

Revelation
Ch 14:14-20

The Two Reapers

I think it is safe to say that the text this morning, along with the verses from last week, contain the teaching that is the least popular among Biblical doctrines, i.e. the wrath of God.

While the topic was never on the top of the charts of popularity, there was a time when it was somewhat more acceptable.

In fact, the imagery of the wrath of God was so accepted that it an idea from today's passage was incorporated into one of the most famous hymns of our society. Listen for it as I read the final section from Revelation ch 14.

The Reapers

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. 18 Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." 19 So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20 And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

DID YOU HEAR the hint of one of the popular hymns of our country?

NO, it's not

We are the grapes of wrath

So stay out of our path

There's no escape from cranky grapes

We are the grapes of wrath

IT IS this hymn

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword

His truth is marching on

I wonder how many people in our country today really know the words to this song. I also wonder how many would embrace the ideas presented in this "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Dr Rayburn...

People nowadays find the notion of impending judgment a violation of our freedom, our rights to self-determination. The idea of Hell is, in modern Western thought at least, undemocratic; a violation of our civil rights. All of this makes complete sense and is absolutely convincing to the modern mind shaped as it has been by the spirit of the age: tolerant, relativist, non-judgmental,

pluralist, and pleasure-seeking. The Last Judgment as it is described in the Bible does not fit into this worldview at all.

Not liking something doesn't mean it is not true – EX: sauerkraut exists whether I like it or not.

Let's take a look at the passage and then consider what it means to explain the reality of brimstone to a so-called broad-minded culture.

Two angles of the same event – the return of Christ

Two sharp sickles

One is in the hands of Christ to Gather His church, not leave them behind but to take us home.

Why do we say it is Christ?

v. 14 “son of man” , golden crown, sitting on a cloud

Two of these ideas have already been used in reference to Christ in the previous chapters of Revelation.

1:13; (son of Man) 1:7 (coming with the clouds). As for the crown, we know that Christ is the one who was exalted to the right hand of God. While in other chapters Jesus is the one handing out crowns to those who were faithful, here he is seen wearing the golden crown.

Jesus receives a message from the angel, i.e. messenger of God. in Mk 14 Jesus indicated that even he did not know the day or hour of the final day, so it makes sense that he gets a message from the Father...”The Time is Now.”

We have two perspectives on the final judgement.

The Grain Harvest by the Son of Man shows completion v. 16

(“Fully ripe” reflects “dried” in Greek, showing that the crop is wheat, barley, or some other grain.) The destination of this grain, once harvested, is not mentioned (unlike the grapes); but John the Baptist and Jesus himself had already promised that Jesus would gather the righteous into his barns for safekeeping (Matt. 3:12; 13:20). – D. Johnson

One sickle is in the hands of angel from the temple v. 17

#2 Sickle for cutting grapes to be put in wine press – the judgement of God. This is an image of a great deal of blood.

The second sickle harvest is not one of completion but of destruction. The grapes that are harvested are

Put in the wine press of the wrath of God. Those grapes in the winepress represent those who have persisted in their rebellion despite the many gracious warnings and calls to repentance.

This imagery is taken from Isaiah 63: 3-6

The numbers and the imagery used indicate the totality of the earth. There is nowhere to hide from the judgement of God. There's no secret hideaway or safe space to avoid the final harvest.

This whole scene is offensive to modern man, even as it has been offensive to mankind throughout the ages. It is offensive to the idea of human autonomy. Church leaders as early as Cyril of Alexandria (376-444AD) proposed a doctrine of universalism, i.e. all are saved and there is no judgement.

There is an emotional tug toward this view, and we might like to embrace it IF WE IGNORE the clear Biblical teaching of the Justice of God.

Let's consider the tension or the conundrum of the love of God and the Just judgement of God. What are the options:

1) There is no God and thus no final judgement, or any judgement.

"Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky." (John Lennon)

It sounds like Utopia. It sounds too good to be true, which usually means that it isn't true, if it is a human oriented dream or vision of reality.

The only things I know of that are too good to be true come from God, i.e. Salvation and all the blessings we have in Christ.

Human based Utopias from Babel to modern versions simply don't live up to their billing.

"Utopia" = "no place"

Here's the rub...If there is no God who has given us His moral will, then it is hard to explain why some sort of moral code exists everywhere. It may not be the same code, but all cultures have some code. If they simply evolved for the betterment of society, then they are only make-believe.

The bottom-line code then becomes "we must only do or permit that which promotes social flourishing, which includes the survival of the human race." That flies in the face of some important cultural mantras regarding the value of life and the very nature of man and woman in the image of God.

2) There is a God, but he is so loving that he would never punish people as the Bible says.

Dr. Rayburn has a great insight on this option.

The God of love involved in this option is borrowed from the Bible, for no other religion teaches such a high view of the love of God. The ancient gods were certainly not loving and gracious. Buddhism has no God per se. Hinduism has thousands of Gods, but none are personal and self-sacrificing. There is no teaching in Islam that "Allah" manifests a love that is so personally overwhelming that it would be incompatible with an expectation of judgement.

The universalist might speak of a God who loves too much to judge, but she/he is stumped by the questions, "What did it cost this kind of God to love us and embrace us? What did he endure in order to receive us? Where did this God agonize, cry out? Where are his nails and thorns?"

Such a view of God may feel good emotionally, but it is all sentimentality with nothing behind it. The worship of such a God is merely intellectual, ethical, and theoretical. Such a God offers no "Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

There is no sense of being constrained by the love of this hypothetical God.

"He loves me. SO WHAT?"

It's a 'love' that is all talk and no action. It is a love that is general and has no content to it, so... "Of course he loves me."

Such a "God" is like the used car salesman who 'loves' everyone who steps onto his lot, but he won't buy you a new car, and he certainly won't give his life to save yours.

Such a God loves hypothetically- there is no substance to back up the emotion. Nothing comes close to the love that Christ has for His bride, for whom he died.

We're all like the Prince Edward from Enchanted.

"Sire, you....like yourself?"

EDWARD: "What's not to like?"

We don't see a need for any sort of accountability or justice from God. "It's all good."

A non-personal God that has no standards can't draw a distinction between right and wrong. The problem is that deep down we know and need the distinctions between right and wrong. We make such distinctions whether we believe in God or not.

The conundrum or irony is that the God who is so loving that He would never judge or condemn someone can only be seen in the Bible, and that same book speaks clearly about the judgement of God. The lead character of the Bible, Jesus, spoke quite frequently of the justice and judgment of God.

There is a boomerang effect in arguing for the love of God that is incompatible with judgment because you must rely on the Bible to even imagine a God so loving, and in relying on the bible you see that this God of love is also a God of justice and judgement.

We want a God too loving to judge, but we also want a God who is so just that he'll deal with the evil that saddens and offends us. If God lets evil go unpunished, is he really all that loving?

3) There is a God who is loving and just, and he will judge in righteousness and equity.

We must never forget that this God of justice has given ample information and warning about the reality of His love, His justice, and the final judgement. He has graciously provided all the information we need to be delivered from the wrath to come. He not only provided the information, He has provided our Savior, our champion, and the lover of our souls.

In reality, there is no love without justice.

When we truly love someone, we are invested with them for their good and we hurt with them when they are hurt. We want justice for them when they are mistreated, cheated, and abused. We understand that great love calls forth the desire and the need for JUSTICE.

EX: During Reconstruction period, there was an average of 160 lynchings per year. When we hear or see how people are victims of injustice, how do we respond?

Do we say, "Oh well, them's the brakes. Win some, lose some." NO, we want someone to make it right.

Looking upon the injustice of our sin, God did something.

While we were yet sinners, enemies, alienated and hostile, God sent His Son to deliver us from the power and penalty of sin. All we have to do is believe.

But as I cited last week from John 5:44 "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?"

The problem with the human heart is that we want the glory for us and from us.

"What's not to like", right?

Here's the Good News – The holy God who will bring the final justice is the loving God who leads with mercy.

God is so holy that Jesus had to die; He is so loving that Jesus was glad to die.

Last week I mentioned Marley's ghost in A Christmas Carol. Marley was doomed to roam the nether world bound by chains and had no rest.

Later in the book, Scrooge asks the third spirit...*

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be only?"

Scrooge then makes this point...

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

As we come to the TWO REAPERS, we know this is a vision of what WILL BE.

But the gracious warning of God and the proclamation of the Eternal Gospel means that one's course may be departed from, and the final end will change.

That is what repentant faith in Christ is all about.

*Dickens, Charles. A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (Annotated) unabridged (p. 59). George Alfred Williams. Kindle Edition.

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