

We're currently studying the most difficult book in the Bible: the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Last week we were in Chapter 13, and for Christians, chapter 13 are the darkest pages of the whole book. We learned about when Antichrist comes to power, and his minister of religion (the false prophet) – under their rule, anyone who does **not** worship this world leader, will be excluded from trade (they won't be able to buy and sell). So Christians (who **are** the only ones who **do** refuse to worship him):

- Won't be able to access power or gas (so many will freeze);
- They won't be able to buy food;
- Or access transport;
- They won't be able to pay for health care...

And for you property owners who reckon you're going to be ok because you can always grow your own food and ride your horse for transport, you won't **have** a property:

- you won't be able to pay your rates
- or your taxes

Your property will be taken off of you...

But don't worry about that too much (there **is** a silver lining to every cloud) - Those who refuse to worship this ruler will be executed anyway, so you're not going to have to worry too much, about not being able to buy stuff or being able to sell your produce....

And so if we were to take Revelation 13 on its own, it would probably leave us feeling "Well, why would I ever want to be a Christian?" If this is what it's going to be like, why would anyone follow this Jesus fella???

And that's why Rev 13 is 'bookended' by Rev 12 & Rev 14...
(which put all this suffering into perspective)

Revelation 12 revealed to us, the Spiritual reality of **why** Christians are persecuted so terribly. It's not only a physical battle between ideologies – it's a battle on a **heavenly** scale, where Satan and his demons fight against the heavenly armies of the Lord our God – it's a **spiritual** battle. And it's only because Satan has **lost** the Spiritual battle, and because he's thrown out of heaven, that in his final death-throws, he takes all his fury out on God's children.

And so back in Chapter 12, we were given a few very important bits of information that give us an immense hope:

1. Satan has lost the war in heaven (**and** he loses overall)
2. These terrible persecutions will only go on for a short time – it is a time cut short by God.
3. God has **not** lost control of the situation – God **is** allowing this to happen, but in God's time, it will be concluded
4. Even those Christians who do die during this terrible period of history, as with **any** Christian martyr throughout the ages, they go straight to glory, where they are honoured, and there is no more suffering...

And so chapter 12 gave us courage to get through chapter 13, and the terrible persecutions that Christians will suffer... And **now** in Chapter **14**, there is a call to endurance. To us who are **not** currently being persecuted, it might not seem like it,, but to those who **are** suffering terrible cruelty, simply because they're disciples of Jesus, Chapter 14 **is** a call to endurance – to endure through the suffering.

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The book of Revelation (to us) may seem like a ‘terribly mixed-up book’, but that’s only until we begin to understand that it is **not** a ‘start to finish’ sequence of events – it describes the **same** events, several times, in different ways...

*And to illustrate this, I’ve plagiarised Phillip Jenson’s analogy of the instant replay that we have with our sporting events ... In footy, somebody makes a spectacular try, and we don’t only see it **once** on the TV – they show it 4; 5; 6 times, from different angles, shot with different cameras... Each time we’re seeing something different, but it’s recording the one event... And that’s what we have in the book of Revelation...*

And not only that, but just like some modern movies (or television programs) have a ‘flash-back’ or a ‘flash-forward’, that’s what we’re encountering today – a flash-forward. For a moment, we skip ahead to the end, and we get a view of what it’s like at the finish:

- It’s a flash-forward to where the tables are turned;
- It’s a flash-forward to where the wickedness of man has grown to its full extent, and God has stepped in to set things right;...
- **This** is where the first become last and the last become first...
- It’s a flash-forward to where Satan is dealt-with decisively;
- the wicked are punished; and
- the righteous are rewarded...

And so it **is** a call to endurance... **Hold on** – here’s the ‘flash-forward’ – Jesus is coming – endure until the end...

So, with a sense of expectation, let’s take in this ‘flash-forward’, as we read Revelation 14:

And I think I’ll just take it one section at a time today:

V1-5:

14 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. ² 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, ³ 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. 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. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, ⁵ and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

Back in Chapter 7, we encountered a group of people, numbering 144 000. At the time I said, “Many bible scholars believe this is a symbolic number, representing the whole people of God. The number 1000 means “a lot”. There’s 12

tribes; 12 apostles. $12*12=144$, meaning all the people of God, and lots of them – 144 000... So the number 144 000 is very likely, a symbolic number, representing all the faithful children of God. And here they are again.

In chapter 7, God put His mark on his people – they were sealed. It's not a mark we can see though, because the seal is the Holy Spirit. And those who were sealed by God, would endure – they would conquer. How would they conquer? By remaining faithful to Jesus, and by continuing to be witnesses **for** Jesus (no matter what happened).

And now with this flash-forwards, we can see “Yeah!!! He's done it!!! Those who have been sealed by God, **have** made it through, to the glory of God. Not a one is missing!”.

Many of them were killed because they dared to be witnesses for Jesus. But here **they** are – **they're** not missing – **they're** with Jesus. And they're not sad about their life being cut short. They're singing and they're worshipping God...

And we're told that **No one could learn** the song that they were singing, **except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.** What does that mean???

Jesus told us, that there is only one way to God, and that's through Him. There is only one way to be saved, and that is to be redeemed (that means to be bought back). No one can earn their way to heaven by doing good deeds. No one can buy their way to heaven... We don't redeem ourselves... (Have you messed up your life? Well, you cannot redeem

yourself...) The only way, is to be redeemed by Jesus Christ. The only way to be saved, is to be bought by the blood of Jesus. Jesus did that for us on the cross. All **we** have to do, is repent of our sin, and submit the rest of our lives, to Jesus Christ as our Lord. (Which isn't an insignificant cost in itself) ...

Alright, it's only the redeemed who are here – it's only the redeemed, who are with Christ in His glory... And so we are looking forwards, to the final consummation. The dead have been raised, and all of Jesus' faithful disciples (from right throughout the ages) (all of the redeemed), are gathered unto Christ...

And here it describes the characteristics of those who make it through to the end...

- Remember, this is the whole people of God (those who have been sealed) – And God has brought them safely through.
- They're **not** an elite group of Christians – they're the same as all of us – they've been redeemed – Jesus had to buy them back, as much as He had to buy any of us back.
- But there **is** a very clear image here, of faithfulness; purity; and loyalty..... All of which, are characteristics of faithful discipleship.

Firstly, they're described as being “virgins”... Oh, that might cut a few of us out (but don't give up listening just yet – this is symbolic).

In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable about 10 virgins, who were waiting for the arrival of the Bridegroom. It was an illustration about “waiting for Jesus to return and being ready for Jesus when He **does** return.”...

And in the book of Revelation itself, we are given the image of the church as the bride of Christ, being presented spotless and holy to the bridegroom (Jesus)...

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he was concerned that some in that church, were being turned aside from truth by false teachers. And he said this:

² Corinthians 11:2 I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Do you see the way it ties beautifully into the rest of the Bible??? We're being told here, that those who stand with Jesus on the day of resurrection, have sincere and pure devotion to Christ...

Secondly, they follow the lamb wherever He goes. That's what discipleship is all about... Jesus didn't tell us to make “converts” – He told us to make “disciples”. And disciples are people who follow Jesus wherever He goes...

Christianity **isn't** about making a decision one day (and asking Jesus into your life), and then it making no difference to the

rest of your life. Those who are God's true children, follow Jesus wherever He leads.

Thirdly, they're also described as being the **firstfruits for God and the Lamb**. And to understand this, we have to have a bit of a knowledge of the Old Testament. When the harvest began, the first and the best of the harvest were brought as a firstfruits offering to God... You didn't bring God the old, mouldy wheat. You didn't bring God the runt of the litter to sacrifice... The firstfruits were pure and holy – the best they had to offer.

Fourthly, no lie was found in their mouth. Alright, disciples of Jesus must not lie. But it's telling us more than this – They were faithful witnesses – the truth of the gospel was on their lips.

And fifthly, they were blameless, and of course, we know the only way that any of us can be blameless, is to repent of our sin, and have all of our blame washed away by Jesus.

So here we've been given a pretty good summary of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus. These are the ones who will be with Jesus on the day of the resurrection:

- It **begins** by being redeemed by the blood of Jesus.
- They then live a life of sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ (they don't get taken off on tangents by false teaching)
- They are obedient – they follow Jesus wherever He leads (no matter what it might cost them)
- They are filled with truth – they are faithful witnesses

- And they have a continuing dependence on God, for their blamelessness. At times we all fail, but before God, we can again be blameless...

Let's move on: V6 & 7..

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ And he said with a loud voice, "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, I'm going to try not to confuse us too much here: When John said "⁶ Then I saw," he's stating the order in which he saw the vision – not the order in which it unfolds. Alright, so we've just had a "flash-forward" to what it's going to be like when Jesus returns. Now we're coming back to where we left off.

Back in chapter 9, the 3 woes (God's judgment upon the people of the world) are beginning to unfold. And now we're getting a more fuller description of God's judgment.

All the way through the book of Revelation (actually all the way through History), people have been given opportunity after opportunity, to repent of their sin, and turn their hearts towards God... But their pride and their idolatry prevents them...

Even now, they are being given one last chance to hear the gospel and repent: And we have a picture of this angel carrying the Gospel through the air.

Today, like never before, the Gospel is being carried through the air. It has become so free and easy to hear (anywhere in the world):

- Organisations like Mission Aviation Fellowship fly missionaries carrying the Gospel, into some of the most remote regions of the world;
- Organisations like the Far Eastern Broadcasting Company transmit the Gospel over the airwaves, into lands that missionaries are never allowed to tread.
- Even our little church here – Bush Disciples, are transmitting the Gospel and Bible teaching, all over the world, through our internet ministry.

*I don't know if you guys realise how much the ministry of this little church, is extending across the globe. Individual messages on our podcast are now being downloaded up to 50 times in a week. Now, I have no idea where these are from... But I **do** know with the video messages:*

- *Australia;*
- *USA;*
- *Netherlands;*
- *Mongolia;*
- *Ukraine;*
- *Saudi Arabia;*
- *We get a lot of downloads from Russia and Germany;*
- *Serbia;*
- *Romania;*
- *Poland;*
- *Norway;*

- *Colombia;*
- *Lithuania;*
- *Korea;*
- *Japan;*
- *Italy;*
- *India;*
- *Ireland;*
- *UK;*
- *France;*
- *Spain;*
- *Taiwan;*
- *Czech Republic;*
- *Brazil...*

All of these places are downloading the videos of our messages. And we're a small fish in a big pond.

Today, like never before, the eternal Gospel **is** being proclaimed to **every nation and tribe and language and people**. Sadly though, even though it's being proclaimed, many still won't listen.

But I want you to notice what the Gospel is, and how it begins: The Gospel (this eternal Gospel) begins with "Fear God". Very often, the Gospel preached today, is "God is love" and it's left at that... But before we can fully experience God's love, first we have to "**fear god**" (where we have a healthy, awe-filled respect for God)... And largely, the fear of God, has been **lost** from our society...

And yet, the unrepentant have a very good reason to fear God. This Angel, flying overhead, is carrying the Gospel (which is

good news). And part of this good news, is his proclaiming, the coming judgment of God...

Preachers who dare to preach on “the judgment of God”, are not very popular today (actually I suspect they were never very popular)... After all, who wants to listen to a message about “An approaching doom???” Most people want to hear a positive message – they want to hear good tidings and a message that will make them feel good...

And I’ve gotta tell ya, I don’t enjoy teaching about the judgment of God, but I’ve been negligent in my duty if I haven’t... Maybe that’s one of the reasons why it’s taken me so long to getting around to preaching through the book of Revelation... But here the Gospel (that means the good news) is: Fear God; give Him glory; worship Him as creator; WHY??? because the hour of judgment has come...

The time **is** coming, when every knee **will** bow before Jesus as Lord... Even those who have rejected Christ will kneel before Him on **that** day... But unfortunately for them, it’ll be too late...

And if this makes our hearts grieve (and I hope it does), imagine how much it makes God’s heart grieve...

V8

⁸ Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”

I'm not going to say much about this today, because in a couple of weeks, we're going to be hearing more about the symbol of "Babylon" and what it represents... But at this point I'll just say this: Babylon, is a symbol of world trade and immorality – it's an image of greed; indulgence; corruption; and essentially, it's an image of "worldliness". And as God judges the world, the collapse of the world financial system (that Christians are already going to be shut out of), is going to be part of that judgment.

V9-13

⁹ And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ 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 sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

¹³ 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 labours, for their deeds follow them!"

In chapter 13, we saw the persecution of Christians. And it would've been so very easy, for them to deny Jesus and to worship the image of antichrist... Their suffering would have finished immediately... But that would've only been a temporary reprieve, and then they would've been far worse off...

A subtle compromise – "It won't hurt to deny Jesus... I can just pretend that I'm worshipping the image – God will know that I'm **not** doing it in my heart"... What a subtle temptation to compromise that would be... But the whole point is, this is exactly the type of compromise that we're being warned about. It's the sort of compromise that dishonours God, and will attract his **full** wrath...

And so, this **is** a call for the endurance of the saints ... There's a **double** reason to remain faithful to Jesus: Those who remain faithful, will be rewarded. But those who compromise, V10 says: 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 sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

You know, the full terror of hell, often gets watered down, by saying "Hell is simply a place where God is not.".... Well, that sounds attractive to a sinner, but it's not true!!! What's

being described, is an active punishment, and Jesus and His Holy angels are right there, overseeing it...

V14-20

¹⁴ 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. 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." ¹⁶ So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 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." 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. ²⁰ 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. (which is about 300km)

This would have to be the most gruesome of images. And I don't think I have to explain it, do I? The image speaks for itself... This is a picture of the final conviction of the guilty and their subsequent punishment...

And of course, it's not literal. We don't know how God is going to punish the wicked, but images of the winepress and fire and sulphur, should be a pretty good clue that it's not going to be nice.

You know, many people today, treat God as if He doesn't exist... Disciples of Jesus are viewed as naïve idiots or legalistic moralisers, pushing their values on the rest of the world...

Academics such as Richard Dawkins have gained celebrity status, and make quite a nice living (thank you very much) by publically mocking God and anyone who would believe in Him... And the world's wickedness continues to increase with the attitude that if there is a God, He's left the building...

And God allows this to continue. For now.

Jesus told a parable about weeds and wheat growing together in the one paddock, and when the time for harvest came, they were both harvested. The good seed was gathered to the barns. The bad was burned....

Oh how terrible it will be, for those who don't repent while there is still time... And the thing is, we don't know when that time will be up.

Which is why, as Christians, we are called to endure.

I want to finish by going back to V12 &13 – I skipped over them before. V13 **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.** “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!”

We often read that verse at funerals, and why wouldn't we? – it seems very appropriate.

But it's really meant more so as an encouragement for the persecuted church. The labours **they** rest from – well, it's not just work – it's like the labour of childbirth – the pain – the travail,,, of continuing in the faith, even when the world hates you and mocks you... But those who die in the Lord, **rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!**

You've heard it said often enough, “You can't take anything with you when you die.” That's not true... You can't take any physical possessions with you, but there's plenty we **can** take with us when we die... How we live on this earth, is storing up wealth for us in heaven.

In V12, the saints (the holy ones of God) are described as **those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

The question before **us** today, as we consider the approaching day of Judgment, is **2-fold**:

1. One: Is my **faith** in Jesus Christ?

Am I a follower of Jesus? Is He my Lord? If I was threatened with death, and my only way out, was to denounce Jesus, or to worship another, would I do it???

Is my faith in Jesus Christ, and in Christ alone?

2. And secondly, am I keeping the commandments of God? As Christians, how we live, matters ...

There's a modern heresy in much of the church today, that says "It doesn't matter how you live. As long as you believe in Jesus, you don't have to keep any commands – you can do what you like..." That my friends, is a lie that leads to Hell...

It matters very much how we live... And on judgment day, will we be numbered among those who compromised? Will we be numbered among those who compromised in our morals; or in our beliefs???

Or will we be among the faithful, pure and holy, singing a new song before the Lamb of God and His throne????

It's been heavy going today, and I'm glad you could stick with me.

Let's pray.