

Whenever we speak of the end times... our hearts often accelerate... partly out of joy... (but let's be honest)... there is also a certain amount of fear. ... Just the very nature of the end times... is that it seems to be somewhat uncertain... ... Didn't Jesus... Himself... say... "*No one knows about that day or hour,*" and then continue with... "*not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son.*" ... .. But the uncertainty of calendars... and dates... isn't what troubles most people... (even believers.) ... It's the notion of final judgment.

Our passage of study this morning... through the Book of Revelation... brings us face-to-face today... with two elements of the final judgment... which (I believe)... are at the very core of this concern.

The first core element of this concern about the final judgment... might be that there exists... somewhere in the back of your mind... a niggling little question... and it sound something like this: Will God really bring me through all of the pain and hardship of this world... to a place in Glory that He has prepared for me? ..."*I know what evangelical Christian doctrine says... but is this really true... especially as it applies to me...? I face a lot of hardship right now. My challenges won't seem to go away... even though I have prayed and prayed for God to remove them. ... Oh sure! ... many of the problems I face... exist... because of wrong choices I've made. (They are of my own making.) ... So how can I be certain that this final judgment stuff... is not part of my destiny?*"

Then the second core element of this concern about the final judgment... might be due to the often raised question: "How can a loving God send anyone to Hell?" Maybe you have struggled for an answer... that will

satisfy your own questioning... or you have worried that someone might ask you this directly... and you won't be able to give them a good answer.

Both of these matters are dealt with in our passage today. But I don't want to simply spit out some "pat-answers." ... I am grateful for how the answers to these two issues unfold in such an impactful manner... by simply slowing down and letting the message of these verses (in their context) hit our understanding.

So... let's begin by understanding the bigger context of today's passage. Revelation chapter 14 will continue to chronicle the events... from the middle of the tribulation period... forward. ... In this chapter... John continues to describe events... all of which will occur in the last three and one-half years... Revelation chapters 13 and 14... describe the middle and the second half of the Tribulation.

Chapter Eleven had introduced the two witnesses (in Jerusalem)... who will work with the 144,000 witnesses scattered around the world (who we will see again today)... ... These all preach God's message... resulting in revivals – during the Tribulation!

Chapter Twelve points to the battle between God and Satan... and Satan's hatred for God's people... which has been going on throughout history. ... Chapter Thirteen takes this further by focusing on Satan's anger in the end time... by describing the work of the Antichrist... and his evil partner... the False Prophet. ... They will have full control of the world's system of human government... world economy... and world religion. God's people are going to have it very rough... during those times!

What we studied last week... in chapter 13... will be the darkest day... and the most horrible hour... in the history of the world. ... It is truly hell's holiday.

Every thoughtful mind must inevitably ask the question, "*How will God's people make it through this period? ... Will they remain faithful to the Lord through to the end with the overwhelming odds against them?*" ... The answer is found in this chapter before us... which also addresses the two core elements for why we fear the final judgment.

### **Revelation 14:1-5**

Chapter 13 described a situation that seems absolutely hopeless... but chapter fourteen opens with Christ standing on Mount Zion in victory.

This is the pattern followed throughout Revelation... and a pattern that is frequent in many believer's lives. ... Just when all seems to be destroyed... just when everything seems to be lost... just when the clouds are the darkest... just when Satan seems to have conquered - then Christ suddenly appears in total triumph and victory.

This has certainly happened on multiple occasions in my life. I can recall many occasions... and perhaps you can too... when all hope seemed to be lost... but God has always come through – sometimes at what seems to be the last possible second. These have been times of financial struggle... physical struggle... and even ministry struggle when I've cried out to God... in the middle of the night: "*Lord, You are going to have to take this. I don't know how... but if we are to continue... Your divine intervention is needed...*" And so far – He has never let me down. ... For example...

there is no possible explanation for how I was able to get through seminary the first time... The challenges I just mentioned were always present. ... And they were there again... when I went back for my doctorate. I wrote a whole lot of my doctoral dissertation in the waiting room of my wife's oncologist, surgeons and chemo-therapy room while she was being treated. ...In all three ministries where I have served as pastor... there have been nights when all I could do... was cry out to God: *"Lord... it sure seems to me that things are going to fly apart. Unless You show me something else I might do... I am waiting for You to act. This is in Your hands... either provide some more of Your divine intervention... or make it clear to me what You want me to do... and I'll do it"* - I strongly recommend that you pray like that whenever you have exhausted all of your resources to solve a problem... and things don't seem to be getting better. Recognize your helpless state before God and ask Him to either give you guidance... or break-in and intercede.

Between Revelation chapters 13 and 14... that is exactly what we see God is going to do. It seems to be His pattern... that just when Satan seems to have conquered - Christ suddenly appears in total triumph and victory. ... If you are facing a particular hardship right now... remember this pattern of His. Don't give up hope!

Believers who go through the Tribulation... (and remember... many are going to come to Christ in that day... through the preaching of the 144,000 and the two prophets in Jerusalem)... they are going to need this kind of hope. I believe that God gave John the visions in Revelation 13 and then 14... specifically so that these very believers will learn to say: *"I would rather be on the side that seems to be losing today but will win finally than*

*to be on the side that seems to be winning today but is going to lose eternally...”*

Even for us today... as we come under greater attack for our Christian convictions... we too must learn to say: *“I would rather be on the side that seems to be losing today but will win finally than to be on the side that seems to be winning today but is going to lose eternally...”*

What powerful encouragement Revelation chapter 14 is! And it is not just the verses we have read so far. It is the entire chapter.

It is encouraging to know that the Lamb -- not the two Beasts (written about in the last chapter) -- is going to have the last word. ... And He is not a lamb that speaks like a dragon... He is the Lord Jesus Himself. ... He is going to have the final word... Our chapter will go on to announce that Babylon will fall... (the great political system... the great economic system... and the great religious system... that will seek to destroy all faith in the True Messiah.) ... And we will also see here... that the followers of the Beast will be judged.

Although many of Christ's own will become martyrs during the Tribulation... they will not lose... they will win! ... Are you able to say right now... what I believe the Lord will soon be teaching the Tribulation saints through this chapter...? *“I would rather be on the side that seems to be losing today but will win finally than to be on the side that seems to be winning today but is going to lose eternally...”* I'm glad to be on the winning side. Christ will reward those who will be martyred for Him.

Revelation chapter 14 makes this point... from its opening verse. In the vision John is having, this particular scene is taking place in heaven (Revelation 14:1-5). The ministry work of the 144,000 has been completed. We cannot be sure, but we can assume that many of them died throughout this seven year period of time. Maybe the majority of them died in the last 3 1/2 years. Whatever one may think as to what actually happened on earth, this scene in heaven is one of great comfort. We see them all, 144,000 strong, not one missing; they are now safe with Christ. What they lived through during their days on earth cannot be fully comprehended at this time, but this much is known, they lived during a time when the worst of hell was unleashed on earth.

The Lamb is Jesus Christ. His day of vindication has come. Evil has rejected Him, but now the Lamb will be victorious over evil.

Remember that He started out with 144,000 and that He came through the Great Tribulation with 144,000. He didn't lose one. These are the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7:4... as having been sealed. They were sealed against the worst difficulties ever to come on earth.

Do you think it is possible that the Lord might lose you...? No! It is **no** more possible. Christ today is enthroned in the heavenly Zion... and we are enthroned with Him (according to Eph 2:6).

**Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)**

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

The scene in Revelation 14 is the assurance to God's people (who will through the Tribulation... and to us)... that He cares for His own and finally will take us to glory.

The second verse of chapter 14 describes the 144,000 as standing. But not only are they standing – they are also singing. They make a sound like the "roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder." ... But it was a sweet sound -- "like that of harpists playing their harps." ... The redeemed no longer seem outnumbered and weak... as they were on earth. Now they roar. (I guess they just... somehow... do it sweetly...)

But we also read that they have been admitted into Christ's presence having special privileges. ... They alone are able to sing a new song. Perhaps the description of them gives us a clue... for why they were given such special privilege.

### **Revelation 14:4-5**

They are separated unto the Lord to be his, just as the Apostle Paul was. Paul tells us in several places that he was committed to celibacy. He was single, and he devoted his life to the Lord as an unmarried man. He knew it was not the will of God for him to be married. So these men follow Christ completely. They are free to do so without any ties with anyone else because they were called to a dangerous and demanding work and needed to be unencumbered in following the Lamb wherever he went.

The abnormal times demanded an abnormal state. ... Hollywood has depicted this in movies... A young man deeply in love goes off to war. ... He was engaged to a girl... but he never came home. ... Or other stories

are about young soldiers who married right before they left... and they fathered children that they never saw.

(Hollywood stories – aside)... During WWI and WWII many young wives later said that they wished they had not married during that time. ... Well, during the Tribulation period the times are going to be so frightful that it will be wise not to get married.

This will be a very special group of saints. While others will speak lies and misrepresent the truth... just to survive the difficult times... the 144,000 will be without guile or blemish.

What a sharp contrast to everyone else of this time period. Falsehood and deceit will abound everywhere – but the 144,000 will keep themselves undefiled from any physical and spiritual fornication... adultery... and lies.

They are “first-fruits.” The term *firstfruits* means "the very finest." But it also carries the idea of an expected harvest. The 144,000 will be the assurance of a larger group of saved Jews... who will also place their faith in Jesus... (the true Messiah)... during the Tribulation. They are the prelude and the promise of many more! ...And before we finish this chapter... we will be given another “harvest” description of the many Jews... who will join them.

You see... while this will be a time of un-imaginable hardship... pain... and suffering... as God judges the earth... there will also be un-imaginable grace... still being extended... for anyone to receive it... if they chose.

Here is more evidence of that...

### **Revelation 14:6-7**



During the present age... (today's world)... the angels are not privileged to preach the Gospel. That responsibility has been given to God's people. ... But the churches will no longer be here to preach the gospel. The 144,000 will have been removed to heaven, and believers will have gone into hiding from the persecution at the hands of the Beast. So God will make use of angels to proclaim his message.

It will be preached to ALL nations. There will no doubt be people saved from all nations in this time. ... In the very midst of persecution and the sufferings of the last days... still the gospel must be proclaimed. ... God's great plan is that it must be proclaimed to the very end of time.

The message shows us again the grace of God in all its magnificence. ... Just when the beast and Satan are seen to be at the height of their authority... the church is gone... and new believers are in hiding... God still ensures that the gospel is heard in the world. ... The angel proclaims... as it were... the last clarion call to **Fear God and give him glory...** for the time for **judgment has come.** ...The call urges that people worship the great Creator.

The message is proclaimed to everyone—every nation, tribe, language, and people. ... No one will be able to have the excuse that they did not know the gospel message. ... We see this several times in Revelation. This is a key theme of this book. ... Whenever there has been a time of judgment... there is a preceding time of warning... when people are given the opportunity to repent.

Would you agree... that those who refuse the constant outreach... (those who want nothing to do with God)... that their punishment is *justified*...? The question – “How can a loving God send anyone to Hell?” should be changed... based on Revelation chapter 14. ... The real question is “How can a loving God force those who don’t want to be there... into His heaven...?” ... Would a loving God force anyone into heaven ...who make continued and vehement decisions... that it is *not* what they want...?

People are told to worship him who "*made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.*" That is the fundamental witness of God to found everywhere in the world. It is the witness that no one can miss because it is manifest all around us. As the words of Psalm 19 proclaim...

**Psalm 19:1-2 (ESV)**

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.*

Nature is everywhere testifying to the existence and the glory of God. What it says is, "There is a God and you cannot live without him. You breathe by him. You think by him." As Paul said to the Athenians...

**Acts 17:28 (ESV)**

*for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”*

"Since there is a God, and you cannot exist without him, therefore, worship him!" It is the fundamental cry of nature. ... It takes four years of college and two years of postgraduate work to deny this fundamental cry of nature all around us.

But all creation bears witness to God's existence... as well as to His power and wisdom. ... Nonetheless... "the beast" will convince men that he is in charge of the world... and that their destinies are in his hands. ... The message of the angel calls men back to basics: God is Creator—worship and serve Him.

### **Revelation 14:8**

Babylon represents the world's wicked systems of government... commercialism... and religion... (Think about it!) ... Each of these are man's attempts to live without God. As long as I have this man-made entity... I don't need God. People try to place their self-sufficiency (all of their trust for their well-being)... in a system of government (the government is going to take care of me)... or in a sense of financial security... or their own religious attempts to earn God's favor through religion. ... By the time the Tribulation ends... "Babylon" (which represents all three of these attempts to live without God)... will be fallen.

The first time Babylon was mentioned it was associated with Nimrod the rebeller against God (Genesis 10:8-10). ... Then it is mentioned in the tower of rebellion against God (Genesis 11:1-9). ... Babylon under Nebachnezzar was the first great world power and embodied all the evil of mankind in religion and otherwise. ... We what this angel announces... (Babylon's fall) when we get to Revelation 17 and 18.

### **Revelation 14:9-11**

The third message is directed especially to those who are deciding about following "the beast." It is a warning that "the easy way" is really the hard way, that to "go along with the world" means to go away from God. The Greek text reads, "If any man continues to worship the beast," suggesting that there is still opportunity for repentance and salvation.

This third angel couldn't be clearer... as he issues a message of warning... mixed with a message of eternal damnation. ... Those who worship the Beast and take the mark of the Beast are doomed.

Keep in mind (according to what we saw last week in Revelation 13:16-17... that those who don't accept the mark... can't buy... sell... work... or function in any way in this Beast led society. ... The angel makes it very clear that those who wear the mark of the Beast will spend eternity in hell. No one will be able to assume a neutral position during this intense period under the Beast. The angel forces the issue... "Who will it be... the True Messiah... or the Antichrist...?" (Easier times now... but an eternal state of suffering – or severe difficulty now... but an eternal state of glory... ?)

This may be the most breathtaking message found anywhere in the Bible. ... Many people in our churches today don't act though they know it... but they have the same choice. ... Many are choosing to identify with the way of the world... and refuse to take a stand for Christ... because they think it looks easier right now. ... But eternity is at stake! It is the same decision. How gracious of God to force the issue on the people of that time... so no one can say... *"Well... if only I had known..."*

Those who reject the gospel will have to make a deliberate effort to do so. Their punishment is justified...! “How can a loving God force those who don’t want to be there... into His heaven...?”

God has three choices: First... he can let rebellion go on forever and never judge it. ... In this case the terrible things that are happening on earth... all these distressing injustices... the cruelty... the anger... the hate... the malice... the sorrow... the hurt... the pain... the death that now prevails... will go on forever. ... God does not want that... and neither does man.

Second... God can force men to obey him and control them as robots. But he will never do that because that means they cannot love him. Love cannot be forced.

Therefore, third, the only choice God really has is that he must withdraw ultimately from those who refuse his love. He must let them have their own way forever.

### **Revelation 14:12-13**

This verse reinforces my belief that so much in the book of Revelation is to encourage the new believers... who come to Christ during the Tribulation. Many will be martyred. Many will lay down their lives. At that time this verse will give comfort and assurance. They will have rest from their sorrows, and their works will follow them, and the Lord will reward them.

### **Revelation 14:14-16**

This harvest is believers. It is a picture to encourage the Tribulation saints once again. Jesus comes and harvests His true wheat. ... This is what Jesus told His disciples about in a parable about Satan planting his seeds

among God's true wheat. We read in Matthew 13 that the servants asked "shall we pull up the weeds? But Jesus answered... "No... let both grow together until the harvest... and then I will tell the harvester... 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned... and then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Jesus interpreted that parable to the disciples, saying, "The harvest is the end of the age (the end of the Tribulation), and the harvesters are the angels." ... This agrees exactly with what we have here. The angels announce that the time of harvest has come, and the words of Jesus in Matthew 13 will be literally fulfilled. Let me read them to you:

**Matthew 13:41-43 (ESV)**

*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

These are very clear words from the lips of Jesus himself. But there is still another scene of harvest:

**Rev 14:17-20**

Is this the same story of harvest twice-told? No. You will notice the first harvest is a harvest of wheat. It is cut with a sickle... and it is a separation of the true wheat from the false-looking wheat. ... But this is clearly a grape harvest... a vintage harvest. The image is now grapes to use the same imagery that Isaiah used of these end times... when he wrote about the series of battles that will be known as Armageddon.

### **Isaiah 63:1-6 (ESV)**

*Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."*

This vivid picture is not of Christ at His first coming but of Christ when He returns in judgment. In Isaiah's day men would get into the winepress barefooted to tread out the grapes. The red juice would spurt out of the ripe grapes and stain their garments. The picture in this verse is of spectators seeing that there is blood on our Lord's beautiful garments as though He had trodden the winepress. When Christ came the first time, He shed His blood for them, but they have rejected it. Now He is trodding down the wicked, and it is their blood that is shed.

To those unaccustomed to vivid descriptions of God's anger in judgement, these are disturbing images. People dislike the idea of other people, even evil ones, being trampled like grapes. The depth and length of the blood flow provides a sickening scene of the immensity of God's judgment. But unless we face the necessity of God's judgment, we will never see our desperate need for his mercy. A god with only a grandfatherly kindness would not inspire our repentance, obedience, or worship. God has promised a harsh harvest for those who reject him. Those who know God

well enough to fear his wrath know God well enough to desire his grace. The crushing wrath of God is coming. Blessed are those who have had their sins forgiven, and blessed are those who lead others to God's mercy.

You see, the "gentle Jesus" who wouldn't swat a fly, whom we have heard so much about, is just not the Jesus of the Word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, but He is also the Judge of all the world. If you do not accept His blood shed for you, then if the Great Tribulation period comes during your lifetime, your blood will be shed.

In his book *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce describes a saint's visionary experience of Hell:

[H]e stood in the midst of a great hall, dark and silent save for the ticking of a great clock. The ticking went on unceasingly; and it seemed to this saint that the sound of the ticking was the ceaseless repetition of the words: ever, never; ever, never. Ever to be in hell, never to be in heaven; ever to be shut off from the presence of God, never to enjoy the beatific vision; ever to be eaten with flames, gnawed by vermin, goaded with burning spikes, never to be free from those pains; ever to have the conscience upbraid one, the memory enrage, the mind filled with darkness and despair, never to escape; ever to curse and revile the foul demons who gloat fiendishly over the misery of their dupes, never to behold the shining raiment of the blessed spirits; ever to cry out of the abyss of fire to God for an instant, a single instant, of respite from such awful agony, never to receive, even for an instant, God's pardon; ever to suffer, never to enjoy; ever to be damned, never to be saved; ever, never; ever, never. O, what a dreadful punishment! An eternity of endless agony, of endless bodily and



spiritual torment, without one ray of hope, without one moment of cessation, of agony limitless in intensity, of torment infinitely varied, of torture that sustains eternally that which it eternally devours, of anguish that everlastingly preys upon the spirit while it racks the flesh, an eternity, every instant of which is itself an eternity of woe. Such is the terrible punishment decreed for those who die in mortal sin by an almighty and a just God.

Hell will be awful, worse than even these words tell. Those who believe in Jesus will be saved from God's awful wrath. Those who endure, who persevere in faith to the end, will be saved.

Let me make it clear that I make no apology for these scenes of judgment. God has not asked me to apologize for His Word. He has told me to give it out. We need to face up to the facts:

1. Sin is an awful thing.
2. Sin is in the world.
3. You and I are sinners. The only remedy for sin is the redemption Christ offered when He shed His blood on the cross and paid the penalty for our sins.
4. You and I merit the judgment of God. Our only escape is to accept the work of Christ for us on Calvary's cross.

Call it an escape mechanism if you want to; but, my friend, when the house is on fire, I'll go out a window or any other way that is an escape. This judgment will inevitably come on those who continually reject Christ. You do not need to be one of them.