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Revelation 14.1-15.4

- I. Introduction:
 - A. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints says that those who have truly been reborn will persevere in good works until the end. This means that true Christians will not continue to harden their hearts refusing to repent. It means that true Christians will not turn away to embrace false teaching which leads them to worship anything other than Christ.
 - B. Many Christians often fear that they are not truly regenerate because they cannot believe that they do such horrible things. They are racked with guilt and doubt their salvation. Perseverance, rather than being a comfort, is a horrible doctrine that causes them great fear.
 - C. Other Christians encounter great suffering, and struggle to count Christ greater than the persecution they face. They waver and contemplate giving in by disobeying God's commands and compromising the gospel.
 - D. How are we to persevere? What is to drive us so that we are able to stay upon the narrow road? Are we to muster up our strength and dig in with all our might?
- II. **Proposition**: Christian perseverance must be fueled by the knowledge that we will some day worship God in His presence with songs celebrating his righteous judgments upon the wicked.
- III. **Organizational Sentence**: Again our passage this morning speaks of perseverance. That is because last week's lesson and today's really form one whole cycle in Revelation. Chapter 12-15.4 all go together to give us yet another whole picture of the church age. However, this cycle actually extends back to the fall and covers history up until the final judgment. Today's text gives us 5 truths that are given in a chiasm. The passage has the form, ABCB`A`. The middle section gives us the thrust to persevere, while the A's tells us about our future worship, with the B's telling us about God's righteous judgment.
- IV. **Truth #1: Redeemed sinners will worship God with a new song in purity.** (14.1-5)
Revelation 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.
 - A. After reporting what he saw concerning the great dragon and the two beasts, John now gives us a report of his vision of heaven. If the previous chapters detailed the great struggle throughout history between Christ and Satan, we now jump forward to the end of this great conflict with a vision that explains the final result of this great struggle. We

know that Satan was defeated and yet rages against God's people, but now we see that these saints remain faithful and pure.

- B. John tells us that he looked and saw the Lamb, Jesus Christ, on Mount Zion with the 144,000 who had been sealed in chapter 7. Remember that the 144,000 represent the whole people of God (See the notes on chapter 7 for a clear explanation). Mount Zion is the throne of God throughout the Old Testament, sometimes associated with Jerusalem and other times associated with heaven itself (Ps. 2.6). Here, it is clearly heaven that is in view. Before, the 144,000 were on the earth living in the tribulation as sealed saints, that is, as those who have been secured by God as belonging to Him. Now, the 144,000 are in heaven with Christ since verse 3 qualifies the 144,000 as 'those who had been redeemed from the earth.' However, this heaven is the heavenly city which we will see at the end of Revelation when the New Jerusalem comes down to earth.
- C. The fact that John restates that the 144,000 has 'his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads,' clearly shows that John intends to contrast this group with those who have received the mark of the beast. There are two camps in view: those who belong to God and Christ and those who belong to Satan and the beast. God has sealed and secured his own, but the beast has simply marked his for destruction.
- D. Verses 2-3 describes the people of God singing new songs to God and Christ with harps. In the Old Testament, singing a new song with harps indicated that the people of God were offering praise to God in light of victory that he had won them (Ps. 144.9-10; 96.1; 98.1). The fact that only the redeemed could learn this song shows the connection between their song and the victory God has won them. This is another reason to distinguish the elders and living creatures from the people of God (See notes on chapters 4-5).
- E. The sound of this new song was so great that it roared from heaven and was like loud thunder. The song of the saints is mighty and strong. But it is also sweet like the sound of a harp.
- F. After describing the worship of those who are redeemed, John gives more details about this group. They are pure. The saints of God are described with images of purity:
 - 1. these who have not defiled themselves with women for they are virgins (this imagery will later be used of the church when it is described as a pure bride for Christ)
 - 2. those who follow Christ wherever he goes
 - 3. redeemed from mankind as first-fruits
 - a. Some have struggled with the fact that the 144,000 are described as the first-fruits, which implies that more saints are to come, implying that this is not a vision of the end.
 - b. These people are correct to point out that 'first-fruits' throughout the bible symbolizes a preliminary installment that speaks of more to come. Therefore, it is correct to say that this 144,000 is a picture of the fullness of God's people that is to come.
 - c. However, it is incorrect to assume from this that this 144,000 does not then stand for the whole people of God because we must recognize that logical timeline of this vision. They are described as first-fruits here not because they refer to saints in heaven now awaiting the rest of us, but because in the vision, the final harvesting of the saints comes in 14.14-16.

- d. Furthermore, 'first-fruits' also has the connotation of sacrificial imagery. Israel was to give to God from among their first produce of the land.¹
- 4. in their mouth, no lie was found for they are blameless (there are faithful in their witness, Is. 53.9)
- G. These saints are pure, not because they never sinned and they were perfect, but because of the blood of the Lamb. They are contrasted with the followers of the beast who worship the dragon and the beast and are idolaters. John is not saying that saints are perfect, but that they persevered in following Christ, and through his forgiveness, they are pure.
- H. The point of these first 5 verses is to show the final result of the sealed saints who have endured the suffering and persevered through the persecution of the beasts and the dragon. They have remained pure and have not turned away. The result of their perseverance is joyful victorious praise to God and to the Lamb. This song of joy and celebration is one that can only be enjoyed and sung by redeemed sinners, for only they know the true joy of being forgiven.

V. Truth #2: Babylon will fall because God will bring righteous judgment. (14.6-11)

Revelation 14:6-11 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." 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." 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."

- A. Next John reports to us that Christ will send or is sending warnings of final judgment to world governments and figures who oppose Christ's reign as king. This comes in the form of three angels who deliver messages calling for repentance in light of coming judgment. John is not saying that there will literally be three angels who deliver these messages to the world right before the end, but rather, this is a picture of God's warning to those who follow the beasts and the dragon throughout history. The point is that there are signs for the wicked. They have opportunities to repent, but they love the beast and its image.
- B. Angel #1: The first angel delivers the eternal gospel to every nation and tribe, every language and people. This gospel is not a different gospel than the one saints believe in, but rather, in this proclamation of the gospel, the judgment that is to come for rejecting it is emphasized.
 - 1. The reason for fearing God is that the hour of judgment is coming.
 - 2. No mention of the grace of Christ is made.
- C. Angel #2: The second angel delivers a message foretelling the fall of Babylon the great. This is the first time that Babylon has been mentioned in Revelation, but it will be used from now on. It is clear that this is a reference to the beast who is the nation oppressing God's people. Peter uses Babylon as a secret reference to Rome (I Pet. 5.13), and it is

¹ Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, pg.742.

clear that John is using it the same way here. Babylon was the nation that oppressed Israel and took them into captivity (Is. 21.9b, Daniel 4.30). Babylon is the type of government that all other oppressing governments will look like. The beast is Babylon is Rome is any government today that oppresses God's people. But here, the angel tells the world that this power will not stand but fall!

1. Babylon is the one who made all the nations worship her. She is the government that in the last chapter caused the whole world to follow her.
 2. Not only did she lead the nations into idolatry, but she led them into drunkenness leading to sexual immorality. A good translation is, 'she who made the nations drink the wine that causes passion for intercourse with her.' The image is one of adultery as the result of drunkenness.
 3. The picture is this: Rome has caused everyone to come to her for security and wealth by buying into its pluralism and denial of Christ, and in doing so, she has caused many to worship idols which is comparable to adultery since our worship belongs to God.
 4. But, the point of the message of angel #2 is that this Babylon who so many go to for security will be brought down and will not bring final security.
- D. Angel #3: The third angel describes the content of the judgment that has been mentioned by the previous two angels. John describes a picture of everlasting, conscious, torment in hell. Verses 9-11 are some of the most straightforward verses on the fate of unbelievers in all of Scripture. Those who argue for annihilationism (the idea that hell is a temporary place of torment that results in the destruction or annihilation of a soul so that hell is not eternal) must recognize that this verse completely destroys their concept of hell.
1. John says that anyone who belongs to the beast will drink the wine of God's wrath. This image is meant to play off of what is said of those who follow the beast in verse 8, namely, that they drink the wine of Babylon which makes them commit sexual immorality with Babylon. The wicked drink of Babylon (metaphorically) and so God will make them drink of his wrath. Ironically, in verses 19-20, we see that the wicked are put in the winepress and smashed so that their blood runs out into the goblets of wine. So, the wicked will both drink the cup of wrath and be the blood which they drink, a gruesome image.
 2. Furthermore, verse 10 says that they will be tormented in the presence of the Lamb and his angels. The image here is one of psychological torment. Unbelievers will one day recognize that Christ is Lord and king, worthy of honor and submission. They will see that he is the source of true joy, but will harden their hearts and continue to seek joy elsewhere even though it torments them.
 - a. Many have pointed out that all who are in hell want to be there. The point they are making is that sin is such a perversion of our whole person that even when we know that what is good is better, we will still choose evil even though it is painful.
 - b. The best analogy I can make is that of addiction to drugs, food, or pornography. Even though we hate the object of our desire because we know it is destroying us, we love it still and keep feasting on that which is nothing more than a grave. In hell, this will be the plight of non-believers who will be tormented by their own sin.
 - c. In hell, none will repent.

3. This understanding of hell guards us against the error that is so common. Most people think that if people knew Christ was God and our savior, they would believe. They think that it seems unfair that God sends those who have never heard of Jesus to hell. They think it unfair that people don't get a second chance in hell to repent. The reality is that sin has so perverted us all that no one will repent in hell simply because no one can repent apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. God sovereignly chooses all who are saved and changes them into new creations who repent and love Christ.
4. The picture of hell John gives us is a torment that continues forever and ever without rest.

VI. Truth #3: Christians must persevere in keeping God's commandments knowing that God will bring rest. (14.12-13)

Revelation 14:12-13 ¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 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!"

- A. The response to this grim picture of hell is one of perseverance. It is a warning that this is a terrible fate. Christians must persevere in obedience to God's commands and faith in Jesus so that they do not incur God's wrath (v.12).
- B. But, the good news is that God will not put us through so much suffering and persecution that we will not ever see the end of it. Our suffering is nothing compared to the suffering of those in hell, and so we can endure long enough to be blessed with rest in God's presence when we die or meet Christ in the air (v.13).
- C. There is a tension in the Christian life between the assurance of salvation and the fear of not being saved. In many places in Scripture, we are given either an assurance that God will not allow us to be separated from his love or we are given a warning that if we do not persevere we show ourselves to not have true faith. Here, in verse 12 and 13 we see one of the few times that both of these emphases sit side by side. We are called to endure and persevere in faith, but we are assured that we will find rest.

VII. Truth #4: Christ will judge the whole earth, separating everyone into two camps: the righteous saints for eternal glory and the wicked followers of the beast for eternal punishment. (14.14-20)

Revelation 14:14-20 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. 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.

- A. John returns to a picture of judgment. Here, the final judgment where Christ separates the wheat from the chaff, the righteous from the wicked, the saints from the followers of the beast, the sheep from the goats. This passage alludes to metaphors Jesus used to speak of the final judgment (Matthew 3.12; 9.37ff; 24.31ff).

- B. First John describes Christ in terms of Daniel 7 and Matthew 24.30 as he has done before. Jesus is the Son of Man coming on the clouds receiving all authority from the Father, including the authority to judge. Jesus in this vision has a sharp sickle in his hand to harvest.
- C. First, John describes the harvesting of the righteous. The harvest is full so that all the elect have now believed and it is time for the end. An angel issues a command to Christ to reap the saints. Some think that it is odd that an angel commands Christ here, but there are two reasons why this is not a problem.
 - 1. The angel could simply be saying this for our benefit, functioning as angels have throughout Revelation as interpreters of events.
 - 2. The angel could be issuing a command from the Father who is in 'the temple' which is why John sees him come forth from the temple. This would mean that Christ exercises authority over all things but still submits himself to the will of the Father.
- D. Second, John describes the judgment upon the wicked reprobate (non-elect). An angel comes forth and wields a sickle this time. A second angel (the third one at this point) comes forth from the altar who has authority over fire commands the first angel to put in the sickle and harvest the wicked.
 - 1. The altar and the angel with authority over fire: This is a picture of judgment. Revelation 8.3-5 shows angels who hold the prayers of the saints in bowls next to the altar who then throw down fire judgment upon the earth. This is the allusion here.
 - 2. The clusters of grapes that are ripe: This is an allusion to Joel 4.13 (see also Is. 63.2-3) which is picked up on by Jesus in the Gospels to describe the final judgment of the wicked. The winepress is a place where the wicked are treaded upon in shame and defeat, and where their blood makes the wine vats overflow. This gruesome image does not imply that the wicked will be destroyed since we know that their torment continues forever from verse 11. John notes that the winepress is outside 'the city' which stands for 'the holy city' where the righteous saints dwell, the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven. This means there is separation of the righteous and the unrighteous. The last phrase of verse 20 is a difficult one: 'and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.' The point is simply that the judgment is severe so that the blood flows high in the vats. 1,600 stadia is a measurement of about 184 miles. It is difficult to see what this measurement modifies. Even though grammatically it seems to speak of the amount of blood in the vats, it is a measurement of distance which suggests that it is referring to how far outside the holy city this judgment will take place. But, it also could stand for how far the blood spread as a result of this judgment. Either way, the overall image is clear.

VIII. Truth #5: Christians are more than conquerors who will sing songs celebrating God's saving work in Christ. (15.1-4)

Revelation 15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. ² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire- and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

- A. Verse 15.1 is a short introduction to what will follow this cycle (12.1-15.4). Just like other cycles which included a logical connection to the following cycle (for instance,

during the description of the 7th seal, 7 trumpets are given out to angels to prepare for the next cycle of judgments). The 7 plagues given to 7 angels is noted before John finishes this cycle with a description of the praise of the saints in heaven after the final judgment.

- B. Again, we see a sea of glass mingled with fire. This time the sea seems calm and under the sovereign control of Christ without any mention of thunder and lightning. This symbolizes the judgment upon the beast has been completed.
- C. The saints stand before God and the Lamb with harps to play songs of praise celebrating their redemption and their victory over the beast.
- D. The song of the saints is a song of Moses and a song of the Lamb. In the same way that Moses wrote a song for Israel to sing when he delivered Israel from the hand of the Egyptians (Deut. 32), now the new covenant people of God sing songs of celebration because their deliverance from the beast. But, it is the song of the Lamb because the deliverance here is much greater than the one led by Moses.
- E. The song celebrates God for his great works of judgment and salvation, his might, his sovereignty, the fear that is due him, and his righteousness.
- F. It might seem odd to us that saints will praise God for his judgment of sin, especially when this judgment is so gruesome and eternally tormenting. It is even more difficult for us to imagine this when people we care about will be judged. However, it is not hard to think about celebrating judgment when we think about those who have committed terrible atrocities. We take joy in seeing those wicked people brought to justice. The reason we don't like to think of judgment this way is because we don't really have a sense of the seriousness of sin against God and the pure evil of the human heart. We must have a proper understanding of sin to be able to rejoice in its demise.
- G. Another roadblock to taking joy in the condemnation of others is the fact that we often see little difference between us and non-believers. When Christianity gets too wedded with culture, it is hard to see any big difference between us and the wicked other than in the realm of ideas. This is not the case where the culture is incredibly hostile to Christianity and where evil is much more apparent to us due to the contrast.