Fear God and Give Him Glory

Revelation 14:1-20

Key Verse: 14:7 “He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

When I was about to write this message, I felt like I was lost in the middle of a deep African jungle and struggling to find an exit. In fact, we studied Christ’s message to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22), and the two cycles of God’s judgment based on the Seven Seals (6:1-8:1) and the Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19). Through these two cycles of God’s judgment, one third of people on this earth died. Still, God saved his people, whose names are written in the book of life, in the midst of this horrible judgment. Chapter 12:1-14:20 teach us on the cosmic conflict, or the spiritual warfare between God’s angels and Satan in heaven and on the earth. Last week in chapters 12 &13 we studied the two signs in heaven and the two beasts on the earth. In chapter 14, today’s passage contains three parts: 1. The Lamb and the 144,000, 2. The three angels, and 3. Harvesting the earth and trampling the Wine press. Let’s study what each part means and teaches us today.

1. The Lamb and 144,00 (1-5) Look at verse 1. “***Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads***.” Here the Lamb indicates Jesus, the Lamb who was slain. Mount Zion symbolizes New Jerusalem, the Holy City, the city of victory. We sing the hymn, “*We are marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God!*” With the Lamb there are 144,000, whose foreheads have the name of Father and the name of Jesus. As we studied in chapter 7, this number of people may be the Jewish Christians who were raptured before the Seven Years’ Tribulation as the dispensationalists believe, or the representative Christians who are redeemed through the name of Jesus. Verses 2-5 teaches us who they are in detail. “***And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless***.” These 144,000 did not defile themselves with women and remained virgins. This does not mean that they didn’t marry, but they kept their souls and bodies pure and holy like virgins. The Bible often compares Jesus to the bridegroom and his people to virgins. (Mt 9:14,15, Jn 3:29, 2 Co 11:2, Rev 19:7, 21:2) Paul said to the believers in the Corinth Church, “*I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him*.” (2 Co 11:2) These days, it is not easy to live as a pure virgin for Christ. This is because the beasts, Satan, tempt us every day, everywhere, from everyone. Recently, a prominent theologian and apologist has been convicted of sexual misconduct, and a popular megachurch pastor resigned because of adultery. If we are not spiritually awake and don’t fight the spiritual battle every day, we are easily tempted and deceived by Satan. Peter said, “*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*” (1 Pe 5:8) May God help us keep our purity and spiritual virginity for Christ Jesus as his pure virgins. These 144,000 saints kept their hearts and minds pure and holy because they followed their shepherd Jesus. They did not follow the pattern of this world, but the truth of God. They followed Jesus wherever he went. They kept what Jesus taught. Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*.” (Jn 8:12) They were purchased by the blood of Jesus and joined his glorious resurrection as the firstfruits of resurrection. (1 Co 15:20,23) Satan is a liar. But they didn’t stand by the liar, Satan, but by the truth of God, Jesus. They were blameless before God and before people. As a result, they joined the glorious heavenly worship and praise as their reward in heaven.

2.The Three angels (6-13) In these verses the three angels appear in order to deliver God’s messages. What was the message of the first angel? Look at verses 6-7. “***Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water***.” In general, God’s message and the gospel had been preached and proclaimed by prophets and apostles. But now, most of them were likely raptured into heaven or martyred on earth. So the first angel took their role as the herald of the gospel. What is the gospel? “Fear God, give him glory, and worship him!” They have to fear God because the hour of his judgment has come. It will be too late to repent after God’s judgment starts. Repentance starts with worshiping God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Repentance is to acknowledge God as God and give thanks to him and glorify his name. These days Michael, Hershey, and young leaders study the book of Romans. In Romans 1 Paul clearly exposes the cause of evilness and wickedness from godlessness. Godlessness is the cause of all evilness. Paul says, “*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools*.” (Ro 1:21-22) When people fear God, who will judge them, they repent. When they fear God, they stop sinning. When the president of this country fears God, he follows the truth of God, not the pattern of this world. When people fear God, they value human life. When they love God, they love other people’s lives. These days because of materialism, human value is degenerated along with the glory of God. They call this ‘the Fourth Revolution.’ Robots replace humans. AI’s take away human positions. They believe that they can clone humans with scientific procedures. As some SF movies show, humans are losing their places to stand little by little. Many people see our future negatively because of this change. But we Christians see our future differently and positively because of the second coming of Jesus Christ. We believe God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and we believe in his promise for our salvation in the midst of his divine judgment. We have the irrevocable promise of God, John 3:16, as the mark of salvation. We believe that God will take us into his kingdom because we are washed by the blood of the Lamb and we have the mark of salvation in our foreheads. Amen! The judgment of God is at hand. Therefore, let us fear God, glorify him, and worship him. Let us proclaim in a loud voice like the angel to the people who are afraid of the coming wrath of God. “*Fear God, glorify him, and worship Him only.*” There is no one on this earth that we can trust and depend on in the middle of tribulation but God alone. There is no name on this earth which was given to us for our salvation but the name of Jesus. (Ac 4:12) Amen!

What was the second angel’s message? Verse 8 says, “***A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.***” The second angel proclaimed the fall of Babylon. The fall of Babylon is described in more detail in chapter 17 &18. Babylon is an ancient city in Babylonia, where Iran is today, which represents the city of anti-God idolatry along with earthly glory and splendor. The angel said that Babylon made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries. This means that Babylon caused all nations to become godless and succumb to pagan worship because of their influence, and it became the object of God’s wrath as a result. Idolatry is spiritual adultery. God rebuked the Israelites’ adultery when they turned from God to Egypt and Assyria. These days, people desire and admire the glory of Babylon. They envy Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, and Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla, who became billionaires in short periods of time. They became the role models of success and wealth. But the angel proclaimed the fall of Babylon. “*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great*!” I don’t mean that these promising companies will bankrupt, but all the glory of the world will fall like flowers of the field. Flowers of the field display their beauty and splendor for a while, but they wither and fall as time passes by. The Bible says the truth, “*All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever*.” (Is 40:6-8, 1 Pe 1:24,25)

What was the message of the third angel? The third angel’s message was the message of God’s wrath and his judgment on those who worshiped the beasts and their mark on their foreheads. Look at verses 9-11. “***A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.***” Those who worship the beast and its image and receive its mark on their forehead will drink the wine of God’s fury. The wine of God’s fury is the cup of God’s wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur and have no rest day and night. Their destiny is quite opposite to the destiny of those who die in the Lord. Look at verse 13. “***Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them***.” Those who die in the Lord Jesus will have true rest from their labor. After finishing their life on this earth, they will have eternal rest in heaven, where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. (Rev 21:4) So we deliver our consolation to those who pass away, “Rest In Peace”. But those who are under the wrath of God have no rest or peace after their death. Their second death will take away all their hope for rest and peace. As Rev 9:6 says, “*During those days people will seek death, but will not find it, they will long to die, but death will elude them*.” True peace and real rest do not come from death, but reconciliation with God. Our repentance and forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ bring true peace and real rest for us. Receiving the blood of the Lamb who was slain is the only way to propitiate God. Real rest comes from peace with God. Romans 5:1 says, “*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*…” Verse 12 teaches us that in order to remain faithful to Jesus we need patient endurance. As we studied last week, we need patient endurance and wisdom in this adulterous and perverse generation.

3. Harvesting the Earth and Trampling the Winepress. (14-20) This part shows us the day of God’s final judgment between the living and the dead. God will harvest his chosen people while he will judge the unbelievers. Look at verses 14-16. “***I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.***” Here, a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle is not Jesus, but an agent of harvest. His golden crown is not a royal crown (*diadem*), but a victor’s crown (*stephanos*). Jesus is also above all angels, not one who is commanded by angels. The angel called in a loud voice to the man with the sickle, “*Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe*.” In the Old Testament, harvest is described as the final judgment on God’s enemies, especially Babylon. (Hos 6:11, Joel 3:13, Jer 51:33) Joel 3:13 says, “*Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness*.” Jesus also likens the final judgment to the harvest of the earth (Mt 13:30,39) But here in Revelation, the harvest of the earth is the day of salvation and the day of glory for the elect. As Jesus said in Matthew 13:30, he will send the angel to gather the wheat (his elect) and bring it into his barn (the kingdom of heaven). It is the day of our final victory and the beginning of our eternal rest in heaven. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness to Christ as John said. May God help us to be faithful to the end until the harvest is completed. Amen!

What will happen to those who are not selected? What is the destiny of those who drink the wine of God’s fury? Look at verses 17-20. “***Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia***.” Another angel who had a sharp sickle was ordered to throw his sickle for the harvest of grapes. Here, a cluster of grapes and overripe grapes symbolize the fullness of the term of their wickedness. It means that the time of God’s judgment has come. There is a difference between the two harvests. The first harvest of the elect is stored in the barn of heaven. The second harvest of the cursed is trampled in the winepress outside the city. The cursed will be gathered and thrown into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They will be trampled in the winepress until their blood flows out, rising as high as the horses’ bridles, maybe 5-6 feet high, spreading for two hundred miles wide. How horrible and dreadful the wrath of God is in the day of the final judgment! Imagine people being trampled like grapes in the winepress and their blood flowing out like grape juice! Still, people won’t acknowledge God as God and give thanks to him. They have no fear of God and live like lawless people. They don’t like accept God’s divine judgment saying, “There is no God. I don’t believe the judgment or hell!” They don’t know what they are talking about. They don’t know where they are going. Let us pray for them and lead them to the way of salvation. This is our mission and responsibility to God’s call. Let us read verse 7 again. “He said in a loud voice, “*Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water*.” Amen!