

In the previous section of Revelation 14, we heard the warning of the three angels. They were warning everyone, the Church and the world included, to turn away from the world and to turn towards God before it is too late. But now we see a vision of what the angels were warning the world about. We see a picture of the great judgment to come. And through these pictures of two great harvests, we see a symbol of the Last Day.

So John begins, then, in verse 14 of our reading: "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand." The first thing that John sees in this vision is a white cloud, and clouds in the Bible are symbols of the presence of God. Whenever we see a cloud, many times we can know that God is near. Take, for example, the wandering in the wilderness when God led his people by a pillar of cloud by day, or the cloud which came down on Mount Sinai when he came to give the Law, or the cloud at the mountain of Transfiguration when the voice spoke to the apostles. All of them are good examples of God being present with a cloud.

And so here we also see in this vision one who is sitting on the cloud, one who looks like a son of man. In other words, we have a picture here of Christ himself in all of his majesty and in all of his glory as God. And he is wearing, we are told, a great golden crown, a wreath crown, a crown of victory, like something that you would give to an athlete. And he has a sickle in his hand. Jesus has overcome the world, and now in his victory, he comes on the clouds to harvest the earth and to gather in all of its fruits.

But John goes on to tell us, verse 15: "And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.'" So this angel coming out of the temple, then, tells Jesus that the time of the harvest has come, that it is time to carry out what he is supposed to do. Now, maybe that's a little bit confusing to us. Why does this angel seem to be giving Jesus commands? Does he have some kind of authority over Jesus that he's able to command him in this way? No, and for a few reasons. First of all, because we can never forget in the book of Revelation that this is symbolic. We should never get hung up on small details. We should always focus on the main picture, because that is the point that John is trying to make. The second thing to note here is that angels are always messengers in the Bible. Whenever they say something, it's because they were told to say it. So if he is giving a command, then, it's because he was told to give this command. And they always speak for God, and that's the same as here. And the third thing that we should note here is that Jesus himself tells us that only the Father knows the time of the end. Jesus says in Matthew 24: "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." It is the Father who will determine when the end will come. And so it is the Father here who is giving the command. The angel is bearing the message from the Father to the Son. Again, let's not get hung up on the details here. This is all symbolic. It's all part of the picture that we see going on here. The point is, God has now declared that the end has come. And so Christ goes out to reap the earth, now that the time appointed by the Father has been fulfilled.

John goes on to say in verse 16: "So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped." I think we should understand this first harvest here, the first part of this reading, as a harvest of the righteous, as Christ gathering in his Church. And the reason for this is because we're not told anything else about this group. We're just told that the earth is

reaped. But the second group, we're told what happens to them. We're told where they go. It is clearly a picture of the wrath of God. But we're not told any of that here. We're simply told that there was a harvest. And so for that reason, I think it's reasonable to conclude that this is Christ harvesting his own, that he is bringing his Church to himself on the Last Day, as we know from other parts of Scripture that he's going to do.

And this should bring great comfort to us, Christians, to see this harvest of the Church on the Last Day, because what we see here is the fullness of God's people. When the very last Christian is gathered into the kingdom, then the harvest will be complete, and we will all be gathered together to the Lord. And the Bible also tells us that that harvest, this gathering in of the Church will be of all Christians, both in the past, in the present, and those still yet to come between now and the Last Day. As Paul puts it, we will not precede those who have fallen asleep. When Christ comes on the Last Day, he will raise all of the dead, and then together as one Church, we will meet the Lord in the air. We will be one mighty Church. We will be one united body of Christ. And as the one great harvest of the earth, of the Church, we will see Christ face-to-face on that day! So no matter what we must endure, Christians, no matter what we must suffer here on earth, we have this joy and this hope. Christ will gather us all together into one on that day, so that we can now pray: "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

But now we see a picture of the second harvest. John goes on to say in verse 17: "Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle." This angel also comes out of the temple, because he is carrying out the will of God. But this harvest is the harvest of evil. It is the harvest of the wicked of the earth. It is a picture of the final judgment. Because ultimately, Christians, God has to do something about evil. He can't just leave it alone. If he tries to ignore it, that would mean that he is not just. If God does nothing about it, then he would not be righteous. God being God means that he has to carry out the judgment against sin, so that all things will be set right once more. And that's what we see happening here in the second half of this reading.

John goes on to say in verse 18: "And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, 'Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.'"

Now, we've seen this altar before, all the way back in Revelation chapter 6, when it was part of the fifth seal. And under this altar were the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God. And at that point in Revelation chapter 6, they were crying out to God for him to do something about the evil in the world. They were crying out for vengeance, because their blood had been shed on the earth. That's the same thing that we see happening here. The angel coming forth from the altar is speaking for God's people. He is calling on God to judge the evil of the world. In other words, he is bringing before God the prayers of the Church.

And that's important for us, Christians, because we should never hesitate to pray. God hears our cries. Every cry that we have against evil, every cry for justice is heard by the Lord, and God will answer those cries both now and on the Last Day. So when we are facing evil in this world, we should not hesitate to pray. Instead of doing nothing, instead of shaking our heads and wondering how things could be better, instead of worrying about the things that we see on the news, we should take it to the Lord in prayer. We should call on him to set all things right, to bring an end to evil, and God will answer that prayer, just as we see him doing here in the book of Revelation.

But evil is depicted as grapes here because they are thrown into a wine press. John goes on to say, verse 19: "So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." Now, why a winepress? Why would John use the symbol here? Because for two reasons. First of all, because in those days, wine presses were almost always pits dug into the ground. And you would throw the grapes into these pits, and then you would trample on the grapes with your bare feet as a way of getting the juice out of it. In fact, there's still some parts of the world today that use this same technique. It's very common. But whenever we see something put underfoot in the Bible, that's always a picture of victory, a picture of conquering. And that's what we see going on here. This winepress is a picture of the victory of God. God will put all evil under his feet like grapes in the press.

And the second reason for this is also because it looks back to the Old Testament, especially a passage like Isaiah 63, which says this: "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel." And there in Isaiah 63, God was talking about the vengeance he was going to bring on his enemies, how he was going to bring justice to his people. And so it is also here. God treads the press in his wrath, bringing judgment upon evil. And we see here a final and complete victory which will never come to an end.

And the last verse of our reading shows just how perfect this victory really is. Verse 20 says: "And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia." Now, the city that we see here is the city of God. It is the new Jerusalem, and we're going to hear a lot more about this city later in the book of Revelation, so we're not going to focus on it here. But the winepress is trodden outside the city because it shows that evil has no place in the new heavens and the new earth. When God comes to remake all things, evil will be done away with forever. These things will be no more.

And the blood flowing out of the winepress is also symbolic. It shows the severity and the perfection of God's judgment. It's said to flow out from the winepress at the height of a horse's bridle, which means it would be roughly about four and a half to five feet deep. It is a picture of completion. It's as if there is no more blood to be shed, as if it is all being poured out in that moment. That's why it is so deep.

And it's flowing out from the city for 1600 stadia. Stadia, or a stade in the singular, was an ancient measurement of distance, roughly about 607 feet. So in our terms, 1600 stadia would be about 183 miles, most of the way from New Salem to Fargo to put it in our terms. But the distance isn't really the point here. The point is the number 1600. And we can understand that in one of a couple ways. First of all, we could understand it as being like four times four times ten times ten. Four is a number of the whole earth, like the four directions, for example, or the four winds. So four times four would be everywhere in the world. So that's what the sixteen would be. Ten is a complete number, and so ten times ten would mean everything. So 1600 in that sense would mean that evil is judged everywhere in the world no matter where it is. All will be brought under the judgment of God on that day. It is a complete judgment. The other way to understand it could be forty times forty. Forty is a number of judgment. Think of like the forty days of the flood or the forty years in the wilderness. So forty times itself would be a perfect judgment, one that doesn't need to be added to, one that is complete. However you want to understand it, the

point is the same. This judgment will be perfect and final. There will be an end to evil forever, and all will be made right once and for all.

And Christians, this also should bring us comfort and joy, to know that God is going to judge evil. It should not bring us some kind of twisted pleasure, as if we rejoice in the destruction of the wicked. No, like the Lord, we should pray for the conversion of the wicked, that they would turn from their wicked ways and live. But rather, this brings us comfort and joy, because we can know God is going to do something about evil. No matter how horrific the world may be, no matter how horrible the news is on the TV in the evening, no matter how much we suffer for the sake of God, evil will be judged. All things will be set right. Evil's not going to get away with it, because God's justice is perfect. So we can look forward to that day, Christians, knowing that all evil will be brought to an end forever, because the Lord is just and true.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all judgment has been given by the Father and who will judge the world in righteousness on the Last Day, strengthen us to withstand the evil of this world until that day when you will make all things right and give us perfect justice forever; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.