

Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: Voices of Victory: Revelation 14

God Wants Our Best-Christ never asks for anything we cannot do.

But let us not forget that He always does expect and require of each of us the best we can do. The faithfulness Christ wants and approves implies the doing of all our work, our business, our trade, our daily toil, as well as we can. Let no one think that religion does not apply to private life. It applies to the way you do your most common work just as readily as to your praying and keeping of the commandments. Whatever your duty is, you cannot be altogether faithful to God unless you do your best. To slur any task is to do God's work badly; to neglect it is to rob God. The universe is not quite complete without your work well done, however small that work may be.

Careful Thinking- "More than an hour has passed away," said the aunt of James Watt to her nephew, angrily, "and you have not uttered a single word. Do you know what you have been doing all the time? You have been taking off and putting on the lid of the saucepan, and catching the drops of water formed by vapor on a saucer and spoons. It's a shame for you to waste your time so!" But was it time wasted? He was musing over that mighty force of steam, which he was by and by to enlist in the world's service, and which eventually changed the whole commercial life of the world. Time spent in thought that aims at practical usefulness is not wasted, but finely invested. To "rest a while" at Our Lord's invitation is to be recruited and reinvigorated for the higher and best service.

Faith's Commitment to God- "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him" (2 Timothy 1:12).

On the point of faith's committal to God, Russell Sturgis has told a very beautiful story in illustration. A party of visitors at the national mint were told by a workman in the smelting-works that if the hand be dipped in water the ladle of molten metal might pour its contents over the palm without burning it. A gentleman and his wife heard the statement. "Perhaps you would like to try it?" said the workman. The gentleman said, shrinking back, "No, thank you. I prefer to accept your word for it!" Then turning to the lady, he said: "Perhaps, Madame, you would make the experiment." "Certainly," she replied; and suiting the action to the word, she bared her arm and thrust her hand into a bucket of water, and calmly held it out while the metal was poured over it. Turning to the man, the workman quietly said: "You, sir, believed; but your wife trusted.

How long shall we be in learning that in all true faith there is this element of entrustment—venture, committal?

One of the themes that links Revelation 14-16 together is expressed by the word voice, which is used eleven times. In the events recorded, God speaks to His people or to the lost world, or His creatures speak out in praise of the Lord or in warning to the world. As the world moves into the last half of the Tribulation, heaven is not silent.

The Voice of the 144,000 (Rev. 14:1-5) This special group of Jewish men was sealed by God before the seventh seal was opened (Revelation 7), and now they are seen on Mount Zion with the Lord Jesus Christ. Contrast this picture to the one described in Revelation 13: the followers of "the beast" whose

mark is on their foreheads (Revelation 13:16). God always has His faithful people, no matter how wicked the world may become.

The 144,000 are standing with Christ on Mount Zion, but which Mount Zion: the heavenly one (Hebrews 12:22-24) or the earthly one? I personally believe that this is the heavenly Mount Zion, and that the scene anticipates Christ's coronation and the establishment of His kingdom when He returns to earth (Zechariah 14:4). Christ today is enthroned in the heavenly Zion (Psalms 2:6), and we are enthroned with Him (Ephesians 2:6). The scene in Revelation 14 is the assurance to God's people that He cares for His own and finally will take them to glory.

Not only are the 144,000 standing, but they are also singing (Revelation 14:2-3). Because of the special experiences they had during the Tribulation, they have a new song to sing that others cannot share (Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). They are accompanied by heavenly harps and other heavenly voices. It is encouraging to know that one day our sorrows will be transformed into songs!

John also pointed out their separation (Revelation 14:4-5). The 144,000 did not belong to the earth because they had been redeemed out of the earth, They were not earth-dwellers, but citizens of heaven. Believers today do not belong to this very special group but, like them, we have been redeemed and are not part of this world system (see John 17:14-19; Philippians 3:17-21).

The phrase "defiled with women" does not imply that sex within marriage is evil, because it is not (Hebrews 13:4). It merely indicates that these 144,000 Jewish men were unmarried. In the Bible, fornication and adultery are pictures of idolatry (Exodus 34:15; James 4:4). While most of the world bowed down to the image of "the beast," the 144,000 were faithful to the true God. While others Red to get what they needed, the 144, 000 were without guile and blemish.

The term firstfruits means "the very finest." But it also carries the idea of an expected harvest. On the Feast of Firstfruits, the priest waved the sheaf before the Lord as a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him (Leviticus 23:9-14). The 144,000 may be the firstfruits of the harvest yet to come; they may be the nucleus of the coming kingdom. However, it would seem difficult for a heavenly company such as this to establish an earthly kingdom.

The Voices of the Angels (Rev. 14:6-20) At least six different angels are involved in this scene, each with a particular message to proclaim "Judgment is come!" (6-7) During the present age, the angels are not privileged to preach the Gospel. That responsibility has been given to God's people. While the nations will fear "the beast" and give honor to him, this heavenly messenger will summon them to fear and honor God alone. It is a reminder that God is the Creator and He alone deserves worship. This is not the Gospel message as we know it (1 Corinthians 15:1-4); rather, it is a return to the message of Romans 1:18, what theologians call "natural theology."

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. The fear of the Lord, not the fear of "the beast," is the source of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

"Babylon is fallen!" (v. 8) This proclamation anticipates the events of Revelation 18 (Revelation 16:18-19). We will consider it in detail then. "Babylon" is God's name for the world system of "the beast," the

entire economic and political organization by which he rules. "The harlot" (Revelation 17) is the religious system that "the beast" uses to help build his organization. When Antichrist establishes his own religion (Revelation 13:11-15), he will destroy the "harlot"; but it is God who will destroy Babylon.

"Escape God's wrath!" (vv. 9-13) 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.

"Drinking the cup" is sometimes used as an image of judgment (Jeremiah 25:15, 51:7, Revelation 14:8). God's final judgments on mankind will be "vials of wrath" poured out from heaven (Revelation 16). God will not mix mercy with this judgment (Psalms 75:8; Habakkuk 3:2), but will pour out His undiluted indignation on a rebellious world.

Images like "fire and brimstone" (Revelation 14:10) and "smoke" (Revelation 14:11) upset some people. They ask, "How can a God of love actually permit His creatures to suffer eternal torment?" But we must keep in mind that God's love is a holy love, not one based on sentimentality, and therefore He must justly deal with sin. We may not like the word torment, but it is here just the same (Revelation 14:10; 9:5; 11:10; 20:10). **God does not send anybody to hell there action does!**

We must also keep in mind that God has repeatedly warned sinners and given them opportunity to repent. The first angel in this series invited sinners to turn to God, and the second one warned that the whole "Babylonian" system would be destroyed. If people persist in their sins even after God sends judgments and warnings, then they have only themselves to blame.

John intended for his readers to see the contrast between Revelation 14:11 and 13: no rest for the wicked, but eternal rest for the saints (see 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12). Better to reign with Christ forever than with Antichrist for a few short years! Better to endure persecution patiently now than to escape it and suffer throughout eternity!

"The harvest is ripe!" (14-20) The Person pictured here on the white cloud is undoubtedly our Lord Jesus Christ (see Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 1:13). We have had the image of the cup, and now we have the image of the harvest, both of the grain (Revelation 14:14-16) and of the grape (Revelation 14:17-20). Again, this anticipates the final judgment of the world.

While winning lost souls to Christ is sometimes pictured as a harvest (John 4:34-38), this image is also used of God's judgment (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43; Luke 3:8-17). God permits the seeds of iniquity to grow until they are ripe, and then He judges (Genesis 15:16).

The grape harvest is often a picture of judgment (Joel 3:13 , which anticipates the Day of the Lord). In actuality, Scripture portrays three different "vines." Israel was God's vine, planted in the land to bear fruit for God's glory; but the nation failed God and had to be cut down (Psalms 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; see also Matthew 21:33-46). Today, Christ is the Vine and believers are branches in Him (John 15). But the world system is also a vine, "the vine' of the earth" in contrast to Christ, the heavenly Vine; and it is ripening for judgment. The wicked system - Babylon - that intoxicates people and controls them, will one day be cut down and destroyed in "the winepress of the wrath of God."

Some see in this image an anticipation of the "battle of Armageddon," when the armies of the world will gather against Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:1-4; Revelation 16:16). Certainly, John is using hyperbole when he describes a river of blood four feet deep and 200 miles long (see also Isaiah 63:1-6). Today, God is speaking to the world in grace, and men will not listen. One day hence, He must speak in wrath. The bitter cup will be drunk, the harvest of sin reaped, and the vine of the earth cut down and cast into the winepress.