

St. Paul's Dorking Sermon Notes 6th June 2010

'Past Imperfect Future Tense'

'Church and the Powers of Evil Rev 14 (1-13)

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Revelation Chapter 14 is at the end of a central section of John's teaching consisting of Chapters 12 to 14, a section of material in which John sets out the conflict that exists between the Church and the World (State). Against a backdrop of the age long battle between God and his goodness and the powers of darkness, John is intent on stripping back the 'stage scenery' for the Church in order to reveal what is really happening! Like a play where the stage is stripped bare and the audience finding themselves on the stage and then discovering that in fact they are not spectators but part of the action!

Chapters 13 and 14 outline the spiritual reality of the powers of evil (13) and a vision of the triumph of the powers of good (14). In Chapter 13 John describes the incarnation of evil as beasts from the sea and from the earth, evil that can be found in the human heart and the community of human kind, evil that is powerful, evil that is greater than the sum of all its parts, evil that the New Testament accepts will characterise the 'last days'. In Chapter 14 John turns from the forces of evil to those of good and in this next vision sees the triumph of the followers of the Lamb (read 14:1-5). The 144,000 refers to the Church – 144,000 is the number of completeness. God's people marked out as His! Marked out as pure, as following Christ, as purchased by God, as being truthful witnesses. Marked out because the hour of judgement is coming!

The central section of chapter 14 is concerned with angels, three to be precise. In his book *Reversed Thunder* Eugene Peterson describes John's angels as apocalyptic angels – "*vast firey sea striding creatures with hell in their nostrils and heaven ion their eyes, not the plump darlings of the Rubens' oils or the giggling, tinsel fringed girls in Christmas plays, but real angels.*" Angels are messengers for witness and encouragement they are not for entertainment and the question we need to ask is 'is the message getting through?' Is it welcome or not! Like unwanted or unexpected emails are we in danger of filtering or binning messages from God!

The three angels in v 6-13 bring three distinct messages to the Church:

Angel 1 A message of Good News! - Read v 6-7: It is good news for every tribe, nation, language and people! As the hymn proclaims "We have a gospel to proclaim good news for all throughout the earth." Although judgment comes, because we fear God and give him glory, we have no need to fear being judged!

Angel 2 A Message of Bad News! – Read v8: Let's not kid ourselves that all is not well in our world! There is real rebellion against God and His Ways.

Angel 3 A Message of Personal Challenge! – Read 9-12: John is not so concerned about the fate of non believers as those of Christians who are prepared to compromise. Questions such as "Is it really that terrible to participate in Roman Worship" then, could be rephrased today as "Is it really terrible to participate in reaping the benefits of a Western Society at the cost of poverty and injustice in other parts for the world?"

There are many prophets of doom and gloom regards the future of the world but as God's people we have a hope that is steadfast and certain and as his prophetic people we are called to be centre stage in his eternal purpose for the world. One of the biggest challenges for us today as Church is that of prophetic witness and not to compromise! The Church is called to be blameless and pure, to be characterized by integrity and truthfulness, to be a people called into battle with weapons of endurance, obedience to God and faithfulness to Christ and his call, We are called to be God's prophetic community for today, that will mean being prepared to be changed and healed, discovering new ways of living out our faith, new ways to live as a prophetic people and being faithful witnesses to Christ.



Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passages and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.

1. Although judgment comes, because we fear God and give him glory, we have no need to fear being judged! Why do some of us who have faith still fear being judged by God? Rev 14:13 is often read in funeral services. Is it wrong for a Christian to be afraid of death?
2. John is not so concerned about the fate of non believers as those of Christians who are prepared to compromise. Questions like "Is it really that terrible to participate in Roman Worship" then, could be rephrased today as " Is it really terrible to participate in reaping the benefits of a Western Society at the cost of poverty and injustice in other parts for the world?" What areas of 'compromise' do you think that we the Church need to work hard at?
3. Do you tend to see a glass as half empty or half full? There are many prophets of doom and gloom regards the future of the world but as God's people we have a hope that is steadfast and certain. How should this hope colour our approach to life ?
4. We are called to be God's prophetic community for today that will mean being prepared to be changed and healed, discovering new ways of living out our faith, new ways to live as a prophetic people and being faithful witnesses to Christ. In what ways do you think that the Church's life of witness should change?