

FEAR GOD AND GIVE HIM GLORY

Revelation 14:1-20

Key Verse: 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.’”

These days coronavirus is like the grim reaper. It attacks people indiscriminately, rich or poor, wise or simple, famous or unknown, the young as well as the old. We can easily become anxious or fearful that we could lose a loved one or even our own lives. Furthermore, we fear the economic downturn and are uncertain about our future security. Fear paralyzes our minds and hearts and affects our lifestyle. When we are paralyzed we fail to do what we should do. We become vulnerable and foolish and spread fear to others. Fear makes us irrational and selfish. This fear must be overcome. How can we overcome it? How can we respond positively to this challenge and be a blessing to others? Let’s learn from this passage.

In chapters 12-13 John gave us the background of conflict between God’s people and the world. The main cause of conflict is Satan who rebelled against God and wants to make people his own slaves. So we must fight against him, but not with the weapons of this world. We need divine power to demolish Satan’s stronghold. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Our offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and all kinds of prayer (Eph 6:17-18). Though the battle against Satan is fierce, we have assurance of victory through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. Chapter 14 portrays the glorious victory of the Lamb and his people (1-5), and God’s last call for unbelieving people to come to him (6-13). It ends with the final harvest at the end of the age (14-20).

First, the Lamb and the redeemed (1-5). In the original Greek, verse 1 starts with the words, “Then I looked, and behold...” “Behold” is an imperative verb that calls us to “pay attention” to the awe-inspiring sight of the Lamb. Chapter 13 described two terrible beasts who persecuted God’s people. The second beast was a counterfeit lamb, called the false prophet (13:11; 16:13). It deceived people through supernatural acts to compel them to worship the first beast. God’s people should not be deceived by this counterfeit lamb. So John calls us to discern the number of the beast (13:18). Mostly, John turns our attention to the true Lamb, who stands on Mount Zion (1).

Who is the Lamb? Thus far John has depicted the Lamb as: once slain for our sins (5:6,9,12; 6:9; 13:8); glorified and exalted as God to be worshiped (5:8,12,13; 7:9-10); the shepherd of his people (7:17). Now he is the King of kings standing on Mount Zion in fulfillment of prophecy (Ps 2:6; Ac 13:33). “Mount Zion” refers to the city of the living God, from which he rules over all things (Heb 12:22-23). This city is the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed. Accompanying the Lamb were 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads (1b). Their number symbolizes completeness. They represent all of God’s people down through the generations. Bearing the Lamb’s name on their heads means that they belong to him because he purchased them by his blood. They also bear the Father’s name because he has accepted them as his children. This divine name signifies their new identity and guarantees their security. In contrast, those who receive the mark of the beast become slaves of the devil and are destined for eternal condemnation.

Verse 2 tells us what John heard. A sound came from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and a loud peal of thunder. The sound was strong and powerful. Usually the sound of mighty rushing waters and loud peals of thunder are frightening and threatening. But this sound was like that of harpists playing their harps. It was sweet, harmonious and meaningful. It was a grand, sublime symphony orchestra which mortals could never imitate. Then the heavenly choir burst into a new song. Though innumerable people sang at once, the song was flawless--no one was out of tune; no one’s timing

was off. Each person's performance was greater than Andrea Bocelli's finest. They were spirited, full of joy, strength and power, and everyone was smiling and victorious. They sang a new song before the throne, the four living creatures and the elders (3a). This new song celebrates God's triumph over sin and death through the Lamb, just as new songs in the Psalms had celebrated the Lord's past victories (Ps 96:1; 98:1; 144:9-10). No one could learn this song except those who had been redeemed from the earth (3b). They uniquely appreciate God's amazing grace of redemption. Singing this new song is their special privilege.

Verses 4-5 describe the characteristics of the redeemed. First of all, they were pure. They had not defiled themselves with women, for they had remained virgins (4a). This means that the believers' faith and devotion to Christ were pure. They had not compromised with idol worship or sexual immorality. Secondly, they were loyal and sacrificial. They followed the Lamb wherever he went (4b). As Jesus gave his life as a ransom for them, they denied themselves, took up their own crosses and followed Jesus--even to death. They offered their lives as a living sacrifice to God (Ro 12:1). They represent the firstfruits offered to God and the Lamb as the foreshadowing of a great harvest. Thirdly, they were truthful. No lie was found in their mouths; they were blameless (5). They always spoke the truth. These days so many lies and rumors are manufactured and spread to destroy others. There seems to be no accountability or constraint. Lies are so widespread that it is almost impossible to know the facts. This is Satan's work, who is the father of lies. But God's redeemed people are different. There is no pretension, no false testimony, and no slander behind the back. They trust each other, respect each other and communicate heart to heart. They are transparent before God and before each other. How wonderful to live in such a society! This is heaven. The Lord wants his people to hold this glorious image of the Lamb and his redeemed in our hearts. Moreover, his church should be a glimpse of heaven as the pillar and foundation of the truth (1Ti 3:15).

Second, the angel proclaims the eternal gospel (6-13). In this part the scene shifts from heaven to earth. Three angels appear,

proclaiming God's last call to unbelieving people before his final judgment.

The first angel proclaimed the eternal gospel (6-7). In verse 6 John saw another angel flying in midair and proclaiming the eternal gospel. This proclamation was not limited to one place or people, but went out to the whole world. The gospel is referred to as "the eternal gospel." Why? The gospel is unchanging and permanently valid. Moreover, its consequences are eternal. While those who worship Satan suffer eternal condemnation, those who worship God have eternal life in glory. The gospel is like a two-sided coin. On one side, it offers God's unconditional grace: forgiveness of sins, acceptance as his children, and an eternal inheritance in his kingdom. On the other side, it pronounces God's righteous judgment against sin and all wicked people. Most likely, the angel emphasized the judicial nature of the gospel.

Verse 7 tells the appropriate response to the gospel. The angel said with 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." This message includes imperatives: "fear God," "give him glory," "worship him." Fearing God is the basis for glorifying and worshiping him. Why must we glorify and worship God? Because he is the Creator. As chapter 13 revealed, those who don't worship God will worship Satan. There is no middle ground. God alone is worthy of our worship.

To fear God is the basic duty of all mankind (Ecc 12:13). What does it mean to "Fear God"? Let's consider how the word "fear" is used. Usually "fear" is associated with danger or being punished. 1 John 4:18a says that "there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment." Here the word "fear" as defined in Louw-Nida's Greek English Lexicon is: *"a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, evil, etc., or possibly by the illusion of such circumstances."* There are many expressions of this fear: fear of pain, failure, rejection, uncertainty, abandonment, loss, etc. Ultimately, all these

fears stem from fear of death. This fear of death is Satan's tool to torment people.

However, when we say, "Fear God," it has a somewhat different meaning. Louw-Nida defines this "fear" as: *"to have profound reverence and respect for deity, with the implication of awe bordering on fear—to reverence, to worship."* Holy fear of God sets us free from all kinds of other fear. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) said, *"The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."* Holy fear also gives us peace and courage to testify about Jesus. A few weeks ago, in a hospital in Lombardy, Italy, doctors became so helpless because of the massive death caused by the coronavirus that they fell into despair. They no longer thought of themselves as saving life, but simply as selecting who would die. At that point, a patient, a 75 year old pastor who was struggling hard to breathe, began testifying about Jesus and sharing Bible verses with other patients. The atmosphere in the hospital began to change. Doctors began to sense the presence of God and listened to the pastor's testimony. Soon, unbelievers, who had trusted only in science, began praying to God for help. They found a new courage and energy to care for patients again. When the pastor died, the healthcare workers experienced God's peace. Some decided to live as the pastor had, giving their lives in the service of others, trusting in God's power and love.¹

Verse 7b tells us why we should fear God and give him glory. It is because the hour of his judgment has come. In Noah's time, the whole world was corrupt and violence was prevalent. God saw that every inclination of the thoughts of human hearts were only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). So God was deeply troubled and planned to wipe out all creation with a flood. But he did not judge immediately. God was patient for 120 years in the hope that people would repent. But when they heard God's message of judgment they thought it was a joke. However, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy

¹ <https://www.faithpot.com/atheist-doctor-finds-god-covid-19/>

fear, built an ark to save his family (Heb 11:7). Noah is a good example for us. As we stay at home together, our families can listen to God's word and pray together to prepare our hearts for Jesus' second coming.

Why do people not fear God? Because they do not want to submit to God. They want to live as they please, thinking that if they reject God they will not be bound by anything; they can be free. They do all kinds of wicked things. "They encourage each other in evil plans, they talk about hiding their snares; they say, "Who will see it?" (Ps 64:5) But God sees everything. God judges according to what they have done. God is the one we should fear. Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" (Lk 12:4-5). When we fear God, we can shun evil and overcome temptations, as Joseph did in Genesis (Gen 39:9). Indeed, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..." (Pr 9:10).

As mentioned already, "fear" is an imperative verb. It calls us to turn to God and put our trust in him, especially in troubled times. This pleases God and he transforms us into courageous witnesses of Christ. When it became apparent how serious the coronavirus issue is, fear and anxiety attacked me. But through Revelation study fear of God came into my heart. This gave me peace and strength to serve the Lord. My eyes opened to see his marvelous blessing on us. Our Easter celebrations were joyful and victorious. Our online worship services have allowed many more people to worship together with us. Our families are being strengthened. We could love one another as we have prayed for those in need, including our beloved M. Mary Min. There may be many things we should do. But most of all we should fear God. Then we can glorify God and worship him.

The second angel pronounces the fall of Babylon, saying, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (8). This announces God's divine judgment on Babylon. For John's first readers, Babylon

would have been understood as Rome. More generally, Babylon symbolizes any idolatrous world system that fosters an ungodly influence over the nations. At the core they are evil and spread destruction, causing people to lose their minds. These systems are so powerful that no one can challenge them. But God judges them completely.

The third angel warns against worshiping the beast. He announces that those who worship the beast will drink the wine of God's wrath and endure constant torment with burning sulfur (9-10). The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. There will be no rest for them day or night (11). This shows that hell is eternal; the wicked are not annihilated and put out of existence at death. Many people think that death is the end of everything. But that is not true. The torment of burning sulfur and anguish will last forever. This is the destiny of those who worship the beast.

Some people think God's judgment is an exaggerated threat that he will not really carry out. Others, who take God's judgment seriously, may doubt God's love. How should we respond? John calls God's people to have patient endurance and to keep our faith in Jesus (12, ESV). Faith enables us to endure suffering without compromise. Faith gives us wisdom that enables us to avoid deception and discern the true character of the beast. When we remain faithful to Jesus we will suffer in this world. But afterward we will receive the reward of eternal rest. John heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" (13a). Anyone who lives by faith and dies in the Lord, whether from martyrdom, or natural causes, is eternally blessed. The Spirit himself testifies to the certainty of this blessing, saying, "Yes, they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (13b). Their labor had been hard and fraught with painful struggles. Those who have labored hard for over a year to prepare the regional summer Bible conference, which is currently in a state of cancellation, understand this. But our days of labor will finally be over and we will enjoy sweet rest with the Lord Jesus. Our deeds are the evidence of our faith in Jesus. God will reward us based on their faith (Heb 11:6).

Third, the harvest of the earth (14-20). After God's last call to unbelieving people, the time of final judgment comes. God is so merciful that he is ready to accept even the stubborn and wicked people who repent only at the last moment. Nevertheless, it is the last chance; final judgment will come. Two harvests are described: one of grain (14-16), and the other of grapes (17-20). They refer to the harvest of the righteous and the wicked respectively. The first harvest is carried out by the Son of Man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. "The Son of Man" recalls Jesus' favorite name for himself (Da 7:13). In verse 15 another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." If the Son of Man is Christ, why would he take orders from an angel, who was a servant of God? The answer is found by noting that this angel came out of the temple in heaven, from the very presence of God. While on earth, Jesus told us that he did not know the hour of final judgment (Mk 13:32). But now, at last, the heavenly Father declares, "It is time." The messenger angel then comes out of the temple and delivers this message to Christ, who carries out his harvest (16).

In verses 17-20, the second harvest involves not only cutting grape clusters from the vine, but also crushing them in the winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city because everything impure, deceitful and shameful is kept outside the city. Blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia. This is approximately the length of the Holy Land from north to south, symbolizing a thorough and complete worldwide judgment.

These harvests coincide with Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13:24-30). Jesus explained that the wheat was sowed by the Son of Man. The weeds were sowed by the evil one, the devil. Both lived together until the time of harvest. When harvest time comes, the Son of Man will send out his angels to weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin, and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Mt 13:36-43).

These days, as we see signs of the end times, we are vulnerable to fear. We need not be fearful, because God the Creator is carrying out his salvation plan to bring about his glorious kingdom. Instead of being afraid of many things, we should fear God and testify about Jesus. In this way we can render glory to him. Let's pray that we may fear God. Let's give him glory and worship him.