



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text Revelation 14:1-20

Revelation

“The Lamb and the Reapers”

TRANSCRIPT

I want to thank Frank Denison for standing in for me last week; appreciate his ministry, and I know it was appreciated by all of you. This morning, though, we're back in the book of Revelation. We've been out of it for a couple of weeks, two Sundays, so let me give you just a brief review, and then I want to give a brief overview of the text we'll read this morning, which is Revelation 14:1-20.

Our previous text, Revelation 13, gave us a picture of the terror that will come upon the earth when the infernal trinity, as it's sometimes called, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, take their place and begin to carry out false worship and persecution of the saints. So it's a chapter full of persecution. Now we come to chapter 20, which is really very much the opposite.

It's a chapter that gives great encouragement to the saints, and it divides very simply into three parts, and you can notice this by a common phrase that we find in three places. In verse 1 of chapter 14, we read, “Then I looked.” In verse 6, “And I saw.” And then in verse 14, “Then I looked.” That divides the chapter into three parts.

The first part speaks of a vision John is given of the victory of the righteous. The second vision, in verse 6 down through verse 13, is a vision of the fall of Babylon. And then the third vision, in verses 14 through 20, is a vision of the harvest of judgment that will come upon the earth. So the last two sections are really about judgment on the wicked, and the first section is about the triumph of the righteous.

I mention that because it's a long chapter. I'm going to read it in just a moment, and it's full of details, and so that we don't miss the basic idea because of

the details, or lose the forest through the trees, I want to give that synopsis of it. Well, let’s read it, and then we’ll spend time in it in a few moments.

“Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;

and he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.’

And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.’

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,

he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone 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; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.

And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.’

Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.

Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.’

So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word and our time of study in it together. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer]

[Message] Occasionally I read a play by Shakespeare; not often, but I recently read *Henry V*, which is about Henry, the English king’s, victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt. And the high point of the play – well, at least it seems to me, at least the most moving part for me – is Henry’s Saint Crispin’s Day speech.

The night before the battle, the king secretly moved among the troops, and incognito, he heard them speak, listened to them, heard their concerns. They faced a strong enemy. The odds were against them, and victory was not at all certain. So the next day before the battle, Henry gave a speech. He told his officers of the great honor they had to join the battle and bleed together.

He called them “a band of brothers.” He said their story would be remembered to the end of the world, and that men would curse themselves for not having fought with them on Saint Crispin’s Day. It was a great encouragement when they faced a very difficult situation, and the English went on to fight the battle and win a great victory. People need encouragement when facing fearful odds. They need reassurance.

That’s what Revelation 14 is; it’s not a speech, it’s a vision that gives a glimpse into the future, and reassures the saints of the victory to come. It’s put in obvious contrast to chapter 13, which begins “The dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.” Chapter 14 begins, “The Lamb stood on Mount Zion.” The sand is a foundation of disaster. The mountain is the foundation of eternal strength.

Our future is on the mountain, not the sand, so in spite of the events of chapter 13, the events to come – Satan’s war on the people of God, and the antichrist’s reign of terror on the earth – that will pass away, and Christ will certainly triumph. That’s the future, and that’s the message of Revelation 14. One of the older commentators, Joseph Seiss, wrote, “The blackest storms often give place to the loveliest sunsets.”

Well, we come now to a beautiful sunset. As chapter 13 ends with the ominous number of the beast, 666, John gives another number when he looks and he sees the Lamb standing, and with him 144,000. These are the servants of God that John saw back in chapter 7. They are distinct from the multitude of the Gentiles. These are those that are of the 12 tribes of Israel.

And John sees them safely on the mountain of God, which I think represents heaven here, as it does in Hebrews 12:22, where Mount Zion is called “the heavenly Jerusalem.” Now, in this, John is given a picture of the end. After chapter 13, with the persecution of the beast in which he destroys the saints, John sees this group of God’s servants, the 144,000, the vanguard of the servants of God in that time, safely there with Christ.

They have come through the tribulation. They have completed their earthly mission, and not one of them was lost. Christ keeps them faithful to the end, and the reason they have triumphed is they have Christ’s name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. Not literally; symbolically, remember, this is a book of symbols.

And that name on their forehead is a way of signifying God’s ownership of them and their faithfulness to him. They belong to God, in contrast to those who have the name and number of the beast, who are Satan’s people. But it’s God’s people who will triumph in the end and stand victoriously with the Lamb in heaven. That’s the picture John is given in his vision.

As I say, it’s not literal. It’s a symbolic picture, and intended to communicate to John, and to all of God’s people, that we will triumph in the end. Let me illustrate what I think is going on in the vision from a painting that is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam – a painting about the Reformation. It’s entitled “Fishers of Souls.” It pictures men in boats on a sea, rescuing people who are drowning from the water.

On one side are the Catholics in their boats, and on the other side are the Protestants in their boats. And you can recognize the two very easily and distinguish them from one another by the clothes that they’re wearing. The Protestant ministers are in their boats, and they’re dressed in black cloaks with white collars, and holding Bibles that are open.

And the Catholics are dressed in the robes of cardinals and monks. They don’t have Bibles; they have incense burners and things like that. Along the shore are the rescued, standing safely. It is about real people – in fact, I suspect that the Protestant ministers who are closest or in the foreground are particular ministers that the artist was painting, and perhaps had been commissioned to paint.

But they’re real people. It’s about real events. It’s about the gospel being preached and people being saved. But it is all represented symbolically. In the picture John was given, he could recognize the people that he saw and distinguish them from the people of the beast, not by the clothes they were wearing, but by the names they had on their foreheads.

They belonged to Christ, and are safely with him on Mount Zion. They triumphed because they belong to him. He will not lose one of them. He will not lose one of his people. That’s the assurance God is giving here in the vision. And then in

verses 2 through 5, John describes the character of these servants. They are pure. They are truthful. They are loyal.

In verse 4, he says, “They have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste.” Literally, “chaste” is the word “virgins;” they’ve kept themselves virgins. But this is not a description of celibacy, and this isn’t setting that forth as a virtue. It’s not set forth as a virtue in the Bible. And again, this is figurative. It’s a description of their loyalty to Christ.

I don’t think we’re to take this idea of not having defiled themselves with women literally. It is no doubt literally true, but that’s not the point. The point of this is to be understood in a figurative sense. They will live and they will minister, as we saw from chapter 13 and as we’ll see in the later chapters, they will live and minister during a terrible time during the reign of the beast.

Which will not only be a time of terrible persecution but a time of great apostasy and false worship; a time of spiritual and moral harlotry, when people worship the image of the beast; and all through the Old Testament, idolatry is described as harlotry. Later in chapter 17, we read of the false religion as the great harlot. But these will be kept from that. They will keep themselves from that, is what John is saying here.

And in verse 5, we read that not only will they be morally pure, not only will they keep themselves from apostasy, but we read that no lie was found in their mouth. So these are men of truth. They declare the truth. They proclaim the truth of God, in contrast to the men of the dragon, who speak lies; particularly the false prophet is described in that way.

Well, these are people who are true, and of course, that should be true of all of God’s servants. This is speaking of a particular group of people, but in principle, it applies to all of us, all of God’s people. The character of these people and the destiny of these people, and all of us should be people of this character. A lying Christian is a contradiction. A cheating Christian is a contradiction.

It’s a pathetic thing to find such character as lying and cheating in the church. Satan is a liar. Christ is the Truth. We are to exhibit his character in word as well as deed. We are to follow him. That’s what these men will do – that’s how they are described in verse 4. “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” And what a picture that gives; what an unusual picture that gives.

It is the shepherd who leads the lamb, but here, it is the Lamb who leads. Who’s ever heard of that? Well, that’s unique, and of course, this Lamb is unique because he’s also a Shepherd. But the Shepherd is a Lamb. The Shepherd knows the sheep in a unique way because he has been one of them. He knows our condition. He knows our circumstances of life.

None of these people, none of us, have ever or will ever go through anything that Christ himself has not passed through. He’s a sympathetic High Priest. He’s a sympathetic Shepherd. He knows our experience fully, and he’s the one that leads us. So they follow him. They don’t set out their own course in life. They follow him. They don’t determine for themselves where they will serve him. He determines that.

So they go where he leads. Now, that’s life for the Christian. That’s life for the people of God. We go where God leads. We don’t know always where that’s going to be; very often we don’t know where that’s going to be, but we trust him and know that he’ll lead us in the right way. And that may be a difficult way – very often he leads us through paths that are tough.

We go through hard times. Our lives, if they’re lived faithfully, as the lives of these men will be lived, they will be lives of cross-bearing. But the Lord leads us always in the best way, even though it may be a hard way, and it’s the way that leads ultimately to Zion, to heaven, and to victory. Now, so that we don’t get ahead of ourselves, all of this – their purity, their obedience – is due to God’s sovereign grace.

They are not of this world. They have been redeemed out of the world. In verse 2, John says that he heard a voice from heaven, which is probably a description of the 144,000 as they begin to sing in verse 3. They sing of Christ. They sing of redemption. It is called “a new song that no one could learn except them who had been purchased from the earth.”

The world cannot learn this song. The world cannot sing this song of God’s grace and redemption because it doesn’t understand it. It has no appreciation of it. It has no interest in it. Redemption and grace are songs they cannot understand. One must understand that one needs a Redeemer in order to sing about redemption. One must understand that he or she is absolutely undeserving, a debtor to grace, in order to be able to sing about grace.

But to those who don’t, to those who think that, well, their righteousness is good, there’s no need to sing about these things anyway, all of that is foolishness. But

these sing of it because they have been, as John says, purchased from the earth by the blood of Christ. His sacrifice paid the penalty of all their sins. He paid it, and in that way bought them, purchased them for himself.

And that’s the reason that they will triumph. It’s the only reason that you and I will triumph: because Christ triumphed at the cross and redeemed us, purchased us from out of this world. So they belong to another; they belong to another master. They belong to another world. They are citizens of Mount Zion, citizens of heaven. That’s where John sees them in this vision of their destiny, triumphant over the beast.

The last description given of them is “they are blameless,” or we could translate that “they are without blemish.” That is, they are justified and fully sanctified. They stand perfect before the Lord in the Lord’s righteousness. Now, that’s the promise that Jude gives to us in his glorious benediction in Jude 24.

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless, or without blemish, with great joy.” That’s a verse that we could spend the rest of the hour on, and much more than that, but it’s a great declaration of God’s sovereign grace to keep us standing and to present us at the end perfect before him.

That’s what he will do, and that’s the triumphant end of these servants. They will overcome the beast, as great as that opposition will be, and stand blameless, perfect before God. Well, that ends the first of the three parts of chapter 14, which I mentioned at the reading of the text, each division, as I pointed out, begins with a similar statement. In verse 1, we read, “Then I looked.”

Verse 6 begins, “And I saw.” Verse 14, “Then I looked. So we come now in verses 6 through 13 to the second part of the chapter, that tells of the fall of Babylon, and the fall of all of those who are connected with Babylon, who worship the beast. The third part is about the final harvest of God’s wrath, but both parts really should be taken together. They have the same theme, and that is of the overthrow of evil.

So the assurance of chapter 14 is not only that God’s servants will be victorious, but that God’s enemies will be defeated, utterly and completely. The reign of the beast will be a terrible reign, but it will be short. It’s doomed. Judgment is coming. Now, this second division is composed of three visions, of three successive angels, each giving a message to those who live on the earth – that is, to the unbelievers.

The first angel appears in verse 6. He is flying in midheaven, and his message to those on the earth is called “an eternal gospel.” He gives it in a loud voice in verse 7: “and he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.’”

Now, at first sight, that doesn’t really read much like a gospel; where’s the good news in that warning that the hour of judgment is come? But part of the good news is that evil will be overthrown forever. The world will be cleansed of corruption and cruelty and all of the things that so shock us, such as the events that we saw this past Monday. Those things will be ended forever.

The world will finally be put right, and that is good news. But also, the call to fear God and worship him is a call to repent and believe in the Savior, and ultimately we cannot fear God, no one fears God who does not believe in Jesus Christ, his Son. So we cannot worship God apart from trusting in Christ. The essential facts of the gospel are assumed here.

The Lamb standing in verse 1 is a picture of the resurrected, triumphant Christ, and we’ve seen him standing before, back in chapter 5, on the throne as a Lamb standing as slain. So it’s the living Lamb, who had been slain, but is alive, and that’s what we have at the beginning of this chapter – the living Savior. That’s understood in this call to repentance.

But also, the full presentation of the gospel, of the good news, always involves the idea of judgment, of wrath. Hell is a reality. That’s what we’re saved from. What is the good news other than being saved from the wrath to come? It’s more than that, I know; it’s being saved to a life of righteousness. It’s being saved to a life of works that please God. It’s being saved to a relationship to him.

But we’re saved from something. The salvation is from the judgment to come, and we have that all through the New Testament. We have it in the gospel of John very clearly. John’s thought of as the apostle of love, but he writes so much about judgment. He writes about it here in the book of Revelation, but in John 3:36, he says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Presently abides on him, and soon, that wrath will come, so the gospel is about receiving life. It’s also about being delivered from death, being delivered from wrath.

Here, a lot of the emphasis is on wrath, in a kind of last call to escape it. It is coming, the first angel says. The certainty of it is the message of the second angel, who appears in verse 8.

He cries out, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.” This is a future event, but it is described in the past tense in order to say that the fall of Babylon, which is future, is so certain to occur it’s as though it’s already happened. This is the first mention of Babylon in the book of Revelation. It’s first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 11, with the Tower of Babel that was built to reach into heaven.

Historically, Babylon – and as you go back to Genesis 11, you know that was a great rebellion on the part of man. That’s the collective rebellion of mankind against God’s instruction to fill the earth. And historically, Babylon was the great enemy of God, the great enemy of Jerusalem and God’s people. It was a city that was filled with pagan temples, and the center of idolatry and Gentile power.

So for the prophets of the Old Testament, Babylon came to represent human pride and unbelief. Everything opposed to God and grace and true worship. But that will someday collapse completely. Now, some believe that John is describing here the fall of an actual city, like he described in chapter 11 when he described part of Jerusalem collapsing as a result of an earthquake.

That will literally occur in the city of Jerusalem, and it may be that this will literally be a city that will fall. That Babylon will be rebuilt in Mesopotamia, modern-day Iraq, and will be overthrown. The details of its demise are given in chapters 17 and 18, and so that may be; that may be how we should interpret this. But even so, the greater meaning is a reference to the capital of the final apostate, godless civilization.

And the message here is that all the evil of the beast and his society, which is either found in a future rebuilt city or symbolized in this ancient city of Babylon – all of that, though, will be overthrown. All of that will come to an end. And the followers of the beast and the dragon will perish. That is the message of the third angel that appears in verse 9.

This is the fourth vision. It’s a warning against yielding to the religion of the antichrist. Verse 9: “Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is

mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.””

The scene recalls the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible says that Abraham rose early and he looked down where the smoke ascended like smoke from a furnace. That’s the picture that’s given in verse 10 of the angels and the saints watching the destruction of those who followed the beast. It’s certain to happen, and it is eternal judgment that’s described here.

Verse 11: “The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.” Now, think of that – endless punishment. No relief. No rest. No end. Now, some try to avoid that today. People don’t like the idea of an eternal judgment, so they believe in what’s called universalism – that everyone’s going to be saved. Or if they don’t believe that, they may seek to modify the harshness of this idea of judgment to come, and believe in annihilationism, that people who do not believe in Christ will cease to exist altogether.

But it’s not the teaching here, and it’s not the teaching of our Lord. In Mark 9:44, it’s very clear that he taught eternal, endless punishment. He said that it is better to go through life without an eye or a hand than to go to hell whole, where “the fire never goes out.” So the lost will be tormented forever, while the saints will reign with Christ forever.

That’s why the angel is giving this warning, this last call to repentance. This isn’t God’s desire for people. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. He called the wicked to repentance, and to reign with Christ with the righteous. Well, that assurance of the beast’s doom issues in a call for patient endurance on the part of those who are about to go through trials and testing.

Patience for God’s people; they are to stay faithful. Verse 12: “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” That’s what characterizes the believer – obedience, and reliance on the Savior. We can only be obedient by relying on the Savior, and the incentive is that the suffering of the saints is only temporary. The life that follows is eternal.

That’s the promise that’s given in verse 13. “And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’”

This is a beatitude or blessing on those who die for the faith. It’s inserted in the middle of this vision of judgment, and inserted there to remind us.

In the context of judgment and great challenge to a person’s faith, it’s there to remind us that there are more important things than this life, than keeping ourselves alive physically. Those who die in the Lord are blessed, and the Holy Spirit says “yes” to that. This is the only direct quote of the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation, and he speaks here to confirm this great truth, that dying in the Lord is a blessing.

It’s a great blessing; the greatest blessing. Nothing can compare with it. This is true for all believers, but specifically, this is a reference to the martyr’s death; to those who, as it were, fall in battle, fall in the spiritual battle, dying for the name of Christ. And what we’re told is dying for the Lord is infinitely better than holding onto this life. Those who die in Christ, the Spirit says, rest from their labors.

The pain and the weariness that result from obedience over a long life of fighting the good fight will end. Now, this may include many of those 144,000 that are standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, but if their life ends in that way, a martyr’s death in this world, it doesn’t end. They don’t lose their life. They go from this world of toil and battle to the victory with the Lamb, standing triumphant with him.

And he says their deeds will follow them. They won’t be forgotten. All of the sacrifices will be remembered by Christ, and rewarded for eternity. In Henry’s speech before the battle of Agincourt, he said that “The man who fought there would someday strip his sleeve, and would show the scars of the battle, and say, ‘These wounds I had on Crispin’s Day.’” They’ll be trophies for him; trophies to his honor.

“Men forget,” Henry said. “All shall be forgot, but this shall be remembered.” And that’s what the Lord is telling us. Our deeds in battle, our deeds of faithfulness and obedience, of endurance, will not be forgot. The smallest thing will be remembered. Turn to Matthew 25:36, and that whole section of the end of the Olivet discourse, he points out that just a cup of water given to a thirsty saint is a cup of water given to him, and he doesn’t forget it.

The most minor good thing that we do will be remembered, and rewarded. Things we do will be trophies forever. With that encouragement, John has two new visions in the third and final part of the book. Both are of the great harvest. The first

is a vision of Christ with a crown of victory on his head and a sickle of judgment in his hand. At the Father’s command, he reaps the earth.

Verse 14: “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.”

Well, here John is describing the judgment to come upon the world, and doing so in the language of the Old Testament prophets, because there, the harvest of the land, which was so common in an agrarian society, came to symbolize the harvest of God’s judgment, when he will collect all of the unbelievers and carry them off to judgment. Here, we’re told that the earth is ripe.

And those who dwell on the earth are the unbelievers, the unregenerate. The statement “they are ripe,” meaning they’re ready for judgment, just as grapes would be ready for the harvest, might echo the statement that was made to Abraham in Genesis 15:16, that Israel would not possess the land until the iniquity of the Amorite was full. Now, that would not happen for centuries, for some 400 years from the time Abraham received that prophecy.

But when the time came, and the iniquity was full, when God’s patience had been exhausted, then the nation would enter the land and conquer it, and judge the sinful Amorite and Canaanite. And when the earth is ripe, when its iniquity is full, Christ will reap with a sickle. It will be just, and it will fit God’s plan. There’s nothing arbitrary in this; nothing arbitrary about what the Lord does.

It will happen when, as John says, the hour to reap has come. God knows that hour. That’s very precise; that’s not just the day. Frequently it’s called “the day of the Lord.” This is more precise, and it’s of the very hour – when it comes, that’s when judgment will happen. We look at human events and we can’t make heads or tails of them very often.

They don’t seem to be going in any purposeful direction, but what we know from Scripture is they certainly are. Time is ticking toward that hour on God’s clock very relentlessly. He is sovereign over the affairs of men. History is under his

control, and he is guiding it to its appointed end, which is one of triumph. Another angel appears in verse 17, and it too had a sharp sickle; with it, it reaped the earth.

This is the fifth angel in the chapter. In verse 18, a sixth angel appears and gives the command, “‘Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.’ So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.”

Now, that too is a picture borrowed from the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Joel spoke of God’s judgment as a “winepress,” where the wicked were trodden down. In verse 20, the winepress becomes a gruesome battlefield. Blood comes out from it “up to the horses’ bridles for a distance of 200 miles.” 200 miles is roughly the length of Israel, where the battle of Armageddon will be fought.

The picture of horses swimming in blood over the entire land is hyperbole; it’s an exaggeration, which is not uncommon in the annals of war. During the reign of Hadrian, the Romans destroyed a town in Palestine, and the Jews wrote that the carnage was so great that blood poured into the sea, 40 miles away. Well, that’s exaggeration; it didn’t literally happen.

But it was such a great destruction that they described it in those kind of words. It’s not literal – not any more literal than Alexander Hamilton was being literal when he described the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, and said that the French were “wading through seas of blood.” Well, we know what that means; we don’t take that literally.

This is a way of speaking which we expect in a book written largely in symbols. Here it’s a graphic way of describing the great slaughter, and that’s the point. To show that in the cataclysmic destruction of the wicked at the end of history, Christ will triumph completely over the antichrist in the end. And so in a future day, when Satan is cast down to the earth, he will begin his reign of terror.

The beast from the sea and the beast from the earth will wear down the saints. It will appear that they will triumph, and Satan will reign over the earth. But he’s standing on the sand at the seashore; Christ is standing on the rock of Mount Zion. He and those who follow him have the firm foundation, the eternal foundation, and we will triumph through him, just as those 144,000 will.

So with that certain hope before us, we are to be encouraged in the present. We don’t know when those events will occur, but the triumph through those events tell us that we can triumph through the events that we live in today. And so we’re to stand firm in the trials of life. We’re to fight the good fight of faith, whatever that may be. It may be at work, it may be at school, it may be in the home, it may be in the doctor’s office as you face some surgery to come – stand firm. Trust the Lord.

That’s what we’re to do; by God’s grace, we will. That’s what’s necessary, the grace of God, and so to do that, you must know him. You must belong to him. You must believe in him. Those who don’t will come to ruin. The Lord spoke of that at the end of Matthew 7, when he told the story of the two builders. One built his house on sand, and the other built on the rock.

When the rains fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew against the houses, the one on the sand fell with a great fall, but the one built on the rock stood firm. Judgment will come. It is inevitable, and you will fall with a great fall if your life is not built upon Christ, so build on him. Believe in him. Trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and may God help all of us who have to live faithfully for him. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the encouragement of this text, and the reminder that we are headed for great victory. Your people will triumph, not in our own strength, but in your grace, because you put your name upon us. You own us. You purchased us out of the earth. You’ve made us your people, and you never forsake your people. You do not lose one of them.

We give you the praise and the thanks, and ask you to give us strength to live faithfully in the present, and we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.