

Revelation 14-15:4 Christ on Mt Zion

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Well we skipped over chapter 13.

I didn't want to cover every passage in Revelation

otherwise the series would have gone on for two many weeks.

Though I have good news for those of you who are enjoying Revelation.

I've added another three sermons in this series.

We were planning to take some annual leave in September,

but we can't go anywhere,

so we've cancelled our leave.

So we are going to do the rest of the book a little more thoroughly

than I had originally planned.

We've skipped chapter 13,

but let me give you a brief overview.

When we finished chapter 12,

the devil who had been kicked out of heaven

was filled with fury and he'd gone off to wage war against God's people.

That is us.

He's out to get you.

In chapter 13,

he appoints a human representative to do his dirty work for him.

The devil is not got a body.

So he relies on his agents to carry out his plans.

The devil's agent in chapter 13 is the beast.

The devil is the dragon and the beast is his second in command.

We read that that dragon gave the beast

his power and his throne and great authority.

The devil gives his minions enough power to do real damage.

And enough power that their sinful human hearts

get what they are longing for.

For of course power is one of the great corrupters of the human heart.

But as well as having power from the devil,

his human accomplice has a disguise.
If the devil's accomplices looked like the devil,
then people would be repulsed.
So he gives them a disguise so they have some plausibility.
In this case, 13:2 'One of the heads of the beast
seemed to have a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.'
In other words, the best was made to look like the Lamb, the Lord Jesus.
The lamb has a fatal wound.
The marks of his sacrifice.
So the devil's servant is given fake marks of sacrifice,
so that people might mistake him
for someone who truly loves his people.

Well one accomplice is not enough.
The devil appointed a second servant to do his dirty work for him.
He is a second beast.
Again he has a disguise.
He has two horns like a lamb.
That is, he is in some way made to look like the Lord Jesus.
Horns relate to power.
So he has some of the power of the Lord Jesus.
But he speaks like a dragon.
What comes out of his mouth is from the devil.
He does miracles to impress the people.
And they are deceived into worshiping the first beast.

These things probably relate to what was taking place in the world
at the time that John wrote Revelation.
People were being deceived into worshiping the Roman emperor.
Some were being killed if they wouldn't comply.
And we read that the second beast, 13:15
"set up an image of the first beast,
so that the image could speak
and caused all those who refused to worship the image to be killed."
People were also being forced to receive a certificate

to say that they had sacrificed to a statue of the Emperor before they were allowed to buy and sell at the market.

And we read, 13:16,

"The beast also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave,

to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name."

And no prizes for guessing what that number is.

666 is the number one less than 7 three times.

Seven is the number of perfection.

This is less than perfection three times.

Just as God is Holy Holy Holy,
the devil is evil, evil, evil.

Well that's a quick bring you up to speed on the chapter we missed. And it's kind of important.

Because the chapter we are reading today has many contrasts with what went before.

The camera angle changes from earth to heaven.

14:1 "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mt Zion, and with him were the 144000, who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."

A couple of years ago, I stood on Mt Zion.

It means Jerusalem, Zion is another name for Jerusalem.

It's not much of a mountain.

More of a hill really.

But it's what it represents that is important.

Zion is what Jerusalem is called

when it's about God living among his people.

If God's people have disobeyed him,
then it's 'Jerusalem has disobeyed me'.

But if God is taking up residence in his temple,
then he is 'in Zion his holy mountain'.

Same place, but different words used at different times.

And this is not the earthly Zion.
This is heavenly Zion,
like the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven
that we see in chapter 21.
Jesus is there and his redeemed people are with him.
The people he bought at the cost of his own blood.
You and I.
And we have his name and God the Father's name
written on our foreheads.

It's setting up a clear contrast.
Those who worship the beast
have his name and number on their foreheads.
Those who worship the Lamb
have his name and the Father's name on their foreheads.
It's very polarising.
You are either in one camp or the other.
There is no middle ground.
Our world feels a bit like that at the moment.
Are you for Trump or Biden?
Are you for lockdowns or freedom?
Do black lives matter or do all lives matter?
In this world we would often want to adopt a more nuanced tone.
We don't want to be pushed to one of the poles.
And that's right.
Human affairs are complex and there are many shades of grey.
But there are no shades of grey
when you are choosing between the dragon and the lamb.
You must be marked with the name of the Lamb and his Father.

The 144000 represent all God's people.
12 Tribes times 12 apostles times 10 for completeness three times.
And they learn a new song,
to give praise to God.
Now some of you don't enjoy learning new songs.

Why not just sing the old ones?
 Others love new ways to praise their creator and their redeemer.
 But in the Bible, a new song means only one thing.
 God's people sing a new song when there has been a great victory.
 When Israel escaped from Egypt
 and the Egyptian army were swallowed up by the Red Sea,
 what's the first thing that Moses and his sister Miriam do?
 They write a song to celebrate God's mighty triumph.
 And the whole nation sings it.
 So it is here.
 God's redeemed people sing
 about his great victory over the dragon and the dragon's minions.
 No one else can learn the song,
 because only God's redeemed people can sing his praises
 for his victory over the devil.

God's redeemed people are described
 as those who did not defile themselves with women
 for they remained virgins.
 It sounds a bit like a community of monks.
 But that's not actually the point.
 As it so often is in the Bible,
 sexual purity is a metaphor for spiritual purity.
 God's redeemed people are those who are faithful to just one God.
 And in the same way when the second angel says, 14:8,
 "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,
 which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."
 It's not so much talking about the sexual immorality of Babylon
 as the worship of idols and assorted false gods that she engaged in.
 What is the character of those
 'who don't defile themselves with women'?
 14:4 'They follow the Lamb wherever he goes'.
 That's the real point.
 True believers are willing to follow Jesus
 wherever that might take them.

For us and the churches John is writing to,
that doesn't mean traipsing the dusty roads of Palestine.
It means being willing
to follow the path of suffering that Jesus followed;
to follow the path of rejection that Jesus followed.
It means being willing to wait patiently
for the glory of God to be revealed in us.
There is lots of delayed gratification in Jesus' life.
The resurrection happens right at the end of the story not the beginning.

The next scene in John's vision is three angels
who make proclamation of God's sovereign judgement.
The words of the first angel are described as 'the eternal gospel'.
When I was at Gafcon,
the catch cry was 'We will proclaim Christ faithfully to the nations'.
There are many aspects of proclamation
that are needed to make it faithful.
For example there needs to be some consonance
between the life of the proclaimer and their message.
It's no good telling people one thing and doing another.
That would not be faithful proclamation.
But the angel forces us to come to grips
with another aspect of faithful proclamation.
Faithful proclamation announces both the blessings and curses;
both salvation and judgement.
Too often we think we've proclaimed the gospel
if we have announced forgiveness of sins
through Jesus' sacrificial death.
That's part of the gospel.
But forgiveness of sins is a pretty meaningless concept
unless there is some consequence of not having your sins forgiven.
This is the angel's gospel proclamation, 14:7,
"Fear God and give him the glory,
because the hour of his judgement has come.
Worship him who made the heavens,

the earth, the sea and the springs of water."
 Fear God because he's about to judge the world.
 I bet no one has told you that is the gospel before.
 But a gospel without judgement
 is a gospel to which there is no urgency to respond.
 And it's a gospel that ignores reality.
 This world is drawing to a conclusion and there will be judgement.

The third angel pictures the judgement
 of anyone who has the beast's image on their forehead.
 14:10 "They will drink the wine of God's fury,
 which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath."
 Remember Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.
 "Father, everything is possible for you.
 Take this cup from me."
 Which cup?
 The wine of God's fury which has been poured full strength
 into the cup of his wrath.
 God must be filled with wrath
 at those who pollute his creation with evil.
 If he was unconcerned about it,
 he wouldn't be loving.
 It would be like the mayor of a city standing idly by
 while rioters burned and looted.
 God's holiness demands his anger at sin.
 The only question is who drinks the wine of his fury?
 Will it be Jesus or will it be you?
 For those who receive the mark of the beast, it will be them.
 For those with the name of the Lamb on their forehead,
 he has drained their cup to the dregs.
 Which is why a voice calls out from heaven, 14:13,
 "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."
 When I talk to Alan Hoskin
 about some faithful Christian who has just died,
 inevitably he says, "Victory!"

Indeed. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

John's next vision is a picture of the day of judgement.
You've heard of the separating of the sheep and the goats.
That's Jesus picture of the final judgement in Mt 25.
Here we have the separating of the grain harvest and the grape harvest.
First Jesus appears as a harvester.
We can tell it's Jesus because he's one like a son of man,
seated on a cloud with a gold crown on his head.
Only Jesus is the human and divine king.
In his hand he has a sickle.
That's the tool used they used back then for harvesting.
And he harvests the earth.
That's the picture of those
who have followed the Lamb wherever he goes
being taken to their eternal home.
Then an angel comes with a sickle.
The angel harvests the grapes,
which are put into the winepress of God's wrath.
They are trampled in the winepress.
But instead of grape juice running,
blood runs out five foot deep for 300 kilometres.
Bear in mind that Israel is 150 km long and 30km wide.
God's judgement is being pictured as full and final.
This is the picture
of those who have the mark of the beast being judged.
And remember,
having the mark of the beast is not a picture of an occult practitioner.
It's a picture of anyone who does not have the name of the Lamb
and his Father's name on their forehead.

There's one final picture in our reading.
The focus of the camera moves back to heaven.
The redeemed people of God are holding their harps
and they are singing,

"Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways, King of the nations.

Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed."

These are beautiful words of praise to God.

When I was a kid, there was a song that went like this.

"Great and wonderful are your ways.

Great and wonderful, O Lord God Almighty."

I tried searching it up on Youtube,

but there are literally so many songs that use the words of this passage,
I couldn't find it.

Such popular words.

But how many of the people who sing them realise
exactly what the actions are that the heavenly choir are celebrating?

With the blood flowing 5 foot deep for 300 km.

The smoke of their torment rising forever and ever.

Because it is the events of this chapter
that are being immortalised in song.

The 144000 are given their harps at the start of chapter 14.

And there they are singing at the start of chapter 15.

Who will not fear you, Lord, indeed!

When we praise God for his righteous acts,

When we celebrate that he is just and true,

Remember that it's God who gets to choose
what righteousness and justice really is.

In celebrating his righteousness and justice,

we aren't gloating about the downfall of those who are judged.

We are celebrating his mercy on those

for whom Jesus drank the wine of God's fury.

That's you and me.

And we are celebrating

that his purpose of ridding the earth of evil has been fulfilled.
Not quite yet.
But it will be.
The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee.
For us, it's just a matter of waiting for God's perfect timing.

"Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways, King of the nations.
Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship before you,
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