

# Four Truths That Prompt Endurance

## Revelation 14:1-20

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



As we have been going through the book of Revelation, we have established that it is not about uncovering timelines and events or decoding secret messages and knowledge. It is a book of hope that is about uncovering timeless principles that spur the Christian on to faithful living. This continues to be an important focus to keep at the forefront of our reading. The middle of this letter continues to present images and events that leave us asking, who, how, and when? These aren't wrong questions, but often they lead us to focus on the "shiny objects" of the text and miss the main idea altogether. So, we must ask, how does this passage help me to see Jesus more clearly and live faithfully in righteousness, and declaring the gospel?

John insists that no one can remain uncommitted in the conflict between God and evil. Either one bears the mark and name of the beast (13:16–18) or one bears the seal and name of God and the Lamb (14:1). John did not make such a sharp distinction because the alternatives were obvious to his readers but because the alternatives were not obvious. A number of the Christians in the seven churches to which John wrote seemed willing to compromise their Christian commitments in order to assimilate into the surrounding culture (2:14, 20). Many in those Asian cities would have found it ridiculous to profess exclusive loyalty to God and the Lamb when one could be much more comfortable by joining in the practices of the wider society. John's visions offer the opposite perspective by seeking to show that it is absurd to join in society's misguided veneration of oppressive powers when one could join in celebration of the true Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>1</sup> So, we are brought back to the main idea, **God's final victory prompts my endurance.**

### 1. Truth #1 – The character of God (vv.1, 7)

#### a. The contrast with the beast and the dragon. (v.1)

- i. One of the beasts stands on the sand, and here is Jesus pictured on the mountain.
- ii. **We should not overlook the fact that the Lamb is standing on the mountain, whereas the beast stood only on sand (13:1).**<sup>2</sup>
  1. The immediate juxtaposition of the Lamb in 14:1 to the beasts of ch. 13 serves the contrast between the two sides. **The point of the contrast is to emphasize**

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<sup>1</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 135–136.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 169.

that Jesus is the true Lamb to whom allegiance is to be given in contrast to the false lamb of 13:11 and the first beast.<sup>3</sup>

2. Against the OT and Jewish background, “Mount Zion” in Rev. 14:1 is to be seen as **the end-time city where God dwells with and provides security for the remnant**, the “144,000 who have been bought out from the earth.”<sup>4</sup>

**iii. The beast marks those for death. Believers are marked with the Father’s name for life.**

1. For the number 144,000 see the note on 7:4. Here, as there, it is unlikely to stand for a spiritual elite of any sort, such as the martyrs. This number of completeness stands for the whole church of Jesus Christ. We should not miss the note of fulfillment. ‘A hundred and forty-four thousand were sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand were saved’ (Kiddle). There they were on earth, confronted by enemies. Now they are in heaven, and not one of them has been lost.<sup>5</sup>

**b. God is to be feared and to be given glory. (v.7)**

- i. Fear here is not a cowering ... yes, those who, apart from God, will cower, but in this sense, it is see God rightly for who he is.
  1. We are reminded again of **Proverbs 1:7 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.**
    - a. This fear is a right understanding and vision of whom God is... that is, his character and nature.
    - b. The fool despises this and follows his heart and intuition to death and destruction.
    - c. The wise person submits and follows the ways of the Lord (who is mighty and glorious) to abundant life.
      - i. *The beginning* (i.e. the first and controlling principle, rather than a stage which one leaves behind; cf. Eccl. 12:13) is not merely a right method of thought but a right relation: a worshipping submission (*fear*) to the God of the covenant, who has revealed himself by name (*the Lord*, i.e., Yahweh: Exod. 3:13–15).  
**Knowledge, then, in its full sense, is a relationship dependent on revelation and inseparable from character** (‘wisdom and training’, 7b).<sup>6</sup>
  2. The second half of the verse clues us into this, he is the author of creation. An action that places him well above any human or other possible deity at the time.
  3. The angel speaks *in a loud voice* for his words go out to all mankind. He calls on people to *fear God*. Evil-doers have much to be afraid of (cf. 6:15–17; 11:11, 13).

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<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 731.

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 732.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 169.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 56.

But the angel's message is not basically negative and he calls on people to *give ... glory to God and to worship him*.<sup>7</sup>

- ii. He is to be given glory because of his nature, position, and ability as the author of creation.
  - 1. Giving God glory is not something that we can bestow on God. Glory and glorified are inherently his, we participate in that glory and radiate that glory when we see him correctly and live in our new identities.
  - 2. **Example: Mountain climbing** – the mountain is not any less majestic or towering if I don't recognize it. It simply is. But, when I climb the mountain, I experience and participate in its majesty and inherit glory. Also, it is not something that you ever get tired of experiencing.
  - 3. **The burning bush** – When Moses asks the Lord who to tell the people when he arrived to deliver them from their bondage in Egypt, the Lord says, "Tell them, I AM sent you." – Exod. 3:13-14
    - a. The Lord goes on reminding Moses that his name is forever and will be remembered by all generations. → He is the one who simply is and is not in need of a source to be.
- iii. If God is who he claims to be, then he deserves my exclusive worship.
  - 1. **The core issue is: who or what do you worship?** The "world" is not just a different lifestyle or philosophy. It's a different worship system. Economics and politics matter because they're an expression of your ultimate allegiance. This section is peppered with exhortations to remain faithful in the face of imperial seduction and threats (12:11; 13:10; 14:12-13). It's fitting that the climax is another glimpse into the worship of heaven (15:1-2), which echoes "the song of Moses" (15:3-4), first sung when God delivered Israel from the idolatrous power of Egypt (Exodus 15).<sup>8</sup>
  - 2. **Christian worship is always a subversive act** - In our corporate worship, we call one another both to the worship of the true God and from the worship of other gods. We call one another from the subtle influence of the empty and destructive idolatries of this world. Instead, we give our undivided allegiance to the one undivided God. John calls us away from any mixing of allegiance to Christ with allegiance to our country in "civil religion".<sup>9</sup>
- iv. The character of God (if he truly is who he claims to be) – calls us to endure in this age because we are aligned with him and have found his ways to be better than anything this world / age can offer.

## 2. Truth #2 – The gospel of grace. (vv. 3, 6)

- a. What has God met us with so that we would be able to rightly fear him, come into a right relationship with him, and experience the abundant life he offers through his Son? → Grace.

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 173.

<sup>8</sup> Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 104). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>9</sup> Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 104). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

- i. One of the things about Revelation that doesn't seem to bounce off the pages to us is the concept of grace. We can read this letter and see and feel a whole lot of "judgment talk," all the while wondering where is grace?
- ii. But grace is all throughout this letter. → The very fact that God disclosed truth through this letter is an act of grace. He did not have to give us his word or this letter to prompt our faithfulness.
- iii. The melodic line of the letter is bathed in grace → Jesus is the victor who extends his victory to each of us.
  - 1. Just consider the ramifications of that in sport. → A victor gives their victory away... never! And, if it does happen, it is always remembered that the person who "won" did so not on their might but on the other person's compassion.
  - 2. This is the story of Jesus for you and me. Jesus had victory over death through his resurrection, and he extends that victory to us so that we may experience it in this life (in part) and completely in the age to come. → Our salvation is a gift of grace!

**b. Salvation - Only through Christ. (v. 3)**

- i. A repeated refrain you have heard in this series has been, "Salvation only matters if the one who offers it can deliver on it."
  - 1. If the god offering you new life cannot deliver on the goods, the offer is a waste and ultimately worthless.
  - 2. This is why the judgment passages are so crucial in Revelation – they show us that God is as able to hold evil accountable as he is to offer salvation. You can't have one without the other.
- ii. The redeemed sing a new song – We heard about this "new song" back in chapter 5:8-10.

**<sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying,**

**"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."**

- iii. This song is sung in right worship and praise of God, before the throne. → **Without the experience of redemption no one could sing the song.** Redeemed *from the earth* indicates redemption from worldly things and worldly people. They are God's.<sup>10</sup>
  - 1. In the OT the "new song" was always an expression of praise for God's victory over the enemy, which sometimes included thanksgiving for his work of creation (cf. Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10). Jewish writings applied the "new song" of Pss. 33:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1 and Isa. 42:10 to the time of the coming of the Messiah in the world to come<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 170.

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 736.

2. God's reaffirmed position (glory, power, and deserving of worship) encourages us in the security of our salvation.
  - a. **This means we are able to endure without worry that something or someone can take away from us what the Father has eternally given to us through his Son.**
- c. **An eternal gospel** – Not only is our salvation secure, but “good news” is eternal.
  - i. **The word gospel (εὐαγγέλιον - *euangelion*) is used around 92 times in the NT.** This is the only occurrence in Revelation. Most often (**59 times**) it is used as a direct reference to the gospel of Jesus. That can be the sense of John in this verse, but it is not explicitly clear that it is. → It is clear that the eternal good news is that God has victory over all evil.
    1. **For humanity, that victory comes through Jesus' death and resurrection.** That he took our penalty and shame so that we might have his abundant life and honor in the eyes of our Father in Heaven.
  - ii. Two ways that this truth helps us endure:
    1. **The gospel means the final overthrow of evil and that is certainly 'good news'.**
    2. John was writing to Christians facing persecution. **For them it was indeed good news that everyone, their persecutors included, would be called upon to give account of themselves, and that the time of the power of evil was determined.**<sup>12</sup>
      - a. We endure because we know and experience in the gospel that God has victory over the powers of this age.

### 3. Truth #3 – Victory over the powers of this age. (vv. 8 & 14ff)

- a. **The statement of verse 8 is a definitive one.** → It is not a “might one day” or “could possibly” or “has a really good chance of” statement. **It is an absolutely sure thing.**
  - i. **For John, Babylon is the great city, the symbol of mankind in community opposed to the things of God.** Sometimes in other writings Babylon means Rome (2 Bar. 11:1; Sib. Or. 5:143, 159, 434; possibly 1 Pet. 5:13). John does not go as far as this, though doubtless to first-century people there was no better illustration of what Babylon means than contemporary Rome. **John is looking forward to the overthrow of all the evil that Babylon stands for.**<sup>13</sup>
  - ii. How does verse 8 help us endure?
- b. **Awareness** - God does not turn a blind eye to sin or evil.
  - i. This is something that is so critically important for us to keep in mind as we read through Revelation.
  - ii. The original audience is living in a world where injustice and inequality were the normal expected outcome in life. To hear a message that the God of the universe saw them and was aware of their sufferings, plight, and the injustices they experienced was really good news.
    1. It is really good news to us today.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 172–173.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 173.

- iii. **Consider the question** – Doesn't God see what I'm going through?
  - 1. This is a question that we ask in our modern experience and the Word of God answers it, yes, He does.
  - 2. When I know that God has not turned a blind eye to my situation, it positions me to endure and persevere.
- c. **Accountability** - God holds the powers and the sin of this age accountable
  - i. It is not that God simply sees our plight, it is that he holds and will hold all evil absolutely accountable.
    - 1. This is the promise of the third section of this chapter.
    - 2. The reality is that it does not matter if God sees my plight if he can't do anything about it. Revelation teaches us explicitly that he sees and acts.
      - a. Remember, Revelation is giving us a heavenly picture of an earthly reality.
- d. **Allegiance** - If I believe that God is sovereign, then he is the only one my allegiance is to be given to.
  - i. All of this comes back to a central them in this larger section (chapters 12-14), there is no neutral ground when it comes to Jesus.
  - ii. **John insists that no one can remain uncommitted in the conflict between God and evil.** Either one bears the mark and name of the beast (13:16–18) or one bears the seal and name of God and the Lamb (14:1). John did not make such a sharp distinction because the alternatives were obvious to his readers but because the alternatives were not obvious. A number of the Christians in the seven churches to which John wrote seemed willing to compromise their Christian commitments in order to assimilate into the surrounding culture (2:14, 20).<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Truth #4 – Judgment means evil won't persist. (vv. 7, 11, 14ff)

- a. **We have to confront our discomfort with the idea of judgment as a modern audience.**
  - i. It is not that we are opposed to good and right judgment, in fact, we greatly desire and respect that. It is that in our cultural moment really don't want to be seen as unkind or unloving people.
    - 1. To withhold right judgment is a very unkind and unloving thing to do, I think we can all agree with that.
    - 2. In other words, if you had the power to make it all right and you didn't, that would be cruel.
  - ii. **John is not gloating over the suffering of the wicked as some later Christians have done.** Nor is he describing suffering for suffering's sake in the manner of the horror thriller. He has a sense of serious purpose. Motives of self-interest impelled many to try to escape martyrdom; they thought they would be better off if they denied the faith. **John wants them to be under no illusions. They must reckon with ultimate realities. And, despite our modern hesitation, we must reckon with them, too. We may shut our eyes to facts, but this does not do away with them.**<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 136.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 175.

- iii. When we allow the Spirit of God to help us understand the eternal importance of God's righteous judgment, it has a powerful effect on us here and now. It allows us to live with patience and experience peace.
- b. **Patience** - If I know that God will hold evil accountable, it enables me to embody patience.
  - i. This is when my circumstances are not what I thought they were going to be, or I've experienced something significantly difficult and I am able to trust those circumstances to the Lord.
  - ii. I do not have to overreact in the moment because I know that God surely sees me and is able to work it all out for my good and his glory in the end.
    - 1. Patience is a posture that results from contentment and experiencing God's redemptive love.
    - 2. When I live as if everything is on my shoulders, I am forced to live at a hurried pace and under unreasonable expectations of myself.
- c. **Peace** - If I know that God will hold evil accountable, it enables me to experience peace in the midst of turbulence.
  - i. Peace is not the merely the absence of conflict in the biblical framework. It is, more completely, a restoration to wholeness. In Christ we are experiencing that wholeness in increasing ways as we endure and follow him faithfully.
  - ii. That experience of wholeness now, even in part, is a foretaste of what is to come in the age that is ahead. → That foretaste fosters endurance in us to faithfully follow Jesus.
    - 1. In other words, we experience in part now through peace that evil won't persist, and just like a taste of a really great meal, it only makes us more eager for the whole thing that is ahead. We don't trade in a beautiful ribeye steak for a microwave burrito.
- d. We cannot forget that John is writing to a group of believers that are struggling to endure. And so Jesus in his mercy (through John), reminds them of the victory that awaits so that they might be found faithful in the turbulent circumstances of their lives.