

Home at Last: Sharing The Good News

WITH MIKE TUCKER

The Bible is actually a pretty simple book in the sense that it has a very simple message. It is a storybook telling a story of Paradise created, Paradise lost, and Paradise regained. It is the story of God's great love for us – a love that will not let us go.

God created a perfect planet. There was no sin, no sickness, no crime, no war, and no death. Satan changed all that when he caused Adam and Eve to sin. Their rebellion changed everything. But God loves His creation so much that He couldn't stand the thought of losing us. So He made a plan to reverse the curse of sin and to bring His erring children home.

That plan is called the Gospel – literally, the “good news.” It involves Jesus' death on a cross as payment for our sins. That payment makes eternity available to all as a free gift from the hand of God. One day Jesus will return to take home with Him all those who have accepted the gift.

Satan has done his worst here on planet Earth. If we had time, we would study Revelation 12 and 13. These two chapters give us a bird's eye view of the history of the great conflict between Christ and Satan. Satan is there depicted as a great beast that longs to have the inhabitants of earth turn their worship from the true God to Satan. That is the story behind the history of planet earth. In all of history, Jesus is fighting against Satan for the souls of men.

One day soon that conflict will end. Jesus' death on Calvary sealed Satan's fate, and He will put an end to sin and death and suffering. We already know how the story ends.

But, what about those who have accepted Jesus' gracious offer of salvation? As we await the return of Jesus, does He have anything more for us to do? The answer is, YES! He has given us the task of telling the world that Jesus is coming again. We are to tell the world of how the story ends so that everyone will have the opportunity to go home with Jesus.

In fact, in Revelation 14, we find a series of three messages that we are to share. These messages tell us that the last great issue in the conflict with the Devil will be over worship. We are to call people to return to a worship of the one true God.

Let's look at Revelation 14:

Revelation 14:1-5

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

In verse one, we see the Lamb, which is Jesus, our Sacrifice. He is standing on Mount Zion. In the Old Testament, Mount Zion is seen as the center of God's government on earth, so Jesus is here pictured as the King of this earth.

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Around Jesus we see the 144,000. This is a symbolic number and not the exact number of those who will be saved. It symbolizes the church as an army that is about to enter into a great battle against Satan and his army. Remember that this language is symbolic rather than literal. The 144,000 are fully devoted to God with a faith that is pure. They prepare for battle by worshipping the Lamb. They sing a song of redemption as they worship Jesus, our Redeemer.

Verse four says, "These are the ones who have not been defiled with women." The Bible speaks of rebellion against God as adultery. False churches are symbolized as an impure woman with whom those who turn from the true God commit fornication. Those who stand with God in the last great battle have decided that they will worship the true God alone, and they will remain faithful to Him.

The fact that they are said to be "blameless," does not mean that they have never committed sin. These people have been forgiven.

So, the picture we see in verses one through five is a picture of Jesus, standing in the place of authority over all the earth, gathering His army for the last great battle.

In order to prepare the earth for this last great conflict, Jesus gives a message for His army to carry to the world. This is a message of rescue and warning. It is God's last message before His glorious return. Look at verse 6.

Rev. 14:6-7

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

Remember, three angels will be seen in chapter 14, each with a progressive portion of a three-part warning message to planet earth. We see the first angel here.

The first angel has the "eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth." The gospel is the good news about Jesus' sacrifice for us. The Gospel refers to the plan of salvation – Christ's substitutionary death on Calvary. This is a promise of forgiveness and eternal life for all who, by faith, receive the merits of that death and the promised rescue from this planet at the Second Coming.

That message, the Gospel, begins with knowledge of who we are. We are sinners.

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

As sinners, we deserve the most severe of punishments.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death...

As sinners deserving death, we find that we can do nothing to save ourselves.

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No amount of effort on our part will ever be enough to win our salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

But God loves us too much to allow our sins to separate us from Him. He longed for us to be reconciled to Himself and demonstrated that love through Jesus.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

How does this help us? How do we access the merits of Christ's death for our salvation?

Romans 10:9

...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The promise to save us will be fulfilled in the return of Jesus to this planet to take us to be with Him forever. Jesus is coming again to take His children home. This will be the crowning act of the Gospel!

John 14:1-3

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

This is the Gospel. If you have never received the Gospel, make today the day. Come to Jesus confessing your need of Him. Accept the gift of His sacrifice for your sins, and claim salvation today. It really is that simple!

This is the heart of God's last warning message for the world. It is a message of loving entreaty. He loves us like crazy, He provided for our need, and He asks us to accept what He's done so that He can save us and take us home.

The first angel's message continues in Revelation 14, verse 7.

Revelation 14:7

Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.

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The command is to “Fear God and give Him glory...” and to “Worship Him.” Remember that the last great issue will be the issue of worship. Will you worship the God of heaven, or will you worship that which is counterfeit?

The word “fear” means, “to be struck with amazement, or to reverence, venerate, and treat with deference or reverential obedience.” To fear God denotes a relationship with God and a full surrender to His will. God is not to be taken lightly.

We often think of “gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” and although there is a sense in which this is true of Jesus, we must also remember that He is called “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” Do not attempt to de-claw or defang this Lion! He is every bit a Lion, and He is to be feared. He is to be revered.

We are to give glory to God – to worship Him. The message includes a call to worship the Creator God of the Universe. Again, we come to worship.

I have noticed a pattern in the book of Revelation. Every crisis on earth is answered by a worship service in Heaven. The angels sing, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!” and “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” God’s last warning message to planet earth begins with the Gospel and continues with worship.

If you will live in the assurance of eternal life today and worship God every day, you will be making preparations for the final conflict on planet earth. That’s what we do to prepare for the end of earth’s history.

Those who would endure earth’s last cataclysmic events at the end of time will accept the Gospel, worship the true God, and live in Christ Jesus every day. That is the message of the first angel of Revelation 14.

But this is only the first part of God’s last message to a dying planet – a message of warning and of rescue. His message continues with the second angel in verse 8.

Revelation 14:8

And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.”

In the Old Testament, Babylon is a religious and political power that opposes God and oppressed His people. On the first night of this series, we learned how Babylon overtook Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took the Hebrews captive. The term Babylon now appears symbolically in Revelation for the first time.

Babylon, among other things, means *confusion*. It is Babylon’s goal to confuse the inhabitants of the earth with false doctrine. Babylon is a blasphemous power, exalting itself above God, attempting to take the place of God.

Babylon represents all human attempts to provide the way of salvation. It represents my effort or works as a means of salvation, and it represents any system that attempts to control entrance to Heaven by obedience to that system or their ceremonies.

The text makes it sound as if Babylon has already fallen. This is a common technique of the prophets. So certain are they that the thing they’ve predicted will happen that they speak of it as though it already has occurred. Babylon, the false religious system of the counterfeit trinity, will fall.

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John said that Babylon “made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” Throughout Scripture, rebellion against God is spoken of as adultery or as drunkenness. Sexual sin and drunkenness represent open rebellion against God and His kingdom.

Babylon attempts to spread her licentious rebellion against God to all the nations on earth. This message is simply a warning against going along with Babylon, or human effort, for the false sense of security it may bring.

We are to take a stand for God. God’s end-time people will be characterized by their unwavering loyalty to God and their faithful obedience to God. We are to remain perfectly loyal to God – completely dedicated and obedient to Him.

Babylon is temporary – it will fall. There is no security in Babylon. Isn’t it appealing to think of leaving chaos and confusion behind? Don’t we long, instead, for the proven peace and order of God’s kingdom? It’s a gift.

God is permanent – He will never fall. We are to remain loyal to Him.

There is one more angel with a message for earth. We find that angel’s message beginning in verse 9.

Revelation 14:9-11

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

This message builds on the second angel’s message. It says that those who reject the message of the first angel and choose to worship the beast and to receive his mark will receive God’s wrath. The phrase “beast and his image” comes from chapter 12 and 13. It refers to satanic agencies working, in the days just before the return of Jesus, to draw people away from worshiping the true God.

The angel warns against receiving a mark on the forehead or hand. The word for “mark” implies a stamp, or an imprinted mark. It was used as a technical term for the imperial stamp on commercial documents or the royal impression on Roman coins. It was also the word used for branding animals. It denotes ownership. Those who worship the power receive his mark of ownership.

The mark is given in either the hand or in the forehead. Those who receive the mark in the hand may not actually believe the things the beast stand for – they may actually believe God to be true and right – but for the sake of convenience, they go along with the requirements of the beast. They comply for the sake of economic or political security.

Those who receive the mark in the forehead actually buy into the things the beast teaches. They have been deceived by his false teachings.

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The followers of God receive His seal, or His mark of ownership, in their foreheads. This seal is based on belief. Their minds belong to God. If your mind belongs to God, your body and your behavior naturally follow.

Those who receive the beast's mark are said to:

Revelation 14:10

... drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger...

In the Old Testament, those who receive God's wrath are depicted as drinking wine from the Lord's cup.

In ancient times, wine was often mixed with spices and herbs to increase its intoxicating power. At other times, it was diluted with water in order to reduce its intoxicating ability.

The wine of God's fury is poured out without being diluted. Those who have rejected God's call to worship Him alone will receive God's fury without dilution.

Verse eleven says:

Revelation 14:11

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever...

Many have looked at this passage and drawn the conclusion that hell will burn forever. It is important to note that this same wording is used in the Old Testament when God rained fire and sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude tells us that these two cities experienced "the punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 7) Yet, we know that Sodom and Gomorrah are not burning today.

Our best guess is that the site of Sodom and Gomorrah is now covered by the Dead Sea. At the bottom of that sea are two great tar pits. They are not burning, because they are under water. However, God's rain of fire and sulfur had an eternal effect. These cities were never rebuilt.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied that God would punish Edom night and day. Again, it would burn with an unquenchable fire and its smoke would rise up for ever.

This simply means that the results of the fire would never be reversed. It would not be quenched until its work was done, and its effects would last forever. Neither the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, nor Edom, are still burning today. However, the effect of God's judgment of fire on those places is irreversible.

The same is true of the fires of hell. They will not be quenched until their work is done; thus, they are unquenchable. The fires of hell will be everlasting in the sense that the effects they produce will be everlasting. Sin and sinners will never exist again. The fires of hell will last, not forever, but until their forever work is completed.

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Revelation 14 contains three messages for the inhabitants of the earth during earth's last days. The messages are of rescue and of warning. These messages are to prepare us for the final conflict.

The first message is a message of the Gospel and a call to worship the Creator. This is ultimately a message of rescue. If we would be rescued, we will receive the Gospel and worship God exclusively.

The second message is a warning that Babylon is fallen. Babylon is a man-made religion that promotes man-made methods and systems of salvation. They will fail and Babylon will fall. There is no security there.

And finally, the third message is a warning of the punishment that will befall those who reject the call to worship the true God, and instead, worship the beast. By receiving his mark, they are marking themselves for eternal annihilation. They will be the recipients of God's wrath.

But God does not end his warning messages with this negative note. Instead, He identifies those who bear His seal.

Look at verse 12:

Revelation 14:12

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

God's last day people will be obedient to God. They will keep His commandments, because they have faith in Jesus. These people are the ones who await the return of Jesus.

The rest of the chapter speaks of a harvest. This means that now that the last messages have been delivered, the next event will be the return of Jesus to rescue his people and judge the world.

The messages of the angels of Revelation 14 begin with a proclamation of the Gospel and make clear that the last great issue is the issue of worship. God's wrath is reserved for those who reject the Gospel and worship anything or anyone other than God alone.

Ultimately, the messages of Revelation 14 are messages of God's love for people.

I urge you today to accept the free gift of salvation won for you by Christ's sacrifice. Reserve your worship for God alone, for only He is worthy.

God has promised to preserve you in the last day and to rescue you from a dying planet. His message is always a message of hope for His people. Accept that message today!