

All Things New: The Harvest
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April 19, 2020
Joel 3:9-17; Matthew 9:35-38; Revelation 14:14-20

Our final Scripture reading today is Revelation 14:14-20. May God bless the reading of His perfect, sacred, majestic Word. "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."

- Current events don't stay current for very long.
 - Our current virus event is the first time in forever that the news has stayed on one subject for this long – except maybe President Trump
 - Topical discussions quickly go out of date; to understand them, we have to go back to the time and understand things from that perspective
 - In the last few months, going back to 70s and 80s movies – how much has changed in terms of acceptable language, romance, violence in PG movies – how many plotlines only work in a world without cell phones – also, how many films that seemed topical don't work now – we see something at face value, not understanding the commentary behind it
 - We lose perspective because we aren't in the same place and time – someone who lived through a war or lived through the devastating illnesses of the past might have a different perspective on our current restrictions

- For us, this passage and its core illustration is really far from us – it’s about the harvesting of the world
 - I admit I’m a city boy – never really knew much about farming
 - Some of you plant veggies – know far more than I do about how it all works
 - Did some research this week on it that was really helpful that might get us into a deeper understanding of this passage
 - For the ancient world, an agrarian society where over 80% of people were farmers by trade and even those who weren’t usually knew about it, this was a powerful metaphor – they saw it every season and it directly connected with their lives – when Jesus used the metaphor
- Detail diving
 - We are in a new section – the marker, “I looked, and behold” is there; we are moving into a new metaphorical concept
 - The Son of Man on a cloud – this is Jesus, with the title He most used for Himself – cloud indicates a lower heaven, perhaps, and His return
 - Crown of gold – there’s a difference here in the Greek that this is a victor’s crown, not a kingly crown – given to someone who’s won a competition. Jesus is coming back here primarily as victor over death and evil and sin.
 - Sharp sickle – the sickle was used for harvest, and it was naturally sharp, so why mention it twice? Sharp sickle is not going to miss a cut – clean, without a miss or a mistake
 - An angel gives the word from the Father to the Son to begin the harvest
 - Jesus said in Matthew 24 that only the Father knew the time of His second coming and the final judgment
 - Jesus is sent, but remember, Jesus is permanently embodied, so at this moment, He is not physically present with the Father – God uses the angel as a messenger to Him, which is the job of angels – this is as much for John as for Jesus (remember Jesus praying for the benefit of the disciples)
 - This is like a grain harvest – the word here translated “ripe” means “dry” in Greek – corn and soybeans have to be the perfect dryness, not too much, not too little – they are ready
 - The first harvest looks to be the faithful – Jesus tends to them Himself – at the proper time, the first thing looked after are those who have committed themselves to following Christ – the Spirit has brought us to maturity

- Then we have two more angels – one with a sickle, the other with the fire of the altar, and he commands the first to harvest the grapes into the winepress of God’s wrath – this follows the pattern of Joel 3, where the sins of the nations are compared to grapes in a winepress finally ready for harvest
- The image is gruesome and massive – 1,600 stadia is a picture of the full earth – the 4 directions on the compass multiplied together and then by 100 – the bloodshed is roughly 200 miles by 4 feet deep – it is a picture of the total annihilation of evil and those who do not repent of their evil
- What can the basics of farming tell us about this vision of the judgment at the end of the world?
 - The harvest happens quickly, and you must be prepared
 - Once begun, it happens quickly – farmers can harvest 2000 acres of corn in six weeks or less, working 18 hours a day, to avoid the loss of any of the crop – country singer Luke Bryan wrote in a song that “the only time of year we miss the church bells chime is harvest time”
 - The ancient Israelites knew this because they had different crops coming in at different times – grain, olives, grapes – and all of them had to be harvested at the right time, and fast – no one could afford to be unprepared when the harvest came
 - The sharp sickle tells us that not only will the cuts be perfect, but quick – not hacking at the crops, but cleanly and quickly
 - Jesus describes in Matthew 24 that when He comes again, it will be like a thief in the night you didn’t prepare for – so always be ready – He tells of the difference between a servant who is faithful and wise and cares for his Master’s matters while He is away and a servant who uses his Master’s absence to abuse the other servants and please himself getting drunk – the difference between what part of the harvest you are in, the grain or the grapes, is whether or not you are prepared and following your Master’s designs
 - Are you following in a way that can be recognized? Facebook posts, serving and helping others, being intentional about time with God? We are not saved by our actions, but our actions should reflect that we are saved!

- Harvest of the world is a community event – we are in this together
 - Harvest is never a one person job – it’s a community event
 - Harvest for a family who’d lost a regular hired hand at retirement
 - In Matthew 13, Jesus describes the harvesters as angels; while we get a picture of Jesus and a few angels here, we see them engaged as harvesting the world in the Scripture
 - There’s a share in the rewards at harvest time – biblically, God receives the first fruits of the harvest well before it’s done
 - The church is God’s harvester – Matthew 9 passage – our job is to plant seeds of the gospel, to water those seeds so that they grow into full maturity, readying them for harvest
 - When someone in the church suffers, we all suffer; we rejoice when one rejoices – when someone is struggling with faith or discipleship, we feel it
 - All people throughout history have been self-interested and self-focused – it’s part of the sin nature – but Americans are particularly individualistic; we see salvation as “my salvation,” “I am saved” – we don’t like a church, we go by ourselves to another one, typically – we make friends with a small group of people at church, but it’s rare to have a church where we know everybody, let alone think of them as our family
 - The culture of 1st century Christianity cannot let us think this way. We are a community to be harvested – Jesus taught us to pray, “our father” – not only others-oriented, but community oriented, with our concern turned to the church in particular – Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”
- Patience for both harvests is all that delays the Lord’s return
 - Farming is a ton of work, but there’s also a lot of work that happens while you’re waiting on the right timing – a harvest that isn’t ready is worthless
 - God is holding back Jesus’ return for the full measure of righteousness to be rewarded and wickedness to be punished
 - God is patient – 2 Peter 3:9-10, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.” Will you be ready for the harvest?