

REVELATION 14

Rev. 14:1-5

- Immediately following the horrific vision of the dragon and two beasts who roar about seeking to devour God's children, St. John is given here visions full of comfort and strength and consolation for all believers.
- The Lamb, Mount Zion, and the 144,000 - The Lamb stands atop Mount Zion and with Him the 144,000 who had His Name and His Father's Name written on their foreheads. These are they who overcame (conquered) Satan by the Blood of the Lamb and Word of His testimony. These are believers who remain faithful to the end – all believers of all time. They stand with the Lamb (Jesus Christ) upon Mount Zion (in the Holy Christian Church) where Satan cannot harm them. While on earth, they belonged to the Church Militant. They refused to give into Satan's temptations and remained faithful to Christ. They were willing to suffer all, even death, rather than deny their Savior. Now, as St. John sees this vision, these believers belong to the Church Triumphant, joining Christ in the heavenly Mount Zion (His eternal kingdom). The message is clear: Though Satan manifests himself in many and various ways in this world for the purpose of deceiving God's children so that they forsake the faith, those who remain faithful (i.e., those who live lives of daily repentance, trusting in Christ as Savior) are assured of victory and life to the full in Christ's eternal kingdom.
- "A new song before the throne" – Here we see once again the Divine liturgy and hymnody which belongs to heaven. We cannot possibly even imagine the beauty of this heavenly worship, although we get a glimpse, ever so dim, in our Divine Service.
- "No one could learn that song except the 144,000" – The Divine liturgy/hymnody is for believers – only believers can learn, understand, and appreciate it. I once heard a pastor who is an advocate for contemporary "praise" worship tell me, "Thomas, hymnals don't appeal to the unchurched!" He was using this line to make the argument that we must design our worship services to appeal to the unchurched. He believed we must avoid using the "old liturgy" and the "old hymns" because the unchurched might feel uncomfortable and not want to join. My response to him was, "No kidding! The hymnals are not designed for the unchurched, but the church. Worship in God's Holy House is not for unbelievers, but believers." He disagreed and told me, "If you have that attitude when you become a pastor, good luck trying to grow your church." There are so many things wrong with that comment and the attitude behind it that it would take many pages to list them all. Instead, let me be brief: **WORSHIP IS FOR BELIEVERS, NOT UNBELIEVERS!** Contrary to this pastor's belief (and, unfortunately, the beliefs of many Lutheran pastors and laity today), the Divine Service is **NOT** the time for evangelism. Divine Service is the time when believers gather together in the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwells to confess their sins and receive forgiveness, life, and salvation through God's means of grace, His Holy Word and Sacraments. Only believers, those who have been catechized in the faith, can know and understand what is really going on in the Divine Service. We do not apologize for this, nor do we ever dare design our worship services around the wants and desires of the unchurched. If they are to become church, then they are to be catechized in the faith so that they, too, can know and understand what is happening in the Divine Service.
- ". . . who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins" – This refers to the purity which exists in all believers. The reference here is to sexual immorality (see v. 8 below). Believers are clothed in the robe of Christ's holiness and righteousness. They are pure, seen by God as "virgins."

- “. . . follow the Lamb . . . firstfruits . . . no lie was found, for they are blameless” – More language describing the purity of all believers, which is theirs through faith in Christ. The point being made here is that the 144,000 (all believers of all time, including you and me) are perfectly holy and righteous through faith in Christ, for His perfect holiness and righteousness covers our imperfections and sinfulness. On the Last Day, believers will be seen for who they truly are and will dwell in perfect bliss forever!

Rev. 14:6-13

- After seeing the blessed reality of the saints on the Last Day in vv. 1-5, St. John is given a vision of three angels and the harvest of the earth. The focus here is on God’s judgment as it is pronounced and delivered upon unbelievers, with the exception of vv. 12-13, which focuses on how the saints become numbered with the 144,000, namely by enduring to the end.
- “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim” – Many Lutheran commentators throughout history have interpreted this to be referring to Dr. Martin Luther and the Reformation, for “[Dr. Luther] brought back and preached the eternal Gospel of the justification of a poor sinner through the merits of Jesus Christ alone, by faith. In the very midst of the kingdom of Antichrist he preached this Gospel, and with such divine zeal and power that many thousands of captives were filled with joy over the deliverance here proclaimed” (Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann, *The Popular Commentary of the Bible*). As romantic and appealing as this interpretation may be for us Lutherans, I think it is a bit of a stretch to limit this to the specific era of the Reformation. Certainly, one would not deny the fact that Luther proclaimed the eternal Gospel in the midst of the Antichrist and reclaimed the central article of the Christian faith, i.e. we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But, here, the context suggests that this angel brings forth the eternal Gospel throughout history (“to every nation and tribe and language and people”). The point here is that the Gospel is proclaimed to every generation and that those who do not heed it are judged by God.
- “Another angel . . . ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon’” – This is the first time Babylon is used Revelation; we’ll see it again later in 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, 10, 21. Babylon is the symbolic name for the evil enemies of the Holy Christian Church, those who are influenced by the Dragon and two beasts (Satan and his Antichrist) to persecute Christ’s Bride. The first century Christians would have applied this to the Roman Empire, for some of its emperors (like Nero – see end of Ch. 13) brought great persecution upon the Church. Throughout history, we can see many “Babylons” rising to persecute the Church, and even today there are “Babylons” present among us. But, the point here is that Babylon is fallen, for the Lamb has won the victory. Babylon may seem to be winning the day throughout history, for the devil’s influence is tremendous in this sinful world and the majority of the people in the world fall prey to his temptations and deceptions, the greatest of which involve sexual immorality, but she is fallen nonetheless. The battle is over; Christ has already won – tremendous comfort for Christians of all time who undergo persecution of any sort.
- “Another angel . . . If anyone worships the beast” – A repeat for emphasis of what we saw in Ch. 13. There are only two kinds of people in this world – unbelievers (who have the mark of the beast on their foreheads) and believers (who have the Divine Name upon their foreheads). Here, the image is especially graphic, urging those who belong to Satan to repent, for if they do not, they “will drink the wine of God’s wrath” and suffer eternal torment in Hell. The Lamb and His holy angels will oversee this judgment, ushering in its

fullness on the Last Day. The spirits of those who die without faith in Christ now go to Hell and suffer torment. Their suffering will be even more severe when they are reunited with their bodies on the Last Day and thrown into the “lake of fire” to suffer eternally in body and spirit. The point: Judgment is coming! Repent!

- “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints” – Believers are exhorted to keep the faith so that they will escape the judgment awaiting unbelievers. They must be constantly exhorted to repent and trust in Christ alone. Through Him, they keep the commandments of God and remain perfect in God’s sight. What is also in view here is consolation for believers, for the Day is coming when their persecutors and enemies will be judged. God will repay them for what they have done to His children. Justice will be served. It’s a guarantee! So, keep the faith, you saints of God, for the victory is yours through the Blood of the Lamb, and your enemies will be judged!
- To further illustrate to believers that they can be certain that theirs is the victory if they endure to the end, “a loud voice from heaven” says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” Believers who die are blessed because their spirits are brought to the Paradise of heaven to join in the heavenly choir around the throne where the Lamb sits. They are released from all the troubles of this earthly life and “may rest from their labors.” “Their deeds follow them!” – All the good works done by them are rewarded in heaven. Good works do not get them to heaven, but they are rewarded there. The greatest good work is to live a life of daily repentance and trust in Christ. The greatest “deed” is to believe in Christ. Good works naturally and spontaneously flow from that faith. They will be put on display on the Last Day (cf. Matt. 25; Athanasian Creed).

Rev. 14:14-20

- Here we see another vision of the Last Day. This chapter began with a vision of the 144,000 (all believers of all time) who stand with Christ on the Last Day. Now, the chapter ends with a vision showing the judgment of unbelievers on the Last Day.
- “. . . a white cloud . . . one like a son of man” – Christ will come on the clouds on the Last Day and His holy angels with Him. The harvest language symbolically indicates that they will gather all unbelievers together and throw them “into the great winepress of the wrath of God” (the place of eternal torment). So extensive and terrifying is the judgment of God upon unbelievers on the Last Day that “blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.” The number 1,600 here is symbolic for the ultimate completeness of God’s final judgment upon unbelievers on the Last Day (4 x 4 x 100 = 1600; 4 being the number of earth – unbelievers will be gathered from the 4 corners of the earth and the 4 winds of the earth; 100 being the square of 10, God’s number for completeness – this judgment will be final and complete). The point: The judgment upon unbelievers on the Last Day will be severe – eternally severe, even as the reward upon believers will be great – eternally great.