

Rev 14:1-20—THE BIG PICTURE

INTRO: As we go through life, it's very easy to lose the forest for the trees. What I mean is, we are so busy—we have our work, we have our kids, we have all kinds of things we have to do or like to do, we are so focused on the day-to-day—that we miss the overall picture of life.

I don't know if you have watched the show "Psych." It's about a guy named Sean who pretends to be a psychic but is really a very observant guy like Sherlock Holmes. He is a consultant to the Santa Barbara police department. In one episode the lead detective Lassiter was in a car chase in the back country along winding roads. Sean happened to be up in a balloon and could call Lassiter and tell him where the guy he was chasing was, because Sean had a balloon's-eye view of the big picture.

We need to remember the big picture so that we can keep our lives in proper perspective. The book of Revelation helps give us the big picture. When we were in **ch.7** I mentioned that the book of Revelation is laid out in a form known as "progressive parallelism." IOW, different sections of the book go back and repeat one another, adding new details, but basically covering the same ground. And that ground is the entire time from Christ's first coming until his second coming.

For example, we have seen that Rev 2-3 deal with issues that affect not just the churches in the 1st century but all the churches in all times and places. **Rev 5-6** begin with Jesus' death on the cross which qualifies him to open the seals of the book of God's plan for the world; **ch.6** then goes through the opening of the seals and ends with God's judgment. **Rev 12** gives us the whole history of the church from beginning to end. We will see the same thing when we get to **Rev 20**. Today we will see the same thing in **Rev 14**.

Rev 14 gives us the big picture of the church, the world, and the judgment. It helps remind us that, however busy we are in this life, there is an end. **Rev 14** also shows us that every human being is a part of one of two mutually opposed camps. It may not look that way from the outside, but which camp we belong to makes a profound difference. It makes a profound difference for us now and for the end—because there are actually two ends. The end for each one of us depends on which camp we are in and what we do now.

O/S: ch.14 does three things: (1) It contrasts the people of the world and the people of God; (2) It announces God's judgment; and (3) It gives us a picture of the carrying out of that judgment. I will read the passage section-by-section and talk about each section as we go.

I. The people of the world and the people of God (14:1-5)

When we were in Rev 7 we talked about how the 144,000 is a Jewish figure of speech for the church, the new, true, spiritual Israel. Most commentators agree that the 144,000 of **Rev 14** is the same group as the 144,000 in **Rev 7**. In today's passage we see again that the 144,000 is symbolic of all believers, not just a select group or a literal 144,000 individuals. In **Rev 14:4** the 144,000 are those who have been "**purchased from among men . . . for God.**" In **Rev 5:9** the Lamb "**purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**" The parallel use of "**purchased for God**" is so close that both groups in **Rev 5** and **Rev 14** undoubtedly are the same. Since Jesus purchased far more than 144,000 individuals, the 144,000 here is obviously a symbolic number signifying all those whom he purchased.

vv.4-5 describe the 144,000 as male virgins. Please don't fall into the trap of interpreting apocalyptic imagery literalistically—as one writer does when he describes the 144,000 as "dedicated Christian youth." Nowhere does the Bible view sexual relations within marriage as sinful. If this image of "144,000 virgins" is taken literally and is *not* a symbolic representation of all believers, then John would be requiring celibacy and being male for the whole church. That, of course, is contrary to everything else in the entire Bible.

Instead, the word "chaste" or "virgins" refers to their spiritual condition. The prophets repeatedly compare idolatry and unfaithfulness to God with sexual immorality. Jesus compared rejection of him to adultery. In our passage, **Rev 14:8** compares consorting with Babylon the great to sexual immorality. On the other hand, as Paul said in **2 Cor 11:2**, *all* Christians are called to be betrothed to Christ as "**a pure virgin.**" So *spiritually* God's people are seen as pure.

These verses are telling us that in Christ, we get a new start. As we discussed in **ch.7**, Christ transforms our status and our citizenship. Why is this so important? It is important because our outward, physical, temporal circumstances are no indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status.

This fact is highlighted by three contrasts between different groups of people we see in chs. 13 and 14. **Rev 13:14** talks about "**those who dwell on the earth.**" That phrase, "**those who dwell on the earth,**" is used several times in Revelation to describe, not people who happen to live on the earth—because everyone lives on the earth—but people who are "of" the world in addition to being "in" the world, people whose heart, mind, and affections are centered in the *world* and not in the Lord. In contrast, **14:1-3** shows the church in heaven with the

Lord. We still are physically on the earth, but our hearts, minds, and affections are centered on the Lord—our real citizenship and ultimate loyalty is not earthly, but in heaven.

The second contrast between groups of people is this: In **Rev 13:16** and **14:9** it says that **“those who dwell on the earth”** are given the **“mark of the beast”** on their **“hand or forehead.”** In contrast, **14:1** says that the 144,000—the church—have *Christ’s* name and the name of the *Father* **“written on their foreheads.”** Having one’s mark or name is a sign of who is the real owner.

Here’s the third contrast: **Rev 13:17** says that if people do *not* have the mark of the beast, **“no one will be able to buy or sell.”** On the other hand, **14:3** talks about how Jesus has **“purchased us from the earth”** and **v.4** says that we have been **“purchased from among men.”** The Greek word for “buy” in **Rev 13:17** is the same as the word translated “purchased” in **14:3-4**. By putting these two uses of the word “buy” or “purchase” so closely together, John is telling us: “Look at who is doing the buying and selling here.”

If Christ has bought us, we may face persecution and the inability to buy and sell on the earth. On the other hand, if we are owned by anyone or anything other than Christ, then we have sold ourselves very cheaply. You may say, “no one owns me: I am the master of my fate and the captain of my soul.” But if that is true it means that *Christ* has not **“purchased you from the earth.”** It means that you are one **“who dwells on the earth.”** Corrie ten Boom once said, **“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.”** We think we own what we buy, but the real question is “Who has bought *us*?”

All of these contrasts are telling us that we are in one of two mutually opposed camps—Christ’s or the world’s—there is no 3rd choice. Ultimately, the issue is: Who or what is most important to us? Is it the world and all the wonderful things this world has to offer—success, money, power, status, family—and these are all good things—or is it Jesus? **13:14** talks about people being “deceived,” and **13:15** and **14:9** talk about people “worshipping” the beast. What the world does is take good things—success, money, power, status, family—and it turns them into ultimate things. IOW, it turns them into the things we put first in our lives; or, to put it another way, it turns them into the things we worship. To use biblical terminology, it turns them into *idols*. We become idolaters.

This can be a very subtle process. That is where, although our outward, physical, temporal circumstances are no indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status, what we *do*—how we *live*—IS the indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status. The reason is that what we do and how we live reveal what our true values and priorities are. For example, **Col 3:5** says that **greed amounts to idolatry**. How do we know if we’re greedy? After all, greed is an inward attitude toward money and things. But what we DO with our money—how much accumulating it possesses us, how much spending it on ourselves consumes us (as opposed to using more of our money to help world missions, build the kingdom, help the poor and needy)—*that* demonstrates what our real god is.

Another good test is how we treat people. In **1 John 4:20** John said **“If someone says ‘I love God’ but hates his brother, he is a liar; because the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”** Again, it’s an outward, visible test that reveals our true inward, spiritual state. How are we doing? God is not fooled by our words. He demands our whole life. Why? Because on the cross, as **v.3** tells us, we have been **“purchased from the earth.”** *Jesus* is now to be primary, not the things of the earth.

Knowing who owns us, knowing whether we are truly citizens of heaven or are merely earth-dwellers, is vitally important. One huge reason that it is so important is because in **14:6-13** the angel announces that this world is terminal. It has an end point. And when that end is reached, the time for God’s judgment has come. So let us consider:

II. The announcement of God’s judgment of the people of the world and the people of God (14:6-13)

In v.6 the angel says that the gospel will be preached to those who live on the earth. That’s the issue. Money is good. Family is good. Education is good. But the issue is *the gospel*, which is all about who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. The gospel is all about our relationship with Jesus. That is what separates those whose primary loyalty is to themselves or the things of this world and those who are citizens of heaven whose primary loyalty is to the Lord. But **v.7** warns us that this world is not all there is. There *will* be judgment.

vv.8-11 tell us what will happen to those who have loved Babylon the great—IOW, the great world economic, political, cultural system. That system will fall, and everyone who was sucked into it will perish eternally.

vv.12-13 contrast that with those who are faithful to Jesus. The issue again is who or what we worship. But our faith is *revealed* or *demonstrated* by how we live. So **v.12** talks about **“the perseverance of the saints”** (the ESV says **“the endurance of the saints”**) and talks about **“their faith in Jesus.”** Then **v.13** goes on to talk about how **“blessed are those who die in the Lord.”** They will find rest. And note: **v.13** ends by saying, **“Their**

deeds follow with them.”

These verses are highlighting that whether or not we have faith in Jesus is the *key* to eternal life or death. Faith in Jesus means truly putting him—his values, his priorities, his nature, his character—first in our lives. But that means we will be tested by trials, temptations, and persecution. Whether we persevere in our faith demonstrates whether Jesus *really* is our Lord.

It’s easy to *say* “Jesus is my Lord” when all is well. But what about when things get bad? What about when we lose a job or lose a child? What about when we are called on to do something immoral or unethical? That’s when the rubber of our faith meets the road of life.

That’s why **v.13** ends by saying **“their deeds follow with them.”** Our deeds—what we do, how we live—are the outward and visible signs that reveal our inward, spiritual faith. That’s also why **v.13** talks about **“those who die in the Lord.”** Their faith persevered all the way to the end. They demonstrated by their whole lives that their faith was real. Because Jesus Christ bought and paid *for* us, that is why he demands our whole lives *from* us.

PROP: Today’s passage has been telling us that our outward, physical, temporal circumstances are no indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status—but how we *live* our lives *is* the indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status.

And the “chickens come home to roost,” so to say, at the end of the chapter which gives us a depiction of:

III. The carrying out of God’s judgment (14:14-20)

In **v.14** we see the **“one like a son of man”**—that can only be Jesus—**“having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.”** The phrase **“one like a son of man”** is directly taken from **Dan 7:13-14**. That passage in Daniel goes on to talk about how the **son of man** has an **everlasting dominion and a kingdom which will not be destroyed**. That is real authority. And that is why anyone who decides not to align himself or herself with Jesus is a fool. All the things in this world cannot compensate if you miss the main thing.

vv.15-20 then describe the reaping of the harvest. This will take place at the end of the age. The scene is very much like the parable of the wheat and the tares in **Matt 13**. In explaining that parable, Jesus describes a two-fold harvest when he returns: the tares (those who do not belong to Christ) and the wheat (those who do belong to Christ) [**READ Matt 13:37-43**].

We see the same two-fold harvest going on here. The gathering of the grapes for the wine press of God in **vv.17-20** clearly refers to the judgment of the ungodly at the end of the age. **vv.19-20** talk about **“the great wine press of the wrath of God.”** That is just actualizing what John had already indicated in **vv.8** and **10**. Those verses said that whoever **“drinks the wine”** of Babylon the great’s immorality **“will drink of the wine of the wrath of God.”**

On the other hand, **vv.15-16** are suggesting a harvest of grain, not a harvest of grapes. I think **vv.15-16** are describing the harvesting of God’s people, not the ungodly, for the following reasons:

- First, the passage describes two separate sickles and two different reapers, which suggests a two-fold harvest.
- Second, just as the references to wine in **Rev 14:8, 10** prefigure the “wine press” of **vv.19-20**, so in **14:4** those whom Christ has purchased are called the **“first fruits.”** That phrase prefigures the grain harvest of **vv.15-16**.
- Third, the grain harvest takes place in only one action: reaping. No threshing or winnowing is said to take place. Therefore, it is not parallel to the grape harvest which is described in multiple actions: gathering (**v.18**), throwing (**v.19**), and treading (**v.20**).
- Fourth, reaping grain in the NT usually is a positive image of bringing people into the kingdom, not an image of judgment on the ungodly.

CONCL: So what can we say? **Rev 14** is telling us that every human being is a member of one of two mutually opposed camps: the earth-dwellers or those whose citizenship is in heaven. It may not look that way from the outside—because our outward, physical, temporal circumstances are no indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status. But which camp we belong to makes a profound difference for us now and for our eternity.

Rev 14 also is telling us that even though our outward, physical, temporal circumstances are no indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status, what we do—how we live—**IS** the indicator of our inward, spiritual, eternal status. How we live reveals what is most important to us. When our lives demonstrate that *Christ* is first in all areas—that *he* is our Lord—our future will be glorious beyond our imagination. See the big picture of life—and live accordingly.