

The previous chapter, Revelation chapter 13, was not a very easy one, because we saw in it a picture of the war that Satan wages against the Church. He uses human authority. He corrupts it and abuses it to serve his own purposes. He even uses false religion as a way of trying to get people to turn away from the truth. Revelation 13 even says to get through these things the saints need to endure. They need to have faith in God. It is not easy to stand firm. We need strength. We need a reason to be able to keep going so that we can see through these things. But that's exactly what God now gives us in our reading for today. God shows us why we can stand firm. God gives us a reason to keep going.

So John begins in chapter 14: "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb." This is a picture of Christ and his Church. Because Mount Zion, especially from the Old Testament, is a picture especially of the temple of God. In the city of Jerusalem, the temple sat on the highest point of the city. It was up on top of a hill. This is why sometimes the Old Testament will talk about going up to the house of the Lord, because you literally had to go uphill. It sat on top of a mount. And God had put his name there. When they saw the temple, they would know that God was with them, that he was dwelling among his people, that he would not leave them or forsake them. That's what we see, first of all, with Mount Zion.

But the name Zion came to be applied to the entire city, all of Jerusalem. Psalm 51, for example, says: "Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem." By building up the city, God would be doing good to Zion. They are one and the same thing. This is where God is. This is his city. This is his people.

But the problem, Christians, was the earthly Jerusalem itself. Jerusalem as a city was often very full of evil. It was idolatrous. It constantly turned away from the Lord. How could this city, full of these people who want nothing to do with God, actually be the city of God? How could this be the place where God's name was? And so Zion came to mean more than just the earthly Jerusalem. It pointed towards the heavenly city, where there is no sin, where there is no idolatry, where everyone believes in God, where everyone trusts in him. Hebrews chapter 12, for example, says: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering." So Mount Zion, then, according to the Bible, is a picture of God's Church, a picture of all those who trust in him.

And John tells us that the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion. Jesus is not far away from his people, unable or unwilling to do anything for them. Jesus is standing in their midst, just as he promised to do. "I am with you always," he says in Matthew, "even to the very end of the age."

And John also says that with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. This too is a picture of God's Church, because we've seen these 144,000 before in Revelation chapter 7. And there we learned that, yes, this is a picture of God's Church in every time and place. So both of these pictures together show that Jesus is with his people. Jesus is on Mount Zion. He is always with them. The 144,000 are gathered around him. He is in their midst. He is not far off from his people. He is with them always.

And knowing that, Christians, why should we ever be afraid of anything that happens in this world? Jesus is with us. He's not going to leave us or forsake us. Jesus stands with us. Jesus walks with us. Even if we have to die for him, he will be with us all the way. As Paul says,

nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing. Not pain or suffering, not governments or anything else. Nothing will ever be able to take us away from God.

And the 144,000 also belong to God, because we are told that they have the name of God written on their foreheads. It's like God has written his name on them the way that we might write our name on something to show that it belongs to us. They belong to God, and this is the proof. In the previous chapter, in Revelation 13, we heard about the mark of the beast, the name of the beast written on those who belong to the world to show that they are part of the world. And we're told that no one could buy or sell without that mark. To not follow the world means a very hard life indeed. But the Church has a greater name, the name of the living God written on her forehead. Even if she must suffer, she belongs to God. And John tells us this to encourage us. We can find strength knowing that we are God's people. We can continue, we can find the ability to endure, knowing that God has written his name on us. Even if we must suffer, it is nothing in comparison with what God has prepared for those who love him. We can face all things, because God is with us through it all.

But how can we know that we truly belong to God? How can we know that we are truly following after him? John goes on to say in the reading: "And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth." So John says that he heard a loud song coming down out of heaven. This song was so loud, he says, that it was like the roar of many waters, like thunder. We might say it was as loud as a jet engine. But this was not just noise. It was also a sweet song, because it was the voice of singing, the people of God joining together in a hymn of victory. Imagine a choir millions strong, all singing praises to God, and that's what we see happening here!

But this song is not meant for all people. It is only meant for the 144,000. Only the Church can learn this song. So it shows us that those who follow God, who learn this song, are those who have been redeemed, purchased by the blood of Christ. They have been separated from the world, separated towards God. They are in the world, but they are not of the world. And they sing the praises of God, because God has made them his own.

But John wants to make sure that we understand perfectly well who these people are, so he also says, beginning in verse 4: "It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Now, let's make sure that we understand what John is actually saying here. He is not saying that the only people who are getting into heaven are virgins, as if sex was somehow a bad thing. Not only celibates are going to heaven. Rather, the picture that John uses here is of soldiers, especially in the Old Testament, keeping themselves pure while they are on active duty. Take, for example, David in the book of 1 Samuel, when he's running away from Saul. And he comes to the tabernacle where he wants to get some food. The priest is willing to give him some of the holy bread, but he asks him if the soldiers with him have kept themselves clean, have kept themselves pure. And David answers: "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels

be holy?" So in other words, soldiers should be single-minded. They should be totally focused on their duty. Not that having a wife was a bad thing for a soldier by any means. It was a good thing. It was a blessing from the Lord. But when they were on active duty, they needed to be focused. They need to focus entirely on what they were supposed to do.

And virgins also in the Old Testament are often used as a way of describing being faithful to God. Because idolatry is frequently called adultery or even whoring in the Old Testament. Judges 2, for example, says: "Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them." So a virgin, in other words, was one who did not go after false gods, one who did not soil themselves in that way. They were faithful to the Lord their husband. And so the picture that we see here, then, are that those who follow God are those who do not compromise with the world, those who are not stained by the world, going after their false gods. They are faithful to God through it all.

John also goes on to say, beginning again in verse 4: "These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless." That word "blameless" there in the Old Testament is very frequently used for sacrificial animals. Because an animal was supposed to be perfect. It wasn't supposed to have anything obviously wrong with it whenever it was offered up to God. Leviticus 22, for example, says: "Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the Lord or give them to the Lord as a food offering on the altar." In other words, when you gave something to God, you were supposed to give your best, not just whatever you happened to have lying around, or even worse, the worst that you had so that you didn't have to deal with it anymore. You gave God the very best of what he had given to you.

And of course, in the New Testament, we no longer offer animals. Jesus brought that to an end. But we do still offer sacrifices, spiritual sacrifices, prayer, praise, thanksgiving. Paul says, Romans 12: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." To be blameless, then, means to turn away from sin, to not walk in the ways of the world, to turn yourself towards God.

Of course, we are still going to sin, but being blameless means that we don't walk in it, that we don't continue in it, that we fight against it. Think of somebody who's living a scandalous life, for example. They're caught in drunkenness or adultery or whatever it may be, and they refuse to turn away from it. They keep doing it. That's something that they can be blamed with. They can be accused and condemned for the thing that they refuse to stop doing. But the one who is blameless is the one who turns away from these things, who repents, who follows after God. And when we look at that, then, we can see how we can know who actually follows after him.

Therefore, Christians, let us take heart. Christ is with us through all things. Following after him means there we're going to have to be different from the world. We can't get away from that. And it's going to be an actual difference. It means not compromising. It means not walking in the ways of sin. And doing that will mean that our lives will not be easy. But it also means that we are following after God, that he has written his name on us, and for that reason, we can look forward to what is to come. So stand firm, Christians, and do not give in, because Christ is with you, and he will always be with you, even as you suffer for him!

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, make us evermore like yourself in all things, so that we may not be conformed to this world, but walk after you in righteousness forever; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.