

Rev 26-03-29a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 29th of March, 2026. We continue our study in the book of Revelation.

We are at the threshold of chapter 15. We're like the glory of God hovering over the threshold of the temple. We've been at this threshold for a few sessions now, but we're knocking at the door of chapter 15.

Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and investigation of his word, and we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for our fellowship, for the support and encouragement that we receive, the prayers that are offered on our behalf. We thank you for answered prayer.

We thank you that you have heard our intercessions and our requests and have responded in your gracious and inimitable way. We're grateful for our challenges as well as for those things that ease our path. We know that all things work together for good.

We pray that our time of study in your word this morning will bear fruit in each of our lives to transform us by the renewing of our minds, to help us to understand your good and acceptable and perfect will. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Last time we looked at our chapter 14, and noticed that there is a description of the 144,000 that enables us, gives us an example to follow that is extremely helpful.

This example reminds us that we are to be sanctified. We know that we fail. We know that we have problems with sin, failure, our attitudes, our actions, our words, transgressions.

And so how can we be sanctified? We know the mechanism for this. It's something we learned long ago. It is foundational, but it is worth reviewing from time to time that we have to go to the Lord with confession of our known sins.

1 John 1, 7 and 1, 9 remind us that to walk in the light and maintain fellowship with God and He with us requires the absence of the defilement of sin. These individuals are not defiled. And the examples that are given are representative of maintaining personal purity.

We do so via confession of sin. The blood of Jesus Christ, His son cleanses us from all sin. From sanctification, we move to purity and purity is endeavoring to establish patterns and behaviors in our lives that avoid sin and cultivates the fruit of the Spirit.

Sanctification, purity, and dedication. They are first fruits and they follow the Lamb wherever He goes. And we saw this beautiful chiastic structure that helps us to remember how this all works.

So not being defiled with women, corresponding to being without fault before the throne. If you can remember the 144,000 not worrying about how they're going to survive the tribulation, but as examples for us of how our daily life should look, it is going to justify the Lord Jesus communicating it to us. We will not be those 144,000, but their description helps us.

So that outside bracket we saw last time, avoiding defilement and maintaining our sanctification so that we are faultless to stand before the throne. Within that, it says that they are virgins. This was the picture of purity and corresponds in that description symmetrically with in their mouth is no deceit.

This goes to maintaining the tongue. It goes to watching what we say. What we say reflects what goes on in our hearts.

Our speech is a window to what we're thinking and good thoughts, good speech. Within that, we saw that they follow the lamb wherever he goes, this idea of dedication. And this corresponds to being first fruits to God and the lamb.

We are a kind of first fruits. Paul talks about this in Ephesians chapter one and two, and it is so essential that we remember who we are and why we're here. We are God's gift to the Lord Jesus Christ.

His body, his bride, as it were, he is the head of all things to the church, and we're unique. We are called, we are separated. These are things that are easy to forget when we're in the maelstrom of circumstance in daily life.

But this picture, these 144,000, when we first see them, they are sealed. They are marked by God. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

You remember the 36 things? I think you can actually adjust that list up or down somewhat, but there's a convenient list of 36 things that happen at the point of salvation. One of them being that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. One of his five primary ministries.

Do you remember the five things that the Holy Spirit does? Let's see if I remember them. He indwells us, he fills us, he gifts us, he seals us into Christ, and he baptizes us into Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, the filling of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the gifting of the Holy Spirit, and the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We see that reflected in the description of these individuals. They are firstfruits to God and the Lamb. We are a firstfruits in this age and unique compared to Old Testament Israel in that we have the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Each and every one of us is so providentially provided for. So up to verse six in chapter 14, we have the time of Jacob's trouble. We tend to think that the tribulation is global catastrophe, seas drying up a third of this, and a half of that, and a quarter of this, and the sun and moon being darkened, flying scorpions and all sorts of things in that this is global.

But the focus of scripture, both in Old Testament prophecy and in the revelation is that this period focuses on Israel. That's why these 144,000 are associated with tribes of Israel, not apostles. Israel, 12,000 from each tribe.

They sing this new song, as it were, before the throne, before the four living creatures and the elders in verse three. And no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth. We currently have wonderful experiences and insights in this age of the spirit, this age of grace, that would be completely foreign and incomprehensible to Old Testament saints.

We are able to praise God and to sing, as it were, a song of praise before the Lamb and before the throne of God himself because of the wonderful privilege we enjoy. These individuals are the first fruits of Israel. And Israel, as Paul reminds us, is going to be holy.

All Israel will be saved. Remember, he says, if the first fruits are holy, so is the whole lump, so is the whole crop. And these individuals are the point of the spear for the millennial Israel that will occupy the land.

But that follows the time of Jacob's trouble. And so then we saw these six angels and we pick up this morning, three angels lead into the picture of the Son of Man and his sharp sickle and the reaping of the grain. Three angels follow that with another angel having the sickle to reap the grape harvest.

I personally believe, without anything other than speculation to support it, that this angel may well be Michael, the angel that is the prince of the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus is going to reap his own out of the 70th week. These are the first fruits.

This grain reaping that we saw in chapter 14, in verse 14, I looked and behold a white cloud on the cloud, one like the Son of Man having on his head a golden crown and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple crying with a loud voice, thrust in your sickle and reap for the time has come for you to reap for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So he who sat on the cloud, and your new King James is correct here to capitalize the pronoun, this is the Lord Jesus, thrust in his sickle on the earth and the earth was reaped.

The words and implements mentioned here are associated with the grain harvest. You remember at the beginning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, when John the Baptist is announcing him and reminds the nation that at the coming of Messiah, he is going to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire and gather the wheat into his barn. And it is a reminder to us that at the judgment seat of Christ, there is going to be a fire of judgment that will test our works, whether they are gold, silver and precious stones, wood, hay and stubble.

This is our daily opportunity. We're not at the judgment yet, we're here, there is time remaining, we can redeem that time, we can invest and lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven by cultivating the ministry of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, following the example of these individuals that we just reviewed in remembering to think about our sanctification, our purity, our dedication and the reason we are here, to be first fruits. So following this in verse 18, another angel came out from the altar who has power over fire.

He cries with a loud cry to the angel that just preceded him in verse 17 that has a sharp sickle, thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth. The clusters of the vine of the earth. These are the grapes of wrath.

You remember the battle hymn of the Republic. There's a lot of problems with that song, but it does mention he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. And there's quite a lot of the rest of that song that you can dispense with, but that's a very vivid image and it comes from this passage.

And ones that follow it. So the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. The wine press was trampled outside the city and blood came out of the wine press up to the horse's bridles for 1,600 furlongs.

This is roughly 200 miles. This is an allusion to what will become more explicitly described in the Valley of Har-Megiddo, Armageddon. We'll be looking at that when it comes up a bit future, but you can write in the margin of your Bible out by verse 15, thrust in your sickle and reap.

This is a grain harvest. In verse 18, this is a grape harvest. The grain is gathered into the barn and notice the grain leaves the earth and is gathered to the one who reaps it before the grapes of wrath are harvested and put into the wine press of the wrath of God.

This pattern would be just as useful if it were in the Old Testament to remind us that we are not destined for wrath, but for deliverance. This is why we believe not just in a pre-wrath rapture of the church, but a pre-tribulational rapture. If you pay attention to your terms, those are really synonymous.

We know that tribulation should rightly apply only to the last three and a half years of the 70th week, but the man of sin will not be revealed until we are gone. And he gets three and a half years, much as the Lord Jesus had three and a half years to present the kingdom as the Messiah to Israel, the false Messiah is gonna have three and a half years to pitch his program, to implement it, to try to manage and control the world through the mark, the number of his name, controlling buying and selling, creating treaties and making covenants to establish peace. You can see how the world currently works and that if someone has enough power and enough popularity, they can make things happen.

This is not the tribulation. This is not the 70th week. Our president is not the antichrist, but you can see how it will work.

Unlike many previous iterations of powerful governments, you can see that a combination of boldness, of innovation, of exerting power at pressure points can bring about the ending of seven or eight wars around the globe, the agreements for trade and commerce trade with us at a certain rate, or we will penalize you via tariffs or whatever it may be. This is not what revelation describes after we're gone, but you can see as never before in history, how it could

work, how it will work. I would not be a bit surprised if when this individual comes, the first beast that is advertised and supported by the second beast, all of it fueled by Satan, if tactics, strategies, means of implementing policy and desired outcomes isn't patterned after what we are seeing right now.

Remember, a pattern can be good and someone can adopt it and pervert it as the antichrist will do, looking at the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ, taking a good thing and copying it and using it for perverse ends. It's like counterfeit money. So you don't have to be unduly impressed positively or negatively by the current political and governmental climate.

You can pick individual issues and decide whether a biblical worldview would support it or retreat from it. You don't have to do anything other than pray for those that have the rule over us, whatever their party, whatever their assignment, whatever their role, we are enjoined as those who are sanctified and purified and dedicated and representing the Lord Jesus Christ to pray. Pray for peace, pray for wisdom on the part of those who govern, but you cannot help but see in the world internationally today, how leverage is applied, how people can be brought into compliance with the wishes of someone who has the power to wield.

It isn't necessarily a bad thing in the present, but it will certainly be a bad thing in this period. The Lord Jesus is going to allow many of his servants, the 144,000 are often loosely described as witnesses. Revelation does not call them that, they are servants, 144,000 servants of God.

Many of them are going to be martyred. We saw the blood calling from the base of the altar, symbolically crying out for justice, gotta wait. These individuals that we saw in chapter 14 are at Mount Zion, standing on Mount Zion.

And this I think is sort of a leap forward to the earliest part of the millennial kingdom where their service and possibly their martyrdom is going to be vindicated and justified as they sing this song, because their service is complete. Their witness to the world as it exists in their example is complete. And they are now standing with the lamb and they follow him wherever he goes.

I think they will probably have a unique assigned role in implementing the kingdom after the tribulation period is over. So we will come back to the wine press of God's wrath and look at it when we get further down the road and start looking at Armageddon. But take a look now at chapter 15.

"Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous." The last time we saw this phraseology, it was the woman and the dragon, that whole scene. And we saw that language used at the beginning of chapter 12. "A great sign appeared in heaven, woman clothed with the sun," and so on." This is another sign, great and marvelous.

Few things as great and marvelous as they are in Revelation are actually described in that way. But this is because we have had the seals shown to us. We have had the angels who sound the

trumpets shown to us.

We know that the thunders have cracked at this point, unknown to us what those entail. But now this final set of seven is going to unfold and it is great and marvelous. As you know, a helpful way to view these is the seals cover the last three and a half years, the great tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, as do the trumpets, as do the thunders.

And now these vials or bowls. Another sign in heaven, great and marvelous. And this is your clue that this is the heavenly perspective.

The seals were an earthly perspective, riders coming out on horses and economic hardship and death and destruction, bloodshed, betrayals of various kinds. From an earthly perspective, it is the maelstrom of man's humanity to man, largely, followed by the trumpets, the horns that are blown by the angels. And this appears to be from an angelic perspective.

And you see angels going to and fro and emerging from pits, and there's warfare between angels in heaven and so on. The thunders are cryptic, something not revealed, but we are told that they are there. And we know some things about thunder and we reviewed that.

Now we come to this great and marvelous sign and notice it is in heaven. This is going to be the heavenly perspective, the divine throne room, the holy of holies in heaven will be the vantage point. Seven angels having the seven last plagues for in them, the wrath of God is complete.

This reminds us of the church in Ephesus that is said to have lost its first love. And we saw that this was foremost, the most important, the highest priority love, not necessarily chronological in its emphasis, but in its importance. Same thing here.

These last plagues are not last because they are chronologically following the seals and the trumpets and the thunders, but because they are the most important coming from God's perspective, coming from heaven implemented by these angels. And unlike a physical scroll with seals, unlike holding a trumpet, these angels have plagues. There's such a trend in postmodern Christianity in the preterist view, these reading revelation wrongly and these other books that come out that God doesn't do negative things.

If people don't accept him, he sort of steps back and lets them hurt themselves, let consequences of poor decisions play out. And he's not active in judgment. He's not active in pushing back against evil.

If that were the case, Joshua would have never led the children of Israel into the land of promise. He would have waited for the 10 nations greater and mightier. By the way, you do notice that when Israel is leaving Egypt and God speaks to them through Moses and tells them where they are going, and he enumerates that there are 10 nations greater and mightier.

But by the time they get there 40 years later, there are seven, 10 nations. But now there are seven, seven heads, 10 horns, you might say. We're going to look at next time and I'll give you a

preview.

See if you can figure this out. This will be sort of homework. Think about the book of Joshua and think about the revelation and the depiction of this time of Jacob's trouble.

That's the only clue I'm going to give you. We'll be looking at it this coming Wednesday, but preview of coming attractions. And this is one of those points of contact, this 10 and seven.

Start out with 10, but three of them sort of become non-issues and they go in against the Hivites and the rest of the Ites. And there are seven of them, seven and 10. But these angels have the seven last plagues, last in the sense that when we see what God does from the heavenly perspective, when God finishes, it is well and truly done.

We've seen the earthly consequences. We've seen angelic involvement and conflict. Now we're going to see God's point of view.

And God is not kidding around. He doesn't step back and wait for the Canaanites to destroy themselves and the Israelites just walk into a land that the evil has judged itself. They sacrificed all their kids to Molech and wound up not having enough to populate the land.

That's not what happens. God actively judges and judgment begins at the house of God. God doesn't just leave us to suffer the consequences of bad decisions.

There is active discipline. How people can get this to work is by ignoring what scripture says. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens and he scourges every son whom he receives.

You may have heard that verse translated, he skins alive with a whip every son whom he receives. I think that's a bit harsh. Scourges is good enough.

This is what the apostle Paul endured, 40 lashes minus one on three different occasions. It is severe, it is memorable, and it was administered when it was done properly and justly to encourage good behavior and the abandonment of bad behavior. So these seven last plagues from heaven delivered by God's angels at God's command are not self-induced misery, self-inflicted wounds.

These are judgments from God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. This is what scripture tells us.

Don't let anyone tell you that, well, people in the Old Testament just misunderstood God. Jesus came and straightened them out, the gentle Jesus who never harmed anyone, never judged anyone, never inflicted any consequences on anyone. Misunderstanding that there are two comings of Christ, are you he that shall come or do we look for another, John the Baptist asks.

The first time he is the lamb as it had been slain, because of that, he returns as the lion of the tribe of Judah. And God is not fooling around when it comes to judgment. So just bear in mind, even in verse one here, in them the wrath of God is complete.

This is a great, an awesome sign. These angels stand with plagues that God is sending on the earth. It is not accidental that the son of man with his sickle has reaped the earth and the people of God, the Jacob, who remain and have endured the time of trouble, unlike any that the world has ever seen before or since.

Jesus said this, it will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. Jeremiah said this, unparalleled since Israel was a nation, since creation, nothing this severe has been seen. Many in Israel will be martyred.

Those who survive, there will be a kind of rapture where they are removed. The son of man is going to get them the way that he has already come and gotten his church. And it's not accidental that that's what we saw at the end of chapter 14.

So John says in verse two, and I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. We saw this sea of glass earlier, you remember, with the 24 elders and the four living creatures. There was no mention of fire in that context.

Now there is fire, why? You've heard me use this illustration before, but I can't help but think of the flag of Japan. It is normally a white field with a red circle in the middle. It is a benign and beneficent sun.

Their battle flag is the same concept, but emanating forth from the red circle in the center are these rays of aggressive flame and heat. God's irenic, peaceful situation in heaven. This is what the elders of Israel saw when they went halfway up Mount Sinai and ate before the Lord, and they saw this vision of the sea of glass.

This is what we saw earlier in Revelation, but now it is mingled with fire because this is the time of the expression of the wrath of God. God is patient. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But his patience comes to an end. The time of opportunity is always given and offered prior to judgment. We saw the angel in the preceding chapter having the everlasting gospel, preaching it to every nation in 14.6 and 14.7. That was the time of opportunity.

Those that have not responded, it is as though the ark door has shut, and there is no more availability of salvation, no appeal. God's patience is at an end. So there is fire mingled with the sea of glass, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

Notice, this is the rapture for Israel. Those that have remained and not been martyred have been taken to heaven. They have victory.

They have endured the time of Jacob's trouble. Dead or alive, they are now in heaven, standing before the throne. They are not going to endure this particular judgment.

Now, what does that mean in practical terms? Because we have said that this overlaps with the seals and with the trumpets, and weren't there believers on the earth? Remember when the woman is taken into the wilderness and protected for a time, times and half a time. This is the time of Jacob's trouble. This is the last half.

Regardless of the actual physical circumstance, these individuals are preserved and protected. Even if they are martyred, this is a transcendent victory. And they now stand on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

This is a wonderful study on music in heaven, harps versus lyres. We'll also be taking a look at that on Wednesday, but we wanna get the overview here. So they have harps of God.

This is accompanied singing. We have seen songs in the past that were voices. We've been given the lyrics.

There is a vocal performance. Here it is accompanied by harps. It's one of the reasons you get that description of people in heaven.

They have wings and play harps. This is a specific group. The harp is David's instrument.

There is actually a difference. There were both harps and lyres in the ancient world. Of the available musical instruments, you can look this up in a new treasure of scripture knowledge, or you can look it up in the various international Bible encyclopedias and so on, and see instruments of the Bible.

What's unique about the harp and the lyre is unlike a trumpet, you can sing while playing. That's how David was able to compose the Psalms. He could play the tune and he could sing.

If you're blowing a shofar or blowing a trumpet, you can't sing and play at the same time. It's just physically not possible. Tambourines and cymbals.

When it says cymbals, these were finger cymbals. They were kind of like castanets, small. They weren't the marching band cymbals we tend to think of.

They were worn on the fingers and thumb and were given for percussion and for rhythm and enhancement of that sort. But the harp is played. There is a tune and there is singing.

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. We know the song of Moses. It is given to us in Deuteronomy.

Here, we have a summary of the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Great and marvelous are your works. Notice chapter 15, verse one.

There is a great and marvelous sign in heaven. Great and marvelous are your works. The judgment of God via the plagues on unrepentant humanity is great.

And it is marvelous. Hard for the human mind to comprehend at first blush. We tend to pity those who endure suffering, especially when we're not real sure of what the occasion or the source, the reason.

But we are told to look at this as God looks at it. And the judgment on the earth with the redeemed safely under God's protection and in his presence is described as a great and marvelous work. These are great and marvelous signs.

What do they entail? We will see it when we come back from the break. But even when our lives incorporate challenge, hardship, suffering, sorrow, and sadness, God is doing a great and marvelous work. And to remember that and to trust that he knows what he's doing as we endure these things is the path to the peace that passes understanding, the bearing of the fruit of the spirit, and the dedication and purity and sanctification that we should represent as the body of Christ on this earth.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll continue in chapter 15.