

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

October 29, 2023

The Marks of the Redeemed

Revelation 14

Prayer: *Father, I just again thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your blessings, I thank you for the comfort that your word is especially when we are just wondering what this world is all about. And so I pray this morning once again as we're in the book of Revelation that you would give us an extra measure of your grace and understanding and that you would again enable us to make this of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as most of you know we're working our way verse by verse through the book of Revelation. And if you're here for the first time, I wouldn't blame you for wondering what in the world we're talking about. And again, if that's the case and you want some background info, there's 13 previous sermons that I've done on this that are still available on sermonaudio. So if something just touches you and you're saying, I have no idea what they're talking about, you can go back and just kind of check that out.

We spent most of last week looking at chapter 13, and again that chapter is all about looking at one side of the battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and that's about the dark kingdom. It's about all the forces that are arrayed with, if you recall, the dragon and two different beasts. And the dragon, as you recall, was this monster who stood waiting before the woman so that he could devour the child as it was being born. And we learned that the dragon is actually Satan, the woman is the church, and the child is the Lord Jesus Christ. And symbolically what we saw is that it paints a picture of the rage of Satan against Christ and his church.

Chapter 13 also includes a description of two other monsters. There's one that rises from the sea, there's one that rises from the land and together they form an unholy trinity. The dragon represents a demonic version of God, the Father; the beast from the sea, that is the antichrist, he's the one who's the premiere representative of the dragon as a human on earth, he represents a twisted version of the Son; and finally the beast that arises from the earth represents the unholy spirit whose passion is to promote the dragon and the antichrist.

Well, chapter 14 where we are this morning, it flips the script as it were, it gives us a panoramic vision of the other side in this

battle. This is the side of light and life and truth and beauty, and it opens with these words. This is Revelation 14:1-5. It says: *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 remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

Well as we've come to expect in the book of Revelation this passage raises far more questions than it answers. And I guess the first question would be, okay, who is this 144,000? Well, Jehovah's Witnesses, they like to claim it was them. I mean, they were thinking they were the only ones who were going to wind up in heaven and that worked until their number climbed way, way past 144,000. And so now they claim that only 144,000 are going to make it into the heavenly kingdom while the rest will be special citizens that rule with God. All the others, those other citizens,

those eight to ten million Jehovah's Witnesses, they're going to be earthly citizens on an earthly heaven, I guess. Of course God had something to say about this number of people and he said it back in *Revelation 7*. He said: *Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.*

So John is describing the 144,000 consisting of 12,000 from each of the tribes and then he goes on to describe that the historic numbers of Israel and its tribes actually is painting a picture of us, of every single believer throughout all of history. And we go back to *Revelation 7:9-10*. He reflects on this description, he says: *After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

So these are all the blood bought brothers and sisters in Christ who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and belong exclusively to God. It says they have their name -- they have his name on their foreheads. And again not literally, I believe, like a tattoo but figuratively in that their hearts and their minds, they belong to God.

This chapter describes the polar opposite of the wicked kingdom that we learned about in chapter 13, this one that's ruled by that demonic trinity of the dragon or Satan, the sea beast as antichrist and the earth beast as its prophet, that's a wicked kingdom, peopled by those who dwell on earth. And again, that, too, is a technical term for all those who have bought into the lies and the deception that captures the citizens of this world. And again, it's talking about these folks who really believe they're free but they're actually under the dominion of the dragon and the two beasts who have forced all of their citizens to receive the mark of the beast.

And again, we go back just one chapter to chapter 13, it says: *It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.* And again, I'm not thinking that's a tattoo or a microchip but rather it's heartfelt loyalty to this earth and its rebellion against God.

So in chapter 14 we have over against this massive number, we have this number that's referred to as the 144,000. And that number actually refers to every single Christian in space and time. And

again, it marks the contrast between this kingdom and the other kingdom noted by the fact that they're standing where? They're standing with the lamb on Mount Zion.

Just to go back to *Revelation 14:1*, it says: *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.* Now the lamb standing on Mount Zion is a direct reference to *Psalm 2* which speaks about the earth rising up and rebelling against God and his kingdom.

And so here we have God, he's pointing to the one who is sovereign and who is in charge and who's always been in charge in spite of what the worldly situation seems to be, and this is what God asks in *Psalm 2*. He says: *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."*

So God's king has been on this holy mountain and he's been on this

holy mountain since before the Garden of Eden. And until the very end of all things in the book of Revelation as it's unfolding, he will remain in charge on that mountain. There's not been a split second where God hasn't been one hundred percent in control and in charge.

Verses 3 and 5 of *Revelation 14* says: *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 remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

So again we're back to the 144,000. It says these 144,000, they know the song, they can sing the song and they can sing the song because they are redeemed. See, the world can't sing the song because it neither knows nor cares to ever learn it. God says: *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* So those who can sing the song of redemption, they're those who have been plucked like a brand from the fire right out of the mass of those who dwell on earth. And our text says so. The text says: *"They were*

purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb."

So we see those redeemed they're from the same place that the unredeemed are, and that is they're from planet earth. I mean even now there's a mixture of saved and unsaved on the planet as there's always been since the dawn of creation. Those who can sing the song of redemption are those who have been purchased by God himself at the cost of his blood.

And God goes on to describe in this paragraph, he's describing his own, and he describes them in six different ways. He says, number one, he says they're redeemed. And again *1 Corinthians* tells us: *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought -- redeemed -- with a price. So glorify God in your body.* God's saying you're not your own. Secondly, he says they've been purchased by God. It says: *You were bought at a price.* And then third, he says they did not defile themselves with women.

Now you have to understand that God is putting this defilement into the context of whether or not you buy into this system that we learned about in chapter 13. Remember the system that's run by the dragon and the two beasts, the system that demands loyalty and

worship as well. You have to understand that God sees loyalty to the dragon and the beast, he sees that loyalty as adultery. And time and again he puts the love of this world's system into the context of adultery. I mean James says in *James 4:4*, he says: *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

We see Paul describing the church as the bride of Christ, and loyalty to him is the same as that of a spotless bride to her husband. This is Paul until *2 Corinthians 11:2*, he says: *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you -- that's the church -- to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*

Then we see in the Old Testament we have prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, they refer to worldliness, they refer to injustice as a type of adultery, as literally a form of defilement with women. This is Isaiah in *Isaiah 1:21*, he says: *See how the faithful city has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her -- but now murderers!*

And then Ezekiel says: *"I am filled with fury against you, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting*

like a brazen prostitute! When you built your mounds at every street corner and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment. You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!"

You see, there's a controversy that surrounds this kind of passage. Some folks look at this passage in Revelation and they say, well, it's anti-women, it suggests that it singles out women alone as the source of defilement. The scripture says, *"These are those who did not defile themselves with women but they remained virgins."*

Some has gone so far as to suggest that this passage is actually saying that marriage itself is a form of defilement and that sex itself is something that defiles. Some have even used this passage to suggest a biblical basis for the celibacy of priests. And again, it just misses the point entirely. I mean, if women themselves were to blame then how do you explain the fact that the primary enemy of the dragon and his beast is a woman, one who represents the church of Jesus Christ? Remember it's the woman who the dragon is after trying to devour the child as he's being born. So you can't make the case that this passage is anti-woman, but you can make the case that the passage is anti-adultery, which scripture defines as any form of idol worship.

So this portrait that chapter 14 is painting of the redeemed is that, number one, the worshipers, they're able to sing a new song; number two, they were redeemed from the earth itself; number three, they were bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ, they were changed, they no longer worship this world; four, they no longer commit adultery by being in love with this world. And next it says in *Revelation 14:4*: *They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.*

Well, I think that should have a familiar sound to it because Jesus once said, he was talking to a group of Jews, he says: *So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* So that's another identifier of the redeemed. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

And now you might want to ask the question why do the sheep follow the shepherd, because they have to or because they want to? And that's an incredibly important distinction. I think once again we need to make the distinction between what we call here the

imperatives and the indicatives. You see, an imperative if you remember from your high school English, an imperative is a command, it's something you have to do; an indicative is a state, it's a condition of being. It indicates something about you.

And so John in chapter 14, he's describing indicatives, not imperatives. He's not telling you you have to do these things to become a Christian; no. He's saying if you are a Christian these things will automatically be a part of you; they *indicate* who you are. And because of the indwelling power of the Spirit of Christ in all believers, you *will* be the type of person that chapter 14 is describing. And so if these characteristics don't really describe you, well then you need to ask yourself if you're really fully entered into the kingdom of God.

So far we've only covered a part of them, and again, just to reiterate: First, you'll know the song of the 144,000 because the cross is not foolishness to you. You want to worship simply because you've been redeemed from the earth and you're a new creature. And next, because you're a new creature, you have no interest in defiling yourself by worshiping the things of this world instead of Christ. Next, you follow after the Lamb because he chose you and not the other way around. God says we were purchased next from mankind and offered as first fruits. Well,

that again instantly brings to mind *Romans 12*, which says: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Well, next it says in this list of things that make up a believer, it says no lie was found in their mouth. And again we're not -- we're talking about indicatives, we're not talking about imperatives, we're talking about things that are indicated by the life that you live. That doesn't mean that you'll never sin by telling a lie once you become a Christian but it does mean that telling lies as a matter of course is not going to define your life.

And why is lying, why is lying itself singled out as something of such importance? Well, we're talking about the final war and that war is between the enemy and the kingdom. And one of the primary characteristics of the enemy, the thing that defines his very nature is the word "liar." Listen to how Jesus describes him. He says: *He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he*

speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. So Revelation singles out the lie as an identifying characteristic of the dragon that warrants special attention and we see in Revelation 21:8, it says: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -- they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." And then Revelation 22:15 says: *Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. So again this characteristic "no lie was found their your mouth" is incredibly important.*

Finally we get to the sixth characteristic which says they're blameless. Now again, does that mean all believers lead spotless, sinless lives? Of course it doesn't. We know we are sinners, we are sinners saved by grace. But we also know what the gospel claims. And God says through the sacrifice of his Son on the cross, God became a man, God lived a flawless life so he could go to the cross and pay the just penalty of our sins, and so by placing our faith in Christ, we now stand before God blameless, not because we are blameless in our behavior, but because God now looks at my record as paid for in its entirety by the blood of Christ. So I am genuinely and truly blameless before God.

And so we're looking at chapter 14 and chapter 14 literally is establishing who is who between chapter 13 and 14; and having established who's who we now turn to the message that the angels have of the impending doom that is awaiting those who've given their loyalty to the beast and the dragon, those who are -- quote -- *"dwellers on the earth."* This is *Revelation 14:6*, it says: *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.*

If you remember back in Matthew 24 Jesus has this long discourse on the end of all things, and in that he made a statement about the proclamation of the gospel. This is what he said in *Matthew 24:14*. He says: *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* Well, what we're reading here in Revelation 14 is the literal fulfillment of that prophesy, and in this case it's being fulfilled not by humans, it's being fulfilled by an angel. We still have the command to go to every tribe, tongue and nation but here we see an angel and it's described as directly flying overhead broadcasting the gospel everywhere. It says proclaiming the gospel to the world one last time before judgment arrives. And it says this angel declares the gospel so every individual, saved and unsaved, can hear it. Verse 7 says: *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."* You have to understand this isn't just a simple proclamation of the gospel, this is the final call, this is the very last opportunity before judgment itself begins. As the angel says, *"because the hour of his judgment has come."*

And that angel is followed by another angel with another declaration, and he says: *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."*

And so the call of this first angel, it's gone out to a world that's largely given itself over to the dragon and the two beasts. You see this rebellion that started in the Garden of Eden, it's now reached its terminal state and the angel refers to this kingdom as Babylon because Babylon's always represented the kingdoms of mankind who stand in opposition to God and his kingdom.

And so this angel is actually quoting from Jeremiah as he prophesied way back when about the original Babylon, and this is what Jeremiah said. He said: *"Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her. Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making*

all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad." You know, people say Babylon, well, that's the United States, but you can make the case for any nation that stands in opposition to God, remembering that God regards worship of other gods as a form of sexual immorality.

Chapter 14 goes on to say in verse 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, 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 sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 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."*

So this third angel makes a pronouncement. What he says is eternal torment awaits all those who worship the beast and its image. The angel says: *And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.* The Greek here actually says the smoke of their torment will go up for the ages of ages. And the universalist suggests that that simply means a very, very long time but one that they believe will eventually end. They do

not believe that hell is forever. I certainly do wish I could agree but I just don't see how the scripture allows that. This particular scripture describes the smoke of the torment of those who worship the beast as going up forever and ever.

And you know, you can go on forums -- and I have -- and you can look at these ones that take the Greek apart and they look at the word "age" and "ages of ages," you can endlessly debate the grammar but I think the genuine problem here is not grammatical, I think it's philosophical, and there's a genuine problem. It's the idea that God would take someone's finite sin and punish him infinitely.

I mean in this case the sin is worshiping the beast but the problem has sometimes been reduced by those in this big debate to three letters, E-C-T. "ECT" stands for "eternal conscious torment." And the question that it raises is how could a just God inflict eternal conscious torment infinitely on a finite creature for a sin committed during a finite lifetime? I mean, how can a sin committed in time be punished timelessly? Isn't that the problem? I mean that's what a lot of people wrestle with. But I think one of the things that this misses is the possibility, the very real possibility that hell is not this static place of punishment where you spend an eternity in time paying for something that you did while you were on earth. Instead, what if it's a dynamic place

where the conscious choices made in this life continue to influence the conscious choices made in eternity? I mean, the angel's essentially saying that those of you who make this conscious decision to worship the beast in this life will continue to worship this beast in the next one, and the consequences of that will be an ever-increasing hatred for God and his kingdom and an ever-increasing appetite for the things of the beast in spite of the fact that worshiping the beast causes nothing but eternal conscious torment.

Verse 11 says: *"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."*

I mean if you want an example of what that looks like practically, just look around you today. I mean the people according to scripture who worship the beast, they hardly identify as Satan worshipers. I mean they simply identify as people who have no interest whatsoever in God or his kingdom. They belong to the enemy not by desire but by default. You see, once you've rejected God and his kingdom, you're going to find you've embraced the beast and everything else unawares. And the frustrations and the misery of living this life without God may be apparent to us believers but people who scripture refers to as *"dwellers on the earth,"* they're those who fully buy into this earth and its system without giving a

second thought to who is the prince of this system. And eternal conscious torment will be exactly what they expect the experience to be completely apart from a God who gives you the respect enough to allow to you choose the freedom to live out an eternal godless existence as something you've already consciously chosen while you were on earth.

I mean we tend to think of hell as something that starts the moment that you die and it's something static. I mean, your crimes occurred while you're temporarily here on earth and yet your punishment is going to occur eternally while you're forever in hell. In other words, an infinite level of punishment for a finite level of sin but that thinking misses something critical. You see, in reality there's nothing to suggest that sin doesn't continue even in hell. And again, why wouldn't it? I mean hell represents a complete and total lack of anything having to do with God including even common grace. Sin is an attitude of the heart and to suggest that the choice to reject God and embrace the beast is a one time lifetime decision alone, well that's not something that's found in scripture at all.

I mean, what if hell is a place where your hatred for God and his kingdom does nothing but grow for eternity along with a misery that always accompanies godlessness. So that a thousand years after

arriving there you're a thousand times more dedicated to hating the thought of God and his kingdom than you were when you first got there. And that's not just idle speculation. It has to do with the phrase that occurs repeatedly in scripture describing the attitude that you find in the residents of hell. You see, they all engage in weeping and gnashing of teeth. And the weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell, it doesn't depict sorrow, it doesn't depict repentance; it depicts rage, it depicts anger.

You go back to the book of Acts you remember Stephen, he's castigating all of the religious leaders and they're growing more and more insensitive, eventually they become enraged and eventually they stone him to death. And Acts describes what took place. It says: *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.* That's not sorrow; that's rage. And Jesus tells us repeatedly that that's what's happening in hell.

Jesus describes the fate of the religious leaders in *Matthew 8:12*. He says this: *"But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* He describes the very people we're talking about in Revelation who worship the beast in *Matthew 13*. He says: *"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all*

things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

In this story Jesus describes an unfaithful servant and his fate in *Matthew 24*. He says: *"But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

I mean in each case we're told the residents of hell experience not just pain but rage and anger and bitterness. Well, if the kingdom of hell is as dynamic as the kingdom of heaven -- and we don't know for certain because God hasn't made that clear -- but if it is and people embrace an ongoing increase in wickedness in the same way that people embrace an ongoing growth in glory in heaven, then how would it be possible for the inhabitants of hell to just decide one day that now they want to go to heaven?

I mean, what I'm saying is that we know that in heaven God tells us that we are going to grow and grow and grow more and more and more

in glory; we're going to be transformed as we grow in our ability to understand and appreciate who God is. God says in *2 Corinthians 3:18*: *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* Well similarly who's to say that hell is also not a static place but a dynamic place where people grow in the opposite way in a deeper and greater hatred of who God is and a hatred for what his kingdom is all about. I hate to say it but that's much more consistent with the idea of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The idea that hell isn't a place of static punishment for earthbound sins but rather a dynamic case of ever-growing misery and wretchedness that is the eternal conscious choice of its inhabitants, that's something that C.S. Lewis spoke of in his novel *The Great Divorce*.

This is what he said: "Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE hell unless it is nipped in the bud."

It was C.S. Lewis who also suggested that hell is locked and bolted from the inside because as much as people are miserable, the only place they would be considerably far more miserable would be heaven itself. And Tim Keller said basically the same thing. This is what he said. He said: "What is hell, then? It is God actively giving us up to what we have freely chosen-to go our own way, be our own 'the master of our fate, the captain of our soul,' to get away from him and his control. It is God banishing us to regions we have desperately tried to get into all our lives."

And Keller goes on to quote J.I. Packer, writing: "Scripture sees hell as self-chosen. [H]ell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice. All receive what they actually chose, either to be with God forever, worshipping him, or without God forever, worshipping themselves." (J.I.Packer, Concise Theology p.262-263.)

"If the thing you most want is to worship God in the beauty of his holiness, then that is what you will get (Ps 96:9-13.) If the thing you most want is to be your own master, then the holiness of God will become an agony, and the presence of God a terror you will flee forever." (Rev. 6:16; cf. Is 6:1-6.)

I think about how people react to the gospel right here, right now, today, your own personal experience. You know, I have a neighbor

who's a wonderful person, he'd give you the shirt off his back, he's always there to help with anything you need, I've known him for 40 years. There's only two times in that entire period of time that I've known him that he's gotten mad at me and both of those times was because I brought up God and eternity. He's a lovely man, but the cross right now is absolute foolishness to him. And like any other natural man, he actually hates God but he has no awareness of that fact.

And God tells us in *Romans 8:7*: *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* I mean there's only one way to resolve that hostility and that's by the grace of God. But I think that's the status of everyone without the gospel. And hell seems to be a place where that status can do nothing but grow.

I want to conclude this morning with something a little brighter, with a contrast that the third angel makes and this is what the angel says in verse 12. He says: *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 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 labors, for their deeds follow them!" Well, what a contrast to the

horrors that await those who worship the beast and how timely is this scripture for us.

Folks, I have very little doubt that things are not going to get easier for us. And what we have here is a call for endurance for the saints. You know, the best possible explanation for the insanity that seems to have gripped more than half of this country is that it's not cultural, it's not political, it's spiritual. And again, I go back to *Revelation 12:12*: "*But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*"

And you know, none of us know how close we are to the end, but one thing we do know is that every single day the enemy's time grows shorter by a day, but we also have God's answer to that uncertainty. Let me conclude to you by reading *Mark 13*. It says: "*But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning -- lest he come*

suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake." Let's pray.

Father, again, I thank you for this word. I know so much of what's written in Revelation is hard, it's dark, it's difficult; but Lord, I thank you for the warning. I thank you that we look out at a world that seems to be collapsing in so many different areas and again, this may be is just the beginning of birth pangs, it may be the beginning of the end, we don't know. But we do know, Lord, that you have called us to stay awake and part of staying awake is learning what your word has to say about these days. So I pray you would open our eyes and I pray you would give us the courage and the wisdom and the drive to see that everyone outside that door is recognizing that something's not normal, that these are strange days indeed and so it gives us an opportunity that we may never have had before. When your neighbor starts saying, "What is going on," we have that answer, and so I pray you would give us the courage to speak it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.