

REVEALED Part Eleven: You Can Be Free *Revelation 14:1-20*

1. The Lamb and the 144,000 (Rev. 14:1-5; Psalm 2:6-12, 96:1-6)

$$\underline{144,000} = \underline{12} \times \underline{1000}$$

The Church is defined in four ways:

1. Those who remain pure
2. Those who follow Jesus
3. Those who are redeemed
4. The firstfruits

2. Messages of the Three Angels (Rev. 14:6-12; Isaiah 21:9)

1. Repentance
2. Defeat of the Enemy
3. Wrath of God

3. Beatitude (Rev. 14:13, 1:3, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 14; Matt. 5)

4. The Harvest of the Earth (Rev. 14:14-20; Joel 3:13; Jer. 51:33; Lam. 1:15; Isaiah 63:1-6; Mark 4:20, 29)

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Revealed:
Uncovering the Mystery of Revelation
Part Eleven: You Can Be Free
Revelation 14: 1-20

Thank you for being patient with us as a pastoral staff and allowing us to share. It has really been a growth opportunity as I have had the opportunity to dig into the Word and into Revelation.

While I was in Guyana I had the opportunity and privilege to preach at Mahaicony Church. It is more of a church plant that they call a preaching point. I preached from Revelation. It was a different type of group. There were about 10 people, and the majority of them were teens, so it's like preaching to you guys here. They had just gotten back from camp, which is interesting; our teens just came back from camp. They were at a very spiritually high place and had just made some really important decisions. They were searching God for his will and how they could live this lifestyle of holiness, this lifestyle we are called to live as followers of Christ. The sermon became how to read the Bible and how we can see the Bible as nourishment for us when we're not in that really high place and we're in the normal day-to-day, when we can see the Bible as nourishment for us and for our souls. I feel here, even in this place, we have during this sermon series on Revelation, been discovering more than this book. Our eyes have been opened to the richness of the Word and maybe you're like me and have fallen in love with the Bible all over again. Your love for the Bible has been rejuvenated. Hopefully you have been inspired to do a little digging to try to look at the culture and the context around the passage that you're reading. Maybe you have been encouraged to ask other people, like a pastor or a small group leader, when you have questions about a certain passage. I hope you have been encouraged to pray for understanding while you are reading the Word. "Lord, how do I understand this, what does it mean?" I say that a lot when I read Leviticus and Numbers. Lord, what does this mean? How do I understand it? He shows me inside Leviticus and Numbers things I never would have thought, so that's your challenge, read those two books and pray every day.

Another thing I hope you have been encouraged to ask, "How does this passage fit with my experience with God?" If you're here, I hope you have had some kind of experience with God where he has worked in your life and you know him to be true and you know him to be good. And so how does this passage that I am reading relate and fit with what I know without a shadow of a doubt about God? Because it should.

Another question you learn to ask is, "How does this passage fit with the message of the church throughout the ages?" For centuries there have been traditions of the church and a belief that has not changed. How does this passage that I am reading fit within that tradition? And so as we begin looking at Revelation, some things that we have learned is that this book is not a code to predict the future. This book is not to be

ignored as maybe we have in the past. We've pushed it aside and ignored the book of Revelation. But if anything we have learned now not to ignore this book.

This is a relevant message for us today, to be strong and to stay true, to stay pure, to live free, to have hope that we can have peace, a hope that we can find rest. What a relevant message.

Last week Pastor Casey shared with us from chapter 13 and we learned about the two beasts and how they joined with the dragon to form this unholy trinity. It showed the power and the allure and the pull of evil. There was an army to challenge the church, to take the church's allegiance away from God, placing the comforts of our short time on earth ahead of our hope and trust in God.

Today we look at chapter 14 of Revelation. I recommend you turn there and keep it out as we go back and forth to it. It opens with a reminder of God's victory over evil.

"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. 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, 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. 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, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless." (Revelation 14:1-5, ESV)

This section of Revelation is one of four main sections of chapter 14. Here we see the Lamb and the 144,000. This image stands in stark contrast to the beasts of chapter 13. The Lamb and his followers are on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is an important location; it is the place of a victorious king. Psalm 2:6-12 says...

"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.' I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." (Psalm 2:6-12, ESV)

Mount Zion is a place of victory! We can take refuge in the King! The Lamb there is standing victorious with a commanding presence. The Lamb is not alone, there are 144,000 followers. Remember the power of numbers we talked about in apocalyptic genre? 144,000 is 12 squared times 1000. I put a nice mathematical equation here for you. A little bit of math for you, for all the mathematicians out there. 144,000 is 12 squared times 1000. Now 12 is an important number from the Old Testament and the New Testament; the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 disciples of Jesus. This is the complete story of God's plan for redemption, the complete story of God's love for us. Multiplying

by 1000 communicates the enormity of the object being multiplied, numbers beyond comprehension. Now there are some religious sects and denominations that try to point to a literal numbered group of people, but the overall use of numbers in apocalyptic genre rules out any literal translation of the 144,000 and points us to a numerical symbol that refers to the complete and entire church.

Also, a huge contrast here to the followers of the beast, marked by the number of the beast, the 144,000 are marked by the name of the Father, the mark of divine ownership, the mark of protection. It's a testimony of allegiance and empowerment to be a faithful witness of God's love, to endure hardship and protection and persecution. From this setting, we begin to hear a great and thundering voice from heaven, roaring waters and loud thunder like the sound of harpists.

Now we are going to stop here and we're going to go on a little rabbit trail. One of these things is not like the other: roaring waters, loud thunder...harps. Now scholars believe that the reference to harps points to the musical nature of this loud and thundering voice, and this makes sense, but...my mind wanders and I begin to see a picture of harps plink, plink, plinking in the arms of cherubs. Imagine how many harps it would take to be that loud. I am reminded of a conversation I had with Joe Robbins, our electric guitarist. Professor Robbins believes that what John is really describing here is a chorus of electric guitars, roaring like waters, as loud as thunder, and as melodic as harps. I think that is a good translation.

This voice was singing a new song in the heavenly court before the throne, before the four living creatures, before the elders. This is that picture of the heavenly throne room that was described to us and painted for us in chapters 4 and 5.

In the Old Testament a new song was often sung to praise God for victory over enemies. And so we see in Psalm 96:1-6

“Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. (Psalm 96:1-6, ESV)

This new song is a song of victory! The Lamb, Jesus, is victorious over sin, death, over oppression, hopelessness. He is victorious over the beast and his temptations! He is victorious over the pressures this world places on us to conform! We can stay strong!

In Revelation 14:3 we see that only the 144,000 can learn this new song of victory! Now remember that the 144,000 represents the church, those who are marked by their allegiance to Jesus.

In verse 4 we see that the Church is defined in four ways. First as those who remain pure. Now remember, we were talking about the importance of numbers, the 144,000 cannot be understood as a literal group, but as a symbolic, metaphorical group. And so in the same way, this is not a verse about abstinence, this is a verse about purity. To be

able to sing this song, the victory song of Jesus, we must be pure. We must live holy lives, lives that reflect the goodness, the love and the holiness of Jesus.

Second, the Church is defined as those who follow Jesus. The Greek word for follow used here is in the present form and this indicates an ongoing lifestyle of commitment. It is not a one-time commitment to follow Jesus; it is an ongoing, daily commitment to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.

Third, the Church is defined as those who are redeemed. In verse 3 we read: "Who have been redeemed from the earth". And in verse 4: "These have been redeemed from mankind". Redeemed people have been freed from slavery. Redeemed people have had their chains of oppression destroyed. Redeemed people have had an innocent party pay the price on their behalf.

And fourth, the Church is defined as firstfruits. In our agricultural society, we can understand the importance of the first fruit of a harvest. It tells us to get ready, more is coming. In Old Testament worship, as well as in our modern Christian worship, we give the "firstfruits" of our labor. As a communication of our love and trust we say, "Thank you for your provision, Lord, we give back to you so that we may continue to trust in you and not in ourselves."

And so in verse 4, the firstfruits are, in the end, all those who choose the triune God over the unholy, false and copycat grouping of the dragon and his beasts. They are those who receive the DIVINE seal, and adopt a lifestyle of following the Lamb. Now it is important for us to understand where we fit in to this story as believers, as the Church and if you are not a follower of Jesus, this may be a good time to start.

The second section of chapter 14 is not nearly as cheery. Here we have the messages of the three angels in verses 6-12:

"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. And he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.' 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.' 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, 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. 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.' Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."
(Revelation 14:6-12, ESV)

These messages from the Three Angels stand in stark contrast to the previous passage. The destiny of the unredeemed is quite different than that of the redeemed – the followers of Jesus. Each angel brings a specific message. The first is a message of

repentance. The angel is directly overhead, in the center of the sky with the message of the eternal gospel, the good news for all ages for everyone who dwells on the earth, every nation, tribe, language, and people. This is a final warning, "Act now, before it is too late!" It is not too late to accept the love of God, the creator of the heavens and earth, the creator of the sea, the creator of the beginning of all life, the creator of the universe. God does not want you to experience the fate of those who reject his love and sacrifice. Don't worship the things of this world; the things the beast would have you believe are important.

The second angel brings the message that the enemy will be defeated. "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." This reminds the first century church of Isaiah's prediction in Isaiah 21:9 of the fall of the historical Babylon. The city of Babylon has long been the code that the first century church used to refer to the oppressive Roman regime. It symbolizes any oppressive regime throughout time. Oppressive regimes force people to drink of their lies of immorality. This enemy will be defeated. The angels warn us not align with them or we will suffer the same defeat.

This is the message of the third angel (the Wrath of God). God will bring his wrath on all who align themselves with the beast, with Babylon, with the path of sin. This wrath will not be diluted, it will be full strength! There will be no mercy mixed with God's wrath! Whether this torment represents a physical agony, a spiritual agony, or a psychological agony, there will be torment, there will be agony, and the Lamb will oversee this punishment. This is both ironic and tragic because of all the Lamb did to make blessing possible for all. And ironically, the torment goes on and on, forever and ever, in contrast to the continuous worship of God by the redeemed.

Just when we think we can't take any more talk of unbelievers being tormented forever and ever...there is another opportunity for the followers of the beast, the rejecters of God, to repent, avoid eternal torment, and be free from the wrath of God. Obey the Commandments from the Old Testament, follow the teachings of Jesus.

This is the God we read about throughout the Bible. He loves his people, they reject him, they deserve his wrath, and he gives them another chance. Over and over again, we see this cycle in the Old Testament and Jesus comes to free us from God's wrath once and for all. Here in the midst of the proclamation of God's wrath upon those who have rejected him there is a call to repent, to come back to your Creator, to be free, to know love.

And John brings us a Beatitude, the second of seven Beatitudes in Revelation. Now many of us think of Matthew 5 and the Sermon on the Mount when we hear the word "beatitude". These are blessings, messages of blessings. This one starts out a little morbid, but it is a blessing none the less:

"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!'" (Revelation 14:13, ESV)

This is an important message! John has been commanded from heaven. The reason for this blessing is found in the words, "in the Lord". This is a phrase coined by the apostle Paul in his many letters to the first century church and it occurs only here in Revelation.

The reason for blessing is one's relationship to Christ! And after a long or short life in relationship with and in alignment with Jesus, death will not be the end. We are to remember the resurrection of Jesus and his power over death. And again the importance of this blessing is shown through the heavenly confirmation from the Spirit. There will be rest from the persecution due to our lifestyle of faith in Christ, our faithfulness to Christ, and our lifelong relationship with him results in blessed rest.

And so we come to the fourth and final section of our passage:

“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. 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.’ So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. “Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 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.’ 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. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1600 stadia.” (Revelation 14:14-20)

This final section of Revelation 14, The Harvest of the Earth, does not end well for those who do not follow Jesus. In verse 14, we see the image of Jesus on the heavenly throne as a judge. The white cloud is a symbol used to represent God's pure and holy throne. The gold crown as we have talked about in the past and seen in other passages represents the victory of Christ over sin and death and the sickle represents and symbolizes Jesus' role as judge. The term, Son of Man, combined with all of the other symbols in this verse leaves little doubt that this being is indeed Jesus, the Messiah.

The angels in this section emerge from the temple and from the altar in the temple. These angels are from the very presence of God. In Old Testament Jewish worship, God's presence resided in the temple and these angels, these messengers emerge from His very presence.

The messages of the angels are similar to the message in Joel 3:13...

“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.” (Joel 3:13, ESV)

In both cases, the writer is calling for justice for the oppressors, Babylon and Rome, to get what they deserve.

The second part of this section paints a brutal picture of what judgement for the followers of the beast will look like. This image recalls Isaiah's account (Isaiah 63:1-6) of God as a warrior trampling on the nations, as one would trample on grapes. And again, in contrast to the victorious act of Jesus' death on a cross, this harvest from the earth is trampled on just outside the city. The place of the cross was just outside Jerusalem.

And we end with the picture of a river of blood, flowing from the winepress in huge amounts. There are many ideas about what the number 1600 means in this verse, all of which point to an amount that will cover vast amounts of the earth. This picture of judgement is similar to ancient stories of war and the blood that flowed as a result.

This is a heavy message. We cannot simply say amen, and dismiss for the day. We must respond to this passage, we must take action.

While this passage ends with eternal suffering and a bloody massacre for all who align themselves with the beast, for all who do not align themselves with Christ and his cross we must remember that this time has not yet come! There is still time! We can turn away from the distractions in our lives, the things we put before God, the things that cause us to worry, the things that bring us glory, the things that bring us honor, all the busy work, the keeping up with the Jones'. It is not too late to wipe these marks of the beast off of our foreheads, to cast them aside into the sulfuric fire of eternal damnation, to unpack these burdens that are weighing us down, that are causing us pain, that are causing us suffering. It is not too late to throw them down, to turn away from the evil that has taken over our lives. It is not too late to turn away from the beast. It is not too late to stop this lifestyle of oppression, to stop this lifestyle of hate, this lifestyle of fear, this lifestyle of selfishness. It's not too late...

There is hope... We can align ourselves with the Cross, we can align ourselves with Jesus, we can align ourselves with the way of servanthood, the way of selflessness, the way of love, the way of hope, the way of truth, the way of life, the way of freedom.

Through the suffering of Christ on the cross you have been made free, you have been redeemed. Jesus took your place of death and you are no longer a slave to sin. You are no longer a slave to the way of the beast.

You can live a lifestyle of love. You can live a lifestyle of peace, a lifestyle of purity, a lifestyle of holiness, a lifestyle of joy. You Can Be Free!

For the majority of us here who know this joy and have experienced Christ's love and forgiveness, this is a call to go. This is a call to go into our neighborhoods and into our city and into the world to share this message of hope and this message of freedom. There is still time.

Maybe you haven't experienced the forgiveness of Jesus, but you'd like to. The consequences of not is sounding pretty bad. Again, for you, the time is now.

Pray