

Revelation 14:1–5

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[0 : 0 0] the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder.

The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb. And in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, it's great to be with you today. And I just have one brief word before we begin with our exposition, and that's to let you know that we really have 13 weeks left in our fiscal year.

And as we approach that time, you might be looking in the bulletin board, we have a long row to hoe. And we are praying at Holy Trinity amongst all our congregations, three combined, that God in his mercy would pour forth from his bounty to supply all the needs of our ongoing ministry. That really would mean \$320,000 over the next 13 weeks. Something seemingly impossible for us, yet we are calling upon the Lord to fulfill that in our midst and through the generosity of his people.

[1 : 5 3] And in a couple of weeks' time, we'll have our own congregational meeting here in the South Congregation to apprise you of the history of Holy Trinity and where the funds have come from and where they need to come from for the next 10 years. But in these intervening weeks, I would ask you first and foremost to pray that the Lord would supply all that is needed for this work here and then I would ask you to pledge yourself to giving to the work that he has given us to do.

So that's out before us as the new year begins. We look forward to seeing how God supplies our needs. Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, as we approach your word, living, we pray that its active force through the power of the Spirit would enter into the marrow of our bone and that our souls would arise, that they would be awakened by you, by the glory that is before us and by the privilege of being your people.

We ask it in your name. Amen. You know, I found in our extended series in Revelation that making apocalyptic accessible is not always easy.

We've arrived at the 14th chapter. In the sermons that have led to this point, I've tried to give you a variety of angles into the literature.

Early on, I thought of it as a movie. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words. And apocalyptic literature seems to flow forth almost like something you're watching, as opposed to the logic of that which you're reading.

[3 : 4 7] I've tried to acquaint you with ancient Near Eastern scrolls that come forth from the caves at Qumran, where there are ancient texts that resemble the ones that we have here.

We've looked at mythological texts that bear greatly upon the literature of Revelation. Today, to make it accessible, I want you to think of it as a dream.

And hopefully that won't put you to sleep. A dream. Some of the greatest works of literature have been penned in the dress of dream.

Take Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, for example, written under the confines of the Bedford jail, in which he spent 12 years. It begins this way.

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down, and in that place to sleep.

[4 : 53] And as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw. That's the way Bunyan brings you in. You look at our own text.

Then I looked, and behold, I saw. It was Leland Ryken who penned that dream, and not narrative, is the model that visionary literature in the Bible follows.

He goes on. Of what do dreams consist? Momentary pictures. Fleeting impressions. Characters and scenes that play their brief part, and then drop out of sight.

Abrupt jumps from one to another. That is indeed what we are finding in the book of Revelation. Think of the very section that we're in now.

We've almost seen three momentary, fleeting, dream-like visions of John in chapter 13. The great red dragon.

[6 : 03] And then, just as it was emerging, the first beast. And then the character of the second beast before us. After our vision today, in verse 6 and following, there will be three more dreams.

In 14.6, then I saw. And in 14.14, then I looked, and we'll see another one. And then in 15.2, and I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire.

Seven brief, fleeting, dream-like visions. Gone. Almost before we come to them.

And so we come to our text. John seems to finally have rolled over in the middle of the night. The nightmarish visions of the dragon and the beast and the second beast are gone from his mind.

And finally, in these verses, before him appears a pleasant dream. The kind of dreams that you have occasionally that you don't want to awaken from.

[7 : 14] Can you believe that we finally come to that moment in Revelation? A text that you want to linger in. You know how it is. You wake up, 6 in the morning, afraid to open your eyes, hopeful to get back into the dream from which you've just emerged.

Only to know that the day's work is before you. We find ourselves in that kind of dream. Two momentary pictures reveal what John sees.

14, 1. Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads.

This vision of the Lamb and the 144. The Lamb standing atop Mount Zion. As early as 2 Samuel 5, when David took the city of Jabez, which becomes Jerusalem, it was already equated there as Zion.

And Zion becomes a synonym for God's dwelling, His city, His place. Mount Zion here, the place where all of God's people are secure.

[8 : 40] And so what he sees flashing before his mind in a moment, in an instant, is the Lamb on top of Mount Zion. The Lamb on Mount Zion.

One thinks of Psalm 2, where the voice of God declared through the prophet, Behold, I will set my King on Mount Zion.

And so for John, the Lamb, Jesus, the Christ, is the rightful ruler over God's city, God's eternal dwelling, the only place where everyone will indeed rest secure.

The anointed one. In his dream, John sees Him in this way. But just as that occurs, the latter half of the verse is the second image which describes what John saw.

And with him, 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. These, of course, are in contrast to the ones we saw in last week's nightmare.

[9 : 53] The sea of humanity, which carried the mark of the beast, which would forever go to God's judgment.

And in contrast to those who are marked with the beast according to the number of man, we find here the number who are sealed unto God, unto salvation.

They first made their appearance where? Back in chapter 7. We saw them weeks ago now. In chapter 7 where it says, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

Verse 4, And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000 sealed from the tribe of the sons of Israel. These then, these 144,000 are a symbol depicting all of God's elect.

All who gather around Him. Indeed, there are hints in the text itself. Verse 5, These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb.

[11 : 14] Now, we've noticed this phenomena in apocalyptic literature all throughout. But some of you have come in late along the way. And you need to understand that in apocalyptic literature, there are symbols put forward depicting the significance of something greater or more complex.

And so it is here. A symbol is something that represents something else by association. Think of the algebraic symbol.

X. I don't know why I would use this illustration. I can't do algebra very well. I remember my brother, when his daughter came to him with my sister-in-law out of the house and she needed help on her math.

And she said, I need some help on my math. And my brother said, Well, sweetie, come on over. I'll help you. That's not a problem. It doesn't matter if mom's not here. She was probably in fourth grade at the time.

So she came over to my very confident brother and laid her homework before him. And he said, Oh, sweetie, this isn't math. Math uses numbers.

[12 : 23] This has letters. This must be English. Thus the home I grew up in. symbols that represent something else.

Something else. Think of it in this way then with the 144,000. They represent, in contrast to those who carry the mark of the beast heading toward God's judgment, the redeemed of God.

The family of God. Brothers and sisters in Christ. The full number. The church.

The saints. Christians. Christians. All Christians. This is what John sees in his divine dream.

This fleeting impression of Jesus standing in the internal city with all his saints surrounding him.

[13 : 31] What did John hear? Three fleeting impressions of sound which describe what John heard in this vision.

Verse 2. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder.

The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. What did he see?

The lamb and with him all of his children in the eternal dwelling. What did he hear? He heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters.

A few years ago I stood on the edge of the Niagara and from that great singular place along a wall of protection you can look to your right and see the waters coming seemingly endlessly through the centuries.

[14 : 45] And you fix yourself right on the precipice and you see it hurling over the side almost jumping beyond the rock and down into this crescendoing thunderous noise of waters.

John hears this sound of many waters and with it like that of a loud thunder. I envision this as we have sometimes in the spring or the summer.

Late at night you're in bed and your eyes are closed but you can tell there's been a lightning strike somewhere in the vicinity perhaps even at a great distance and the rolling rolling Midwestern thunder comes across and you hear it as it approaches you and you hear it as it goes over you and you hear it as it dissipates into the great distance.

This low constant rumbling. That's what he heard. He goes on and says like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

I love Tyndale's first English translation of this text in 1526 where he translated it this way in a very wooden way and in a literal way harpers harping with their harps.

[16 : 29] I love that. What did you hear? I heard harpers harping with their harps. I heard this low underneath bass sound that had depth and strength and glory and dignity and yet I could also liken it to the stringed instruments in this orchestra hall of his mind the bass the cello the rich tones of the viola the compliments of the violin all rising as the lamb was in his city with his people I told you this week was a dream you wouldn't want to awaken from what an image!

what a sight what a sound one glorious scene depicts what he both saw and heard 19.3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth so the sound is now translated into the voice of a choir and it's the choir of God's full people gathered look this is no hundred voice gospel choir as great as that is this is no hundred and seventy voice choir singing

Verde's Requiem under the perfect hand of Mutti how great that would be this is not the manly 1990s football stadium filled voices of those who are undergoing a season of spiritual refreshment as thunderous and as glorious and as moving as that would be this is not the choir that I heard at the age of eleven or twelve when sitting under the outdoor tents in southern california during the Jesus people movement and christian contemporary music being born where those would come to the service ninety minutes ahead of time to be able to get in to be able to sing the praises of our lord as moving as that is to me emblazoned in my memory forever as the closest

I have come in song to heaven this is the choir of God's full family from the beginning of ages to the final trumpet shout from continent to continent country to country tribe people language in all of its fullness gather singing like harpers harping on their harps the content of the song we are not told although I think I have some hint in the text concerning it in 14.3 we are told that it was a new song and that it was sung before the four living creatures and the elders it makes us turn our bibles back doesn't it to chapter 4 where we had the echoes of the four living creatures singing their song in verse 9 casting down their crowns before the throne and singing worthy are you our

Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created that song of the four living creatures gave glory to God for you created all things for creation and that song was eclipsed in chapter 5 with those who are gathering around him even the elders of verse 8 and they sang verse 9 a new song singing worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you have ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God and they shall reign on the earth the elders breaking forth in song not merely before the father for creation but before the lamb for salvation and now in our own chapter we have the full family gathered before the lamb singing again a song which is new which we do not yet know the words to in their very presence it seems to me that this could very well be the song that we sing for glorification the song that we sing when we are all gathered when sin no more is still resting too comfortably in the corners of my being and will what a song while we're not told the content of the song we are certainly told the characteristics of the choir and it's the characteristics of the choir that I think also lend credence to this song being a song of glorification verse four this great word these did you notice it in the reading of the text it is these who have not defiled themselves with women for they are virgins it is these who follow the lamb wherever he goes these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for

[24 : 02] God and the lamb and in their mouth no lie was found for they are blameless! We're not given the content of the song but we're given the character of the choir and they are these who are not defiled again the image here that he uses is of a male choir who have never been with women now that would embody in the sense that what he's talking about here are all those who are heirs of the living God and of course it doesn't just mean that they haven't had sexual intercourse in an ungodly way when it says they haven't defiled themselves with women this is a symbol that says This choir in all of its fullness is without blemish never having given itself to the world is out of them gone from them behind them they are pure what a great image imagine the church of the

Lord Jesus Christ not merely standing in need of grace which we all need but standing in glory blameless righteous complete full man as men should be that's the way he depicts it and the characteristic is they follow the lamb wherever he goes certainly you and I don't do that yet certainly we still go our own way certainly under his grace he pulls us back thank God thank God but here they are following him wherever he goes the shepherd upon the hills and the sheep not needing to be pulled back in this is a picture of glorification this is a picture any rural shepherd would love to see in his own flock this is a picture of the church at its consummation and look at their mouths no lie was found no deception no defilement no division that's the characteristics of the choir what what a dream to have can you see

John's dream in full Jesus the presence of the church the church having been made perfect through his blood now raising their voice singing a song in gratitude to the father for their glorification awake my soul awake my earthly soul and sing of him who died for thee awake have have your way may I begin even in my earthly journey to in some measure call forth from my soul a song that is befitting of my glorified state may my life go forth in these streets and on this neighborhood seeing the wares of the world and passing them by for my soul waits!

for this song! May my lips which so easily now are debased childish deceptive be put away that coming forth from my body in purity and in integrity under the power and control of the spirit I might begin even now to do that for which I was created to stand in the presence of the lamb to sing glory before his throne for indeed he has created all things and saved all his people and glorified them through the blood of the lamb that's a dream worth dreaming that's a life worth living all of our

Sundays here are at best an expression of the heart's desire for the fulfillment of this vision this is why for me I want an increased measure of it not an ungodly over realized eschatology but a godly longing dream for this eschatology to be realized at holy trinity church in the congregation of the south side oh for the day and the dream when all of us together are captured by this that our own voices would rise that our own positioning of our bodies would be such that our frames of frail flesh would be near to one another so that my ears might hear the voice of your praises that

[31 : 34] I might myself be strengthened in my song and in my duty to live as a follower of Christ is this so wrong a thing to consider is this so far a thing to pray for a greater and greater degree of this in our lives and in our worship where this very room I've been praying since we entered it that this very room would in its smallishness be filled in some infinitesimal like picture of his fullness where his family would be crowded to the corners so rich is our desire to praise his name may the affections of our soul long for that day may our lives be strengthened to live without defilement may our lips be committed to living without deceit may our worship be authentic and what an opportunity even this wednesday evening to prepare ourselves as a congregation in mass to transport ourselves all the way downtown to the downtown congregation and to join with our brothers and sisters there even as people are making their way from the west side congregation that we might for ourselves experience in some measure some small measure the fullness of the family of

God in song and at table can you hear it quiet at first oh for a heart to praise my God a heart from sin set free our heavenly father as we stop for a moment this fleeting impressionistic dream of john we come face to face with the longings of our heart and we pray oh lord that you would begin in this year to plow our souls from corner to corner overturning rocks that for too long we have neglected overriding places that for too long we have not let you go and fill our affections with a desire even now to join this choir on that day lord hear our prayer amen