

The Grapes of Wrath

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[0 : 00] It's such a joy to worship with you all each morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sean. I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Kings Church, and it's my privilege to preach God's word to you this morning.

Please turn with me to Revelation chapter 14, verses 6 to 20. We've been in this passage. We've been in the book of Revelation since the winter.

And we are in chapter 14, verses 6 to 20. I have the grave task this morning of preaching the passage that Pastor and Theologian D.A. Carson calls the most horrific passage on hell in the whole Bible.

But God's word includes sobering passages like this because God knows that we need to sober up from the wine of sin. Because God knows that we need a healthy dose of eternal reality check. Though hell might be an inconvenient truth that we might wish to ignore, and Jesus spoke of it repeatedly throughout the Gospels. And it's dangerous for us to ignore. So in Revelation chapter 14, verses 6 to 20, we pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.

[1 : 08] Heavenly Father, give me grace this morning to preach the horrors of hell that conveys your love and justice, your worthiness and glory and your mercy.

As we humble ourselves before your word, please, God, make us sober-minded people with their eyes set on eternity so that we might live in this life in a manner that is pleasing to you.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand and join us for the reading of God's word from Revelation chapter 14, 6 to 20.

Amen. Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead with an eternal gospel proclaimed to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

And he said with a loud voice, Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come and worship Him who made heaven and earth the sea and the springs of wire.

[3 : 02] Another angel, a second, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, pour full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur 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, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image and whoever receives the mark of its name.

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write this, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them. then I looked, and behold, a white cloud and seated on the cloud one like a son of man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.

[4 : 36] And another angel came out of the temple calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.

So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.

And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.

So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1600 stadia.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. 61 million people are estimated to have died last year in 2023.

[5 : 53] That's approximately 5 million deaths monthly, 167, 123 deaths daily, and 6,963 deaths hourly, 116 deaths every minute, and two deaths every second.

just now, two people went to either heaven or hell. And two more. And two more.

Yesterday, over 167,000 people went to either heaven or hell. We often forget that death is coming for us all.

We lather on anti-aging creams to hide the appearance of aging. I'm not saying that's wrong for you to do. I'm just saying that's what we tend to do.

We run on treadmills and ellipticals and eat fish oils and turmeric to improve our health and extend our lives. Our society seeks, at all costs, to alleviate pain and avoid death for as long as possible because ultimately he doesn't want to reckon with death and what lies after.

[7 : 15] But it would be spiritually helpful for us to think about the inevitability of death and the eternal destinies of heaven and hell more often. Moses' prayer is recorded in Psalm 90.

For all our days pass away under your wrath. we bring our ears to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. By confronting us with the eternal and inescapable realities of heaven and hell, Revelation 14, 6 to 20 seeks to give us that heart of wisdom.

God, the inevitable judgment of God should make all of us fear him and give him glory. I'm going to first talk about the contrast of the call to repentance and a call for endurance in verses 6 to 13 and I'll talk about the harvest of grain and the harvest of grapes in verses 14 to 20.

It says in verse 6, Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

[8 : 32] This seems auspicious at first. This angel has an eternal gospel to proclaim to all those people who dwell on the earth. And the gospel means good news as we talk about every week.

It's what we rehearse during worship every Sunday, the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that he died on the cross to atone for our sins and to appease the wrath of God and that Jesus was raised from the dead so that we might have everlasting life and fellowship with him.

That's the good news. However, there are clues here in this passage that suggest that the emphasis of the angel's pronouncement is not actually salvation but judgment.

This angel in chapter 14 is flying directly overhead and proclaims the eternal gospel in a loud voice and begins a threefold announcement of divine judgment. And these details are parallel in chapter 8 verse 13 of the evil that flies directly overhead and proclaims in a loud voice the threefold woes of divine judgment.

They both have as their addressees those who dwell on the earth. And those who dwell on the earth is John's way, the way he characteristically refers to those who do not have faith in God, those who refuse to repent of their sins and therefore are the object of the wrath and judgment of God.

[9 : 56] That's in contrast with those who dwell in heaven as Revelation 13, 6 and 12, 12 talk about which is us, God's people, those who believe in Christ. Even though we might live here presently on earth, even now our dwelling place, our citizenship, and our home is in heaven.

The focus on the judgment of God is confirmed by verse 7. It says, And he said with a loud voice, Fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.

This raises the question, how is the announcement of the judgment of God the eternal gospel? That's because there is no gospel without the judgment of God.

For example, when Isaiah 60 prophesies of the good news of Jesus Christ that's to come, it announces good news and the mercy of God to the people of God, how God will deliver them and build them up.

But in that same exact context, it also speaks of the fact that the nations and the kingdoms that opposed God and oppressed God's people will perish and be utterly laid waste.

[11 : 09] The good news of deliverance on the one hand for God's people necessarily includes on the other hand bad news of judgment for God's enemies. The gospel is often summarized with John 3.16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

But God's judgment is also implied by the gospel because those who reject the gospel will be punished. John 3.16 is followed by verses 18-19.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God. And this is the judgment.

The light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. The eternal gospel is the message of God's deliverance and rescue but the corollary is that those who refuse God's rescue and deliverance will surely perish and face God's eternal judgment.

We frequently observe this pattern in scripture. Romans 1.16 I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation for those who believe.

[12 : 34] And then it's followed immediately by for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. 2 Corinthians 2.14-16 says the fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus Christ is a fragrance from life to life for those who are being saved.

But that same fragrance of Christ is the fragrance from death to death among those who are perishing. This eternal gospel of verse 6 is addressed to those who are perishing. to those who dwell on the earth. And it is therefore a fragrance from death to death. That's why it's described as an eternal gospel which matches verse 11 where it says that the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.

That's literally eternity of eternities. It's the same word as the eternal gospel. The gospel is eternal because its truth abides forever and because what we do with that truth determines our eternal destinies.

Not all truths are made equal. Not all truths are equally relevant or equally important at all times. I was looking for the most random fact I could find.

[13 : 53] For example, the 1896 Summer Olympics held in Athens, Greece was the first international Olympic Games held in modern history. Fascinating but useless.

It's completely irrelevant now. But the eternal gospel is eternally relevant and it is eternally important which is all the more reason why we must proclaim it to all the nations.

and this gospel is also universal. It does not apply only to a part of the world only to a particular people. No, he says it applies to every nation and tribe and language and people which is why we must go to all the nations.

And the angel says in a loud voice in verse 7 Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come and worship Him who made heaven and earth the sea and the springs of water.

The appropriate response to this eternal gospel and the impending judgment of God is for us to fear God and give Him glory. If we know that God is the creator who made the heaven and earth and the sea and the springs of water if we know that God is the universal judge who punish evil doers then we ought to fear God and give Him glory.

[15 : 19] The fear of God is a prominent theme in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 9.10 says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

So to fear God is to know Him rightly. Similarly, Proverbs 15.33 says the fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom and humility comes before honor.

So the fear of the Lord is not just being terrified of Him but knowing Him rightly and relating to Him with humility and submission.

In other words, if we know how big God really is and how small we really are, if we know how holy God really is and how sinful we really are, then that produces fear, reverence, awe, worship.

That's the fear of the Lord. In Revelation 16.9 we see unbelievers who despite the warnings and the previews of God's judgment refuse to repent and give Him glory.

[16 : 33] But as we saw in Revelation 11.13 when God's final judgment comes, even the most stubborn unbelievers will have no choice but to be terrified, quote, terrified and give glory to the God

of heaven.

That's what it says in Revelation 11.13. The day is surely coming when every knee will bow before Jesus and every tongue will confess the name of Jesus and worship Him to the glory of God the Father.

That day is coming. And we then really only have two choices. We can fear God and give Him glory now voluntarily or we will be terrified of Him and give Him glory involuntarily in the future.

we can worship God joyfully now or we can worship God begrudgingly in the future. One way or the other God will get the glory that is due to Him.

But if we wait until God's final judgment we will have lost our chance to repent and we will not escape the fire's path. So this is a call for repentance for all those who have not yet put their trust in Jesus for salvation.

[17:47] Fear God. Please I plead with you fear God and give Him glory. That is your salvation.

Do it while you still have time. After this angelic pronouncement of the hour of judgment the second angel follows in verse 8 saying fallen, fallen is Babylon the great she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.

This is a preview of the more lengthy section on Babylon and the fall of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18. Prophet Isaiah prophesied of the fall of Babylon in the 8th century BC using these exact words in Isaiah 21.9 fallen, fallen is Babylon.

That expression Babylon the great comes from Daniel 4.30 where the king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar at the time boasts is not this Babylon the great which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty.

But that boasting is short lived because Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in an immediate sense in 539 BC when the Persian Empire led by King Cyrus attacks and conquers Babylon.

[19:05] But John appropriates that prophecy Isaiah's prophecy and tells us that it will be fulfilled it was already fulfilled in an immediate sense but it will be fulfilled in an ultimate sense at the end of the age.

Because ancient Babylon sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple of God and led people of Judah into captivity and exile and because King Nebuchadnezzar tried to assimilate the Jewish religion and culture into Babylonian culture and religion the name Babylon became synonymous with worldly powers and influences that persecuted God's people and seduced them into compromise.

That's what Babylon represents. In the first century Babylon was the code name for Rome because in the same way the Babylonian Empire destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC so the Roman Empire destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD.

But Babylon the Great is not primarily a reference to ancient Babylon or even to ancient Rome or even to modern day Iraq which is where Babylon geographically used to be. But as John says here in Revelation 14 because the Babylon the ultimate Babylon will fall only at the end of the age.

So it represents the center of the sinful world's cultural influence and economic power. in chapter 17 Babylon is called the great prostitute who sits on the beast of chapter 13 which has seven heads and ten homes.

[20:39] So Babylon and the beast are intimately related. They're not identical but they're related. The beast represented the worldly rulers and governments and kingdoms that oppose God and oppress God's people and Babylon is carried by this beast.

meaning Babylon's sinful influence and wealth are given prominence and propagated by the beast. Babylon the great is described in 17.5 as the mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations. She makes as we see in our chapter chapter 14 verse 8 she makes all the nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality and in doing so she is a fertile prostitute who becomes the mother of prostitutes and of all of earth's abominations.

Babylon's wine of the passion of her sexual immorality is explained later in chapter 18 verse 3. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.

So this sexual immorality I'm sure there's literal sexual immorality involved as well but here it's also a metaphor in part for the commerce and wealth that's enabled by the beast the worldly kingdoms.

[22 : 06] And it's also a metaphor for idolatry because remember from chapter 13 verse 17 no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark of the beast that is the name of the beast or the number of its name unless you pledge allegiance to these worldly sinful powers to the beast you cannot buy and sell and prosper so that these people who grow rich through their intercourse with Babylon the prostitute are guilty of idolatry.

Babylon has made them drunk with the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality and seduced them with prosperity and pleasure into committing spiritual adultery against the Lord himself. To enjoy the riches and the pleasures of Babylon the prostitute people have succumbed to the powers of the beast. In what ways are the pleasures and the riches of this world drawing you into the grip of the beast?

This is why the third angel announces in verses 9 to 10 if anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand he also will drink the wine of God's wrath poured full strength into the cup of his anger.

Here the wine of God's wrath is contrasted with the wine of the passion of the Babylon sexual immorality. If you are using the English standard version of the Bible you could look there in that verse and you probably have a footnote next to the word passion in verse 8.

[23 : 42] That tells you if you go down and look at the footnote that the word translated passion can also be translated wrath. In fact outside of Revelation 14 8 and 18 3 where it's translated the passion of the wine of the passion of Babylon sexual immorality every single time that word is translated as wrath anger or fearing.

And I think that's a better translation. It's the exact same Greek word that's translated wrath in verse 10 the wine of God's wrath. So then the wine of the wrath of Babylon sexual immorality is being contrasted with the wine of God's wrath.

What is the wine of the wrath of Babylon sexual immorality? We're told exactly what's in that cup in Revelation 17 6. It says that the Babylon prostitute is drunk with the blood of the saints.

The blood of the martyrs of Jesus. So her wine is the blood of God's people. She's drunk on violence against the people of God which is why it is fitting to describe as the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality.

Babylon and those who intercourse with her rail against the people of God and they enrich themselves at the expense of the people of God. They get drunk with the blood of the people of God and their intoxication leads to even further idolatry and adultery.

[25 : 16] But divine retribution is coming. Verse 10 tells us that those who worship the beast and took on its mark, those who intercourse with Babylon will drink the wine of God's wrath, pour full strength into the cup of his anger.

In the ancient world, most people diluted wine, usually with two to three parts water and one part wine, they dilute it, so it was much weaker than the wine that's distilled nowadays for people to drink.

And so that's what it's referring to here. Babylon's wine of wrath is diluted wine. No matter how potent it seems, it's only diluted wine.

But the wine of God's wrath is undiluted poured full strength. The Lord spoke of this wrath in Isaiah 51 17, stand up O Jerusalem, O you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord, the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.

It's a terrifying picture. Imagine being forced to down liquor that you cannot handle, that will make you drunk forever, leaving you staggering and completely helpless.

[26 : 48] There's no sobering up from the wine of God's wrath, death. Because it's the punishment that lasts for you. We see this in the rest of verse 10, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the man.

Can't get clearer than this. When sinners reject Jesus Christ and die, they do not simply cease to exist. They go to hell, where they are tormented with fire and sulfur.

This is the place that is called later in Revelation 19, 20, and 20, 10, and 21, 8, as the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. fire. Now, I do think these are metaphorical, but that does not make it less real or less painful.

To illustrate, God is described in Scripture as a consuming fire. He is the one who dwells in unapproachable light, it says in verse 26, 16. 1 John 1, 5 says that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

So God is light, he is fire, he dwells in unapproachable light. In contrast, Jesus describes hell as the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[28 : 20] This is Matthew 25, 30. The expression gnashing of teeth refers to your teeth chattering because it's so cold. But at the same time, hell is also called a place of eternal fire.

Obviously, both of those two things cannot literally coexist because if there's fire, there's warmth and there's light, you're burning. You cannot be burning and chattering and cold at the same time. You cannot be in outer darkness and be in eternal fire at the same time.

I think these are metaphorical. But these metaphors reveal the true nature of hell. Christian philosopher Henry Stobb explains it this way, hell in the Bible is very hot or very cold, depending on whether the sinner is perceived as a rebel or an alien.

hell is made by those who climb the holy mountain and try to unseat the holy one who are blazed with glory, dwells in the light unapproachable. Those who mount an attack on God and cross the barrier of this exclusive divinity die like mods in the flame of him who will not and cannot be displaced.

And hell is made by those who, turning their backs on God, flee the light and move toward the eternal blackness that marks God's absence. hell, then, is unarrested sin's natural and programmatic end.

[29 : 42] Sin is either rebellion or flight, and when persisted in, leads either to the fiery furnace or to the cold and desolate night. Hell is, then, either a place of outer darkness and extreme cold in the absence of the light of God, or the place that burns with fire and sulfur with the wrathful presence of God, who is a consuming fire.

John, here in Revelation 14, is highlighting the latter. The one who does not put his faith in Jesus Christ will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

This is why it is not fully accurate to describe hell only as the absence of God. It is true in a sense that hell is the absence of God.

2 Thessalonians 1.9 says that those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

This conveys God's judgment, God turning his face from them. Instead of making his face shine upon them, instead of lifting up his gracious countenance toward them, he turns his face from them in judgment.

[31 : 08] That's God's absence. But in another sense, God cannot be fully absent from hell since God is omnipresent, present everywhere. As Psalm 139, 7-8 says, Where shall I go from your spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. Revelation 14-10 teaches us clearly that the wicked will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels, in the presence of the Lamb.

This is not a contradiction. God is present in hell, but not with his gracious countenance, instead with his wrathful countenance. As Pastor John Piper puts it, with, an everlasting frown of disapproving justice.

The fact that fire and sulfur are metaphorical does not decrease the horrors of hell. If you are a Christian, then you know God in his boundless mercy and compassion.

But can you imagine facing God's eternal wrath injustice? Can you imagine spending eternity before God's disapproving frown of justice?

[32 : 39] Can you imagine the eternal torments of hell? This is why we Christians should never use swear words like hell or damn.

We should never use any swear word, period. Ephesians 5, 4 commands us categorically that there be no filthiness, no foolish talk or crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Swear words are without exception, out of place, and unseemly, because they profane what is sacred, or make light of what is grave. words are never just words.

The words that we use shape our attitudes and actions toward the things that those words represent. Do you think that people who casually throw around words like hell or damn will take hell and damnation seriously?

do you speak casually or jokingly about the Holocaust? Surely not.

[33 : 57] Why then would you speak casually of the place of eternal torment? Where the undiluted wrath of God is poured out in full strength.

look at verse 11. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day or night.

These worshippers of the beast and its image and whoever receives the mark of its name. In James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, there's a preacher who describes hell vividly in this manner.

A holy saint was once vouchsafed the vision of hell. It seemed to him that he stood in the midst of a great hole, dark and silent, save for the ticking of a great clock.

The ticking went on unceasingly. And it seemed to this saint that the sound of the ticking was the ceaseless repetition of the words, ever, never, ever, never, ever to be in hell, never to be in heaven, ever to be shut off from the presence of God, never to enjoy the beautiful vision, ever to be eaten with flames, gnawed by vermin, goaded with burning spikes, never to be freed from those pains, ever to have the conscience upbraid one, the memory enraged, the mind filled with darkness and despair, never to escape, ever to cry out of the abyss of fire to God for an instant, a single instant of respite from such awful agony, never to receive, even for an instant, God's pardon, ever to suffer, never to enjoy, ever to be damned, never to be saved, ever, never, ever, never.

[36 : 11] This is the meaning of verse 11. Their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day or night. You might ask, how can sins committed in this short temporal life warrant eternal punishment?

How is that just? I have some of my kids' beautiful drawings hanging up in my bedroom and if one of you were to come to my house and then go into my room and then scribble all over their artwork, it will probably leave my kids crying and I will be very upset with you.

but I'm never going to sue you because I'm not going to get anything because those paintings are not worth that much money yet.

But in Italy, if you deface monuments or artworks, even for the sake of protests, you have to pay fines up to \$64,000. Why?

Because that artwork has significance. It has cultural cachet and value. Or think of it this way, if a man swats a fly, nobody will bat an eye.

[37 : 45] But if a man were to slap his wife, he can go to jail. Why?

Because a human being is way more valuable than a fly. The gravity of the offense and the commensurate punishment depend not only on the nature of the act itself, but on the dignity and worth of the object of that offense.

How much more than does this principle apply when it comes to God? God is infinitely worthy of our faith and obedience and worship for that reason to sin against God merits infinite punishment.

That's why we say in one of our confessions of sins that we use on Sundays, let us never forget that we have an eternal duty to love, honor, and obey you, that you are infinitely worthy of such, that if we fail to glorify you, we are guilty of infinite evil that merits infinite punishment, for sin is the violation of an infinite obligation.

Our sins deserve eternal punishment, not primarily because of what we have done, but because of whom against whom we have sinned.

[39 : 21] Sin is an act of treason against the kingship of God. Sin is an act of adultery that betrays the everlasting love of God, and sin against an eternal God merits eternal punishment.

That's why they have no rest day or night. And the restlessness of the worshippers of the beast is contrasted with the rest that is prepared for the worshippers of the lamb in verse 13.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them. If we are truly in Christ, if we are Christians, then it's a blessing for us to die.

Do you believe that? Paul says it's better for him to die and to depart to be with Christ in *Philippians* 1.23, because there we will have finally rest from our labors.

The Greek word translated labors here is a word that conveys a sense of toil and hardship and trouble and difficulty. That's what our life on earth is like, isn't it?

[40 : 39] Here we are beset by our own sinful flesh. Here we are assailed by the sinful world. Here we are tormented and pursued by the devil. But this verse assures us that though we might be

persecuted and killed in this life, we will have life forevermore with God in heaven.

Though we might be poor and disenfranchised here on earth, that soon heavenly inheritance will be ours. 19th century British pastor Charles Spurgeon describes dying and going to heaven in this beautiful way.

To come to thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labor, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes.

This should motivate us to endure with faith and obedience. Verse 12 says, here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

The certainty of hell should make us fear God and give him glory. And the certainty of heaven should make us keep God's commandments and our faith in Jesus. Christian author Randy Alcorn says this in his book entitled Heaven.

[42 : 08] Earth is an in-between world touched by both heaven and hell. earth leads directly into heaven or directly into hell, affording a choice between the two.

The best of life on earth is a glimpse of heaven. The worst of life is a glimpse of hell. For Christians, this present life is the closest they will come to hell.

For unbelievers, it is the closest they will come to hell. What is earth to you? where are you in your relation to Christ?

Is earth the closest you'll get to heaven? Or is this the closest you'll get to hell? The scene shifts in verses 14 to 20 to the contrast of the harvest of grain and the harvest of grapes.

The main point is the same. The inevitable judgment of God should make all of us fear him and give him glory. It says in verses 14 to 16, And I looked as behold a white cloud and seated on the cloud one like a son of man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.

[43 : 21] And another angel came out of the temple calling with a loud voice to him who said on the cloud, Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe. So he sat on the cloud, swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

This figure here is set apart from the angels, the number of angels in the rest of this chapter, because he is described as the one like a son of man.

He is seated on the cloud and wears a golden crown on his head, indicating his rule, his kingship.

This is none other than Jesus himself, Christ the king.

John has already referred to Jesus as the one like a son of man in Revelation 1.13, and he is alluding in both of those passages to Daniel 7.13-14, where in prophet Daniel's vision, one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven and approaches the engine of days and receives from him everlasting dominion and glory and kingdom, so that all peoples and nations and languages serve him and worship him.

Jesus applied the prophetic vision of Daniel 7 to himself when he was on trial with the high priest in Mark 14.62, the high priest asked Jesus, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed?

[44 : 41] And then Jesus replied, I am. And you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

Some people object that Jesus could not possibly, this could not possibly be Jesus because he receives a command from an angel in verse 15. But this poses no problem because the angel is simply a messenger.

The word angel literally means messenger. And notice that this angel comes out of the temple, meaning the temple in heaven, the dwelling place of God himself, God the Father.

The angel in verse 15 is simply relaying the command of the Father, put in your sickle and reap for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe. Jesus taught us in Mark 13, 32, concerning that day or the hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

So it is natural for Jesus to receive the announcement of that hour which only the Father knows from the Father's messenger. I think this first harvest by Jesus represents the harvest of first fruits that we saw last week in verses 1 to 5.

[46 : 01] There I argued that the 144,000, the elect people of God, it represents those who are sealed with the name of the Lamb, and it represents all of God's people, those who have, as verse 4 says, have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb.

And I mentioned last week that first fruits is an allusion to the Old Testament feast of the harvest, where the first fruits of your labor, like wheat, first fruits that come up as grain, that are ready for the

harvest, are taken and dedicated to God as a wave offering.

And in this sense, this idea of first fruits comes to represent the portion of the harvest that belongs specially to God, that is set aside and set apart for God. That's the idea that's behind James 1.18 when it says, concerning all of God's people, of his own will, God brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

This first harvest is the harvest of first fruits, this harvest that Jesus brings about. It's the harvest of redemption. And the second harvest, which we'll see shortly, is the harvest of judgment.

The two-stage and time harvest is seen in Matthew 3.12, where John the Baptist says, concerning Jesus, that a winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

[47 : 31] The wheat that will be gathered into the barn is contrasted with the chaff that will be burned with fire. And we see this same two-stage harvest in the parable that Jesus tells in Matthew 13, where the kingdom of heaven is to compare to a field that is sown with both wheat and weeds.

And the master of the field says, let them grow together. Don't try to separate them out now. Let the weeds and the wheat grow together. And then, when the harvest comes, the weeds are burned, and the wheat are gathered.

The second harvest, in verses 17 to 20, is different. It's from the first harvest in a number of ways. First, it's harvested by the angel and not by Christ himself.

And second, in verse 18, this angel came out from the altar. The angel who announces this, the angel who has authority over the fire. Fire from the altar. This is a reference to Revelation 8, 1 to 5, where the prayers of the saints, crying out to God to avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth, rose as incense before God at the altar before the throne.

And in answer to those prayers, God commanded an angel who then took the fire from that altar and cast it upon the earth, upon those who dwell on the earth, which brought forth the judgments of God in the trumpets, seven trumpets.

[48 : 48] So this is, this is the angel that announces the second harvest is one who has authority over the fire from the altar. In other words, this is a harvest of judgment.

While the first harvest was a harvest of grains, possibly wheat, second harvest is a harvest of grapes. Notice verse 15 says the harvest of the earth.

And the Greek word that is used to say that the harvest of the earth was fully ripe is a word that literally means to dry up or shrivel up. And that's the word that's used in Greek to describe when a harvest of grains is ready.

Because a grain harvest is not ready until the wheat turns dry. I don't know much about farming, so I did this up online, and some random farm online claims that the wheat grain has to have less than 14.5% of moisture left in order for it to be stored safely.

I don't know how he measures that. In contrast, verse 18 says, put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe. The Greek word for ripe here is a different word than the one used in verse 15.

[49 : 59] This word here means to bloom, to come to the best time of its life. So even here, there is a stark contrast. The people of God, when harvest time comes on earth, are like wheat that's withered up and shriveled up, and that's why they're ready for the harvest.

Because they're oppressed and persecuted on earth. But the enemies of God, the grapes, are plump and juicy, full of and drunk with the blood of the saints.

But when the sickle is swung, their fates are dramatically reversed. The wheat are gathered into the barn as the first fruits for God.

And the grapes are trodden outside the city. In this life, the people of God face the wrath of the dragon, 1212, and the wrath of Babylon, 148.

But in eternity, it's the enemies of God who will face the wrath of God himself. It says in verses 19 to 20, So the angel swung his circle across the earth and gathered the great harvest of the earth and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

[51 : 11] And the wine press was trodden outside the city and blood flowed from the wine press as high as a horse's bridle for 1600 stadia. It's a gruesome image.

It's great that we have it in words and not in pictures. It's a gruesome image of people like grapes being thrown into a wine press. and then crushed, trembled all over so that the juice squeezes out of the wine press like blood.

And the blood that spills out of the wine press is such that it stretches for 1600 stadia, 184 miles, and mounts up to the height of a horse's bridle, which is worn on the horse's head, so it's about six feet tall.

Imagine. It's a tsunami of blood that pours forth from this wine press of God's wrath. Number 1600 is likely symbolic like most other numbers in Revelation.

It can be four times four times a hundred, similar to twelve times twelve times a thousand to make up the 144,000 people of God. Number four throughout Revelation symbolizes universality.

[52 : 29] The earth's four corners, the four winds of the earth, the four-fold formula of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. And so 1600 stadia represents the comprehensive universality of God's judgment.

No one escapes it. Even in this, there is poetic justice because if you remember from Revelation 11, 2, they are the holy city which represents the people of God.

It's said we're trampled by the unbelieving nations. But here in 1420, it's the unbelieving nations that are trodden outside the sea. The trampled and tread are the exact same Greek words.

I think we could use some good news after this. Hebrews 13, 11-12 notes that Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin.

outside the camp, outside the city, where the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement were to be burned.

[53 : 38] Jesus went where sinners deserve to go to be punished so that he could die for our sins as a sacrifice. David Wells, a Christian theologian, puts it this way in his book, *The Search for Salvation*.

Man is alienated from God by sin. And God is alienated from man by wrath. It is the substitutionary death of Christ, it is in the substitutionary death of Christ, that sin is overcome and wrath averted. So that God can look on man without displeasure, and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated, and God is propitiated.

that's the good news of the eternal gospel. If you refuse to believe in Jesus and fail to accept Christ's sacrifice for sin outside the city, then you are still in your sins, and you are still under the wrath of God, and for this reason you yourself will be excluded from the beloved city and suffer eternal torment outside the city.

sin. But if, if you turn from your sin in repentance, and you turn toward Jesus in faith, if you fear God and give Him glory, your sins will be paid for, and you will be destined to bear the eternal wrath of God and His frowning countenance no more.

[55 : 10] Do you know, beloved saints of God, that when God looks at you, He does not see a failure and a disappointment or an incorrigible mess, but that He sees a beloved child?

Do you know that there's not a drop of the wine of God's wrath left for you to drink?

Because Jesus bore that wrath on our behalf on the cross? Remember, just before He goes to the cross, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He's agonizing and pouring His heart before His Father, He says, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. What is that cup? You guessed it. That's the cup that we see here.

That's the cup of the wine of God's wrath. The cup of staggering. The cup of eternal torment. Cup of alienation and separation from God.

[56 : 23] That eternal cup. Jesus takes it for us on the cross and He drinks it to the very last drop. Down to the trace.

so there is not a drop of wrath left for us. Oh, that should give us great confidence.

My Christian brothers and sisters, should give us great confidence for both life and death. We close with this hymn.

It was written in the 17th century by a pastor named Richard Baxter. Lord, it belongs not to my care, whether I die or live.

To love and serve Thee is my share, and this Thy grace must give. If life be long, I will be glad that I may long obey.

[57 : 28] If short, yet why should I be sad? to soar to endless day. Father, grant us by Your Spirit the eyes of faith, that we might take hold of these eternal realities and live them out daily.

Lord, save those who are lost in this world, and grant endurance and perseverance to those who are Yours. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. have been there.