

*All Things New: Blessed Are The Pure In Heart*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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*Ezekiel 43:1-2; Proverbs 3:5-10; Revelation 14:1-5*

Our final Scripture lesson today is taken from Revelation 14:1-5. May God add His richest blessing on the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”

What a difference a week makes! One week ago, we were still meeting at Weight Watchers. Many assumed the Corona virus would just pass over. People were living their lives much as they always had. A week later, the president is giving daily updates and we're having Bible study over the Internet and broadcasting our worship from our home. Sudden changes like this make us far more aware how caught up we were in ourselves and our plans.

I am honestly not sure since living in Russia that I've gone a week without eating out! Without running to karate and robotics, having to make food at home and record videos for Catha's students, everything is so much different. And I'm sure it is for you too! Everybody is trying to get used to the new normal. Yet these sudden changes also point out ways that our lives can change for the better – checking in on our CrossWay family and our neighbors, spending more time in Scripture and prayer, recognizing the opportunity to become stronger believers. As hard as some things are right now, we don't want to return to the “old” normal either.

Just like our lifestyle change, today's passage is as big a change as you can get from last week's passage. This week, we see just how different God is from the beast in Revelation 13 and how different believers are from those who are caught up in the ways of the world. In the next few minutes, let's see what this passage has to say about our God and His faithful ones.

In last week's passage, ominous beasts from the sea were given authority by the dragon, God's ancient enemy the devil, to manipulate and deceive the world. Those who were not under God's seal worshiped the beast and served him. The beasts represent world governments that oppose God and His righteousness. The beast constantly mimicked God, but in every way always fell short; the beast engages in a pale imitation of God without God's perfect holiness and love. We realized that we don't need an imitation because God has offered us the real thing, His one and only Son, as the perfect offering for our sin debt and as the perfect friend, brother, confidant, and Savior.

Today's passage has no mention of the evil dragon or his beasts. It's a total 180, a total contrast to the wickedness of those who belong to the dragon and follow him. We know we're in a new section because there's a verbal division between this passage and the last, because of John's words, "Then I looked." God is revealing something different to John, something to sweep away the vile taste of the beast and to focus us back on Himself.

While that's not something we're going to study at length today, it's something to always remember: Scripture never focuses on wickedness for very long without giving us a portrait of God and His righteousness and His perfect response to the evil in our midst. As Christians, we acknowledge evil, we preach the reality of it, we do not deny it – we do not shy away from condemning evil for what it truly is. But our focus isn't on evil. Because we are fallen creatures, it's easy for us to become like what we focus on, even when we do so to denounce it. We want to focus on the love, glory, power, majesty, righteousness, justice, and holiness of the living God. We acknowledge sin; we repent of sin; but we focus on Jesus. As the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Now, John's vision continues. "There before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion." John sees Jesus on a mountain – not just any mountain, but Mount Zion. Zion is synonymous with Jerusalem, and it usually means the holy city, the eternal city. Zion is ultimately the new Jerusalem, the one that God perfects in His Kingdom. Jesus is on the mountain where the New Jerusalem will be built; it is His home, His place among us.

On that mountain alongside of Him are "144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." Earlier in the study we learned that the 144,000 is not a literal number, but a figurative one that stands for the whole of all believers. In Revelation 13, the people belonging to the world were forced to wear the number of the beast, but God's people do not have that mark; instead, they have the seal of God on them – the name of Christ and the name of the Father are what believers wear. We bear the sign of the one we serve.

And that leads me to our first take-away point for today: *believers bear the mark of God*. Famous designers mark the clothes they created, right? People pay crazy amounts of money for items by Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior; they want to be seen with the Nike swoosh on their shirt or The North Face logo on their coat. On a simpler level, remember when Mom wrote your name in the clothes you took to camp so that you'd be sure to get back home with the stuff you brought with you? A Sharpie was all it took to say, "This belongs to me."

Believers are marked with the name of God and His Son. We need this truth deep down in our souls, especially in trying times such as these. If you are a believer, God has placed His name on you. God does not write in pencil; He doesn't write in disappearing ink. An indelible Sharpie is barely close enough. We have been sealed for the day of redemption by the Spirit – Ephesians 4:30. If you have genuine faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you have been predestined; you have been claimed; you have been called; you have been justified; you are being and have been sanctified; you are being brought into His glory; you have His name on you.

When you are tempted to look into your pantry and say, “Is there enough food for next week,” and start to worry, remember that God’s name is on you and do not be afraid. When you are tempted to look at your bank account and say, “Where did all my money go,” and start to get upset, remember that Jesus has written His eternal title on your forehead and you will not be forsaken. Maybe the government is going to send everybody checks; maybe they aren’t; maybe they’ll be more than what you need; maybe they’ll be less. Set all that aside.

If you are a believer, you are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. You will inherit God’s Kingdom. Trust that God will be enough to take care of you. His name on you is more important than Gucci or Prada, and it means that your eternity is secure. Lean on God; He is your papa, your Abba, your daddy, your Father. He will see us through to our home on Mount Zion in the New Jerusalem. And if you are not a believer now, turn to Him today. There is no time like now to know His grace and love. Today is the day for salvation; today is the day to turn your heart to the Lord. You either belong to the beast or to the Lord of heaven and earth.

Moving on...“I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.” This fascinates me because these different elements sound so bizarre together. Rushing waters is different from thunder is different from harps. What does this mean?

In the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, God’s voice is compared to a raging torrent. In Psalm 93, the Lord is called mightier than the thunder of the great waters. And harps were used to celebrate the Lord and His goodness in worship. Harps meant the Lord was in the midst of His people. When the people went into exile in Babylon, away from the temple, they hung up their harps because harps were only for songs of joy and gladness.

I’m going to throw in a quick clip from one of our favorite places, Zoder’s Inn in Gatlinburg, TN. Right beside the inn is the Roaring Fork River. It’s just a stream, but when it has rained for a couple days (like it had in this clip), the sound is immense. Take a listen...

Now if you were to hear that without a picture, you might wonder what it was or where it was. It might sound frightening or ominous if you thought a flood was coming to wipe out your home! But that’s like the sound of harps to me. I’m not sure I know a more beautiful sound than the Roaring Fork River...it makes me think of happy trips and good times and the love of family enjoying themselves. That incredible roar is a sound of peace and grace to me, even when it’s raging like it is in that video.

And that leads us into our second take-home point today: *our God is mighty*. Not the sound of a roaring river, not the sound of a thunderstorm right outside your door, can give you the full picture of the amazing might of God. Nothing compares to Him. Not the hurricane, not the whirlwind, certainly not the Corona virus. He is mighty, and His charging in to save is worthy of the loudest, most beautiful praises.

This is so important because it means nothing if God has sealed us to Himself in baptism and written His name on us if He has no power to keep His promises or assert His authority. We've seen people trying to assert authority and telling people to stay home, and what do we see? Crowds of thousands on the beach at Spring Break. We are used to seeing even the mighty of this world have their power fail on them. But God's might never fails. There is never a time that He is not in control.

A situation like ours right now might get us to wondering: how do we reconcile the might of God with the power of a disease like this that is crippling the world? Couldn't God stop the virus in its tracks? Yes, He could. God has everything under His control. Nothing is outside His authority. So why doesn't God bring this whole mess to a halt? The simple fact is, we are sinful people. Our ancestors Adam and Eve brought death and suffering into this world by trying to become like God. Disease became a thing when rebellion against God came into the world.

And yet God in His might uses things like the Corona virus to point people back to Himself. How many of us are eating around the table again with our families? How many of us have time back that we were spending on the go, time we could be spending with God? How many of us are out of the noise of the world long enough to recognize that still, small voice telling us to change our ways and turn to Jesus?

God is giving us an opportunity. He's giving us the time to slow down long enough to hear Him calling to us. Because He is mighty, He can take care of us through this crisis and through the future ahead of us. God does not fail us; Psalm 121 reminds us that God who watches over us does not slumber or sleep. He has the strength, the power, the authority to see us through. Remember that in the days ahead.

Back to the 144,000...“they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.” The saints praise God, and we do it uniquely. No one can sing the song except the redeemed. Not the angels, not the cherubim, not the seraphim, not all the fascinating beings God has made in the heavenly court, not the animals, just us. Only those saved by Jesus have the privilege of learning the new song that rings out in the throne room of God.

That points out a simple key thought: *we have unique roles to play in the redemption story of God.* We have a unique role as the redeemed together as the church, the people of God, and we have unique roles as believers. God made you for a specific purpose. Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

I can't do your good works. I can preach the gospel, I can tell my friends what I believe, I can serve at the pregnancy center, I can do what God made me to do. I can't do what God made you to do. Your friends you counsel, the children you raise up to know the Lord, the co-workers who see you giving of yourself for your neighbors, the people you invite to worship to learn about Jesus – those are your works. Every believer sings the song that only we can sing, because of all creation, we alone are the redeemed, the ones rescued from sin by the hand of Jesus Christ.

It might be easy for us to bunker down in our homes with our Netflix and our Golden Grammys and keep the world out and post memes on Facebook all day. But even now, we can call a friend and say, “How are you?” We can send a text and say, “Do you need anything?” We can shop for someone who’s endangered by the virus to say, “I love you and I’m here for you.” Mother Teresa said, “We cannot all do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” This is likely not our time of great things. But we can do small things with great love that might have an incredible impact on someone’s eternity that we don’t even know.

Finally, we get into a description of the 144,000. It says the 144,000 “did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.” Remember the 144,000 stand for saved believers; this is not a criteria for a small group but a description of all believers. Now this doesn’t imply there is something wrong with marriage; repeatedly Scripture talks about the blessings of marriage and of children; Paul, who advocated for the single life, tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:28 it is no sin to marry, and that most people should marry. This is a question of the believer and spiritual purity.

Time and again in Scripture, adultery is condemned. The worst form of adultery is idolatry, forsaking God for another. Later in Revelation, a harlot encourages people to turn to her lusts rather than the purity of God. Christians are described as those who have followed after God with pure hearts. Not that we start out that way; not that we haven’t chased after what the world tries to offer us. It’s that through the blood of Christ, through our faith in Him, we have been changed. We want the purity of Christ and not a substitute. When John writes, “No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless,” it’s further explaining the purity that comes from being washed by Christ and changed to be like Him.

“They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.” Believers were purchased by Jesus, by the Lamb. What does it mean that they were offered as firstfruits? Most of us have heard of a tithe. God called His people in the old covenant to give Him 10% of their labors. The firstfruits were the portion that explicitly belonged to God. Giving the firstfruits was a gift in faith, that God would provide the rest of the harvest that was needed. Believers are the firstfruits because God has said, “These belong to me.”

Finally, “they follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” If you want to know what a Christian does in a nutshell, in simplest form, that’s it – they follow Christ wherever he goes. That’s the simplest way to identify a Christian; it’s the best evidence we have. It should be apparent to everyone that someone is a believer because they are always heading in the direction of Jesus and pointing others in His direction.

And so my friends, that is our challenge today, our final bullet point. *Do we follow the Lamb wherever He goes?* Do we follow Him into safety and security? Into challenge? Into danger? Into repentance and change of heart? Because a Christian follows Him into all of those things and more. Christians don’t follow the Lamb merely when it’s convenient or comfortable. Christians follow Jesus into the hardest places, into the valley of the shadow of death, because they want others to follow Him too. The Christian life is not all about hardship all that time; not at all! It’s about joy and peace and grace received and grace given. But it’s about trying to follow Christ in all things.

I encourage us to look at ourselves deeply and ask, “do I follow the Lamb wherever He goes?” This isn’t a matter of saying, “Boy, I’ve been a bad follower, so I’m in deep trouble.” No, it’s about determining to get back on the path behind Jesus, being ready to admit your mistakes and failings and returning to the road He’s on. It’s a challenge for us to realize that maybe, we haven’t actually followed Christ and just come to Him hoping for salvation. But God doesn’t just want to rescue you from eternal death. He wants to give you eternal life, and eternal life is all wrapped up in His son Jesus. As much as you genuinely want the life Jesus gives, the more closely you’re going to follow.

And what we’ve learned this morning also gives us hope. God is almighty and has placed His name upon us. We can follow Jesus onto dark paths where it’s easy to stumble because we already know we have been claimed by God. We already know He has the power to restore us when we fall. So friends, I invite you into the challenge of following Jesus. Draw close to Him, and you will know the power of God that will never fail you, and you will live knowing that He has already written His perfect name across your heart.