

## Sing a New Song

*Last Things*

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**Bible Text:** Revelation 14:1-5  
**Preached on:** Sunday, January 7, 2024

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Our Scripture lesson this morning is taken from Revelation chapter 14, the first five verses, and you'll find that on page 1,928.

1 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. 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

May we pray.

*Lord, help me again to tie things together in this mysterious book that is so full of allusions to the whole of Scripture. We pray for that simplicity and gift of simplicity and clarity of explanation and practicality of application through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Now you have a handout, and your handout is not like mine, it's like mine except I have the red-letter edition, and what I did was to go through the

Greek New Testament, and I tried to identify every passage in the book of Revelation that had to do with worship. So things like the temple, things like the tent and the tabernacle, things like people blowing trumpets, and incense and all these other things I highlighted in my red-letter edition.

And what I want to do with this is to say to you that the book of Revelation is a book of worship, and we often miss that.

You know, we hear these prophecies, this is going to happen, that's going to happen, Joe Biden and Donald Trump are going to get into a duel together, and Nikki Haley is going to assassinate both of them with a sword that she inherited for her Hindu great-grandfather, and then we're going to... I'm being absurd.

The point is that many approaches to the book of Revelation are just that absurd, and they want to make the book of Revelation fit our times. The trouble is that the book of Revelation was written for people who were living in the first century after Christ, and it was designed to give comfort to those people in the middle of all the trials and tribulations that they faced. That doesn't exhaust its meaning, because the book of Revelation's prophecies recapitulate, on and on throughout history, even as Old Testament prophecies had an initial fulfillment and recapitulate into our time.

The greatest example of that, in my opinion, is the prophecy that Isaiah has in Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." We know from the New Testament that refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, but what we discovered when we examined that passage over a year ago is that that was Isaiah's second wife, who was a virgin when he married her, and we can prove it conclusively if we examine Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 8.

Isaiah had at least two sons, Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Both these boys' names had symbolic value (Isaiah 8:18). Shear-jashub roughly translates as "A remnant will return" (Isaiah 7:3), while Maher-shalal-hash-baz's name is "Swift is the spoil, speedy is the plunder" (Isaiah 8:3)

These sons were given to Isaiah as object lessons to the apostate king of Israel, Ahaz, who didn't trust in the Lord but in the king of Assyria to rescue him from Rezin and Pekah. The boys'

early childhood pointed to the very short span of time until these kings were removed.

**Maher-shalal-hash-baz is also called Immanuel by Isaiah's new virgin wife** (Isaiah 7:14; 8:8), an event of great significance (Isaiah 8:1-5).

However, Matthew makes absolutely clear that Isaiah's second child points beyond himself to the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy (Matthew 1:18-25). (<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sid=313221814547893>).

So the fulfillment of that prophecy of the virgin birth is initially about Isaiah's new virgin wife, because people in those days often had more than one wife. And so, anyhow, its initial fulfillment, Isaiah's virgin wife, but its ultimate fulfillment is the Lord Jesus Christ, who was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and was born of Mary. And so that's an interesting thing and that just opens a can of worms that, if you go back in my sermons, you can find where I put those worms back in the can.

So prophecies have an initial fulfillment, but then oftentimes they repeat and have an ultimate fulfillment.

So looking at this in Revelation 14: What is the book of Revelation really about?

The book of Revelation is really about how to worship. It's a worship book, and all you have to do is look at all those texts in the handout, and I left the Greek there because it was just too hard for me to remove the Greek, so excuse me, and also minus the red-letter edition. But I think that's an important truth.

So we looked in here at the 144,000. Who in the world are the 144,000?

They're people who will knock on people's doors, particularly on Sunday mornings to catch them at home, and they will sell them literature, like *The Watchtower Magazine*, and in the early days of the Jehovah's Witnesses, they knew who the 144,000 were. But what happened is, all of those people are now dead, because that was so long ago and so now the Jehovah's

Witnesses don't participate in the Lord's Supper, I believe, anymore because they just exhibit it, because the 144,000 are all dead.

Jesus' shed blood established "a new covenant" that replaced the covenant between Jehovah God and the ancient nation of Israel. (Hebrews 8:10-13) Those who are in that new covenant partake of the Memorial emblems. It includes, not all Christians, but only "those who have been called" in a special way by God. (Hebrews 9:15; Luke 22:20) These ones will rule in heaven with Christ, and the Bible says that just 144,000 people receive that privilege.—Luke 22:28-30; Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1, 3.

In contrast to the "little flock" of those called to rule with Christ, the vast majority of us hope to be part of "a great crowd" who will gain everlasting life on earth. (Luke 12:32; Revelation 7:9, 10) While those of us with an earthly hope do not partake of the Memorial emblems, we do join in expressing thanks for the sacrifice that Jesus made in our behalf.—1 John 2:2. (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/502015257>)

And then there are other people that take it at face value. Our translation leaves out something in verse 4, "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure" (Revelation 14:4).

That's not really what the Greek says. It says they're virgins.

Literally, "These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins" (Οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν· παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν. *Parthénos*, παρθένος: "one who has never engaged in sexual intercourse, virgin, chaste person" (Frederick William Danker (ed. 2000). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature*. Third edition BDAG based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-deutsches wörterbuch zu den schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen literatur*, sixth edit. (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press), p. 777.)

And so some people think that these are literally 144,000 Jewish men who have never had relations with a woman. "This is what it clearly says.

They're virgins. They've not defiled themselves with women." And so they look at it that way.

I want to set forth for you a very different idea, and that is, to understand it in light of chapter 7, if we turn back there for a moment, Revelation chapter 7, and that's page 1,920:

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 3 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.' 4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from **all the tribes** of Israel. (Revelation 7:1-4)

Well, that's not true. From all the tribes of Israel? If you go through it, there's a tribe missing, and the tribe that's missing is Dan.

So people, you know, "Well, the Antichrist must be a Jewish man from the tribe of Dan."

I wonder if Benjamin Netanyahu is from the tribe of Dan. I don't know. It's really missing the point. The point is that this is arranged this way to give a very basic truth.

Did Jacob have 12 sons? Yes. But you know that Reuben messed up (Genesis 49:3-4), and so the blessings of the firstborn went to Joseph. And so Jacob, before he dies, blesses the two sons of Joseph as if they are his own children, because the blessing of the firstborn in the Old Testament was a double portion (Genesis 48:1-22).

And so Ephraim and Manasseh are counted as sons of Jacob, and so if you go through, they're all there, but Dan's missing. Why is Dan missing? I have no idea. It is a literary device.

What is the point here? The point is that there were 12 tribes of Israel, and there were originally 12 apostles, and 12 times 12 is 144, and then a thousand is the cube of 10.

So I believe, and I won't fight with people over it, but I believe that 144,000 is a symbolic way of referring to all of God's people in all ages. Old Testament believers, New Testament believers, all God's people in all ages.

So if we look at this back at chapter 14, why are they called virgins?

These people that have never had relations with somebody?

No, we have to go back to the Old Testament. The great theme of the Old Testament is that Israel is the wife of the Lord. She's the Lord's wife and so therefore you find this theme in the prophets, in Ezekiel, profoundly in Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23, and in the whole book of Hosea, where God instructed Hosea to marry a woman who was a prostitute, and God wanted Hosea to experience emotionally what God himself experienced when his people betrayed him and broke their trust, their covenant they entered into at Mount Sinai with the Lord. And so Hosea writes about that, and the redemption that's there, because Hosea sees his wife one day in the slave market being auctioned off to the highest bidder, and he bids for her and he buys her back (Hosea 1:2; 3:1-3). So Hosea, that's that theme.

So the virgins here, you see, it's simply a way of referring to God's people who were loyal to him, who keep their covenant with him, who are faithful to him and so there are 144,000, that's the square of the New Testament leadership and the Old Testament leadership with a thousand, which is the cube.

And that's a picture of the temple. Have you ever thought about it? Do you know that in the tabernacle—the tabernacle had in it the Holy of Holies—it was a cube, 10 by 10 by 10 cubits (Exodus 26:15-30). A cubit is what? It varies from person to person, but basically a cubit is from your fingertips to your elbow. That's the short cubit. The long cubit is a cubit and a span (the width of one's hand), and that was easier to measure. You go and measure a cubit, you go here, anyhow.

So 10 times 10 times 10 is a picture of the Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of God where the Ark of the Covenant is and so we notice something else, it says here in Revelation 14:1, they're standing on Mount Zion.

Now we have to go back and understand that the Jerusalem that is above is much more important than the Jerusalem that is below, and we've seen that in our studies in looking at Galatians (Galatians 3:26-29; 4:25-31; Hebrews 12:22-24), and he says that Jerusalem above is our mother. In other words, it's a picture of the true home of all believers, which ultimately is in heaven with the Lord himself.

And then notice here that they have God's name, that is the name of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

Now think about that for a moment. What immediately precedes chapter 14? It's chapter 13, and if you look at that same page in verse 18, he says, "This calls for wisdom," this is Revelation 13:18: "If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666."

And if you go back above it, you see that the dragon, who is Satan's imitation of God the Father, and the beast, who is Satan's imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the false prophet, who is Satan's imitation of the Holy Spirit (Revelation 13:4, 11-15), they cause people not to be able to buy or sell unless they have the mark. And you see here, verse 16:

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.  
(Revelation 13:16)

And I'll share more insights on that probably in a month from now.

But the point I want to make is this: The followers of the false Christ, the beast, the imitation Jesus, they have a mark here or here. But can you see it? Can you identify it? I don't know.

But you know what? I want to invite you today, *if you have the mark on your forehead*, to the Lord's Supper. What is the mark on a believer? The mark on the believer is the waters of baptism. Baptism marks us, it signs and seals us as belonging to the Lord (Acts 2:38-39; Romans 2:28-29; 4:11; Colossians 2:11-12).

Is everyone who is baptized truly saved? No. Are all those who've never been baptized truly lost? No. But baptism nevertheless is a sign and a seal of the righteousness of faith, just as the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of our participation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So here is the great contrast: Revelation 13 ends with the Antichrist, the beast, and his mark, and Revelation 14 begins with these 144,000 virgins who haven't defiled themselves, that are faithful to the Lord of the Covenant. And it's a very striking contrast, isn't it? We should not forget that. Now, as we go through this, we discover something about worship in verse 2, Revelation 14:2:

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. (Revelation 14:2-3)

So what does that mean? Well, let's try to explore that a little bit this morning. This is a new song. If you hold your hand there and go to the second page of your handout, and you see there a verse, Revelation 5:9, this is their song, Revelation 5:9:

And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.' (Revelation 5:9)

So I want you to see something here, this new song that they're singing is a song that's reflected in Revelation 5:9, and people can't learn it except the 144,000.



What does that mean? It means this: this book is a closed book until we have received the Holy Spirit, because the things that are here are Spiritually, capital S, discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

And so what's in view here is singing a new song. What do I mean by that? Well, there are three or four thoughts I want to share.

First of all, I want to explain a little bit of my past.

When I was in seminary, my wife and I discovered a sweet little church that wasn't terribly far away, and that church practiced the old traditional way of Presbyterian worship. Presbyterians did not have pianos or organs, they had no instruments, and they also sang out of the book of Psalms exclusively. And so because I was drawn to that little group of people, and only one other seminary student attended that church; whereas, the churches around the seminary were inundated, immersed with seminary students, my wife and I just enjoyed worshiping in Elkins Park at the Third Church of the Covenanters.

And that goes back to the Scottish Reformation and how that the church had to go underground when King Charles I's son, Charles II, came to power. He severely persecuted, particularly the Presbyterians, because they had signed a document called *The Solemn League and Covenant*.

And so he persecuted them severely and then he dies, and his brother James II comes to power, and he really persecuted them, and so then James' daughter, who was married to King William of Orange, a Dutchman, came and rescued the British Isles from these terrible persecutions, and he defeated the forces of King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in Northern Ireland in 1690.

And so there came to be a settled church. The Church of Scotland was restored; the Church of England was restored. But there were some people who said, "Nah, this isn't good." They didn't renew the covenant, the National Covenant, and so from that time in 1690 until 1714, this little group of people who said, "We need to renew the Solemn League and Covenant," came to be known as the Covenanters. And they didn't even have a pastor until 1714. But they were sweet people, and they're still around today, and they have a college called Geneva College, and they have, I believe it's the

fifth oldest seminary in the United States, the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

So we really liked those folks, but then something happened: They allowed us to take Holy Communion, and someone questioned that. “Well, how can they take Holy Communion if they’re not in covenant with us in this covenant that was made so many years ago?”

And so my wife and I, who had experienced taking communion, became excommunicated and that hurt us deeply. We were put out of communion.

Oh, we were still welcome, Bob and Sandy, and by that time we had our little daughter Lydia, who’s married to a preacher, and it was very painful.

It was agonizing because we loved those people—small little church, we loved them. But that church practiced closed communion, not simply close communion, but closed communion. Unless you were a member of their denomination and had sworn to uphold—no longer the Scottish Solemn League and Covenant, but the covenant entered into in 1871—unless you did that, you couldn’t take communion.

And so I did something, I ended up joining that denomination, which was a foolish thing to do, because I didn’t agree with all their positions. In fact, that denomination had a position that you could not vote in elections because when you voted in an election, you were asking a person to affirm something that you couldn’t affirm.

And you know why they changed their minds on that? It was in 1960, when a Roman Catholic was elected president, and if there was ever a denomination that was militantly anti-Roman Catholic, it was the Covenanters.

So I’m not trying to to put them down. I loved those people. They published things that I had written in their national magazine. I spoke in their conferences. All those things, but one day I had to inform my presbytery that with malice aforethought, I deliberately broke an ordination vow, and that resulted in my becoming a Methodist janitor in the summer of 1975, which was a very wonderful experience.

All right, with that background, what I'm trying to get at is, I adopted a position of exclusive psalmody, and if you read texts like Ephesians chapter 5, verses 18 and 19, and Colossians 3:16, it speaks about singing psalms and hymns and songs.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord. καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἴνω, ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ. (Ephesians 5:18-19)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with gratefulness in your hearts to God. ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ νουθετοῦντες ἑαυτούς, ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ἐν [τῇ] χάριτι ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ. (Colossians 3:16)

And their apologetic method was to say, “Well, if you look at the psalms in the Greek Septuagint, you will find there are songs there.”

Yes, that's true.

And you'll find there are hymns there: In fact, the title of Psalm 67 in the Greek Septuagint is: “Unto the end, among the Hymns, a Psalm of a Song,” (Εἰς τὸ τέλος, ἐν ὕμνοις· ψαλμὸς ᾠδῆς, Psalm 66:1 in Greek).

And of course, there're Psalms. The word psalm actually means accompanied by a guitar. Really, yes, psalmos, you're strumming that guitar (*Psalmós* ψαλμός, verb: *psállō* ψάλλω: “The original mng. of ψ. was ‘pluck’, ‘play’ (a stringed instrument)” (BDAG, p. 1096).

So anyhow, after I left, and I was called by my congregation the week after Labor Day to come to Alexandria, Louisiana, I was silent, and it really bothered me.

What am I saying as I go through this story? What I'm saying is that we're compelled as we worship with other believers, to identify with them and not to stand off and be aloof.

And so as I restudied the issue of exclusive psalmody, I changed my mind. Was my mind neutral in that? No, I had come to love my congregation in Alexandria and served that church for 40 years, and in my love for them, I wanted to be able to sing with them, rather than keeping my mouth shut as we sang the hymns, unless we sang a psalm.

And so as I studied—I want you to see in Revelation 5:9, a very critical verse. What is the worship of heaven like? In the worship of heaven, they sing a new song, and that new song is this:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.  
(Revelation 5:9)

That's about the Lord Jesus Christ. And I came to the conclusion and the conviction that the psalms **by themselves** are unscriptural. That sounds very strong, because if you do not Christianize them—and guess who Christianized the psalms? Isaac Watts.

He paraphrased the psalms and included the name of Jesus. "Jesus shall reign where ere the sun" is paraphrase of Psalm 72, and so on. Isaac Watts paraphrased the Psalms and made them speak Christianly. Do I love the Psalms?

I love the Psalms. I read a Psalm every day, and I love the Psalms, and the Psalms speak to us in the profoundest way. The difficulty with exclusive psalmody is that it does not focus on the cross at all. It doesn't mention the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we have to understand that the Psalms are pre-Christian, and therefore they are part of the weak and beggarly elements (Galatians 4:9), they're part of the Old Testament, which according to the book of Hebrews is not a perfect system and because it was imperfect, it had to be replaced with a new covenant (Hebrews 7:11-28; 8:6-13; 9:8-28).

So they sing a new song. Now I want to throw out another idea. When you become a believer, when suddenly God opens your eyes to understand the truth, this book, which was a closed book and an obscure book with no real meaning and significance, even if you were an intellectual giant and studying it, you're missing something. But once the Lord opens your eyes to who he is, once you fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ, and you pick up this book and you read, you're like Saint Augustine.

You remember Augustine's story. Augustine was a brilliant, a brilliant philosopher, and he had searched for meaning all over the world and one day he is in a courtyard and he hears children singing a sing-song thing over the wall and they were singing, "*Tolle lege, tolle lege,*" which is Latin, "Take up and read," and he looked and there was a book, and it fell open to the book of Romans where it said, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and put no confidence in the flesh." At that moment when Augustine picked up that book, the New Testament, opening to the book of Romans, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and put no confidence in the flesh," at that moment, Augustine was converted. He became a believer in a moment of time, and suddenly his eyes are open.

28. Now when deep reflection had drawn up out of the secret depths of my soul all my misery and had heaped it up before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by a mighty rain of tears. That I might give way fully to my tears and lamentations, I stole away from Alypius, for it seemed to me that solitude was more appropriate for the business of weeping. I went far enough away that I could feel that even his presence was no restraint upon me. This was the way I felt at the time, and he realized it. I suppose I had said something before I started up and he noticed that the sound of my voice was choked with weeping. And so he stayed alone, where we had been sitting together, greatly astonished. I flung myself down under a fig tree—how I know not—and gave free course to my tears. The streams of my eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to thee. And, not indeed in these words, but to this effect, I cried to thee: "And thou, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever? Oh, remember not against us our former iniquities." For I felt that I was still enthralled by them. I sent up these sorrowful cries: "How long, how long?"

Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?”

29. I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which—coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, “Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.” [*tolle lege, tolle lege*] Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. For I had heard how Anthony, accidentally coming into church while the gospel was being read, received the admonition as if what was read had been addressed to him: “Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.” By such an oracle he was forthwith converted to thee.

So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle’s book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.” I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

(*Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* (1955), Book VIII, Chapter XII, 28-29 (trans. ed. Albert C. Outler) (Philadelphia: Westminster Press).

Now what I want to say to you about singing a new song is this: When you become a believer, things that seemed to be obscure and meaningless and fruitless suddenly take on new meaning so that hymns that you may have learned as a child, you may have memorized when people used to sing in our

public schools 60 or 70 years ago, suddenly those songs take on a whole new meaning.

So for the believer to lift his voice and sing is to sing a new song.

And so as we probably will continue this in two weeks, as we think about who these people are, if you look at the top of page 1,928:

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. (Revelation 14:4-5)

Let me speak for a moment about the Lord's Supper.

Should you come to the Lord's Supper if you fell into sin yesterday? Think about it. Anybody here fall into sin yesterday? (Hmm. I see that hand. No, I don't.)

Here's the thing we have to remember: Each of us is more sinful than we want to be if we're a believer, and we're more sinful than we think we are, because no one truly knows his or her own heart. Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above everything else, desperately wicked. Who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

The Lord knows it, and so as we come to the Lord's Supper, I want you to remember one fundamental truth: You're blameless.

If you're a believer, the righteousness of Christ has been put to your account, and your sins have been put to his account, this great exchange.

You don't simply stand neutral before God, sins forgiven, you stand with positive righteousness, and I want you to understand that if you're in Christ, you are entitled to come to the Lord's Supper.

Now the Lord's Supper is a powerful thing. It has a healing impact.

I'll never forget an event that happened in my congregation years ago, it was at least 30 years ago. We had a man in the congregation who had had cirrhosis of the liver, and he'd had a liver transplant, and the drugs were not

working. He's on all of these anti-rejection drugs with his new liver and one night, we had a home group that met where we would have the Lord's Supper.

And as we're praying for—his name was Paul—as we were praying for Paul, suddenly there was a weird thing that happened. The preacher, who happened to be yours truly, began to pray, and we prayed:

“Lord, send the power of your Holy Spirit in this house now, so that as Paul takes the cup of the Lord's Supper, it will heal his body.”

You know what happened? The door of the house blew open loudly, and as we shared a common cup, and as Paul took from the wine of the Lord's Supper, he was healed. He no longer had to be on rejection drugs. What I want to say is, I'm citing that as an experience that I was part of, and that I witnessed, that there's healing in the cup. Healing in the cup. Why?

Because that cup not only symbolizes, but seals to us the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ shed his blood to undo the terrible works of Adam. In other words, God corrects his creation at the cross, where Jesus bears our sins on himself, and then gives to us his righteousness, And the bread speaks to us of our unity in Christ.

And so I want to commend to you the bread and the wine. Commend to you the bread, because in a few moments I will lift that loaf, and I will say the words that Christ said at the Last Supper, “This is my body.”

Do we believe superstitiously that somehow or another it ceases to be bread, and then becomes literally, in a tooth and tongue-swallowing way, the actual, literal, physical body of Christ?

No, but we do believe something, it is full of power, and that's why Paul warns the believers in Corinth not to take the Lord's Supper carelessly, in a frivolous manner, to take it without reflection.

God wants you and me to reflect today on our own lives. Where have I come short? What do I need to change? In the first communion service of a new year, 2024, what is the thing that I need to lay before God and say, “Lord, help me”?



And as we examine ourselves, then we should eat. No one should stay away from the Lord's Supper. We should eat, and we should eat knowing that is pregnant with power to change us in a mysterious way that no one in my mind has ever successfully explained. Christ is present in this meal, and we know that again because some people partook of the Lord's Supper in a careless way and ended up getting sick or even dying, according to the text in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:27-31).

But that same power is there for you and me to heal us, to draw us to Christ, and to draw us to one another, because what God really wants of his church in the year 2024 is that all those who love Jesus would be one. All those who love Jesus would be one. And the loaf speaks to us of our unity in the Lord Jesus Christ and being identified with him, and the cup speaks to us of his precious blood that was shed.

So I want to invite you this morning to take with me the Lord's Supper, because it's "the new covenant in his blood," and it's his "blood of the new covenant" that the cup contains. And you are welcome. We will never exclude a professing Christian from the Lord's Supper. How painful, how evil to exclude a professing Christian from the Lord's Supper.

We don't simply practice closed communion or even close communion, we practice open communion, because the table should be open to every single human being who professes faith in Jesus Christ. Do you? Then examine yourself now as I pray.

*Lord, I pray that as we partake of the Lord's Supper, you would bless us, Lord, as we have come to sing a new song, Lord, a song all about the Lord Jesus and his redeeming work and how we've been purchased to God by him.*

*And Lord, we also sing the Psalms as a new song because they have new meaning for us, because the Lord Jesus Christ is the stone that the builders rejected and has become the head of the corner, Lord, in Psalm 118.*

*We sing the Psalms, Psalm 23, Lord, because you, Lord Jesus, are our shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep.*

*Lord, we sing the first Psalm as the blessed or happy man, because in Christ we are blessed and happy. And Psalm 2, because you have commanded the*

*kings of the earth to bow their knees and submit to you and to kiss your Son, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*So Lord, we come to you today with a new song in our hearts and delight in you, and thank you, Lord, that each of us here is part of that 144,000 virgins from all the tribes of Israel, that we are redeemed.*

*In Jesus' name, amen.*