

It's been a little while since we were in the book of Revelation, so I think it's worthwhile to just have a quick review of where we are in the book so that we understand this passage. The previous two chapters, Revelation 12 and 13, are the very heart of the book. And in this part of the book, we see a vision of the war between the dragon and the Church. Satan has been cast down out of heaven, to be sure, so that he's no longer able to accuse us, but that doesn't mean that he has given up. Satan continues his great war against the Church also here on earth. And in this war he uses two great beasts, the first of which is a symbol for false government. Satan corrupts what God has given for good and uses political pressure and social pressure as a way of trying to get people to turn away from the Lord. And the second beast is false religion, and it tries to make people worship the first one. Now, God, of course, preserves his Church throughout this war. That was the whole point of the beginning of chapter 14. But that doesn't mean that we can take things easy. We still have to be quite serious, and that brings us to our reading for today.

So in our reading in Revelation 14, John sees a vision of three angels in the middle of the sky. And these three angels have come with a message for all people. It is meant for everyone on the earth. But that message is a warning. The first angel comes and says 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." Now, if we want to understand what this angel is saying here, again, remember that this message is meant for all people. It is not just meant for those who are in the Church. The angel proclaims this message also to those who fight against the Church. He also proclaims it to those who serve the beast, to those who are enemies of God. All people on earth, whether they believe or not, are called to worship God, to give glory to him, and to serve him alone. Because Christians, God deserves our worship. God, after all, is our Creator, and we have been made for him and for his glory. If we had no other reason to worship him, that would be enough. So all, then, are called to bow to him, to serve him, because his judgment has come. This angel, then, is calling on all people to repent, to turn away from their false gods, and to turn to the living God. We are called to worship God alone, because time is running out. God's judgment will soon fall, and then there will be no more time. We must turn to him before it is too late!

But this message is not just for the world. It's a message that we also need to take to heart. Because if we turn to the world, Christians, if we look to something other than God for our help, we will fall under the same condemnation as the world. So why should we look anywhere else? Why should we fear anything else other than God? As Jesus says, we should not fear those who can only kill the body. That's all that they can do, ultimately. But rather we should fear him who has the authority to cast both body and soul into hell. He is the one who deserves our fear. He is the one who deserves our worship. He alone must be our God!

The second angel comes along right on the heels of the first, and he says in verse 8 of our reading: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." Now, this is the first time that the name Babylon has appeared in the book of Revelation, so it's worthwhile to unpack it a little bit so that we understand what it means. Babylon was the capital city of the ancient Babylonian Empire. It was the very heart of one of the greatest empires of the ancient world. Babylon was the one who destroyed Jerusalem. Babylon was the one who destroyed the first temple. Babylon was the one who carried Israel away into exile. At its height, the Babylonians were the most powerful empire in the world. All the world trembled before Babylon. All feared her might.

But Babylon was more than just a military power. Babylon was also the home of all kinds of false religion, the home of all kinds of idolatry. You'll remember in the book of Daniel, for example, Nebuchadnezzar, who was a Babylonian king, set up a great golden statue near the city of Babylon in the plains of Dura, the same statue that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship. That's just one real good example of the kind of idolatry that was in Babylon. Babylon was the center of everything opposed to God.

Now, the city itself fell. It eventually crumbled into nothing. It was captured by the Persians, and the city is no longer here today. But Babylon became a symbol in the Bible, a symbol of everything opposed to God. If you took everything in the world that was evil, and you rolled it all up into one single city, that city would be Babylon. And so that's how it's being used here in the book of Revelation.

But the message of the second angel is quite clear. Babylon will fall. In fact, he says Babylon is fallen. It is so certain that Babylon will be defeated, so certain that it will fall that the angel speaks as if it has already happened. The city was still standing, so to speak, and he speaks as if it is already gone. And his point is clear. Everything that the world trusts in will fail. Babylon led the world into sin, and she will be judged for that sin. So why should we trust in her? Why should we look to her for help? Judgment will surely come. Babylon cannot avoid what she surely deserves. And those who belong to her, those who are in her will be judged along with her. We must leave before it is too late!

And just in case there was any confusion left, the third angel brings an even more clear message, when he says in verse 10, that those who worship the beast: "He also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured 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." Those who follow after the beast, those who are part of Babylon, whatever picture you want to use, will be judged because of it. God's wrath will be poured out upon them in full strength. They will suffer an eternal judgment, one that will never come to an end. Because turning away from God, Christians, is not a small thing, as if it's just a take it or leave it, it doesn't really matter. It is a terrible thing, and those who do so will be condemned because of it. Nobody can say that they didn't know. Nobody can say that God didn't warn them. The message of the three angels goes out into all the world: "Turn to God before it is too late!"

But this message is also for us, one that we need to listen to as Christians. Because it shows us that giving into the world is not a neutral thing. We cannot compromise with the world just to avoid the pressures of the world. It's not good for us to say things like: "I know that the Bible says this, but..." And it's not good for us to say things like: "The Bible says this, but I can't say that! There's no way that I could." It is dangerous for us to think that there is no danger, to give in to the world just to keep a job or to keep the peace or whatever it may be. To go along with the world, to be a part of Babylon even partly runs the risk of falling under the judgment of God. There can be no compromise with the world. As John says in verse 12: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." We must endure as Christians. We must not grow soft in our faith. Having faith in Jesus means that we have to leave the world behind. It means that we have to leave behind its empty pleasures. We have to leave behind its empty promises. Leaving the world means that we have to endure all of those sideways glances that people give to us, thinking us strange. It means having to endure the

mockery, having to endure the gossip. Leaving the world means that we cannot care what other people think. Because the angels warn us, Christians, we must turn away from the world before it is too late!

But turning away from the world means that we belong to God. As verse 13 of our reading says: "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!'" Blessed are all those who have lost all for God! Happy are they who leave the world behind! Fortunate are they who forsake everything for the sake of God! Because what they will be given will be far greater than what they have lost. And the Spirit himself promises us rest, Christians, the great Sabbath rest to come for the people of God. It is what waits for those who turn away from the world, a peace which the world can never know, a peace which the world can only promise, but never give.

And everything that we do in the service of God will not be forgotten. Even the smallest thing done in God's name is precious in his sight. God remembers when every time turning away from the world hurt us or cost us. God remembers when we were made fun of simply for being Christians. God remembers every good thing that we do, even the smallest things that we do. Even giving a cup of cold water to someone simply because they are a Christian is not forgotten before God. Because God remembers them all, and he rewards them all in the glories of heaven. It is a blessed thing to leave Babylon behind, because what waits for us is far, far greater than anything in this world!

So Christians, do not look to the world. Turn away from Babylon. Fear God and give him glory, and trust in him above all things, because what waits for you who trust in Jesus by faith is greater than anything in this world by far!

Let us pray. Almighty God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water, be our shield in the hour of temptation, and lead us out of Babylon, so that we may dwell with you forever in the glories of the heavenly city; through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.