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Sermon Notes

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The Eternal Outcomes of the Eternal Gospel

Revelation 14:1-13

For twenty centuries, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed among the nations, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading at great cost, little by little, to the distant shores of the earth. The harvest has been plentiful and millions are already rescued into the heavenly realms, free from all the suffering of the earth. This spread of the gospel has been bloody and difficult, but its outcome has been amazing and glorious. Missionaries, martyrs, evangelists, and witnesses have risked their lives, peace, comforts, wealth, and families to win lost people to Christ. And many have paid with their lives to spread the gospel. Much blood has been shed on earth by those trying to stop this gospel from spreading to the lost.

But the greatest stories are yet to come. The final act of the Great Commission, the final act of the spread of the gospel will see suffering and persecution and bloodshed on a scale we can scarcely imagine.

Satan will move his two puppets – the Antichrist and the False Prophet – to set up a system of world government and world religion and expect everyone on planet earth to bow down and worship.

At that time, God will raise up an army of courageous witnesses who will boldly stand in the face of the greatest persecution there has ever been and refuse to bow the knee to an idol

This morning, we will learn of their identity and courage... they stand as a timeless goad to us to be bold in our witness to Christ!!

Summary of Revelation 14

The whole chapter is meant to be an insert in the dramatic flow, a RESPONSE to the horror of Satan and the Antichrist and the False Prophet... the horror of the worldwide reign of the Antichrist and the worldwide religion focused on the Antichrist... to focus on a HEAVENLY VISION of TRUE WORSHIP to the Savior!!!

The whole chapter is looking ahead to the final outcomes of Redemptive History... of the redeemed worshipping the Lamb for their eternal salvation, and of the damned, suffering torment eternally in hell... the first five verses feature the **eternal worship**; then **three angels give three final messages to the earth**. Then the chapter declares **what kind of people will survive these horrors** ... a life of faith-filled obedience to the commands of Christ, of ENDURANCE right to the end.

The last section of the chapter, which we will look at in two weeks, will cover the final harvest of the earth by Christ

Now, let's look at the details:

I. The Lamb and the 144,000 (vs. 1-5)

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

A. The Lamb Standing on Mt. Zion

1. Mt. Zion has BOTH an earthly reference—the city of Jerusalem—and a heavenly reference—the heavenly city of God
2. The Lamb, obviously, is Jesus Christ, taking his stand amongst the 144,000 redeemed from the earth
3. But is it a final, heavenly scene or an earthly one?
4. If Earthly, this is a Picture of Jesus After the Second Coming, Standing Among the 144,000 redeemed
5. If Heavenly, this is a picture of Jesus in eternity, standing among the 144,000 redeemed
6. Those who say this is Jesus literally standing in Jerusalem point to Zechariah 14

Zechariah 14:3-4 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem

- a. Therefore, for those interpreters, Revelation 14 is a foretaste of the Second Coming of Christ and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom with the super-saints, the 144,000 who served him with great courage in the final tribulation
7. So... which is it? Honestly, I don't know!

8. However, it seems like John can SEE Jesus standing on Mt. Zion, but he HEARS a voice from heaven... so it seems that John's perspective is on the earth

B. Who Are the 144,000?

1. We saw this number back in Revelation 7, and sought to identify them then... this perfect, squared number
 - a. In Revelation 7:3-4, they were "sealed" as servants of God, 12,000 sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Israel
 - b. The next vision in Revelation 7 was of a multitude redeemed from all over the world

Revelation 7:9 ... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

2. Some scholars identify the 144,000 as Jewish evangelists who travel boldly all over the world during the time of the final seven year tribulation, preaching the gospel to people all over the world
3. Others believe that the 144,000 and the multitude refer to the same people—the redeemed from every nation (including the Jews) and from every era of redemptive history
4. It is hard to be dogmatic about this... both have arguments to commend them
5. My instincts are that these are describing some specifically sanctified and set apart missionaries who risk their lives right under the nose of the Antichrist to keep preaching the gospel
 - a. The fact that they are singled out to learn a song no one else could learn AND
 - b. That there is a limited number of them, however interesting the number 144,000, AND
 - c. That the plainest understanding of verse 4 is that they were virgins,
 - d. Implies these are special individuals serving Christ in the final phase of the tribulation, during the days of the Antichrist
6. However... it is possible to understand all of these in light of the entire church when finally redeemed in heaven

C. The Marking of the 144,000

Revelation 14:1 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

1. Marked out by God the Father and the Lamb
2. As just mentioned, in Revelation 7 they are sealed on their foreheads to protect them from the judgments of God
3. Just like Ezekiel 9, marked out to protect them from the wrath of God that is about to fall
4. Here it seems more a sign of OWNERSHIP... these choice servants belong to God and to the name
5. The name of God is written on their foreheads, front and center... the first thing you see and know about them... also related to their THOUGHTS
6. Direct contrast to the “mark of the Beast”, put on the hands or foreheads of all who worship the Beast
7. Basically, these 144,000 belong to God, and those with the mark of the Beast belong to Satan

D. The Worship of Heaven and of the 144,000

Revelation 14:2-3 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³ And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

1. John hears a POWERFULLY LOUD sound of worship
2. He likens it to a waterfall and a thunder clap, two of the loudest natural sounds we can ever hear
3. But this powerful sound is beautiful—like a harpist playing harps
4. They sang a NEW SONG in the presence of God’s throne
 - a. John refers back to the vision of Revelation 4
 - b. The throne of God... the living creatures... the twenty-four elders all hear the song
 - c. The NEW SONG is intriguing, especially to musically trained people
 - i) It is the idea that some perfect strain of heavenly music that fits our souls perfectly is waiting our consummation

Revelation 14:3 No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

ii) No one can learn it except the 144,000.... Meaning there is a sense of needing to go through the suffering and redemption that these select servants did

d. Worship is the final purpose of our salvation... as John Piper has put it so eloquently in *Let the Nations Be Glad*... missions is temporary, but worship is eternal!

E. The Purity of the 144,000

Revelation 14:4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.

Revelation 14:5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

1. These verses speak of the holiness of the 144,000
2. Personal holiness is a prerequisite for fruitful service on earth as well as entry into heaven
3. If the 144,000 represent ALL the redeemed, it seems strange because it is written exclusively from the MALE perspective... ***“they did not defile themselves with WOMEN”***
4. Furthermore, the simple translation says they are VIRGINS... though some translations say “they are PURE” or “CHASTE”
5. Sexual purity is clearly in view no matter what else we understand... God hates sexual immorality and demands sexual purity from all his servants
6. Problematic: the implication that marriage is a substandard form of the Christian life
 - a. The Roman Catholic church has had this view for centuries
 - b. It demands clerical celibacy, and denigrates marriage
 - c. But God honors marriage and says in Hebrews 13 that the marriage bed is undefiled
 - d. Paul says forbidding marriage is a “doctrine of demons”
7. Answer: It may well be that this is an army of Jewish evangelists and missionaries who stand directly toe to toe with the Antichrist and his wicked henchmen around the world... they are like a vast “Seal Team 6” for the

Lord... and part of their commitment is to the SINGLE LIFE extolled by the Jesus in Matthew 19 and the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7

a. Jesus, Matthew 19

Matthew 19:12 ... there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

b. 1 Cor. 7: Paul wishes that more would live as he did, free from earthly concerns

c. He extols the value of single-minded devotion to Christ

1 Corinthians 7:32-34 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-- how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-- how he can please his wife-- ³⁴ and his interests are divided.

d. Key insight: "IN LIGHT OF THE PRESENT CRISIS..."

1 Corinthians 7:26 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

e. The idea is this... Paul is saying in light of persecution and imprisonment, torture and death, it's good to remain single... married men, especially those with children, have more to protect

Richard Wurmbrand, missionary to Romania in the communist era in the 1960s told a story of a father and son both persecuted for the gospel...

The Communist torturers came towards Pastor Florescu again, this time with red-hot iron pokers, "Who else believes as you do? Give us their names." Florescu would not speak. They had already cut him again and again with knives and beaten him very badly. When he refused to cooperate, he was returned to his cell.

Starving rats were then driven into his cell through a large pipe. He could not sleep, having to defend himself at all times. If he rested a moment, the rats would attack him. He was forced to stand for two weeks, day and night. The Communists kept asking him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly.

In the end, they brought his fourteen-year-old son and began to whip the boy in front of his father, saying that they would continue to beat him until the pastor told them what they wanted to know. The poor man was half crazy. He bore it as long as he could. But when he could stand it no more, he cried to his son, "Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear your beatings anymore!"

His body bruised, blood running from his nose and mouth, Alexander looked his father in the eye. "Father, don't do me the injustice of having a traitor as a parent. Withstand! If they kill me, I will die with the words, 'Jesus and my fatherland.'"

This enraged the Communists. They grabbed the young man and beat him to death, his blood splattering over the walls of the cell. He died praising God as his father watched. Not only did he hold onto his faith, but he enabled his father to do the same.

Obviously that story illustrates amazing courage on the part of the son... but also how the desire for a godly man to PROTECT his vulnerable wife and children ends up a weakness, an avenue of probing the Antichrist's henchmen could use

In that final phase of human history, the persecution will be the greatest the church has ever endured. Jesus said it would be a time of suffering unlike any ever seen in history, so great that if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive. For these 144,000 it will be best to stay free from heart entanglements so they can die freely and with no earthly entanglements. Total devotion to Christ!

F. Total Dedication to Christ

Revelation 14:4 They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

This refers to willingness to DIE for Christ, that others might live through their witness

Matthew 16:24-25 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

G. The Eternal Worth of the 144,000

Revelation 14:4 They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

1. The idea of “firstfruits” is of the BEST of the human race offered to God
2. Also the idea is one of a vast harvest yet to come... the fruit of the 144,000 courageously preaching Christ in the last days

H. Now... Three Angels Fly Over the Earth to Warn People to Repent and Believe the Gospel

1. All three angels have a basic mission of warning earth’s inhabitants of the eternal dangers of continued rebellion against the God of heaven
2. The **first angel** warns people to fear the God who made the earth and everything in it, and to flee to the only refuge there is... the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ
3. The **second angel** warns people that the evil world system called “Babylon the Great” set up under the Antichrist has fallen under the judgment of God and the time has come to FLEE IMMEDIATELY
4. The **third angel** warns people that the consequences of worshipping the Antichrist, of receiving his mark, will be eternal torment in hell
5. These three warnings are given by grace from a loving God who is also perfectly just, whose wrath is most certainly coming... God doesn’t have to give any further warnings... the fact that these are written in scripture is sufficient for the entire earth
6. Faith-filled persons will HEED these dire warnings and find refuge in Christ from the coming wrath... as Noah by faith heeded the warnings of the coming flood and his fear led him to act

God doesn’t owe the world to send these angels right before the end... the warnings of scripture are enough

II. The First Angel, Proclaiming the Eternal Gospel Worldwide (vs. 6-7)

Revelation 14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

A. The Worldwide Proclamation of the Gospel

1. This is the final phase of the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth

2. If the 144,000 are called, chosen, anointed evangelists and missionaries during the time of Antichrist, they will make amazing progress to the ends of the earth
3. This angel is a mysterious supplement to the human witness entrusted to the followers of Christ
4. Basically, this one verse is the only example in the New Testament of angelic involvement in the actual preaching of the gospel

B. An Angel Flying in Midair

1. The next three paragraphs all focus on announcements made by angels
2. The word “angel” comes from the Greek meaning “messenger”... angels have often been entrusted with words from God to be given to the human race
3. Angels can appear as normal people... Hebrews 13 says that some have entertained angels without knowing it
4. Angels were indeed active in giving some messages connected with the life of Christ... they announced his birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem, including that he was born as a Savior for the world; before that, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the significance of the baby she would bear... he would be both Son of God and son of David, and he would be conceived by the Holy Spirit; angels also announced to the women that Christ had risen from the dead
5. Beyond this angels were involved heavily in the spread of the gospel in the Book of Acts... an angel appeared to the Roman Centurion Cornelius to send men to Joppa to have Peter come and preach a message through which he and all his family would be saved; an angel was sent to rescue Peter from King Herod the night before he was to be executed; an angel told Philip to go south to the desert road where he would preach the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch
6. So we should not think that angels can have no part in spreading the gospel
7. But the ministry of reconciliation, the Great Commission of the gospel message has been entrusted to human beings... we have no reason to believe that God will send an angel to an unreached people group in Central Asia or in the South Pacific or in the Muslim world... Christian messengers have been given a timeless command from our Savior:

Mark 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

8. Now angels would do an amazing job!! They would be utterly fearless... they would be impossible to kill or to keep in prison...they would not need to learn

any language or culture... they could travel easily, no need for airline tickets or TSA screening; no need for financial support; they would be tireless, free from sin, relentless, and would probably preach the gospel to every single human being within a month or less...

9. If they appeared glorious, radiant with the glory of the Lord as they did to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem, their hearers would be terrified and would scarcely put up a single word of opposition to them... think of the reaction of the battle-hardened Roman soldiers guarding the tomb:

Matthew 28:2-4 *There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

10. Perhaps that is part of the reason why God did not choose to use angels as missionaries... the supernatural display would remove a lot of the faith needed to believe in a human Savior... faith coming by HEARING THE WORD, not melting before the messenger
11. God wanted the messengers to look as human and humble and even contemptible as possible:

Jesus Christ was not visually glorious or impressive...

Isaiah 53:2 *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

The Apostle Paul was not either:

1 Corinthians 2:3 *I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.*

12. If God chose a mighty angel who was radiantly glorious, the reaction might be the same as Daniel in Daniel 10, who was so overcome with terror, he could hardly breathe
13. It is possible that God has dispatched angels at various times in redemptive history to preach the gospel fully and lead people to Christ... there is no scripture that precludes this... just because it says that God has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5) and asks "How can they preach without someone being sent" (Romans 10), does not mean that God cannot and will not send angels
14. Now angels CAN appear as merely human... Hebrews 13:2 says some people have entertained angels without realizing it
15. BUT THIS ANGEL is flying in midair... clearly a glorious supernatural being... no attempt to conceal that!

C. The “Eternal Gospel”

1. The angel is given the ETERNAL gospel to preach
2. There is only ONE TRUE gospel... Paul said in Galatians

Galatians 1:8 even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

3. The true gospel is the message of salvation from sin through faith in Christ, the slain and resurrected Son of God
4. It is called eternal because it was crafted in the mind of God before time began (2 Timothy 1)

D. Preached to Every People Group on Earth

Revelation 14:6 he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people.

1. The angel’s preaching is able to be understood by every language and culture on earth
2. But it doesn’t mean that the people of the world will believe

E. A Warning to those who Refuse

Revelation 14:7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

1. The angel warns all the inhabitants of earth to fear the God who has the power to judge the entire globe
2. The trumpet judgments will have already come on the earth, destroying the plants and the fresh water and the seas and oceans... the people of the earth will have seen already what God can do
3. The “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”
4. To “give him glory” means finally to realize that God is the Creator of all things and the rightful King and Lawgiver...
5. Notice also that the angel points especially to the CREATION... the God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water... all things are his for he made them

III. The Second Angel, Proclaiming the Judgment on Babylon (vs. 8)

Revelation 14:8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

A. The Second Angel Comes... Strengthening the Message of the First

B. The Warning: Babylon the Great Has Fallen!

1. Babylon is the worldwide system of evil that Satan set up, that makes the nations drunk with the maddening wine of her adulteries against God... the "world" that John warns against (lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, boastful pride of life)
2. It will reach its consummation under the Antichrist
3. Here the angel is predicting the very fall of Babylon that Revelation 17-18 will describe in detail... the angel emphasizes the shocking suddenness of the fall of Babylon with the repetition... FALLEN, FALLEN is Babylon the Great!
4. The fall of Babylon will come suddenly
5. So the angel, sent by the grace of God, flies in midheaven and gives this somber urgent warning to FLEE
6. The warning is a timeless one to the people of God as well:

Revelation 18:4-5 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; ⁵ for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

IV. The Third Angel, Warning of Eternal Condemnation in Hell (vs. 9-11)

Revelation 14:9-11 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

V. The Call for Endurance in Obedience... Even to Death (vs. 12-13)

A. These Three Warnings Result in Faith-filled Obedience by the Elect

Revelation 14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

1. The final days of suffering on earth will be extreme and overwhelming
2. The Antichrist will be the most powerful man in the history of this wicked planet... no dictator, not even Hitler, will have the same combination of devilish intelligence, governmental power, and jealous pride seeking worship
3. Christians will pay for their faith in Christ with their lives

B. The "Patient Endurance" Required will be the Test of True Salvation

Matthew 10:22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

1. Keep in mind, the "standing firm" in such a time of extreme temptation and persecution is nothing we can work on our own
2. But it is something God will work in us by his Holy Spirit

Matthew 10:19-20 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

C. Because of the Extreme Nature of the Trial, Christ Has Counted and Shortened Those Days

Matthew 24:22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

D. The Rewards of Faith-filled Endurance Will Also Be Eternal

Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

VI. Applications

A. The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom

1. All three of these angels seek to work a godly, helpful fear in the inhabitants of the earth
2. As I just said, the essential difference between the elect and the reprobate is how they ultimately react to the word of God
3. We don't mock it or make light of it... we flee to Christ!

4. So if you are an unbeliever, you must flee to Christ while there is still time

Hebrews 9:27 man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

Matthew 12:36 I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

5. So... flee to Christ NOW while there is time!

B. We Are Christ's Ambassadors... Even if We Are Not Among the 144,000

1. Those may well be Jewish converts, men who boldly challenge the Antichrist in the final phase of human history
2. We Gentiles living NOW in this phase of history can be inspired by their total dedication to Christ... they will be sexually pure, forsaking married life and the pleasures of this world so they can be totally available to Christ
3. This is the kind of dedication required to make a maximum impact for the Lord

Revelation 12:11 They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

That takes courage!

Will we follow the Lamb wherever he goes?

Matthew 4:19-20 follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

C. Be Warned About the Dangers of Babylon

1. The greatest threat to our soul here in affluent America is worldliness... the comforts of a materialistic lifestyle
2. Here we have no persecution from the government
3. Here we have no vigilante Muslims roving the streets to kill Christians
4. Here we have no nationalistic Hindus, seeking to keep their country pure from Christianity
5. Here we have no fanatical Communists or Nazis with power enough to topple the government and set up an atheistic state
6. Instead, we have the constant onslaught of temptations to pleasure and ease and comfort that blunts our senses and makes us spiritually dull

7. COME OUT AND BE SEPARATE! That is the call we will hear in Revelation 18:4, and we need to heed it now
 8. That means watch carefully how you live... how much time you spend watching Netflix, how much money you spend on your favorite comfort foods, how weak a self-focused life makes us from sharing the gospel
 9. We need to pray and ask the Lord to show us how the spirit of Babylon has crept into our souls... and ask the Lord to purify us from all unrighteousness so we can FOLLOW THE LAMB WHEREVER HE GOES
- D. Look Ahead to the Terror of Hell
- E. Look Ahead to the Certainty of Reward