

## **“THE SONG OF THE REDEEMED.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Revelation 14:1-13**

### **Introduction.**

Chapters 12 and 13 were pretty rough. We came face to face with evil, with wickedness, with Satan’s violent hatred of Christ whom he tried to devour and of Christ’s church which he pursued into the wilderness.

Furthermore, those faithful to Jesus might not be able to buy and sell and provide for their families, they will be put to death. In fact it appears that Christianity and the church might be crushed all together. It sounds tempting to give up the fight and just surrender. But that’s not the last word.

As fierce and aggressive as Satan has been, like a prowling and roaring lion, for all that he has only failed. Chapters 14 and 15 give us a different vision, a vision of what happens to those who don’t take the mark of the beast and what happens to the beast and his servants.

Remember John is writing to Christians who are struggling in the midst of a hostile and pagan culture.

It reminds me of Psalm 73:

**Psalm 73:2-3** But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

**Psalm 73:12-14, 16-19** Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

14 For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

18 Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

19 How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

Verses 1-5 encourage the righteous and verses 6-11 warn the wicked, then verses 12-13 encourage the righteous some more.

### **Glorious Worship by the Redeemed, 14:1-5**

We move from a dragon standing on the shifting sands of the seashore to John’s vision of a lamb standing on Mount Zion. The lamb is Jesus, Mount Zion is heaven. And he also sees the 144,000. Do you remember who they are? This is a symbolic number for the saints, for all those redeemed by the atoning blood of Jesus. 144,000 is the complete number, the fullness of heaven.

Futurist such as dispensational, pre-tribulational, premillennialist, such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins say the 144,000 is the literal number of Jews who will be saved after the rapture of the church. These Jews will be the ones who bring Gentiles into salvation after the tribulation and after the rapture of the church.

But we have already talked about the problems with this view. It takes literally what should be taken symbolically. It puts the meaning and understanding of Revelation only in some far distant future. It says that God only seals and protects 144,000 Jewish believers.

The 144,000 are the true Israel of God, the OT and NT church, the whole remnant of God's chosen children under His care and protection.

What follows is a detailed description of the 144,000. Everything in this description is meant to assure us, to encourage us, to equip us to endure to the end, to be faithful to Jesus who is faithful to us.

**First**, they have the Father's name and the Lamb's name written on their forehead (vs. 2). They belong to God. In chapter 7 we read about the sealing of the servants of God on their foreheads. This doesn't mean they are protected from harm, for we have already seen many are persecuted and even martyred. The seal means they will be preserved through trial and their faith will remain steadfast. Nothing will separate them from the love and presence of God.

**Second**, they have not been defiled with women (vs. 4). Does this mean that only virgins will be in heaven? Well, it depends on what you mean by virgins. This is referring to spiritual virgins, or those who have not committed spiritual adultery. They are those who refused to worship the beast or the image of the beast. Spiritual apostasy is often pictured in Scripture as fornication or adultery.

Being undefiled means resisting the temptations to follow the beast and the worldly and idolatrous systems which are agents of the beast. They have not compromised morally or ethically or spiritually. They abstained from worldliness. They refused to drink the wine of the passion of Babylon's sexual immorality.

This is a call to resist sexual impurity in particular but spiritual impurity in general. This is a call to test your devotion and faithfulness to Jesus.

**Third**, they have followed the Lamb wherever he goes (vs. 4). We are all following someone or something. Using Revelation language we can say that everyone is following either a dragon or a lamb. A Christian is a sinner who has committed his way to Christ, he isn't perfect, but with repentance and faith by God's grace and the Spirit's power seeks to faithfully follow Jesus.

Do you know the difference between the voice of the dragon and the voice of the Lamb? You grow in knowing Jesus' voice by following Him, by reading His Word and knowing His truth.

**Fourth**, they are those who are called the firstfruits for God and the Lamb (vs. 4). Remember in the OT how the firstfruits of the harvest were dedicated to God, like a tithe. This is a

reference to the harvest that we will get to in the last part of this chapter. The redeemed are those harvested out of the world, out from among the unredeemed to be dedicated to God.

They *have been* redeemed. They didn't redeem themselves, they weren't extra good and earned it. They are saved by the mercy and grace of God and redeemed for God and the Lamb. They are purchased and paid for and belong body and soul to Him.

*Finally*, they are those in who where is no deceit or lie and who are blameless or faultless before the throne of God (vs. 5). They have rejected the deception of Satan, they have refused to exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25) and have thrown off the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13).

The followers of Jesus speak the truth. They have maintained a true and faithful witness, their integrity is intact even under great pressure. Do you know the truth? Are you speaking it to yourself and others?

Perhaps most impressive of all was what John heard. This great multitude is singing a special song, a song never heard before and a song only known to the redeemed.

This song may be like a personal testimony, a song that only those who have actually experienced the redeeming work of the Lamb can learn this new song and sing it. This is the *song of the redeemed*. The angels can't sing it.

It's not sung by Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus; not sung by Mormons, or by just good and decent people who have done right and lived clean and left others alone and been tolerant of others even though they themselves don't believe anything.

### **Grave Warnings by the Three Angels, 14:6-13**

Suddenly there are angels hovering around John. Three angels each with a very important message for the people of earth, final warnings before the end.

#### ***First Angel, the Angel of Grace, vss. 6-7.***

This first angel awakens the inhabitants of earth of the pending hour of judgment and calls them to heed the Gospel before it's too late.

One final opportunity is given to repent, though the context and what follows implies that no one listens. The message is ignored and they are without excuse in the judgment.

Who is the Gospel for? It's not just true for us here in Lynden or in America, it's true for everyone, and it's eternal, for all time. You know the most relevant truth that can be known, a truth that remains relevant forever. The eternal Gospel is the only Gospel.

Fear God and give Him glory.

#### ***Second Angel, the Angel of Doom, vs. 8.***

This is a quote from the OT:

**Isaiah 21:9** And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!” And he answered, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.”

The second angel announces the fall of Babylon. Who or what is Babylon? In the OT Babylon was a city that became a great empire that led Israel into captivity. They destroyed the temple and oppressed the people of God.

Early Christians saw Rome as the Babylon of the OT revived. Rome also destroyed the temple and oppressed the people of God.

We will see a detailed description of her in chapter 17, as the great whore of Babylon who seduces the nations. Babylon is the symbol for the world, for fallen human society, for all wicked world systems. It is the sum total of all pagan culture with all its excesses and sin and rebellion against God in whatever form. It especially encompasses sexual immorality.

There are powers at work in the world trying to entice people to commit spiritual adultery, to fall into idolatry, to lead us away from God and get us to deny God.

God’s judgment will come upon the world’s political, social, economic and religious system, code named Babylon. The party is over, the world’s dance is coming to an end, the fun and games will soon no longer be fun.

Notice the past tense of fallen. It won’t happen until Revelation 17-18, but it is prophesied as done. In our history it hasn’t happened yet, Babylon is still going strong, but its fall is certain.

Proverbs is full of warnings about the lure of the world. We must guard our hearts from worldly pleasures, from Babylon’s delights.

### ***Third Angel, the Angel of Warning, vs. 9-11.***

The third angel announces the judgment of God on all who worship the beast and bear his mark (13:11-18).

This horrible judgment is *described* with three phrases.

**First**, those who chose the wine of the passion of her (Babylons) sexual immorality in verse 8 will now drink the wine of God’s wrath. All sinful pleasures are short term and short lived, the consequences follow quickly.

The patience and longsuffering and slow to anger nature of God has run out. The judgment is no longer remedial or corrective. It is eternal punishment from which there is no escape.

Remember Jesus asked the Father if it was possible for Him not to drink the cup of the Father’s wrath. It wasn’t, so Jesus drank the full cup of the Father’s wrath. Either Jesus drinks it for us or we must drink it for ourselves.

**Second**, they are tormented with fire and sulfur or fire and brimstone. This is probably symbolic for intense spiritual and psychological torment and anguish.

**Third**, their torment will be public, in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb.

Following the description of the judgment are two phrases that **describe the duration** of the punishment.

**First**, the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, or literally unto ages of ages, and **second** they shall have no rest. Is hell forever? Is the torment of the wicked eternal? Is this just or unjust? Does the punishment fit the crime?

As you know this is one of the most unpleasant doctrines in the Bible, one that is particularly odious/abhorrent to non-believers.

It is a huge debate not just between Christians and non-Christians, but among Christian scholars. I have several books on both sides of the issue, some say the punishment is eternal and some say that the wicked are at some point annihilated, they cease to exist.

How is it just for finite creatures who committed a finite number of sins be punished with eternal conscious torment? This whole idea just seems morally and emotionally distasteful, especially coming from a God of love and mercy.

But we cannot build our doctrine or theology on our feelings or what our heart wants to believe, we must build it on the Word of God.

**The opinion that eternal punishment is an unfair length of sentence** for a finite length of sin misses on several levels.

First of all as sinners we have no clue as to the immensity of our evil or the enormity of our sin against God. Second, as sinners we have no clue as to the enormity and magnitude of the eternal holiness and justice of God. Third, as sinners we have no way of satisfying the debt or appeasing the wrath of God, so we keep on sinning into eternity.

When someone objects and says hell is disproportionate and that it's unfair that 70 years of sin merit a million years of punishment, answer by saying that the wrong comparison is being made. The degree of our crime is not measured by how long we have offended God but by how high and holy is the God we have offended.

I must be faithful and implore anyone here or listening to this sermon on CD, flee the wrath that is to come and be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37).

Don't follow a defeated foe into eternal death. Follow a victorious Christ into eternal life. Only the eternal Gospel can deliver us from the eternal wrath of God.

**Interlude, vs. 12-13.**

After the terror of these announcements and warnings, comes another encouraging voice from heaven.

Here is your motivation to endure and persevere. When the world winks at you, when Babylon beckons you into her embrace, when the compromise with the beast seems small, remember these images.

Trusting Jesus may get you persecuted, it may even get you killed, but death is not the final thing or the worst thing.

A beatitude is spoken over them, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” There are only two ways to die, either out of the Lord or in the Lord.

When we think about death in the flesh there is much about it to make us sad. Death cuts us off from those we love, it cuts us off from so much that we hold dear, that matters to us. It cuts us off from our hopes and dreams and plans. Death is sad to us for many reasons.

And for this reason, our Christian faith is an incredible gift because it gives us countless reasons to view death as a blessing.

As Paul says, “To live is Christ but to die is great gain” (Philippians 1:21).

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And who has given us His Holy Spirit:

**Ephesians 1:14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

The riches of glory are ours in Christ 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!”

**Prayer:** Holy and righteous and just God. Though we are tempted to hesitate to ask this, nevertheless we ask that by the vision-clearing power of your Holy Spirit you would enable us to see more clearly and stand more in awe of your righteous justice and your life-saving grace. May we have a deep and health fear of hell. May we be used of you to rescue others from it. And may we now more than ever before have a totally new love and gratitude for Christ who bore our guilt and suffered for our sin and delivered us from hell. Put in our hearts the song of the redeemed, in the name of Jesus.