

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 20, Revelation 14-16--Grain/Grapes; Seven Bowls

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All right. So we're diving deep into Revelation 14 today. It's all about, you know, salvation and judgment, those big themes.

And just to set the scene a bit, chapters 12 and 13 were intense, right? All that conflict between, well, good and evil. But chapter 14 kind of shifts things. It's like we move into this, I don't know, this new phase where we see the victory of those who stayed true to God.

And also, well, the consequences for those who chose, um, chose a different path. Yeah. It is a pretty stark shift, like moving from this period of intense struggle to one where the, um, the results of all those choices become, I guess, really clear.

Right. Exactly. And to guide us through all this, we've got Dr. Dave Mathewson.

He's this, you know, Revelation scholar who spent years, I mean years, unpacking all those, uh, mysteries and symbolism. And you know what? He actually calls verse four of this chapter his favorite in the entire book of Revelation. Oh, wow.

That's interesting. I know, right? So I'm super curious, what could possibly be so captivating about this one verse? Well, I guess we've got to dive in and find out. The chapter starts with this, like, really striking image.

We've got the Lamb who represents Jesus, you know, standing victorious on Mount Zion, and he's surrounded by 144,000 followers. Each one has his name on their forehead, and they're, um, they're singing this unique song, a song that no one else can learn. Okay.

That's a pretty exclusive choir. So what's the deal with these 144,000? What makes them so special? Well, the number itself is symbolic. It represents, you know, the faithful church.

It's like drawing this parallel to that Old Testament image of Israel as, um, as God's chosen people, you know, and they're also described as virgins, which symbolizes their, like, purity and resistance to all that idolatry that was happening all over the place in the Roman Empire. Oh, I see. So even back then, Christians were facing pressure to conform, to go along with the world's way of doing things.

Kind of like today, right? I mean, we face pressure to fit in, to compromise what we believe. Is there a connection there? Do you think? Absolutely. It's a reminder that being a true follower of Christ often means, you know, standing strong in your faith, even when it's, well, when it's unpopular, when it's difficult.

That's powerful. And that brings us to Mathewson's favorite verse, Revelation 14.4. Let me just read it here. It says, "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure."

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. It's such a strong image of total devotion. Why do you think this verse resonated so deeply with Matthewson? You know, I think it really gets to that core message of Revelation.

That idea of staying faithful to God, even when you face persecution, even when you're tempted to stray. The 144,000, they kind of symbolize those who just refuse to, you know, compromise their beliefs. Those who follow Jesus, no matter what, no matter the cost.

Yeah. It's about making that choice to follow the Lamb, even when it's hard, even when the world's pulling you in another direction. But we can't forget the setting of this scene, right? It's all happening on Mount Zion.

And that's more than just, you know, a place on a map. There's got to be something more to it. What's the significance of Mount Zion? Mount Zion? Well, it symbolizes God's presence, his protection, and ultimately salvation.

It's kind of looking ahead to the new Jerusalem that's described in Revelation 21 and 22. You know, that eternal home where God will be with his people. So it's this picture of ultimate security, of victory for those who stayed faithful.

But there's one detail that's always kind of bugged me. The 144,000, they're called the firstfruits. And that always made me think there's more to come, like a bigger harvest, you know, like the first apples ripen, but there are more on the trees still.

Yeah, that's how a lot of people interpret it. But Matthewson, he has a different take. He thinks that in Revelation, the firstfruits represent the complete final people of God, not just an initial group.

Wait, so it's not just like, I don't know, like a preview. It's the entire, the whole grand finale of God's redeemed people. That's it.

He points to those Old Testament examples, like Jeremiah 2.2-3, where all of Israel is called the firstfruits. So it's not a partial harvest. It's the full, complete ingathering of God's people, you know, at the end of time.

Think of it like you're not just part of a preliminary group. You're part of the final, complete people of God. Wow.

That changes things. It's not about waiting for some bigger harvest. It's about recognizing that, you know, the culmination of God's plan for redemption is happening right here, right now.

That's, I don't know, that's a pretty powerful thought, but the story doesn't end there, does it? Revelation 14, it takes this sharp turn. You're talking about verses 6-13, right? Yeah. Where we meet those three angels.

Each one has this urgent message for the world. The first angel, he proclaims this eternal gospel, calling everyone to, you know, fear God and give him glory. That sounds pretty familiar, don't you think? Like that call to repentance we see all through the Bible.

Oh, yeah, it does. But what's interesting is that this call to repentance comes after all those intense scenes of judgment back in chapters 11 and 13. It's like there's still this, you know, this chance, this window of opportunity, even as judgment is unfolding.

Yeah. It's not like all hope is lost. The door to repentance is still open.

But then, well, the second angel's message, that definitely turns up the drama. He shouts, fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. Talk about a statement.

This is where judgment gets, you know, pronounced on the wicked. Okay, Babylon. We all know it's this loaded term, right? But what does it really mean here? Why Babylon? Well, remember, John's writing this letter to those Christians who were living under Roman rule.

And Babylon, with its history of arrogance and oppression and all that, you know, idolatry, it becomes this symbol, this powerful symbol for the Roman Empire. It's kind of looking ahead, foreshadowing what's to come. We're going to see Babylon's final downfall explored even more in chapters 17 and 18.

So Babylon represents those corrupt systems, you know, those powers that are against God. Got it. And then the third angel's message really drives home the consequences of siding with those forces.

Oh, absolutely. This angel warns those who worship the beast and accept his mark. The imagery he uses is, well, it's pretty intense.

It talks about drinking this undiluted wine and enduring this torment with burning sulfur and smoke that just rises forever and ever. It's a vivid picture of, you know, God's wrath, God's judgment. Yeah, it's definitely where the chapter takes a darker turn.

You know, those images are pretty unsettling. It's a bleak picture of what happens if you reject God. Well, we have to remember that this imagery comes from the Old Testament, where God's judgment on those wicked empires is often portrayed in these, well, these strong symbolic terms.

It's not about, you know, literal torture. It's about showing just how serious the consequences are for choosing evil over good. You see this kind of imagery in the prophets too, you know, especially when they're talking about the downfall of empires like Assyria or even Babylon itself.

Right, right. So how are we supposed to understand these messages today? Are they just scary stories to, I don't know, frighten us, or is there something deeper for us to, you know, take away? I see them as, well, both warnings and calls to persevere, especially for those Christians who are facing pressure to conform, you know, to fit in with the world. They remind us that God sees our struggles and that in the end, he will judge and vindicate his people.

So it's a reminder that our choices matter, not just now, but also in the future. And even when things look dark, God's justice will, you know, win out in the end. But Revelation 14 doesn't stop there, does it? The last part of the chapter hits us with another set of powerful images.

Oh yeah, you mean the two harvests, one of blessing and one of judgment. That's verses 14 through 20. That's right.

We get these two contrasting scenes: a grain harvest led by the Son of Man and then a grape harvest that's, well, that's directed by an angel. What's the difference? What's happening here? Think of them less as like chronological events, you know, and more as different ways of picturing the same events we saw earlier in the chapter. It's all about understanding what the symbols mean.

Okay, so let's unpack that symbolism. What's the deeper meaning behind each of these harvests? The grain harvest in verses 14 through 16 echoes what Jesus taught in Matthew 13, where the wheat represents the righteous and the weeds are, you know, the wicked. The wheat gets carefully gathered and preserved while the weeds are destroyed.

In Revelation, it's a positive harvest. It symbolizes the gathering of God's people, which links back to that first fruits idea we talked about earlier. It's a picture of salvation, the faithful being brought together.

Okay, so the grain harvest is about the wealth of good stuff. What about the grape harvest? I have a feeling it's not going to be quite as cheery. You got it.

The grape harvest in verses 17 through 20 is directly connected to those pronouncements of judgment in verses 8 through 11. It portrays, well, the fate of those who chose to side with Babylon, those forces that are opposed to God. So the grapes, they get trampled in a wine press, but instead of juice, what flows out is blood.

It's symbolizing the horrific consequences of rejecting God. John really, I don't know. He really makes his point with that imagery.

He describes this blood flowing as high as a horse's bridle, stretching for miles and miles. That's pretty intense. That detail, it's not just there for shock value.

John's trying to evoke those Old Testament scenes of judgment to emphasize just how huge and how severe the consequences are. He's drawing on this long history of similar imagery to really underline his point. So we've got these two harvests happening, one of blessing, one of judgment.

It's like this reminder that the choices we make, they have eternal implications, but are these harvests sequential? Do they happen one after the other or are they happening simultaneously? That's where that symbolic interpretation comes in. Matthew Sitchin suggests they're not necessarily sequential, but different sizes of the same event, different ways of understanding what's happening on this cosmic level. Okay.

So it's more about grasping the big picture, right? The contrasting outcomes for those who follow the lamb versus those who, well, those who take a different road. There's a lot to unpack here, and we've only just, I don't know, scratched the surface. Stay tuned for part two where we'll go even deeper into the symbolism of these harvests and what they mean for us today.

Okay. So we just finished talking about those two contrasting harvests. The one that brings blessing and the other one that's, well, not so much.

And you know, that image of the blood from the wine press, it was really graphic. It really stuck with me. Like John really wanted to drive home the point about the consequences, you know? And you mentioned that those harvest scenes have roots in the Old Testament.

Could you tell us a little more about that? You're absolutely right. It is a pretty striking image. And about the Old Testament connection, yeah, you're spot on there.

Using the harvest as a metaphor for judgment, that goes, well, it goes way back. Like the prophet Joel, he talks about God's judgment on the nations as a time when, you know, when the grapes are ready for the wine presses. It's like the harvest; it signals that it's time for things to, I don't know, to be sorted out, to be made right.

So John is drawing on this familiar image to communicate that God's ultimate justice is coming. It's not, you know, it's not a new idea. Exactly.

It's like he's tapping into this deep well of understanding from, well, from centuries of scripture. And you know that detail about the blood reaching the horse's bridles and stretching for miles? That has this really interesting parallel in the Book of Enoch. Enoch.

Hmm. That one's not, I don't know. That one's not really familiar to me.

It's one of those, you know, ancient Jewish texts. Not part of the traditional biblical canon, but it was, um, it was pretty well known in the first century, and it probably influenced John's writing. In Enoch, there's this, um, there's a similar scene where blood flows like a river and it, like, reaches the height of a horse's breastplate.

It's like John's using multiple layers of, you know, scriptural understanding to create this, this really powerful picture of judgment. It's like he's, I don't know, layering these images, weaving them together from the Old Testament and other Jewish writings. It creates this, like, incredible tapestry, but it's not just about the scale, right? There's also this feeling of inevitability to it all.

Like this is it, the moment where, you know, everything comes to a head. Yeah. The harvest imagery, it definitely gives you that sense of, I don't know, like ripeness, like things have reached their natural conclusion.

It's like judgment time is here. The peak of all this, you know, comes before. You know how in movies there's that moment when the tension builds and builds, and you just know something big is about to happen.

It's like that. Exactly. You got it.

In Revelation 14, we're seeing that climax, but on this, you know, on this cosmic scale, this is where God's justice is, like, fully revealed. But it's not just about, you know, punishing those who've done wrong. It's also about vindication for those who've, you know, stayed faithful, those who stood strong in their faith, those who endured persecution for what they believed in.

This is their moment. This is where they're acknowledged, and I don't know, upheld. It's like, you know, it's like that satisfying scene in a courtroom drama when the innocent person is finally set free, and the guilty person is, you know, finally held accountable.

There's this sense of rightness being restored. Absolutely. It's about restoring balance in the universe.

You know, remember that cry from those souls under the altar back in chapter six, how they cried out, how long, O Lord, until you judge those who shed our blood? Well, in Revelation 14, we get the answer. God's judgment is coming, and it will be. Well, it will be swift and decisive.

Justice will be served. So how do we, like, how do we apply those themes of salvation and judgment to our lives today? Should we be living in fear, you know, always looking over our shoulders, waiting for the apocalypse? I'm guessing that's not the message here. You're right.

It's not about living in fear, but it is a call to, I don't know, to understand that our choices have consequences, not just now, but also in the future. Revelation 14 reminds us that we can either choose to align ourselves with God's purpose, you know, follow the Lamb, or we can choose the ways of the world, which ultimately lead to destruction. Yeah.

It's like choosing to build your house on sand versus building it on solid rock. One's going to stand the test of time, and the other one, well, not so much. That's a great analogy.

And if we choose to build on that solid rock to follow Jesus's example of love and sacrifice and service, then we can be confident that we'll be part of that grain harvest, you know, welcomed into God's eternal kingdom. It's a message of hope, even in the midst of all this talk of judgment and consequences. But I have to admit, some of those images in Revelation 14 are pretty, I don't know, unsettling.

Those descriptions of the wine press and the blood, they raise some tough questions about, well, about God's judgment. It's not always easy to reconcile those images with the God of love and mercy. I get it.

It's definitely challenging. Matthew Sin, he, he cautions us about taking that imagery literally, like it's some kind of, you know, gruesome torture. He suggests we see it as symbolic.

Symbolic. Okay. So if it's not about literal torture, then what is it about? He says that this language draws on that Old Testament tradition of portraying God's judgment as like a time of purification.

It's about separating the righteous from the wicked, not about inflicting pain just for the sake of it, you know? So it's about restoring order, setting things right, not just punishment. Exactly. The imagery, it's meant to emphasize just how serious it is to reject God's love and mercy.

Yeah. It's a stark picture of what happens when you turn away from God. Which brings us back to the importance of, you know, repentance.

Even as judgment is happening, there's still that chance to turn back to God. That message from the first angel, the one proclaiming the eternal gospel, it offers a sliver of hope, even amidst all those warnings about judgment. Yes.

It's not a message of despair. It's a call to action, an invitation to choose- I don't know- to choose life, to choose love and righteousness, to turn away from the darkness and embrace the light. And that choice, it ultimately rests with each person, right? Revelation 14 lays out this, you know, this stark but hopeful vision of the future, a future where God's justice wins, where the faithful are vindicated, and God's kingdom is established on earth as it is in heaven.

It's a reminder that we're part of something, you know, something much bigger than ourselves. Absolutely. And we're not just, you know, passive bystanders.

We're active participants in this, in this whole drama. The choices we're making today, they have eternal implications. It's a powerful challenge to live our lives intentionally, you know, to choose wisely and to follow the Lamb wherever he leads.

And that's what makes Revelation 14 so relevant, even today, even after all these years. It speaks to that deep longing within us, that longing for justice, for redemption, for a world where love, you know, where love wins out over hate. This has been, well, pretty intense, but also really insightful.

It's like we're getting a peek behind the curtain of history, seeing the ultimate showdown between good and evil, and it makes you think, you know, what side am I on? What choices am I making? Where will I stand when the harvest comes? Those are the questions we all need to wrestle with, you know, but we're not done yet. There's still more to uncover in Revelation 14. In the final part of our deep dive, we'll explore the message of hope and victory that, well, that ultimately comes out of this chapter.

Well, we've definitely journeyed through a lot in Revelation 14. I mean, we've covered it all: the 144,000, those powerful angels with their messages, and then those contrasting scenes, those harvests of blessing and judgment. Yeah, a whirlwind tour through some pretty intense imagery and symbolism.

You know, I bet some of our listeners might be feeling a little overwhelmed. It's easy to get lost in all those details and kind of miss the big picture. It's true.

Revelation can be like that. It's complex, multilayered. So maybe, maybe we should take a breath and think about what we've learned so far.

What stands out to you as the most important takeaway from Revelation 14? Honestly, it's the unwavering faith of those 144,000. You know, they're like this powerful symbol of those who just won't compromise their beliefs. They follow Jesus no matter the cost.

It reminds us that being a true disciple, it's, well, it's not always easy. It takes commitment and, yeah, often sacrifice. I agree.

And it's not just about what you do, you know, or avoiding certain behaviors. It's about, like, aligning your heart and your mind with God's will, living a life that really reflects his character. Which brings us back to that phrase, that call to fear God and give him glory.

It's not about being, you know, terrified of God, is it? It's more about having this deep reverence for him, a deep respect, recognizing his authority and choosing to, you know, to live in obedience to his ways. Exactly. Fear in this context, it's about acknowledging God's awesome power and holiness, you know, and responding with humility, with his willingness to, like, submit to his will, recognizing who's really in control and giving him glory.

Well, that's about acknowledging that he's worthy of our praise, our worship. It's living our lives in a way that honors him. So it's more than just words or going through the motions, right? It's about this total transformation inside and out.

Absolutely. And that kind of change can only happen with the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. Remember how the 144,000 are described? They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

It's all about that relationship, a journey of faith, not just following a bunch of rules. Right. And we all know that journey isn't always easy.

I mean, as we see in Revelation 14, there will be challenges, you know, temptations, maybe even persecution along the way. That's true. But the good news is we're not alone on that journey.

We have the promise of God's presence with us, his protection, and ultimately his victory to sustain us. Yeah. Even when things get tough, we can hold on to that promise.

It's like that thread of hope that runs through all the darkness and judgment in Revelation 14, because in the end, the Lamb wins. The faithful, they're vindicated, and God's kingdom, it's established. That's the ultimate victory we're moving towards.

And remember that symbolism of Mount Zion we talked about, that place of God's presence and protection. It's this powerful image of, I don't know, security in the middle of all the chaos. Like an anchor, you know, it keeps us grounded when the storms hit.

And it points us towards the new Jerusalem, the eternal city where God will be with his people forever. It's a beautiful picture of hope, of restoration. So Revelation 14, it's not just about doom and gloom.

It's a message of hope, of encouragement for those who choose to follow the lamb, you know, even when the going gets tough. Absolutely. It reminds us that our choices, they matter.

They have eternal significance. Choosing to be faithful, well, it might be hard, but it leads to life, to joy, to victory in the end. A message worth holding onto for sure.

So if you had to leave our listeners with one question, you know, something to think about as they go about their day, what would it be? If Revelation 14 is all about this, you know,

this cosmic battle between good and evil, how is that playing out in our own lives today? What choices are we making? Are we aligning ourselves with God's kingdom, with his values? Or are we compromising, you know, conforming to the patterns of this world? Where do we stand in all of that? Will we be part of the grain harvest or the grape harvest? Wow, those are powerful questions. They really make you stop and think about, you know, your life, your choices. Well, thank you so much for taking us on this deep dive into Revelation 14.

It's been a challenging journey, but it's been really enlightening. It's been my pleasure. And remember, even though Revelation is full of symbolism and complex imagery, you know, it ultimately points us toward the hope and the promise of God's victory.

And that's a message we can all hold on to. And until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep seeking truth.