Outline for Revelation 14

EI: The Lamb responds to the advance of the unholy trinity by gathering His force and beginning the final sequence of judgment on the unrighteous.

HI: The Lamb answers the dragon with judgment.

PI: The Lamb answers the dragon with judgment.

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this lesson will be to explore the themes and theology of Revelation 14 with a special focus on the coming judgment and how we can be prepared for it.

Introduction: So the last four weeks has really been a journey through the deep dark woods. We have seen John’s vision of the steady advance of the forces of darkness in this world to the point where it is open season on Christians. Anyone who refuses to take the mark of the beast or otherwise worship the beast faces the likely potential of martyrdom. Yes, we have seen that God’s sovereignty is still not challenged in any of this. Yes, we have seen in fact that God’s sovereignty causes this incredible advance of the dragon and his minions to be within set limits and no further. Yet by the time we reach the end of chapter 13 it is easy to feel like we are sitting alone in the dark. How is God going to respond to all of this? How is He going to reassert His power and might and sovereignty in the face of this blasphemous, reality-denying beast? This is what we get as we get into chapter 14. In chapter 14 we see the response of the King: judgment. Judgment is coming and there is no longer anything that stands in its way. There are finally no more delays. With this said, let me make a couple more comments before we get started tonight. The last few weeks of our journey through Revelation have been tough ones. We have seen the number of ways the dragon and his beasts will be allowed to make their final assault on the people of God. This will be a very hard time. On our own, none of us will make it through this period. On our own we won’t have the faith to remain faithful to God in the face of such vicious persecution as we have read about. The good news is that we don’t have to face it alone. We will face it not only with the help of the Holy Spirit, but alongside all of our other brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the importance of Christian community. We do not have what it takes to stand against the world on our own. We were designed to be in an active community of believers in which we receive encouragement and hope and help in our daily journey of taking up our crosses and following Jesus. The good news is further that these dark days about which we have been studying for several weeks are not the end of the story. Things will get worse in terms of temporal concerns before they get better, but they will get better. Speaking from an eternal perspective these will be sad days because of the number of folks who will be forced to declare their loyalties and these will not be in favor of God, but they will prove no threat to God’s sovereignty and glory. He will still be in charge and will still be guiding the events of history to their best possible (i.e. most honoring of Him) end. And if we are among those who confess Christ in our daily lives then we will be among those whom He confesses in these final days. As we move forward from chapters 12-13, then, the final sequence of events leading up to the last judgment begins now. This glorious end is in sight. With no more delays, then, let’s get to the text.

14:1-5: The vision of the Lamb and His army.

- This particular vision of John begins with His seeing the Lamb standing with the 144,000 on Mount Zion. What’s going on in this scene? Is this something literal and if not, what does it symbolize? Is this taking place on earth or in heaven?
  - There are a lot of things here so let’s address them in turn. First, there is a ton of significance to the phrase “Mount Zion” in Scripture. Let’s do a quick run through some verses in the OT to give you an idea of how significant a place it is. I need readers for: Ps. 74:2, 76:2; Zech. 2:10, 8:3; Ps. 53:6, 69:35, 87:5, 102:13; Ps. 110:2; Obad. 21; Joel 2:32; Ps. 48:2-11; Isa. 2:2, 24:23;
Mic. 4:1-8; Isa. 31:4; Zech. 14:4; Zeph. 3:15-19; Isa. 1:27; 4:5, 46:13, 51:3, 62:11; and finally Ps. 2:6. From all of this what kind of a picture of Mount Zion can we piece together?

- Who is this group of 144,000? This is almost certainly the same group as we saw back in chapter 7—a group of all the believers.

- Now, if you saw a single man standing on the top of a mountain with a huge group of people behind him, what would you think? I believe that I would be afraid. He intends to ride down on me and wipe me out. I get images of Sitting Bull sitting with his army while looking down at Gen. Custer shortly the ensuing massacre. This is a military image. The Lamb is the leader of the army of the faithful who have already conquered the beast by the power of the Lamb’s blood. This group who conquered him spiritually once is preparing to conquer him physically as they ride behind their captain.

- What is the intention of the imagery of the name of the Lamb and the Father written on the foreheads of the 144,000? This is a mark of loyalty and possession in the same way as the mark of the beast. As with the original forehead seal back in chapter 7 this may or may not be a literal forehead mark (although with the imagery it certainly points to something like the painted face Celts lined up behind William Wallace before some of the big battle scenes in Braveheart) on the forehead, but the point is that this group is clearly identified as belonging to the Lamb. And as another subtle Trinitarian note, the 144,000 are marked with both the names of the Lamb and the Father. Why be marked with both names unless they are in fact the same person?

- It this scene taking place in heaven or on earth? This is a tougher issue with a lot of debate in favor of both sides. First, we know that the Lamb is not going to return before the time for the millennium and we’re not there yet. This points to a heavenly scene. However, that John saw this vision and then “heard a voice from heaven” suggests that it is taking place on earth. Perhaps the truest answer is a combination of the two. John has a vision of an earthly scene in order to prepare for the heavenly reality.

- After having this incredible vision of the Lamb and the group of faithful from across time John starts to hear things.

  - First, he hears a voice from heaven “like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder.” What is the image here? Well, what does the sound of many waters or loud thunder sound like? Loud. Powerful. Mighty. Who has been to Niagara Falls? Do you remember what it was like to stand on the observation deck (or better yet, take the boat ride out) and just take in the sound of the water falling? The sound dominates the entire area on both sides of the international line. And the rumbling of thunder can be heard for miles and miles. Growing up I was always told that for every five seconds between a flash of lightning and the sound of the thunder, the storm is one mile away. I can remember times when it was several seconds before I first heard the faint rumbling of thunder that gradually grew to a dull roar before fading out. John hears an immensely loud and powerful voice here.

  - Second, though, he hears a voice “like the sound of harpists playing in their harps.” What is the image here? Have you ever heard a harpist play? It is a beautiful sound. Particularly when played well. Each string reverberates with beauty. The intricacy of the patterns the harpist plays can boggle the mind. How, with that many strings, that close together, can someone hit that many notes which all work together to create this wonderful cacophony of sound? This majesty is only intensified by adding more players to the mix. Now, for John’s audience, their harp was a 10-12 string lute or lyre that was not as loud but much more portable than modern harps. Yet even these instruments, when played well, can produce much beauty. John hears a stunningly beautiful voice here.

  - Now, the sound of thunder and water and harps are all very different. The text doesn’t give us enough information to reconstruct what John heard, but rather we have a picture of the power and beauty and grace of the sound.

  - At this point, whose voice(s) do you think this is? Certainly in its origin in heaven there can be a good argument made that this is the voice of God. And yet, in v. 3, the text notes that “they
were singing a new song before the throne…” It seems more likely given the full context that John is hearing the sound of the heavenly chorus. This is a great song of worship. The appearance of the four living creatures and the 24 elders only serves to reinforce this image.

- What is this new song that John hears? The text doesn’t give us the answer to this one, but from the context it would seem this is the song of the redeemed. It is the song sung by those who have conquered the dragon and its beasts. It is a victory song along the lines of that which was sung by the people of Israel after God brought them through the Red Sea on dry ground. The reason that no one else could learn this new song is that they did not have the experience base necessary to sing it. They are not redeemed and so they don’t have the right stuff in them to learn it.

- Scripturally speaking, this new song is not a new theme. We hear declarations of a new song several times in the Psalms. (Have several people read Ps. 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 144:9, and 149:1.) What is the reason behind these new songs? God is often being praised for delivering His people from a variety of circumstances. Looking back in Revelation itself, we can get some clues as to the content of this new song. The song might be new only to us because we (the redeemed) are learning it. In this sense, we are learning the worship of heaven from the heavenly chorus itself. In Rev. 5:9 we see the heavenly chorus take up this new song. What is its content there?

- As a side note here, that the 144,000 is described as the group who had been redeemed from the earth lends further weight to the idea that this is not a literal group of 144,000 as there will be many more than that who are among the redeemed.

- Moving ahead, this group of redeemed are described as those who “have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.” Does this rule married couples (and a lot of people making poor decisions who aren’t married) out from this group? I certainly hope not. I’d kind of like to be a part of it. Fortunately, the image of physical sexual immorality is frequently used as a metaphor for spiritual immorality. In other words, this is not making a statement against either marriage or against women generally. Much to their discredit, in the culture of the day, women were often viewed as little more than objects of temptation for men. Consider the example of Proverbs 1-9 with the important recognition that Wisdom, the paragon of virtue is also portrayed as a woman. John is using imagery familiar to his audience and we need not take it as normative for informing our views. However, there are two other ideas that can help inform what John is trying to say here. Throughout the Bible Israel and then the church are pictured as the bride of Christ. The ideal bride is adorned in white as a symbol of her purity and chastity. In the same way, the church as the bride of Christ is to be unstained from the impurities of this world so that she is ready to be taken and made whole by her husband. So in one sense, these are spiritual virgins. In the other sense, warriors in the Israelite army were to remain chaste in the days leading up to a battle. This was so that they were focused on the task at hand and not the lusts of the flesh. We see a great example of this in the story of David, Uriah, and Bathsheba. With the military imagery operative in the picture of the Lamb standing with His army, this image could also be in play. I don’t see good reason to rule out either of them. On the whole, given the male imagery, I would lean towards the military reference, but not dogmatically.

- This group of 144,000 is further described as those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. How does this strike you? This is a group who has dedicated themselves to being involved in places where the Lamb is involved. Well, in what kind of places do you think the Lamb is involved? Where does the Lamb go?
  - Does He go to the church?
  - Does He go anywhere else?
  - Think about the Gospels—where does Jesus go? He goes out to all kinds of places. He goes to parties with sinners. He goes to dine with lepers. He invites Himself over to eat with tax collectors. Where might some of these places be today? Would Jesus go to bars? How about strip clubs? Wal-Mart? How about to the neighbor’s house who drinks too much and probably beats his wife and kids (and not simply to tell him what a lousy man he is)? Do we have the faith to go all of the same places that Jesus goes?
• What else might be included in their following here beyond simply going to different places? Following His example perhaps? What else?

• Thirdly, this group is described as “those who have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb.” This makes it even clearer that the group here is a group of the faithful. The description of them as “firstfruits” would seem to indicate that this is the faithful who have died up to this point. They have been washed clean of their sinful natures and are waiting for their final resurrection bodies. As a small, but interesting detail here, what do you think it means that this group is the firstfruits “to” or “for” God and the Lamb?
  o We are created to bring glory to God. When we do so, we are an offering to Him. In this sense, we are seeing here a partial fulfillment of Paul’s words in Ephesians 5 that “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her in the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless.”
  o And on the idea of our being “redeemed from mankind,” we are purchased by God through Christ’s blood from out of the sinful mass of humanity.

• The last thing is that “no lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”
  o Anyone in here ever told a lie? So does this mean we are all excluded from this group? How about is anyone in here blameless? So what’s going on here? If we are to be among the people of God, then we need to be a people defined by the truth. This doesn’t mean we won’t still sin and tell lies from time to time, but on the whole, we are defined by the truth. Well, who defines the truth? God does. We need to be defined by the reality of God. We need to seek to be people of the truth. We must seek to eliminate any lies of this world from our lives. Anything in our lives which proclaims that someone or something other than God has a part in defining reality is necessarily not of the truth. Let us consider carefully the number of different ways we live like God doesn’t exist or doesn’t matter and seek to root these out of our lives. Let us seek to be a people defined by the truth.

14:6-13: The final warning and call to repentance.
• I have said to you many times throughout our study thus far that one of the main goals of Revelation is repentance. This goal comes forth in two different fashions. First, the book is written such that once people get over the initial confusion (with the Spirit’s help) their reaction should be something along the lines of, “Whoa, I don’t want to be on the losing side of that, I’d better put myself in God’s hands.” This thought leads them down the path of repentance. Second, as we can see, when the days described here are on us, everything God does is with the goal of presenting Himself to the world as singularly worthy of worship so that people will repent and follow Him instead of the corrupt system of the world. I have also said during our conversations, however, that at some point the time and chance for repentance is going to end. People’s choices will be sealed. They will merely be waiting to receive the natural consequences of their choices be that eternal life or eternal death. In terms of our journey through the actual book, we are nearing the point where everything starts happening at once. We are into the final sequence of events which will lead inexorably to the end. The judgments at this point are less focused on repentance and more focused on bringing justice, announcing the arrival of the Lamb, and beginning the process of renewing creation itself. The harvest of the earth which Jesus talked about with His disciples several times is upon us, the final warning now goes forth.

• With all of this in mind, someone read 14:6-13 and we will examine it in four parts.
• Where else in the book have we seen something flying overhead offering warnings?
  o We saw this in 8:13 when the eagle (or vulture) flew over the earth crying out with three woes.
    ▪ Anyone remember what these woes were?
    ▪ The army of locust-like demons, the army of demonic creatures on horseback, and (probably) the seventh trumpet.
  o What’s the significance here?
• The image here is of a warning going out to the whole earth. No one will be able to miss these final warnings of judgment.

• As you know, Lisa and I watch Extreme Makeover: Home Edition regularly. A couple of weeks ago they did a renovation for a school for the deaf in Oregon. Running out and yelling into a megaphone wasn’t going to do all that much for that group. As a result, the design team hired a plane to fly over the picnic they were having. Even people who couldn’t hear were able to receive the message when it was put somewhere that no one could miss. That’s the idea here.

• And what is the message the first angel proclaims?
  o It proclaims an eternal gospel to those who dwell on earth. Here are some things to note about this. First, this is not a second chance at repentance for those who have already died (there is no such thing in Scripture). Instead, it is directed at those who dwell on the earth. Second, this first angel proclaims an eternal Gospel. Is this the same Gospel that Jesus proclaimed? In other words, is this a call for all the earth to turn to Christ, accept His substitutionarily atoning death, and receive the prize of life?
  
  • This is a tough question to answer. This is the only time the word appears in the book of Revelation which is fairly significant in its own right. Second, the literal translation is as I’ve said it to you: “an eternal gospel.” Furthermore, there is no mention of Christ or anything related to Him. This gospel is much simpler: fear God because He’s about to bring serious judgment and you don’t want to be on the receiving end of it.
  
  • With this in mind, is this a call to repentance here, or simply a call that these folks will be worshiping God whether they want to or not?
    • Given what we know of God’s nature, I would lean towards this being a final call to repentance. Perhaps this is God’s way of saying, “Too bad, so sad. Now you are going to give Me the glory I deserve because you won’t have a choice,” but that doesn’t seem to fit with His revealed character.
    
    • Well, since it doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense that God would waste time calling people to repentance whom He knows are not going to respond, does this mean that people who have taken the mark of the beast actually do get one more chance to repent of their folly? To say yes to this question would force me to go back on what I said a couple of weeks ago. No, I don’t think that any who take the mark of the beast will be able to repent once they have done so because their hearts will be hardened by the act. As far as whether or not that means anyone will be able to respond to this last call to repentance, I will have to say that I don’t know. In spite of that I would still argue that it is no waste of God’s time. Neither is it petty on His part. I think this is a genuine call to repentance before all sales are truly final. This demonstrates once again His great patience and grace. Even on the cusp of bringing to bear the just results of the choices of all people across time, God offers one last chance for those who have rejected Him yet thus far to repent and receive Him. The words of Peter (2 Peter 3:9) are resonantly true.
  
  o What do you think about there being no mention of Jesus in this gospel presentation?
    • It could be that this is some sort of an exception in the last day along the lines of, “Well if you won’t accept Jesus, will you at least accept God Himself,” but I doubt it. Consider the great lengths to which John has gone thus far in the book to demonstrate with the utmost of conclusiveness that Jesus is God. The Son and the Father are one and the same person. To fear God and give Him glory is to fear and give glory to Jesus because He is God. Yes, the second part of this call is to worship God as Creator which sits more under the duties of God the Father than God the Son, but given the nature of the trinity, such a designation does not rule out any other member. Taking a cue from Jesus’
parable of the laborers in the vineyard, this is the owner going back to the town square one last time at 5 in the evening to see if there were any other workers still waiting to be employed.

- As a final thought here, part of the power of this last call to repentance is the immanence of the end, the nearness of God’s judgment. When Jesus began proclaiming the message of the kingdom as told by Mark at the beginning of His Gospel, He focused on the immanence of the kingdom: “Repet, for the kingdom is at hand.” He could say that because He was the bearer of the kingdom. What do we use to draw people to the kingdom between these extremes of immanence? Is the kingdom still “at hand”? Is the hour of God’s judgment still upon us?
  - Perhaps one of the reason that we are not terribly enthusiastic about announcing the kingdom of God to a lost and dying world is that we don’t really believe that it is imminent. Let’s face it: it’s been nearly 2,000 years since the kingdom was inaugurated. It’s been 1,900 years since John wrote this book about the nearness of the end. People stopped worrying so much about the quick (as we understand) return of Christ in the days of the apostles. We don’t have people worried anymore about their loved ones dying and missing out on seeing Christ return as the Thessalonian church did because we don’t really believe that we’re going to see it. Some of us even hope we don’t. Maybe a lot of us do. We figure that we are going to die well ahead of time and be a part of the group of dead in Christ to rise first in the millennium. That’s a pretty exciting thing. Yet in losing our sense of immanence, we lose much of our passion and drive to spread the message. “There will always be time,” we tell ourselves. Yet if we take the words of Scripture seriously, this is simply not so. If we lose this sense of nearness, we run the risk of being unprepared ourselves. Let us take very seriously the message not only of Revelation, but of the whole of Scripture. The end is near. Let’s make sure that both ourselves and everyone around us are as prepared as possible.

- What is going on in the second angel’s warning?
  - This is the declaration of the end of Babylon. This will be pursued much more fully in chapters 17-18.
  - Who or what is Babylon?
    - There are of course many who would argue in favor of this referring to the actual city of Babylon. I would argue fairly strongly against this interpretation. Throughout the book of Revelation it is pretty clear that references to Babylon are symbolic references to Rome. Remember: this book was written at a time that even possessing a copy of it would be very damming. Rome had a really effective way of dealing with civil and political unrest (of which this document could have provoked plenty): they killed everyone involved in such plots and hung their bodies up for days, weeks, months, or even years as a reminder of what penalty for crossing Rome. Though prison reform movements would cringe at the thought, hanging up the bodies of folks who receive the death penalty in, say, Time’s Square would be a pretty effective crime deterrent. Therefore, it did not behoove John who was already living in exile because of his Gospel work, to write a book openly condemning of Rome. Thus, Rome throughout the book is Babylon. Consider the parallels: both conquered Israel; both destroyed the Temple; both were the most powerful empires in the world of their days and it was long before another rose up to bring them down; Babylon met its end at God’s direction and the message here seems to be that Rome also will; both demanded that Israel worship according to their pagan customs; both were well known for their debauchery and depravity.
    - So, this is a declaration of the fall of Rome, then?
      - Well, things are perhaps not quite so simple as that. Babylon is John’s spiritual Rome. If Babylon was used symbolically for John, might Rome be a symbol for us? I mean, the Roman Empire is long gone. On that basis alone someone could argue that Revelation has been fulfilled and is no longer relevant. But, we know this isn’t the case.
      - What might Babylon/Rome be a symbol of?
- A large empire that believes it has no need for God in order to thrive?
- A large pagan/secular empire?
- A world system opposed to God and His people?
- A nation that stands astride other nations in the world and whose success or failure determines the same for many other nations in the world?
- The United States?
- I am as patriotic as anyone else, but we live in a nation that invites parallels with the world system opposed to God in the book of Revelation. Should our Lord tarry, the U. S. will eventually fall (even Rome only lasted less than half a millennium), and another empire will rise in its place—perhaps even in our lifetimes. Let us not use Revelation as a platform simply to criticize the deprivities evident in our culture (though there will be plenty of that in a few chapters). Let us use it to take a prophetic stance towards our culture and boldly call it forth from depravity to righteousness.

What specifically is the crime for which Babylon/Rome is condemned?
- She is condemned for making all nations drink the wine of the passion (wrath) of her sexual immorality. So let me get this straight. Sexual immorality is the great crime prompting all this judgment from God? Not so much. As with v. 4, sexual immorality here is symbolic for spiritual immorality. In other words, this primary empire has led other nations in the world to fall into the same idolatrous patterns as the exporter. Putting this in perhaps more understandable terms, this is condemning a nation who not only has an idolatrous culture, but who also exports this evil culture to other parts of the world. For better and for worse it isn’t too hard to see a lot of parallels here for us as well. The U. S. in particular and the secular West in general has become a major exporter of modern, secular values. This is part of the reason that many majority Muslim nations look at us with such hostility. While they have their own ideological problems, in terms of raw morality they have many places in which they are on a much better footing than we. They see the attempts to influence their culture in the direction that ours has long been heading and rightfully resist and resent the efforts. This is why it is so important for us to stand as a prophetic voice in the wilderness calling our broken culture to repentance as well as living out such repentance ourselves.

How does the final angel’s warning strike you?
- This is by far the most disturbing of the three. This proclaims the finality of the decision to take up the mark of the beast and worship and its image. This suggests to me that, speaking chronologically for a minute, this warning come when there are still some who have not yet taken the mark and who have also not yet given themselves into God’s hands. Now it could be that this is simply a condemnation of those who have already taken it, but given a context which seems at least somewhat focused on repentance, this doesn’t seem to fit. It seems better to me to see this as a final warning to those who haven’t yet but might still take the mark. But for all those who do, their end is sealed. This becomes clear when we look down to v. 11 and see this same phrase repeated. Grammatically speaking, this is called an inclusio and is a device used to bring emphasis to something, in this case, the identity of those who will face God’ wrath.
- In Greek the word “worships” is in the present tense. The present tense in Greek was used to convey a present action with ongoing results. In other words, these are not merely folks who gave a nod to the beast one time. These are folks who have taken worshiping the beast as their life mission. They have given their lives to the service of the beast and his plans. Looking at this from a different angle, however, produces a different but complementary picture. Folks who do not belong to God worship the beast. Remember: we are created for worship. We are going to worship something. If we are not worshiping God then we are naturally going to be worshiping the beast. In any event, whereas the last warning was more corporate in nature, this one strikes
me as more personal. In other words, God’s judgment is going to be both corporate and private. He is going to bring down world systems that are opposed to Him, but He is not going to overlook any single person who has not repented and put her life in His hands.

- What do you suppose the phrase “the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger” means?
  - In the ancient world everyone drank wine. Water wasn’t safe and there was refrigeration to keep grape juice from fermenting. This does not mean, however, that everyone was an alcoholic. Instead wine was typically diluted by half or even greater so that drunkenness was not a common thing. In fact, the only time someone drank full strength wine was in order to get drunk. The image here is of folks who have received the penalty of God’s wrath and they will never get up again from the effects. This is someone who gets drunk and then never sobers up. Ever.
- Now, those are more of the details here. What do you think about the fate awaiting these folks?
  - This is the first picture of an eternal Hell given in the book of Revelation. It is not the first in the Bible.
  - How does this idea of an eternal Hell strike you?
    - An eternal Hell is just. God wouldn’t do it otherwise.
    - Folks who oppose this idea come primarily from the place of annihilationism. This is the view that at some point in the future (after history is over) God is going to declare those in Hell to have suffered enough and will simply snuff them out of existence. They argue that this is more loving and just of God. The problem with this position is primarily that it’s not biblical.
    - One of the other critiques of the doctrine of an eternal Hell is that it has been abused as a way to frighten people into Heaven. How does this strike you? Is it ever right to scare people into Heaven?
- In light of these warnings, John offers a bit of insight. With the preceding warnings clearly offered, the saints must push on with endurance. While God will provide us rest when we need it, our journey never stops in this life. We never fully arrive. Let us run the race before us with endurance until our heavenly Father calls us across the finish line.
  - Now, who are the saints?
    - They are described as those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Both of these components are vitally necessary. If we strive simply to keep the commandments, we will fall to worshiping our efforts as commandment-keeping. If we
focus solely on our faith in Jesus we run the risk of antinomianism in which we take on a kind of libertine existence. These are the folks who gleefully declare their freedom in Christ allows them to do whatever they want so long as their faith is in Christ. These, however, are two sides of the same coin. To remove one is to be left incomplete. James clearly declared that we need both.

In v. 13 we get the second of seven beatitudes in Revelation. (The first was way back in 1:3 when we saw that there is a special blessing on folks who read and hear the words of Revelation.) What do you think of the blessing?

- **At one level it makes pretty good sense.** We have already talked about the fact that being alive at this point in history will not be a cakewalk. It will be more of a nightmare made bearable only by the confidence of our faith that chapters 20-22 will yet come. At this point the lines of eternity will be clearly drawn and none will cross from one side to the next. Those who die “in the Lord” at this point will have a one way ticket to Heaven. I should say they are blessed. In another sense, this is speaking broadly of all those who have died “in the Lord.” Whenever someone goes to the grave with their faith firmly planted in Christ they are blessed because they will receive the crown of life.

Finally here we get a word from the Spirit. This is the first time in the book and one of the few times in Scripture where we see a word explicitly from the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seconding this word of blessing and even adds to it. These folks are blessed because they can rest from their labors. What do you think this means?

- **While we will get into this in more detail in chapter 20, when God brings His judgment to bear, we are not judged on the basis of our faith.** We are judged on the basis of our works. It is our good works as believers that will follow us into eternity and judgment. Those works won’t be enough and so our faith in Christ will fill the gaps, but the works demonstrate our faith. This is why it is so important to not only believe the right things about God, but to act on those things in order to demonstrate belief.

14:14-20: The great harvesting of the earth.

- In Matthew 13 Jesus tells a parable that has come to be known as the parable of the Wheat and the Tares today. In this parable a man plants a field with good grain. Then, in an act of sabotage, his enemy comes at night and sows tares (weeds) among the good
wheat. This devious act remains unknown until things begin growing. At that point the owner’s servants bring the presence of the weeds to the attention of their master. His response indicates that he already knew about the weeds and even how they had gotten there. Upon inquiring as to the kind of response he wanted them to make, the owner instructs his servants to do nothing at the present time. This is a bit of a shock at first—why would the owner leave these destructive weeds growing in his field bringing with them the potential to impede the growth of the good wheat? But then the master offers his explanation: he doesn’t want to risk losing any wheat in the process of rooting out the weeds. It is not as though the servants would be careless in their harvesting, but what if some of the wheat had their roots tangled with the roots of the weeds? Pulling the weed could result in the unnecessary destruction of the wheat before it has a chance to bear its valuable fruit. Instead the servants are to wait for the harvest. At that time both would be harvested together and separated. And the vile weeds would be thrown in the fire to be burned. Tonight we at last to the harvest. The end is here. The harvest is going forth. All that remains is the final statement of God’s power and dominion over the earth—the seven bowls of God’s wrath—and the millennium before the final judgment. The great challenge of this passage from an exegetical standpoint and one which we will come back to after we have unpacked all the details and applications is whether what we see in these verses represents a single or a double harvest.

With that all said, would someone read these verses for us?

What do you think about the description of the “one like a son of man” in v. 14?

- There are three parts to his description:
  - He is seated on a white cloud. This is probably an allusion to Daniel 7:13 (someone find and read that). The messianic figure in Daniel is described as coming with the clouds. I think the image here is one of a throne. I get an image, not of a cartoonish scene in which this character is chilling on the edge of a cloud with his feet dangling down and a sickle slung lazily over his shoulder. My mind forms more of an image of a towering figure seated regally on a throne made of clouds—white for purity and victory—with a sickle in both hands. The figure is seated, but poised to rise and swing his great sickle in a powerful stroke.
  - He has a golden crown on his head. Now, we have seen the image of a golden crown before.
  - He has a sharp sickle. The sickle is a symbol in other places of the final judgment of God. (Cf. Mark 4:26-29) It is sharp meaning that it accomplishes its purpose swiftly and completely. There is no need to go back for another swipe because there is nothing left.

Who (or what) has been described as wearing a crown in the book so far? (Cf. 4:4 and 9:7)

What do you think is the difference between those gold crowns and this one? For the 24 elders we said their crowns were a symbol of their regal nature as they had some sort of leadership function before the throne (leading worship we later said). For the locusts, they were described as having what appeared to be golden crowns on their heads. This could be understood to mean John didn’t want to get close enough to really find out (for which I couldn’t blame him). It also could have been a symbol of victory for them as they will be allowed to conquer the unbelievers for a five month period. As another thought it could also have been a perversion of the authority granted them by God. They received the authority from another but wore crowns as if they had it in and of themselves.

Given the broader description of this “one like a son of man,” this crown is probably a symbol of his messianic authority.

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Who is this figure?

The two options are that this is an angel (perhaps even an archangel of sorts given the weight of his task) or that this is Jesus Himself. In support of this being an angel, in the harvest scene of vv. 17-20 it is clearly an angel who carries out the harvest. Also, why
would Jesus take instructions from an angel (cf. v. 15)? In support of this being Jesus is the clear allusion to Daniel 7:13ff which is a very intentionally messianic passage. Also, Jesus’ favorite title for Himself in the Gospels was “Son of Man.” He took this as a name that communicated His divine origins. On the balance, this is probably Jesus, not merely an angel.

- Why does the angel in v. 15 come out of the Temple?
  - That’s where the presence of God was thought to dwell so this is the angel symbolically coming as a messenger (i.e. angel) from God the Father. The image of God sitting on His throne in the Temple is one of powerful, divine judgment as we near the end of the book.

- Why does the angel cry out in a loud voice?
  - Jesus is probably not hard of hearing. This could symbolize the power and authority of the angel’s command from God. It could also create an image of God’s Temple in the highest reaches of the heavens (far above sinful earth) and this one like a son of man much nearer the earth as He prepares to swing His sickle.

- Why does God need an angel to send a message to Jesus anyway?
  - I think what we are seeing here, if this is in fact Jesus seated on the cloud, is the division of duties among the Trinity. God the Father is the one seated on the throne. Jesus is involved in judgment. Yes, Jesus knows everything the Father is thinking because He and the Father are one and the same person, but in His functional subordination to the Father, He receives the message from the angel just as any other servant of God would. This is an rare moment in Revelation when we catch a glimpse of the other side of the Trinity. God is unified, but He is not unitary. One of the most common heresies related to the Trinity throughout the history of the church is that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are three separate persons. This heresy is usually pretty easy to spot and folks who hold it are separated out from the main body of Christian orthodoxy in spite of repeated attempts to jump back in the box. (The primary examples here are Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.) The other main heresy regarding the Trinity is just as pernicious, but often remains hidden under the surface. Otherwise solidly orthodox believers will hold this heresy without even realizing it. It is called modalism and this is the idea that while there is one God, and while He might have three different “persons” (whatever that means), each of these persons is really just a “mode” of the one God. In this way the distinctions between Father, Son, and Spirit are diminished to an unbiblical level. The Son isn’t really distinct from the Father in person and function, He is just the Father wearing the face of the Son. The Spirit is merely the Father in a more ethereal form. This makes the Trinity a bit easier for our minds to fully grasp, but it runs counter to the teachings of Scripture. And places like this are what help us understand the truth in its real glory. The Father and the Son (and the Spirit) are one and the same person, but they are distinct from one another at the same time. We see this in Jesus’ receiving word from God by angelic messenger instead of simply knowing the time for harvesting by Himself. This little scene also reinforces and echoes Jesus’ word to the disciples that only the Father knows the timing of the events through which we have been wading for half a year now. Not even the Son knows the timing. This can only be true and the doctrine of the Trinity still be maintained if there is a functional subordination among the members of the Trinity. In their persons they are perfectly equal, but in their duties of overseeing the world there is a subordination of Son to Father and Spirit to Father and Son.

- The next thing we see here is the call to harvest the earth because the harvest is ripe. The One like a Son of Man heeds the call, swings the sickle, and the earth is reaped. We’ll talk more about who is reaped and what happens to them in just a minute.

- In the next scene we see another angel, armed like Christ in the first section, come out of the Temple. What is the significance of the Temple here again?
  - The Temple symbolizes the presence of God the judge on His throne pronouncing judgment on the earth. This angel is coming in judgment.
• The second angel in this segment comes specifically from the altar and has authority over the fire. What does this mean and who is this angel?
  o More to the point, have we seen this angel before? While there is a good deal of extrabiblical imagery of angels having authority over God’s fiery judgment, in the immediate context, we have likely encountered this angel before in 8:3-5. This was the angel who stood at the altar, filled the censer with the prayers of the saints, and then hurled the fire down on the earth which was a symbolic initiation of the active judgment of God on the earth.
  o What is the significance if the angel here is in fact the angel from chapter 8? The angel in chapter 8 was responsible for handling the prayers of the saints. The judgment the angel began was in part a response to these prayers. The saints had long been praying for God to act in history to right the wrongs committed against them (Cf. 6:9-11) but had been previously told to wait for the appropriate time for action. In the same way that we have seen partial answers to their prayers in the judgments of God in the various seals and trumpets, this harvesting of the earth could also been viewed in part as a response to the prayers of the righteous. Indeed, God’s actions in the end are His clear response to the prayers of His people throughout history for Him to bring justice back to the earth and to final exact the vengeance that belongs only to Him.

• Why the shift in metaphors from vv. 14-16 from wheat to grapes?
  o These are the grapes of wrath. The OT background for this image is most likely Joel 3:12-13 (someone read this). If this passage is portraying the judgment of the unrighteous, then John is simply borrowing from Joel’s metaphor.

• Now, unlike in vv. 14-16, this harvest is gathered up and thrown into the winepress where it is presumably destroyed. And who is the perpetrator of this destruction? In other words, who is the one to tread on the winepress in v. 20?
  o At first glance it would seem that this should be the same angel as in v. 17. But, the text does not say that the angel is the treading. The angel brought the harvest to the winepress and then the winepress “was trodden.” This suggests that someone else did the treading. The identity of this figure must ultimately remain a mystery because the text simply does not provide information, but here is one thought. Perhaps this figure is Jesus. Jesus is clearly the judge in the end. Also, often when a phrase is grammatically in the passive voice (meaning the action is done to the subject rather than by the subject) the specific grammatical feature in play is a divine passive. This is a passive voice construct in which God is presumed to be performing the action on the subject without actually mentioning His name. (Cf. 6:2, 4, and 8) Furthermore, in 19:15 Jesus as judge is described as treading on the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. So, while I would not die on this hill, perhaps Jesus is in view as judge here.

• Also in v. 20, the winepress is described specifically as being located outside of the city. What do you think is the significance of this?
  o The city of Jerusalem holds a very special spiritual place in the activity of God towards the world. Throughout the OT Jerusalem is depicted as a city of peace; a refuge from the chaos of the world that lives opposed to God. This is why God’s pronouncing judgment on Jerusalem and moreover on the temple building itself in the prophets before the exile was such a shock to the people’s system. The original fall of Jerusalem broke the people of the mindset that they were safe from the wrath and judgment of God regardless of their behavior simply because they dwelled in the “Holy City.” (In the same way, we are not exempt from the judgment of God because we go to church all our lives and try to do the right thing. Our only hope is Christ—the baby born at Christmas.) In spite of this glaring exception (which served to remind the people that it’s their faithfulness to God that counts and nothing else), God regularly spoke of His acting in mercy towards His people and His protection of them would come by gathering them in the Holy City. When He judged all the earth He would gather His people in His city and establish His eternal reign there. I do not personally have a strong theology of place and so I do
not believe this is a reference to a specific place, but rather God’s drawing His people to Himself—His presence defines the Holy City. On the other side of this promise of protection, those ultimately opposed from God would be shut out of the city. We can see this in chapters 21-22 when the people of God are promised a dwelling place in the renewed Heaven/Earth which will be off-limits to the unrighteous just like Adam and Eve were kept out of Eden once they had sinned. In this sense, this act of judgment on the unrighteous will take place outside the walls of the city.

- Finally, the blood from this treading of the grapes of wrath which are the unrighteous, will yield a flood of blood “as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.” How does this strike you?
  - The image of blood reaching to a horse’s bridle was a familiar one in some of the apocalyptic literature of the day. It was routinely symbolic for death and destruction of unimaginable portions. One ancient Jewish apocalyptic text that predated Revelation described a similar scene saying, “the horse will walk through the blood of sinners up to his chest; and the chariot shall sink down up to its top.” (1 Enoch 100:3) As for the 1,600 stadia, this was approximately the length of the land of Israel. More symbolically speaking, 1,600 ($4^2 \times 10^2$) could represent the completeness of God’s judgment. In other words, this image is of the blood of the unrighteous covering the entirety of Israel to a depth of 5 or so feet. It is simply a picture of unimaginable slaughter, death, and destruction. Is this a literal image? Surely not. But it is graphic to make a point. The fate of those who finally oppose God in spite of all His attempts to call them to repentance will be worse than anything of which our finite minds can conceive.

- This discussion leads to the question I asked you to think about at the beginning: what is going on in these two descriptions of harvesting the earth? Do we have a description of a single harvest that is repeated in two different ways to emphasize different parts of it? Do we have a description of two separate harvests? If the first, why the vastly different descriptions? If the second, are the same people harvested each time or does each harvest reference a different group of people?
  - I personally lean towards the view that this is describing two different harvests: one of the righteous, one of the unrighteous. Let me offer some evidence which will help us understand more fully some of the imagery.
    - First, and perhaps most obvious, the harvests are carried out by two different agents. The first is carried out by a figure that while a bit ambiguous is most likely Jesus. The second harvest (though not judgment) is carried out explicitly by an angel.
      - Any thoughts on why the second reaper is more explicitly an angel whereas in the first it was a somewhat ambiguous reference to Jesus?
      - Given that this is a scene of judgment here is one thought. Perhaps Jesus is the figure in the first scene because while portraying judgment, it is the judgment of the righteous who are harvested and offered to God as the firstfruits of the crop. Jesus is the One carrying out this action because it is an action of saving His people. These are the people who have placed themselves under the umbrella of His Lordship and are trusting in the cleansing for sin He accomplished at the cross. These are judged, but they are covered in His righteousness and thus are saved. This second group, however, has no such source of protection from the fiery judgment of God. It is merely a messenger who does the reaping here (although, as we have seen, it might still be Christ who does the judging) because they have no intercessor as do the faithful. They receive no special consideration because they have spent the entirety of their lives rejecting such offers. All they receive is judgment without a hint of mercy.
      - Second, the two harvests make use of imagery in chapter 14 that points towards this conclusion. In the first harvest, people are likened to a crop of wheat. This is the harvest of the righteous. Back in 14:4, the righteous are described as firstfruits for God and for the Lamb. When you look up the word “firstfruits” in a concordance you will find 23 occurrences. There are two Hebrew words behind this word “firstfruits.” One refers to the first and best part of a harvest. The other refers specifically to the first part of a grain harvest. Both words have to do with the grain...
harvest and refer to an offering made to God in gratitude for His blessings. It was the best of what God had provided given back to Him as a thank you. See the allusion here? On the other hand, looking back to our time a couple of weeks ago when we saw that those who take the mark of the beast will be subject to the undiluted wine of God’s wrath. Throughout the prophets, when we see wine it is often in the context of judgment in some fashion. Sometimes positive, sometimes negative. But as we saw earlier, the prevailing image here is from Joel 3:12-13. In this sense, the grapes and wine imagery in the second scene are intended to portray the unrighteous.

• Third, but related to the second reason, the wheat harvest is simply reaped while the grape harvest is reaped and then graphically destroyed. In some of the images of judgment and destruction that Jesus used when talking with His disciples, once the harvest was collected it was threshed or winnowed or tossed into the fire to be burned or some other graphic sounding action. None of this is present here. The harvest is merely brought in. The grape harvest, on the other hand, is collected, put in the winepress, and treading until blood flowed in abundance.

• Now, why does this matter? Well, it matters because we see the justice of God put on display here once again. The whole earth will be reaped, but those who have placed their trust in Christ will find life because they are covered in His righteousness and thus forgiven. The wicked, on the other hand, will receive their due.

• Some closing thoughts on chapter 14. One of the real reasons for hope here is that the depredations of the dragon and his beasts will not stand. They will not be allowed to oppose the people of God for all time. Judgment is coming for both the righteous and the wicked. At the close of chapter 13 we are in a pretty hopeless situation. It is open season on the believers and things are not looking good. The scene from Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers when the army of the Fellowship is making a stand against the great and evil army of Sauramon at the mighty fortress Helm’s Deep. The battle rages on, the walls are breached, and the good guys make one heroic stand after another but the army of orcs and Uruk’hai is just too big for them to hold against any longer. As dawn on the third day approaches as the sun is cresting on the valley leading to the fortress there is a great light. Gandalf the White is sitting at the top of the hill with the full force of Rohan’s mighty cavalry ready to ride down and vanquish the foes of the light. There has been an epic battle raging in the spiritual realm ever since the dragon was thrown from heaven by Michael and the armies of God. Defeat of God’s armies is not an option so the attentions of the enemy have been focused where damage can be done: on people. Chapters 12-13 together present our Helm’s Deep. In chapter 14 the light dawns on the third day and we see our salvation coming nigh. Just like in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy there was still much action remaining before Sauron was defeated but the prospect of victory suddenly became much clearer when Saurumon was defeated, we still have steps to take before we reach the end now, but victory is nigh. It will come under the leadership of the Lamb. It will come in the timing of the one seated on the throne. It will come after all hope of any other souls repenting and seeking God’s ways has been finally exhausted. But it will come. The wrongs of this world will be made right. Justice and righteousness will reign. Faith will be made sight. Hope will be fulfilled. Love will find its home.