

“THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 14:14-20

Introduction.

As I read this part of Revelation did you think well finally something in Revelation that I almost understand. We know a thing or two about harvests around here. And we remember the parable of Jesus about the wheat and the weeds (tares), where the wheat is gathered in and the weeds are thrown into the fire.

John has a vision of two harvesters and two harvests, two reapings of the earth. The first harvester is called one like the son of man and the second is an angel. It appears the two harvests are different and what happens to them is different.

We have before us yet another of several descriptions of another aspect of the Second Coming. There will be a close of the age, an end to time and it will be like a great harvest.

The Grain Harvest of the Earth, vss. 14-16.

Who is this one like the son of man? Most of the time in Scripture this is a shorthand phrase for Jesus Christ.

Daniel 7:13-14 “I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came *one like a son of man*,
and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.
14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Matthew 24:30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see *the Son of Man coming on the clouds* of heaven with power and great glory.

Remember John’s description of Jesus back in chapter one:

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.

Revelation 1:12-13 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands *one like a son of man*, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

This is Jesus.

The appearance of Christ is decisive, this is the beginning of the end. The final great cosmic conflict is about to begin between the Lamb's followers and the dragon's followers.

We also see that these harvests depend on the authority of God to begin. In both harvests an angel comes from the throne of God to announce the time has come.

Mark 13:32 Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

As I was studying this passage I learned that there is quite a division among scholars as to the meaning of this first harvest.

Is this a harvest of the righteous or another aspect of the harvest of the unrighteous?

Some think this is two aspects of the harvest of the unrighteous. They base this on some texts in the OT.

In Joel 3 there is a harvest of grain and a harvest of grapes and both are harvests of the wicked.

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

Also sickles are generally only used in as an instrument of judgment and in the OT harvest is generally a symbol of judgment on the wicked only.

But I lean in the direction of those who say the first harvest is different, that it is a harvest of the righteous, for several reasons.

First, in the NT Christ spoke of gatherings of both the righteous and the wicked, of wheat and weeds, of good fish and bad fish, of sheep and goats. In Luke the grain harvest is a harvest of the righteous.

Luke 3:17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

In Revelation only grapes are specifically mentioned in the context of punishment for the wicked and the winepress of God's wrath.

Revelation 19:15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Second, in Revelation 14:4 the 144,000 are described as the “firstfruits” which seems to point to this later full harvest in 14:15-16.

Third, the harvesters are different so it would seem the harvest is different. Jesus harvests the righteous, another angel harvests the wicked. And there is no mention of threshing and winnowing in the first harvest.

Fourth, the two different kinds of harvests match the two judgments in Revelation 20:12 of those whose names are in the Book of Life and those who are not.

Everything about this harvest seems in contrast to the second harvest.

The Grape Harvest of the Earth, vss. 17-20.

Another angel comes out of the temple with a sharp sickle. This is where the image of the legendary Grim Reaper comes from.

The angel of death in art and literature is often a personification of death in the form of a cloaked skeleton wielding a large scythe.

This sounds like the angel in Revelation 8

Revelation 8:3-5 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

This angel comes from the altar to tell the other angel, the Grim Reaper, it is time to begin. We should tremble at these words, they are solemn and terrifying. The prospect of death and judgment should be scary things for humans to consider.

But there is something far scarier than death, and that is the wrath of a holy God. As scary as Satan is, he isn't as scary as the wrath of a holy God.

When a righteous, perfect, good God gives every possible blessing to mankind and mankind takes all His gifts and uses them against God and tries to make himself god, and resists God and disobeys every single command of God, this is an invitation for judgment and wrath.

This grim Specter of death has come to repay according to the fruit of their deeds. God's patient endurance has a limit, it will run out, as He has warned it would.

The grapes are ripe, meaning that the iniquity of the wicked has filled up to the brim. Their sin has reached the full measure.

The bubble is about to burst, the lie is about to be exposed, the deception is about to be uncovered. All the allure and appeal of sin, all the apparent pleasure and joy and satisfaction, all the false promises, are about to be shown for what they really are. There is no fruit in them, no goodness, no life, only sorrow and death.

Those who don't have an advocate, a mediator, a lawyer, to stand between them and the judge, will face the full wrath of the judge alone. They will be crushed in the winepress of His just fury.

There is only one escape, one refuge to which all must flee and that is the cross of Jesus and the blood of Christ. Jesus came into the world to save sinners (I Timothy 1:15) and everyone who calls on His name will be saved (Romans 10:13). In the face of pending judgment there is no better Gospel and there is no better news.

We will see greater displays of God's justice and wrath in judgment later in Revelation, but just remember that God is glorified in all His attributes. All His attributes bring Him glory and will be cause for worship. His tremendous majesty will be on display just as much in His wrath as in His love and the one will heighten the other.

Verse 20:

Grapes are crushed in a winepress. So the wicked are depicted as being cast into the winepress of the wrath of God and crushed. Unbelievers will be punished forever.

The description of the blood is overwhelming. It is a mental image meant to capture the magnitude of the horror. Those who have never seen battlefield bloodshed can't even begin to comprehend the dreadfulness of this scene.

This judgment will be so awful that we should pray for the souls of even our worst enemies and for the souls of those who do the worst persecution.

John sees a river of blood four to five feet deep for nearly 200 miles, the entire length of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba.

This is a figurative statement, not a literal one. This is a phrase meant to convey a destruction of exceptional proportions and unprecedented scale. The end is certain and it isn't pretty.

The number 1600 is the square of 40 which is a common number for judgment in the OT. It's symbolic of the fullness of time when the fullness of sin is complete.

We are in the quickly closing chapters of Revelation where judgment falls and then the glorious vision of heaven and the New Jerusalem is given. John is showing us what the final fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies will look like.

Implications and Applications.

There are only two ways in the Bible, blessings and curses, salvation and judgment, heaven and hell, mercy and justice. And as I said in the mercy and grace sermon, those who reject the mercy of God will drink the justice of God at the Second coming of Jesus.

As I said last week there are only two kinds of people, those who are in Christ and those who are outside of Christ. There is no other way, no middle way. Be among the 144,000, the saints who follow the Lamb. Don't give in to the lure of the world and all its attractions and defilements.

Everything we do is preparing us for a harvest. We are all ripening for one of two harvests, either the grain of God's goodness or the grapes of God's wrath.

Mark 13:33-37 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. 35 Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Are we ready to face the final judgment and the judge of all mankind?

Julia Stuurmans told me this week that she really wants to go home to heaven, she is ready. This world and this life has no hold on her anymore. She can't quite see what purpose God has for her here, she is ready to go.

One of the great principles of Scripture is that *we shall reap what we sow*. It is an infallible agricultural rule, whatever you sow, that you will reap. And it is a spiritual rule.

Job 4:8-9 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. 9 By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

Galatians 6:7-9 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Luke 13:6-9 And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ 8 And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Are you growing, are you fertilizing, are you thinking about the soil of your heart, are you watering, are you cultivating, are you aggressively pulling weeds?

Are you sowing TV shows and movies, are you sowing materialism and worldliness, are you sowing gossip and worthless talk, are you cultivating hidden, secret sin?

What are you sowing? What are you planting? What kind of seed are you spreading? What are you doing that will have eternal fruit in someone’s life? What encouragement, what blessing, what building up of the body?

Do you have fears or anxieties or doubts that need to be addressed, honestly faced and turned over to the Lord?

We have all been told what is coming, what to expect. Are we living and preparing with that reality in mind? God will keep His Word, will we keep God’s Word?

Jesus drank the full cup of God’s wrath, He bore it all in His body. Those who trust in Jesus don’t have to drink the cup of God’s wrath.

Take comfort and not grow weary in well-doing. In due time you will reap a great reward of eternal glory and joy.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

II Timothy 4:6-8 The time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Live longing for the day of His coming on the clouds.