

An Eternal Gospel: A Song to Sing / Early Morning Service

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[0 : 00] And please pray with me, God, give us now an increase of your grace that your word truly could be brought to bear on our life, that we might bear forth the fruit of your spirit in this world in which we live and move and have our being in you.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Well, this morning I hope your imagination was captured by the reading from Revelation chapter 14 as Olaf read that in that we have five more visions following the two from the previous chapter last week.

In that incident we were showed the power of politics and the worship of power. And in the midst of that our attentions were arrested, were alarmed, were gripped by the Lord of grace.

Well, this chapter continues with that theme of worship and today's reading gives us two images of the one who is worshipped and we're given one people who worship the Lord.

So two images of the worshipped one are this, the one of the Lamb and the one of the Son of Man. And the one people are expressed here as saints and servants.

[1 : 29] Now it's easy to get distracted by some of what's going on or maybe even confused by what's going on in this chapter. Of course, one portion of it at the end of chapter 14, we have the grapes of wrath which might call to your mind John Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize winning story.

There's also an image of the Grim Reaper in this which I think in this case doesn't minimize death but does in our culture. But let's take a look at these two images first, the one of the Lamb and the other of the Son of Man.

Important because we can turn worship, I think, into something else other than the one who is sitting on the throne. The previous section warned us about the devil who is hiding, deceiving, and tempting us away from true worship.

So how do you define worship? You're probably thinking about when the church gathers together. But that's not the only time that we worship, as important as an essential that is.

In fact, though, all of life is about worship. And while we must never give up gathering together for worship, we must also never cease daily to enjoy and glorify and praise the Lord.

[2 : 42] So let's look at two questions. One, which is, who do we worship? And then the second one is, who is it that worship, that one whom we worship? So first of all, the Lamb. John continues with the second of seven visions stating this in verse 1.

Then I looked and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb. At the center of worship is the Lamb. How many times do you think John uses this term in the book of Revelation?

Well, I'll give you an answer. 30 times. While no other book in the New Testament even hits double digits. Only in the Old Testament does Numbers, the book of Numbers, exceed it with 62 occurrences.

I occasionally ask people when I visit them in the hospital, what image comes to your mind when you think of God? And most people will say a shepherd. But no one ever says a lamb.

Now, there's nothing wrong with thinking of God as shepherd. But why don't we think of our Lord as lamb? There are some pictures of a lamb. It's best not to hold, I think, when we think of our Lord.

[3 : 55] However, the one from Leviticus and Numbers is the one. Now, lambs were staple livestock and provider of wool for the people of God.

But they were also, as you know, the object of sacrifice. And after the first two visions in chapter 13 of heaven, the true one that were provided here is the one that includes the Lamb of God who's on Mount Zion.

And what do you figure Mount Zion means? Well, turn with me to Isaiah chapter 2. It's really easy to find. It's on page 567.

567. Verse 3, it says.

I hear you churning there. Thank you. Verse 3, it reads beginning this. Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.

[5 : 02] For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. We get this idea from Isaiah, what this Mount Zion, that John, I think, has in mind.

Right at the center of Mount Zion is the Lamb, the one whom we worship. The Lamb sacrificed and conquered, crucified. That's what we learn in chapter 13. The Lamb, though, is the one who teaches the Father's ways and how it is that we worship, who it is that we worship.

And so the purpose of Christian teaching here in Isaiah, expressed in Revelation, is that we walk and we live and we move and have our being in the Lord as we worship him.

So the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he is the one who gives us this truth for life as we worship him. While we are forbidden from creating graven images of God, this picture is instructive as our Lord leads us in worship.

The one who was slaughtered, the one who was crucified, is the one who's at the center of this image, this picture of worship for us. That's the first image.

[6 : 15] The second image, then, is the one of the Son of God. John has this vision of the Lord, and he discloses it in verse 14 when he reads this, when he states this.

He says, Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on a cloud, one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. Not only the picture of the Lamb now, who takes away the sin of the world, but the Son of Man, seated on a cloud with two tools, a crown and a sickle.

I think we get the picture. First is the Son of Man. What is the Son of Man? It is used one-tenth of the time that the Lamb is used in Revelation.

That is to say, the Son of Man is now only used three times. But it was Jesus' favorite term for himself. Thirty times in Matthew and Luke, he uses it, 16 in Mark, and 14 in John.

As the tools of the trade suggest, the Son of Man is the judge, with crown and sickle. The Son of Man doesn't come to render condemnation, though.

[7 : 24] His wrath is real in Revelation 14. Yet the Son of Man judges and discerns and pronounces. And the purpose is to show us mercy and to justify those who are unjust.

The Lord himself is just and good, using the law for the purpose to convict us of our sin and to show us the penalty of sin, which is death, so that he can deliver us from what spoils and separates us from our God.

This is the work of the Son of Man. Christ is for us like no one else, the righteous for the unrighteous. And the vision is of two harvests or reapings here.

The first is by the Son of Man of the justified in verse 16. The second by an angel of those destined for the great winepress of God's wrath in verse 19.

Some are destined for eternal separation from the Lord. The word's not used here, but it means hell. And this is not without word and warning from the Lord's messengers.

[8 : 34] But the wrath of God in chapter 15, verse 1, is that it's finished. John reveals, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

You remember Jesus' words from the cross. It is finished. Not just over, but satisfied. Completed. Conquered is sin and death.

Note that all of this is taking place not in peace and serenity at the end of chapter 15, verses 1 to 4, but the Lord is reigning over plagues and adversity and suffering.

We're all inclined to think that the Son of Man isn't present during our times of trouble, but quite the contrary. We're showed that through worship, we get this picture, this glimpse of God, who in this turmoil is the one who reigns and rules over all creation as the Son of Man.

But who then is it that worships? We get caught up in defining and describing and planning worship. John is really interested in that, but he's also really interested not just in prescribing worship, if at all, but presenting the worshipers.

[9 : 48] Who is it that worships the Lamb and the Son of God? What is the outcome or effect on us by Christ? John presents two outcomes. That of saints and that of servants.

And we are the saints expressed here who are redeemed by our Lord. Did you know that you're saints? Do you believe that? Is that something that kind of grips you?

Now I know this term is reserved in the Roman Catholic tradition for people who meet special criteria. The Biblically, it's a term used for those who are redeemed, and it's plural, not just individual, or not at all individual.

John states in verse 12 this, here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Verses 12 and 13 is the text for that great hymn you must know, for all the saints who from their labors rest.

Who are the saints then? Well, not literally. 144,000 in verse 1. It's more than we can count. In chapter 7, the saints, that 144,000, is actually a number, a multitude that cannot be counted of all the nations.

[11 : 08] But also, in addition to that, the saints are those who are redeemed in verse 3, who are bought at the price of Jesus' death, who in verse 4 are not defiled, and also in verse 4, the ones who follow the Lamb.

And we are blameless in verse 4, or verse 5, but in verse 7, we are the ones who fear God because of His judgment, a just God who judges.

But in verse 12 and 13, we learn more about who those saints are, the ones who endure and persevere and don't give up. And in contrast, we're not the ones who don't rest, but the ones who do rest, in verse 13, and know the peace in the midst of turmoil and tribulation.

But that's not all that we are, saints. We're also servants who praise the Lord. John reveals this in chapter 15, verses 2 and 3. Those who had conquered the beast in its image and in the number of its name, standing.

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God. So we become like Moses who sang this song.

[12 : 22] As we sing this song of the servant of God, we become the servants of God. So this is what it actually means to be a saint also. Saints aren't saved by their works, but we are saved for works of service, making us servants.

And our whole life here on earth, as it is in heaven, is a song that glorifies the Lord. Servants sing, and even when we don't sing, our work becomes a song to the Lord.

And so we are servants singing the song of Moses. But imagine this, as Jesus declares, we're even greater than Moses because of who we've seen.

We'll notice then, in closing of this section, begins on a mountain, but it ends on the sea. It begins with a kind of a bird's eye view in a place which then we end up, which is sometimes kind of confusing, which is the sea.

The life of the saints and servants is anything but easy, I think we're being told. Not many of us find ourselves on the sea with little control. How many of us are actually sailors, literally on the sea, and have experienced that?

[13 : 36] But all of us can imagine how uncontrollable the sea is at times. In fact, some church architecture is likened to that of a boat.

And this portion that you're sitting right now is actually the nave, which comes from naval language. Sometimes, the ceiling is actually pictured like that of the bottom of a boat.

This one almost is, but other churches even more so. As we find ourselves actually in worship, not in upside-down worship, though the world in which we live sometimes is actually inverted like that.

But we're brought actually into the presence of the Lord as we worship the one who is the Lamb and the Son of Man. As we grow in our knowledge of what it means to actually be the saints of the Lord and His servants.

To then declare with Moses these great words which were read earlier and I finish with, Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations.

[14 : 35] Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

Speak to you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.