who followed Jesus, but all his generations after would be considered outcasts, persecuted and despised, only allowed to have the most demeaning jobs in society.

So there are entire villages of people who have been persecuted as Christians all their lives without ever knowing Christ for themselves. So when the pastors go into these villages and preach the gospel, many of these people are hearing of the Savior for the first time, hearing of the one who first suffered for them, who bled for them, who died for them, who rose from the dead for them, and one day is coming back for them. They go from being called "Christian" to actually following Christ.

The reminder is clear for us as well. Don't go through life being a Christian in name only. Don't think that because you were raised in a Christian home that makes you saved.

Don't live life just going through the motions. Don't be satisfied with simply having the philosophy of a Christian, the label of a Christian, without truly knowing Christ.

And don't be satisfied with just knowing about Jesus. Know that you know Him, and that He knows you. And when this life is over, you will receive the blessing of v. 13...

[13] And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Here is the clear contrast: Those who reject Christ have no hope. Those who follow Christ have eternal hope – even facing death, knowing that we are promised eternal rest from our labors, from our struggles, from our pain and sorrows, because in Christ all things will be reconciled and made new.

(Transition): So far in this chapter, we've been reminded of the beautiful redemption that we have in Christ and how all the Church will one day gather around His throne and sing that new song. Then we saw the judgment of our Sovereign God enacted.

Now we come to the fearful time of the harvest when Jesus divides the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats – dividing His followers from the rest of mankind. When John sees...

III. The Final Gathering of Souls

Jesus shows this to John using two metaphors. The first one is like a harvest of grain, beginning in v. 14...

[14] Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. [15] And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." [16] So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The one sitting on the cloud is Jesus. He has a golden crown (representing His kingly authority), and He has a sickle in his hand, representing

judgment. And the angel who comes out of the temple announces, “The time of judgment has come.”

John sees Jesus swing the sickle upon the earth and mankind is reaped like a harvest. We may ask, “Is this for believers or unbelievers?” The answer is found in Jesus’ words from Matthew 13...

The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- Matthew 13:39-43

That’s what’s happening here in Rev. 14 – a gathering of all people, both saved and unsaved.

This is also a reminder for us that history is going somewhere. It’s headed in a specific direction. We are not in some endless cycle of evil rising and falling, and good overcoming for a short time, and then evil wins again.

Instead, there is coming a day when everything will be made right – when the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be rewarded. Those who have rejected Christ will face eternal judgment, and those who have trusted in Christ are given eternal reward.

But there’s a second depiction of a harvest. It’s the same judgment as we saw in the previous verses, but with a little different focus...

[17] Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. [18] And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” [19] So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. [20] And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

What was simply a warning before has now become reality. What the angels were announcing, has now come to pass. God's full wrath has been poured out upon the wicked.

And in this part of the vision, an angel swings the sickle, but instead of wheat we see the image of grapes being harvested.

When wheat is gathered, it is separated from the tares. The wheat is gathered into the barn, and the tares are burned in the fire. But when grapes are harvested, they go to the winepress. A winepress is violent and messy. The grapes are crushed underfoot and the juice pours out the bottom of the press and is collected for wine.

That's what verses 17-20 are meant to illustrate - the violent, fearful judgment of God, His holy wrath poured out on the unbeliever.

And notice this winepress is described as, "outside the city", which represents being outside of God's covenant. And as wine flows from a winepress, those facing the full wrath of God, those who join in with the devil to oppose God and oppose God's people, all are crushed, and the Bible says the blood from those being judged will flow as high as a horse's bridle for 1600 stadia, which is almost 200 miles.

This is more symbolism, meant to depict how horrible this judgment is. Now, why 200 miles? One commentator points out that this is the distance between of the ancient borders of Palestine, which is a broader symbol for all those outside of God's covenant, all who do not belong to Christ.

But there is no picture, no symbol, no illustration to fully convey how terrible God's judgment will be. But this is close. And it's serious. It's horrific. It's no fun to talk about. But we must talk about it – not only in polite Christian circles on Sunday morning, but we must convey the seriousness of God's wrath to come to every person we can.

Some say "That's not very loving." There is nothing more unloving than to withhold the truth. We do not speak of God's judgment with glee and laughter. I do not rejoice when I think of people being crushed by the Almighty God and then spending eternity in everlasting torment. I get no joy from that. But it must be told. The warning must be given.

And that warning, given clearly in God's word, is a sign of God's mercy and grace. He gives a warning so that all may know and respond to His grace now, so that we won't have to face His judgment later.

Conclusion

With this in mind, knowing that *a day is soon coming when the Lord will bring in His harvest of souls – both the righteous and the wicked – into eternity*, how should we respond?

-We should rejoice in the ***power of the cross***. Jesus endured the full measure of God's wrath for you. What is being poured out on a vast multitude of people in these verses was already poured out on one man. Stop and let that sink in. Stop and consider just what Jesus endured for you, and for all who would be saved.

-We should remember the ***importance of our calling***. As Christians we are called to warn people of the judgment to come, and to tell them how to escape it. Only in Jesus can we be forgiven of our sins and reconciled to God. Only in Jesus can we know complete acceptance and adoption and protection from His wrath to come. This should inform our evangelism.

-This should also ***inform our worship***, knowing that Jesus already took the wrath we deserve. Remembering that should cause us to live in greater humility, that our gratitude would be a little deeper, that our song of praise would be a little louder, and our lives more devoted to Christ.

-And finally, if you have not yet fully trusted in Christ, ***today is the day of salvation***. Turn from your sin, ask Jesus to forgive you and cleanse you and be the Lord of your life. Whatever the reasons you've stayed on the outside looking in, whatever has caused you to keep an arm's distance from the Lord, know that His arms are open wide today.

He's calling you, and all of us, to fully trust in Him, so that when the great harvest takes place, may we be counted among the righteous, only because of the grace and mercy of *the Righteous One*.

(Let's Pray)